# REVOLUTION AND DISENCHANTMENT

## ARAB MARXISM AND THE BINDS OF EMANCIPATION

*Fadi A. Bardawil*

# REVOLUTION AND DISENCHANTMENT

Theory in Forms

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AND ACHILLE MBEMBE

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*Fadi A. Bardawil*

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To Abdo and Gisèle Bardawil
and
Zouheir Aniss Rahhal

العدد ٤ الثمن ٢٥ غرشا

في هذا العدد

* الافتتاحية :
من التهم البالية : التروتسكية
* ماذا يجري في نقابة المعلمين
* زاوية التثقيف النظري:
نصوص مختارة من "ما العمل؟"
لينين ، ١٩٠٢
* مشكلة السكن

افتتاحية

من التهم البالي

١ . ماذا يعني الاتهام بالتروت

يطلق حزب الثورة الاستراك
الاشتراكي " . لماذا هذه الس
"سوفياتيين" ولا "صينيين" و

ماركسيين لينينيين وحسب ! وب

العدد ، فلم يجد حزب الثورة
التروتسكية طبعا . هل معنى
الاشتراكية حاولوا تحديد معني
سبب اللجوء الى التروتسكية كته
التحديد . في الخلاف الصيني
تهمة التروتسكية دونما اي احر
وهو بالنسبة لحزب الثورة الاشتراكية ، المارق الذي لا نقاش معه ولا عمل

الاكتفاء بصلات متخفية عن طريق تبادل النشرات ! اذن ، لا مبرر لمحاول
الاختلاف والاتفاق وتحديد ما . وبذلك تتقهقر الحركة الماركسية العمالي
العجاف التي ولدت الانعزال التنظيمي والهزال النظري والتي ادت الى
يد الاحزاب الشيوعية .

ولكن اذا كان فريق من الرفاق الماركسيين يرفض التهم ، فهل يكفي
برفض مماثل ؟ حتما لا . اذ ان السكوت او الاحتجاج ( بحجة المساس
تبقي الموضوع في الاطار الذي يطرح فيه . وهذا الاطار هو الذي ولّد ب
الماركسي يشكو منه حتى الان . لذلك سيكون جوابنا محاولة تحديد موقف

٢ . ما هي التروتسكية ؟

المقصود من طرح السؤال بهذا الشكل هو البرهان على ان التر
الى القيام بعمل قادر على استيعاب الواقع اللبناني والعربي . بذلك يتن
لتجربة هي من تجارب العمل الماركسي — بعيوبها ونقائصها — لا عن الق

وهذا هو الموقف الوحيد الجدير بماركسيين يثقون بالتحليل العلمي . وال

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## A Note on Transliteration and Translation

I use the common transliteration of Arabic names when used by authors in their non-Arabic works, most of which rely on a simplified French transliteration system. For example, I use Waddah Charara and Fawwaz Traboulsi instead of Waḍḍāḥ Sharāra and Fawwāz Ṭrābulsī. I adopt the same convention for cities—for example, Beirut instead of Bayrūt. I otherwise follow a simplified transliteration system based on the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*). All diacritical marks, except for the ʻayn (ʻ) and hamza (ʼ), are omitted. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

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# Prologue

Je voudrais sans la nommer vous parler d'elle.
—GEORGES MOUSTAKI

At a fundamental level, I am preoccupied in *Revolution and Disenchantment* with the question of theory and practice. More precisely, I explore the seductions, authority, and pragmatics of theory in revolutionary political organizations and academic settings. My modes of investigation are therefore historical and ethnographic, in contrast to a philosophical one that offers, say, an a priori account of how theory ought to relate, or not, to practice. I pursue these questions by tacking back and forth between the long overlooked archive of the 1960s Lebanese New Left and the critical theories produced in the Euro-American academy.[1] In particular I examine the beginnings, high tides, and vicissitudes of Lubnan Ishtiraki (Socialist Lebanon, 1964–70), a small Marxist organization, composed for the most part of militant intellectuals. In this work, I do not reconstruct a comprehensive history of the Lebanese Left, its political fortunes, and the multiple theoretical streams that nourished it, and the ones it produced. Rather, I revisit a minority Marxist tradition, which produced conceptually sophisticated diagnostic works, and a revolutionary movement that splintered. In taking the Marxist tradition as my major site of investigation, the question of theory and practice is thought concomitantly with the dialectic of revolutionary hope and political disenchantment.

I do not revisit the theoretical works and political trajectories of an older generation of militants because I think they provide answers to a present characterized by both a heightened state of communal and nationalist fragmentation and an increased interconnectedness fostered by the accelerated circulation of capital, people, and technologies. Having said that, more than a handful of the questions this generation of militant intellectuals confronted have regained intellectual and political relevance in the wake of the Arab revolutions and the global anticapitalist mobilizations: Who is the revolutionary

subject? What are the different forms a political organization can take, and when does an agency of emancipation turn into one of power that stifles the people's initiatives in their own name? What are the privileged sites of political practice, and its multiple scales? Do militant intellectuals translate *texts* to educate the masses? Or translate themselves to working-class neighborhoods and jobs to learn from the masses (*établissement*)? How does one mobilize across difference?[2] If power is primarily conceptualized as exploitation, how are other forms of power conceptually apprehended and politically articulated with a class-based politics? More specifically, what is the political status of forms of communal solidarity in a revolutionary project? What forms of class-based national politics are possible when the political is not autonomous from the social—sectarian, regional, and kinship divisions—and when these multiple communal constituencies share the state's sovereignty? These questions about theory and practice that seek to elucidate the subject and agent of revolution, as well as the modalities, scales, forms, and telos of political practice, are confronted by militants in their daily practice. In the Marxist tradition, which holds theoretical analysis in the highest regard, these questions are tethered to the generative labors of translation and interpretation that produce its universality in practice, through the global circulation of texts—think Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci, Mao Tse-Tung, Che Guevara. In *Revolution and Disenchantment*, I weave the story of revolutionary hope and disenchantment with the answers the Lebanese New Left articulated in practice to three fundamental issues that generations of Marxists worldwide confronted and were divided by: the question of intellectuals, as the vectors (or not) of revolutionary theory; the debate around the organization, as the mediator (or not) between theory and practice; and last but not least the anxiety generated by nonemancipatory—non-class-based solidarities—attachments, such as national and communal ones, as impediments (or not) to revolutionary practice.

The problem-space of beginnings is radically different from the one of completion. Much has happened in the world since I began feeling my way around some of the material that ended up in this book. This project initially took shape in the US in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, characterized by the imperial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the polarization it effected among Arab intellectuals. This period witnessed the increasing public visibility of intellectuals critical of Arab culture and society grouped under the catch-all banner of "Arab liberals," a substantial number of whom previously belonged to leftist political parties. At the time, it did not seem that there was

any possibility to break free from the political deadlock that presented itself as the impossible choice between "national sovereignty" under tyrants hiding behind a thin veneer of anti-imperialist rhetoric and a potential "democracy" to come brought about by foreign sanctions and occupations epitomized by the invasion of Iraq. In this conjuncture *theoretical* anti-imperialism, as practiced in the US academy, resonated loudly, and affectively, as an ersatz political anti-imperialism. As the tanks rolled in, the least one could do is put on a postcolonial armor to debunk the claims of intellectuals deriding Arab culture for its atavisms or calling for the "liberation" of Muslims, particularly Muslim women, from the yoke of religious fundamentalists as rigged faulty knowledges in cahoots with imperial ideologies.

The project was first articulated as an attempt to understand the shifts in political ideologies from Marxism to liberalism in the Arab world. At the time, the opposition to the Iraq War and the US plans in and for the region in its aftermath came hand in hand with a critical attitude toward universals, such as liberal democracy and human rights, as vectors of imperial violence cloaked in ideologies of liberation. In brief, the polarized present justified the interest in, and the will to critique of, liberalism. The first part of the question—Marxism—however, was a different story altogether. It was nourished by older subterranean political-affective veins, which were carved out in the early 1990s, as I was coming of age, in the aftermath of the Lebanese civil and regional civil wars (1975–90), the cradle of my generation's political consciousness. The 1960s and 1970s Left, with its militants, thinkers, novelists, playwrights, poets, and musicians, became then a site of deep political-affective investment. For one, that tradition was generative of theoretical-aesthetic-political explorations far more seductive and engrossing than the intellectually tenuous, politically provincial, and aesthetically kitschy productions of the nationalist and sectarian (Christian/Muslim) forces. For those of us escaping the provinces of families, regions, and sectarian communities and meeting in Beirut, for the most part in university halls, a few years after the fighting stopped, the Left was also a name for a project that held the promise of a political community much wider, and more inclusive, than the stifling compounds of, predominantly but not exclusively, sectarian communities. The Left, it is needless to assert, also held the promise of a more socially just world. The conceptual resources of the tradition also enabled the beginnings of a critical apprehension of the postwar economic policies and privatized reconstruction projects in the mid-1990s that were opposed by a number of former leftist militants. Last but not least, the 1960s Left was on the right side of history. It supported, and allied itself, with the Palestinian revolution, against the predominantly Christian Lebanese

nationalist forces, who during the wars (1975–90) were backed by Israel. For all these reasons and more, it seemed like the 1960s generation was the last great revolutionary, and intellectual, generation. The fact that this generation failed to achieve its revolutionary goals did not dampen the melancholic tones of this attachment. Melancholy, though, should not to be confused with assent. The attachment did not preclude an intergenerational, critical at times, dialogue. This was a melancholy for a time that precedes my birth in the first years of the civil wars and my generation's formative experiences. At least then there was a possibility of emancipatory political practice that escapes the times of repetition of inter- and intracommunal fighting. History, at that point in time, could have been made. It was a youth that was traversed, in part, in the future anterior tense, sustained by endless streams of revolutionary song, some texts, and a dearth of political experience.

So when I began the project theoretical anti-imperialism and political anti-imperialism came hand in hand. The first, particularly in the form of the theoretical epistemology critique of the universalist or essentializing discursive assumptions of Arab intellectuals and militants, or both, was in tension with the political-affective attachment to the Left tradition as a project of total emancipation. I did not release the tension in one direction or another. Bit by bit, and after meeting some of these disenchanted Marxists and talking with them at length about their political lives and conceptual works, I grew increasingly skeptical about the suitability of epistemology critique to capture the stakes that animated their projects, and the multiple articulations of theory and practice I was unearthing as I lingered over and reconstructed aspects of this generation's spaces of experience and horizons of expectation.[3] In part this was a well-known story of ethnographic humility, which consisted of testing the limits in practice of certified theoretical contraptions to immediately capture an entire world upon landing there. That said, the narrative of ethnographic humility was entangled in a more personal (dare I say postcolonial?) two-step move. The first step consists of confusing the latest metropolitan theoretical moves with the most sophisticated ones that are assumed to have a universal validity. In practice, this reproduction of the colonial divide takes the form of assuming that "abstract theory" is produced in the metropoles and "concrete facts" are found in the Global South. It also takes the form of pinpointing the lack of conceptual sophistication, or the old-fashioned nature, of theorists in the peripheries. To say this is to underscore both that the West was taken to be the land of theoretical opportunities and that a certain idea of what constitutes "theory" was assumed to be the most prized form of thinking. The seductions of academic metropolitan theory are also compounded by a spotty knowledge

of the works of previous generations and a dearth of critical engagement with it in the present (step two). This is too large an issue to be broached here, but suffice it to say that generational transmission, which is in part related to postcolonial state and educational institutions, is a very difficult and fraught question that leaves its marks on works and lives: Where do you begin from and how?

While I grew increasingly skeptical of theoretical anti-imperialism as the primary conceptual lens to approach the archive of modernist and contemporary Arab thought, I was still attached to political anti-imperialism as the prime contradiction that ought to dictate political alignments. Then the Arab revolutions happened (2011–). The event broke the political paralysis resulting from the deadlock of having to choose between authoritarian nationalists and imperial democrats. The long eclipsed subject and agent of emancipation—the people—occupied center stage again. The revolutions were a seismic pan-Arab event. They displaced the West from the heart of modern Arab mass politics in rearticulating popular sovereignty outside the orbit of imperial decolonization. Unlike the twentieth-century mass movements, the revolutions that mobilized millions of citizens against their own regimes were not propelled by anti-imperialist engines. This does not mean that anti-imperialist concerns were completely absent but that they were not the main drive of the revolutions. Earlier mass political movements in the region carried successively the banner of decolonization from political domination (independence movements), political and economic dependence (radical national liberation movements and the Left), and Western cultural alienation (Islamists). The Arab Left thought the questions of external economic independence and internal class contradictions together, but for the most part these twentieth-century movements articulated multiple visions of political, economic, and cultural sovereignty from imperial orbits. The first wave of revolutions (2011–) ushered in a new structure of feeling, which, in my case at least, put to rest the melancholic attachment to the 1960s generation as the marker of the last great leap into emancipation.

Looked at from the perspective of the aftermath of the Arab revolutions, we seem to be entering into "post-postcolonial" times that are beginning the process of decentering the West in practice after it has been subjected to multiple iterations of theoretical decenterings in the past.[4] This is not only because of the practice of the revolutionaries but also because of the recent geopolitical conjuncture, which dislodged the post–Cold War arrangement during which the West, and particularly the US, was the supreme intervening military power. Arab, regional, and non-Western international powers are increasingly and unabashedly involved in the region. Two caveats. First, unlike its decenter-

ing in theory, which is staged as a liberatory act of decolonization, its decentering in practice certainly did not usher in an era of progressive politics. A quick glance at the Russian, Iranian, Turkish, and Israeli involvements in Syria, in addition to Western ones, and the destruction they brought on are enough to put an end to the automatic association of the decentering of the West with a horizon of justice. Having said that, this is certainly not a cause for imperial nostalgia and to begin lamenting "the decline of Western civilization." The legacies of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the never-ending "War on Terror" are still unfolding in our political present, not to mention the continuing US support of the Israeli colonization of Palestinian lands. Moreover, the multipolar interventions today are in part the consequences of the recent US interventions in the region. This decentering is a crucial fact to be reckoned with, without celebration or lamentation, and it's not an easy thing to do since clear-cut binary antagonisms and the logic of the "main contradiction" are hard to dislodge from political alignments.

The limits on anti-imperialism, as the main contradiction, animating both theory and politics is clearly revealed in the growing chasm separating oppositional, diasporic or not, intellectuals in the metropoles and critical thinkers, artists, and revolutionaries at home and those of them who recently found sanctuary in the metropoles. The political alliance between metropolitan oppositional culture and revolutionary forces at home that Edward Said wrote so eloquently about, and that he embodied in his own practice, today seems like a relic from a bygone age.[5] Critical strategies that rely exclusively on speaking back to the West through marshaling a set of binaries—West/non-West; homogenization/difference; universal/particular; secular/nonsecular; westernized elite/nonwesternized masses; liberal Muslim/nonliberal Muslim—that retain the West at the heart of their deepest attachments have become increasingly problematic in the wake of the Arab revolutions. They cannot account for political practice outside of its relation, and opposition, to imperial orbits, obliterating the revolutionaries' attempts to make their own history, and reinscribing in the process the West as the main subject and agent of history.[6] These critical theories also fail to critically account for the multiple societal divisions that result from the entanglement of the political in the webs of the social fabric and for the interventions of non-Western powers. In other words, forms of revolutionary practice, the logics of communal solidarities (sectarian, ethnic, regional, kin), and interventions by non-Western powers whose coordinates cannot be plotted on the axis of the West remain invisible in theory. At most, these critical strategies point out, and rightly so, that communal solidarities are the offspring of modernity—imperialism, capitalism, the nation-state. Non-Western interventions in the region can be condemned

politically and morally, but these critical theories do not have the resources to apprehend them conceptually.

Lest you think that there is an "Arab exceptionalism" lurking in the situation I am describing, I will bring this preface to a close by undertaking a historical and regional translation. More than a decade ago, Rey Chow interrogated the self-referentiality of the knowledge produced by area studies that, by focusing on "targeting or getting the other," ends up consolidating "the omnipotence and omnipresence of the sovereign 'self'/'eye'—the 'I'—that is the United States."[7] Chow, who herself grew up among survivors of Japan's invasion of China between 1937 and 1945, remembers how, as a child, she was used to hearing more about the wartime atrocities committed by the Japanese against the Chinese than she did about the US violence against Japan. The arrival of the Americans, she recalls, was considered "a moment of 'liberation'" (Chow, *Age of the World Target*, hereafter AWT, 25–26). These childhood oral narratives will persist in her mind as a "kind of emotional dissonance, a sense of something out-of-joint" (AWT, 26). "It is as if the sheer magnitude of destruction unleashed by the bombs," Chow writes, "demolished not only entire populations but also the memories and histories of tragedies that had led up to the apocalyptic moment, the memories and histories of those who had been brutalized, kidnapped, raped, and slaughtered in the same war by other forces" (AWT, 26). The erasure and silencing of these multiple, non-US-centric experiences results, she notes by drawing on Harry Harootunian's work, in the haunting of area studies by the "problem of the vanishing object." In brief, the events, "whose historicity does not fall into the epistemically closed orbit of the atomic bomber—such as the Chinese reactions to the war from a primarily anti-Japanese point of view," Chow asserts, "will never receive the attention that is due to them" (AWT, 41). Chow's reminiscences, particularly the out-of-jointness between one's violent experiences, and emotions, and what metropolitan disciplines and critical theories take as their object of study and critique, resonates deeply with the generation of disenchanted revolutionaries whose story this book recounts. Self-referentiality may render these metropolitan works provincial, but that does not subtract from their authority, which is not necessarily an epistemological effect—say, of their theoretical superiority—but a consequence of their institutional location. Metropolitan scholars, diasporic or not, have the luxury to, and selectively do, ignore works by Arab thinkers and militants at home in a way that the latter cannot afford to do.

You may, at this point, detect a tension in my argument between the case I am making for the necessity of taking stock of the decentering West in practice—by revolutionaries and non-Western interventions—and my reinscription of the

hegemony of its knowledges and educational institutions. I don't think there is a tension here. Again, we are living in times when English is still the strongest global language, in a time when the educational institutions of the West, particularly those of the US, are still hegemonic and opening offshore outlets in different parts of the world; *and yet* the multiple political, economic, and military developments, particularly in the Arab world today, steer us toward not collapsing critique exclusively with opposition to the West. In this conjuncture, what are the analytical, political, and ethical costs of insisting that critical theory equals a critique of the West and its discourses? If "Europe is no longer the center of gravity of the world," then how does this "fundamental experience of our era" impact the modalities of operation of critical practices and the political compass that guides metropolitan oppositional alignments?[8]

# INTRODUCTION

Yet the shadows that cling to Marxism
cannot be dispelled solely by desk lamps.
—RUSSELL JACOBY

We know, of course, that anthropologists, like other academics,
learn not merely to use a scholarly language, but to fear it,
to admire it, to be captivated by it.
—TALAL ASAD

*Revolution and Disenchantment* is preoccupied with an earlier episode of Arab political hope and despair. It takes a step back to the 1960s to excavate for our present the lost archive of the Lebanese New Left. It is at once a history of the rise of the New Left and its subsequent ebbing away, as well as an anthropological inquiry into the production, circulation, and uses of revolutionary and critical theory. In doing so, I am less motivated by an encyclopedic drive of inquiry that seeks to fill a gap in the literature by examining an archive that has not yet been explored—although that is also important in itself. Rather, I ask, how does the reconstruction of revolutionary lives and the excavation of an overlooked theoretical tradition shed light on the *metropolitan unconscious* of our critical—anthropology, critical theory, and Middle East studies—traditions?

Unlike the much older Arab communist parties—the Lebanese CP was founded in 1924—that revolved in the Soviet orbit, the New Left emerged out of the ideological and militant constellations of Arab nationalisms. The New Left militants were the generation of the Palestinian revolution that came to embody revolutionary hopes in a future of sovereignty and social justice after the swift military defeat of the Arab regimes against Israel in June 1967. I focus primarily on the trajectory and theoretical writings of Waddah Charara (1942–), a prominent Lebanese transdisciplinary thinker whose major works bridge the social sciences and history, in addition to multiple forays into the Arab-Islamic *turath* (traditions) and translations of theory and poetry. Charara

cofounded Socialist Lebanon (1964–70) with a handful of comrades.[1] I also close in on segments of the political and critical paths of Fawwaz Traboulsi (1941–) and Ahmad Beydoun (1942–). Traboulsi was cofounder of the organization and alongside Charara was one of its main dynamos before becoming a prolific historian, sociologist, and translator, and a major public face of the political and intellectual Left in Lebanon. Beydoun, who joined the group about a year and half later, would go on to become a distinguished historiographer and cultural critic, who also wrote poetry and the script of *Beirut, the Encounter* (1981), one of the cult movies of the Lebanese civil and regional wars (1975–90). In brief, the underground Marxist organization was a hub of militant intellectuals who much later, in the wake of successive waves of political disenchantment, became prominent intellectuals.

In 1970 Socialist Lebanon merged with the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, the radicalized Lebanese branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement, which severed its ties with President Gamal Abdel Nasser after the 1967 defeat, to found the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL). Charara, who was instrumental in the fusion between both organizations, subsequently led a substantial internal opposition movement along Maoist lines that was expelled from OCAL in 1973. At the beginning of the Lebanese civil and regional wars Charara's shock in the face of the sectarian—Christian/Muslim—forms that wartime practices of fighting, killing, pillaging, and destroying took led him very early on to put an end to nearly two decades of political militancy and exit from the Marxist tradition of thought. The sectarian divisions of the masses during the war revealed the difficulty of practicing a class-based politics of emancipation. Political practice could not be extricated from the webs of the social fabric. Communal solidarity eclipsed class interest. In the wake of disenchantment, Charara turned to a minute sociological investigation of the modalities of operation of communal—sectarian, regional, kin—power. Charara was probably the first of his cohort of militant intellectuals to take his distance from, and become critical of, leftist politics and ideologies, which, even if they did not themselves arise on sectarian grounds, did not manage to break free from the dominant communal polarizations dividing Lebanese society.

In excavating first Socialist Lebanon's forgotten archive from the 1960s and then focusing on Charara's theoretical texts in the wake of disenchantment, I unearth a minoritarian tradition of immanent critical Arab thought that diagnosed the logics and practices of power and examine the vicissitudes of a revolutionary project that sought to articulate an autonomous leftist practice. This diagnostic tradition, as I will develop throughout the book, steers away

from the dominant topoi of contemporary Arab thought. Its diagnostic immanent edge, which focused first on the practices of anticolonial regimes and Left political parties before examining communal logics of subjugation, did not get caught up on the ideological battleground of authenticity. It moved away from the comparison of "Arab" and "Islamic" values with "Western" ones, ushering a critique of the latter from the standpoint of the former, or translating one set into the other. When the promise of revolutionary emancipation was eclipsed, the critique of communal solidarities did not revert either to a Marxist historicism or a liberal critique of the social fabric and culture from the standpoint of a detached, context-less abstract reason. These political communal solidarities were not "traditional," "pre-capitalist remainders," Charara argued very early on in the mid-1970s, but modern products. They are partially the result of the logics of formal subsumption at work in Lebanese capitalism and the divisions of the Lebanese nation-state. Charara and Beydoun retained from their Marxist past a reflexive stance, which thinks the conditions of possibility of a critical work's own conceptual building blocks, and the critic's positionality, as it is thinking its object. It is this attachment to reflexive critique, in the wake of their realization that class is no longer the universal engine propelling political practice, that led them to formulate an immanent sociological and historical critique of community that is not grounded in universal reason. This critique worked by detecting the cracks in the communities' own mythologizing discourses about themselves, highlighting in the process contingencies, heterogeneities, and divisions and the gaps separating discourses from practices. This patient diagnostic tracking of the layers of sedimented narratives and the vagaries of actual political practices can't be more different than blanket culturalist statements that critique Arab societies from "the mythical space" of Western normative liberal theory.[2] But why reopen today the archive of a generation that was formed during the high tides of Arab nationalism, founded the New Left, and adhered to the Palestinian revolution before ending up as detached, disenchanted critics of communal logics dwelling in the ruins of futures past? What is the purchase in and for the present of revisiting this story of a generation that moved from nation to class to community?

**History, First.** This generation, born for the most part on the eve of independence in Lebanon (1943) and Syria (1945), lived through, acted in, and thought about major political turning points. It was marked very early on by the Palestinian Nakba, or Catastrophe (1948), before being swept by the high tides of the Ba'th and Nasser's anticolonial nationalism in the 1950s. By the 1960s, they became Marxist critics of both anticolonial Arab nationalisms and pro-Western Arab governments. This generation of New Left militants

revolving outside the Soviet communist orbit and within a wider Third Worldist network of internationalist solidarity—the Chinese, Algerian, Cuban, and Vietnamese Revolutions—produced very early prescient Marxist critiques of imperialism, the national liberation regimes, and the Arab bourgeoisie. The Marxist ground that dialectically held these external (imperialism) and internal (regimes in power and the bourgeoisie) critiques together was premised on the presence of "the people," the revolutionary subject capable of embodying this program in its revolutionary practice. The ground began to crumble with the beginning of the Lebanese civil and regional wars (1975–90). A few years later, the Iranian Revolution (1979) constituted a seismic event, whose aftermath began to radically alter the Lebanese political landscape by adding a militant Islamist component to the sectarian divisions already at work. Meanwhile, the 1980s witnessed the ebbing away of the Lebanese Left and the Palestinian resistance a few years after the Israeli invasion (1982); increased violence of the neighboring authoritarian regimes, such as the Syrian Ba'th's Massacre in Hama (1982); devastating regional conflicts, such as the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88); and increased Islamist militancy (Hizbullah, 1985 to the present, and Hamas, 1987 to the present). After 1982, Israel, the postcolonial regimes, Islamist militancy, and sectarian confrontations all contributed to dashing the revolutionary hopes of those militants and thinkers who would come to be known as the 1960s Left generation.

This string of events resulted in the fragmentation of the members of this generation who were bound by their anti-imperialism, support of the Palestinian revolution, and a commitment to a horizon of social justice, in different political and ideological directions. Charara and Beydoun retreated from militancy into a life of writing, and some of the comrades converted into, or became fellow travelers of, Islamist anti-imperialism.[3] Others retreated to the fold of their own sectarian communities—Christian, Sunni, Shi'i, Druze—that they had initially broken away from when they joined Marxist political parties in the 1960s. Looked at from the perspective of their "Palestinian years"—from their early childhood memories of the Nakba (1948) to the invasion of Beirut (1982)—this generation lived through successive seismic transformations. Their story, one of a generation captivated by the dialectic of revolutionary exhilaration and political despair in an ideologically saturated world and in compressed political times, deserves to be told.

**Theory, Second.** These militant intellectuals inaugurated a sophisticated minoritarian tradition of revolutionary and critical Arab theory, characterized by "a transversality of knowledges," which defied the logics of professionalization, expertise, and disciplinarity.[4] They weaved their works by engaging authors

such as Karl Marx, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Mao Tse-Tung, Leon Trotsky, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Vo Nguyen Giap, Ibn Khaldun, Che Guevara, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Pierre Bourdieu, Cornelius Castoriadis, Michel Foucault, and Abdal-Rahman al-Jabarti, among others. Excavating this archive provides multiple "ex-centric" vantage points, located outside of hegemonic centers, their institutions, disciplines, and languages, which bypass the colonial divide assigning the Global South as locus of "concrete facts" and the North the manufacturer of "abstract theory."[5] In doing so, there is a gain in reflexivity generated by highlighting how the questions, stakes, modes of criticism, and practices of engagement of disenchanted Marxist intellectuals speak back to the ones practiced in critical anthropology, area studies, and postcolonial studies—what I earlier called the critical disciplines' metropolitan unconscious.

In fact, it is this metropolitan unconscious that is in part responsible for the neglect of the archive of Arab Marxism and the examination of the production and circulation of critical theory from what is now referred to in shorthand as the Global South. Except for the brief Third Worldist interlude of the 1960s, when militant intellectuals like Mao, Giap, and Guevara were read and commented on, Western Marxists did not, for the most part, seek out, translate, and converse with the tradition's non-Western theorists.[6] Moreover, Arab Marxists were either criticized or neglected by critics whose reading practices condemned them for what they dubbed their Orientalist, historicist, and modernist discursive assumptions. Their "epistemological complicity" with Empire turned them from revolutionaries to discursive compradors.[7] You know you're really out of luck when both Eurocentric Marxists and their postcolonial critics agree to ignore you. Moreover, the imbrication of scholarship on the Middle East in Western political agendas sidelined militants who were neither bound by the frontiers of the nation-state nor the boundaries of religious tradition and were therefore on the margins of nationalism and Islamism.[8] Last but not least, these militant intellectuals, who shared many of the same texts that later came to constitute the body of academic theory that social scientists drew on, appeared, at first sight, to be much closer to these disciplines' theoretical skin than, say, Salafi Muslims. Their low coefficient of "Otherness" pushes to the limit the question of who occupies the slot of anthropological understanding and is a subject of charitable interpretation and who is the object of critical condemnation.

This is why, in recovering this history, my aim is to bypass the treatment of modern and contemporary Arab intellectuals as falling into one of two camps: either imitators of the West, call them self-Orientalizing and westernized natives

if you want, or autochthonous—religious thinkers engaging in an immanent critique of their societies.[9] I hope I have managed to convey that what I am engaged in is far from a study of the unilinear reception by Arab thinkers of Western revolutionary and critical theorists, which at times announces itself with sensationalist titles à la *Reading Althusser in Ras Beirut,* anticipating the metropolitan dazzlement at the wonderful conjunction of reading a "universal" text in a "particular" location. Reception presumes a priori an origin and a destination, an authentic and a copy, while I am making a case for the primacy of multidirectional streams of translation.[10]

Having said that, Arab thought and literature have, in the past hundred years, also been produced from the Global North, a fact exacerbated by the massive displacements of people in the wake of the Arab revolutions. Successive waves of migration resulting from economic hardship, colonialism, relentless imperial interventions, authoritarian regimes, and civil wars resulted in the dispersion of Arab thinkers; just think of the Palestinians, who became a stateless diaspora after the first wave of eviction from their homeland that took place with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Arab thinkers and militants could be at home, in the diaspora, in exile, refugees, or shuttling back forth between their homes and a more secure location depending on political circumstances.

This dispersion is also linguistic: in addition to Arabic, they mostly also write in English or French or in more than one of these languages. While *Revolution and Disenchantment* focuses primarily on the travels, trajectories, and works of militant intellectuals who founded Socialist Lebanon, it does so by engaging their labors in the same analytic frameworks as Arab thinkers in the metropoles. It aims to incorporate into the spaces of contemporary Arab thought those distinguished exilic contributors, such as Edward Said, who rubbed shoulders with these thinkers in the same pro-Palestinian political and intellectual spaces, but are not included in the pantheon of contemporary Arab thinkers.[11] Without folding these intellectuals into the same tradition, scholarship will fail to address the shifting conditions of production of Arab thought, and it will reproduce the colonial divide. Arab thinkers at home will continue to be objects of study, while those in the diaspora will be addressed as colleagues to be engaged or as theorists whose work is used to frame the works and lives of others. This act of folding acquires an added significance in the wake of the Arab revolutions (2011–), which led to an increase in the global dispersion of Arabs from São Paolo to Istanbul. Former revolutionaries and militant intellectuals are today visiting researchers, professors, scholars at risk, and graduate students around the world.

To put it briefly, the book makes an argument for considering Edward Said not only as a cosmopolitan and postcolonial theorist but also as an Arab intellectual among others intimately impacted by, and engaged with, the unfolding of political events in the region—and for understanding the disenchanted Marxists at home, not as "local, autochthonous" intellectuals but as theorists at the crossroads of transnational streams of discourses. Of course, the mere fact that Edward Said is absent from compendia of contemporary Arab thought, or that his work is marshaled as the theoretical paradigm that frames the work of others, is symptomatic of the metropolitan unconscious of area studies disciplines. Otherwise, I wouldn't have to make a case to include Edward Said in the same analytical frame as Fawwaz Traboulsi, Waddah Charara, Sadik al-Azm, Ahmad Beydoun, and Mahdi ʿAmil. In other words, I seek in this work to hold the tension between the interconnectedness of our world and the structural imbalance of power that makes some intellectual theorists to be engaged and others autochthonous intellectuals to be studied, or native informants to be used. I seek to avoid both highlighting an interconnectedness, which does not take power into account, and an erasure of interconnectedness, which is itself a symptom of power.

**Political Present, Third.** Last but not least, unearthing this archive in, and for, our political present is a timely affair. I certainly do not intend to collapse the distance separating the past of the New Left militants from our present. The political conjuncture they inhabited and acted in, and the answers they articulated exclusively in a Marxian idiom before abandoning it, is not exactly ours today. I am also not attracted to retrospectively judging whether they were right or wrong in their analysis and political wagers. To recover the theoretical labors and visions of emancipation of a previous generation of militants and thinkers is not only an antidote to public amnesia but an exercise that clarifies the distinct contours of our present and an invitation to an intergenerational conversation around the possibilities and binds of emancipation.

In addition to revisiting the theoretical-political questions they were preoccupied with, and which have become salient today in the wake of the Arab popular uprisings (2011) and the recent global anticapitalist mobilizations that I mentioned in the prologue, I am also driven to revisit their dual legacy: revolutionary exhilaration and political despair. Hope and disenchantment; revolutions and murderous regimes, foreign interventions and civil wars; and citizens and communal subjects are all constitutive of our very recent past and our present. It is in this sense that we are inheritors of the dual legacy of hope and despair of the 1960s Left. To do so, I carve a path between a corrosive Left melancholy that disparages an uncertain and increasingly precarious present while

drinking to stories of the 1960s, the golden age of internationalist solidarity, on the one hand, and a liberal and Islamist triumphalism that banishes this past's relevance to our present by dismissing this Marxist generation's critical labors and practice because of the collapse and disintegration of socialist regimes or their cultural alienation from their society, on the other.[12]

### *Fieldwork in Theory*

In examining the transnational travels and translations of critical theory in different spaces such as political party cells and academic settings, as well as its uses and appropriations in political projects, the book engages in what I call "fieldwork in theory." It looks into the different social lives of theory. I ask not only how theory helps us understand the world but also what kind of work it does in it: how it seduces intellectuals, contributes to the cultivation of their ethos and sensibilities, and authorizes political practices for militants. Anthropology has produced a rich reflexive tradition that, by turning the discipline's critical gaze inward, has interrogated the epistemological assumptions undergirding its concepts and its practices of representation.[13] The book shifts the focus away from the critique of the discursive assumptions of theoretical discourses to the ethnography of their production, circulation, and political effects in nonacademic settings.[14] As the frames of inquiry become the objects of ethnographic investigation, the anthropological frontiers between the worlds of slick, context-less, abstract, and frequent flying theories and the concrete stickiness of ethnographic empirical worlds become increasingly muddied.[15]

Fluency in theory was, and remains, a prized good in anthropology despite recent observations that the discipline has taken an empiricist turn.[16] For one, dabbling in abstractness makes for a more fluid circulation and a wider readership, as any editor would tell you. In anthropology, it also provides a common lingua franca that rises above the particularities of the discipline's geographic subdivisions, joining its practitioners together in a more encompassing disciplinary space of arguments. For instance, in the mid-1970s, Middle East anthropology was considered a marginal subfield that had by and large failed to both attract an audience beyond area specialists and contribute to disciplinary theoretical debates.[17] By the late 1980s Middle East anthropology managed to escape its parochialism. It was home to two influential theorists—Clifford Geertz and Pierre Bourdieu—as well as some key figures of "reflexive anthropology" (Vincent Crapanzano, Paul Rabinow, and Kevin Dwyer).[18]

At least since Geertz recast doing fieldwork as an act of interpretation, strict separation between observation and "data collection," on the one hand, and

interpretation and theoretical reflection, on the other, became harder to maintain.[19] This separation was roughly mapped on a temporal and spatial structure. First, the anthropologist travels somewhere to do fieldwork. This is the moment of participant observation, the ethnographer's gaze, and experiences, supposedly to be recorded in field notes and diaries—a moment of discovery and self-discovery. And then there is the second moment, a consequence of the anthropologist's privilege of departure, for metropolitan anthropologists, who for the most part do not permanently reside in the societies they study.[20] This is the time when the anthropologist comes back from the field and sifts through her notes, audio recordings, pictures, and archives to compose a text presenting the collected material.[21] This is when the "raw material" gets processed and made to *speak back* to theoretical concerns, when it gets fashioned into a recognizable text complying with the styles and academic conventions of the field. After years of mentorship, writing manuals and boot camps, procrastination and drafts of drafts, the initial ethnographic gaze is, at last, translated into a disciplinary trace.

Having said that, anthropological practice is still by and large structured around a distinction between the anthropologist's theory and the people's lives and intellectual traditions, which she studies during her fieldwork. This leads anthropologists to struggle with a few things, mainly the epistemological status of their accounts of people's lives, practices, and discourses, which are mediated by their own theoretical tools. Anthropologists are no longer authoritatively affirming, like Ernest Gellner did in his study of Muslim Moroccan Berbers, that "what appears to be *vox dei* is in reality *vox populi*."[22] The epistemic authority of the anthropologists' theoretical discourses remains, nonetheless, a vexed question. As Michael Jackson recently asked, "But why not place Sophocles' drama of Oedipus, Freud's model of the psyche, and Kalabari [Nigeria] and Tallensi [Ghana] myths on a par?," undoing therefore the distinction between art, theory, and myth.[23] Because thought, Jackson says, requires some distance from the empirical field while underscoring that distancing is not a "sign of superior intellectual skill," nor are the accounts produced as a result endowed "with a superior epistemological truth-value."[24] Philosophy, he adds, is a strategy to take our distance from the sensory and social worlds of experience, in contrast to ethnography, which is one for close and "intersubjective encounters."[25] In brief, we encounter again the distinction between the sticky materiality and intersubjectivity of the lived empirical world, and the slick, abstract, conceptual universe that hovers above it.

This distinction is also upheld by authors who do not argue for what is gained by the use of philosophy and theory but what is potentially lost. "People," João

Biehl and Peter Locke write, "are plural and ambiguous, irreducible to history and populations, norms and social forces."[26] In this case, theory, which is put to use to provide an account of a particular ethnographic encounter, risks, through its powers of subsumption, ironing out the complexities of the world. It also stifles "conceptual innovation" from the ethnographic ground up. Calls were also issued to return to ethnographic theory, as a response to a diagnosis of the discipline as descending into a parochialism as a result of its conceptual subservience to Continental philosophy coupled with a neglect of its own history, debates, and concepts, such as mana, taboo, and totemism.[27] In contrast to the discipline's past, when philosophers, social theorists, and psychoanalysts could not avoid wrestling with its ethnographic concepts, today anthropologists churn out studies that apply "the concept-of-the-month" in a game that no one outside the discipline cares about.[28]

These current debates about theory in anthropology are symptomatic of the discipline's anxiety regarding the political and epistemic authority of its discourses vis-à-vis the forms of life it inquires about (are its concepts superior to other traditions of intellectual inquiry?) and their intellectual authority vis-à-vis the big ideas produced by philosophy (are they subservient to Continental philosophy?). Anthropologists, and sociologists, have held philosophy in such awe that it has led them to oscillate between getting as close as possible to it and trying to dethrone it.[29] The French genealogy of the social sciences, which provides US academia with much of what it considers to be its theory, reveals—from Émile Durkheim to Pierre Bourdieu—different attempts to displace the authority of philosophy by arguing that the social sciences provide better, and more reflexive, answers to philosophical questions than the mother discipline herself.[30] These debates also bring out the question of anthropology's status today as a discipline that tries to be accountable to multiple constituencies, both internal and external to it, that are driven by different questions and attachments. It has to be wary of accusations of colonial violence, which can take the form of reifying difference, or of culturally appropriating a concept from its everyday uses in its form of life and "elevating it" to the status of theory, while simultaneously striving to be theoretically innovative and autonomous from the hegemony of ideas produced by philosophers. Can it manage to carve out a space for itself that does not fall back on the epistemological violence it was accused of in the past, when it generated its ethnographic concepts from below, without being epistemologically subservient to Continental theory?

The distinctions between the concreteness and messiness of the field and the abstractness and slickness of theory, as well as the one between the bottom-up

ethnographic theorizing and the top-down application of Continental theory, do not hold when one's "raw material" and "fieldwork experiences" include translations of, glosses on, and engagements with works and authors that form the canons of political and social theory. When one observes strands of one's own "theory" in the field—but not exclusively so, let me add—the presumed "innocence" of the supposed first moment of immersion, observation, and experience evaporates, since the frames through which one sees, classifies, and records are themselves, in this particular case, the objects of inquiry. The back and forth between the stickiness, concreteness, and senses-drenched materiality of the field and the slick world of abstract theory comes to a halt. In this case, the conceptual distance separating the tradition doing the inquiring and the one inquired about diminishes. For this is an internal traffic in theory. Yet the initial conservative pleasure of recognition, which overcomes the anthropologist as a result of her acquaintance with these theorists in the classroom (say, Marx, Gramsci, Bourdieu, Althusser), quickly recedes from view. It vanishes as the researcher encounters the multiple social and political lives of concepts, which are translated, transfigured, and embedded in emancipatory projects by members belonging to a different *generation* whose spaces of experiences and horizons of expectation were fashioned by different times and places. This is why doing fieldwork in theory, and tackling the question of theory from the South, cannot restrict itself to picking a few concepts, or authors away from their spaces of argument, to call into question some aspect of, or highlight an absence in, metropolitan critical theory.[31]

Fieldwork in theory moves away from the reification of discursive assumptions toward the labors of excavation of traditions of intellectual inquiry and the reconstitution of the theoretical, ideological, and political stakes at play in order to understand the numerous translations and modulations of critical theory.[32] Moreover, far too often revisiting the works of earlier critical thinkers focuses on assessing the purchase of their theories, either by making a case for the usefulness of their concepts for understanding the contemporary moment or by going in the opposite direction by seeking to denaturalize our present by underlining the difference separating their labors of conceptualization from ours. In both cases, their theories are what are mainly at stake in the excavation operation. In this work, I am also driven by a desire to recover something more than their concepts. I will pay attention to their critical ethos, their intellectual sensibilities, their sense of positionality, their ways of navigating the terrains of social accountability and intellectual autonomy and of theoretical production and political practice. In paying attention to these extra-epistemological issues, I avoid collapsing the inquiry into the social lives of theory, into a reified

conceptual analysis of Marxist, Islamic, or secular discourses. In doing so, we get a better sense of the political struggles and the stakes animating the spaces in which these theoretical works were produced, circulated, and appropriated. I am driven to do so by a desire not only to provide a more complex picture of the intellectual life and political struggles in the Arab world but also to curtail an instrumental appropriation of "Arab theory" and to forestall the reproduction in critical scholarly discourses—and disciplinary institutions—of ideological distinctions, such as between the secular and the religious.[33] In *Revolution and Disenchantment*, I intentionally *hold the tension* between narrative (historical and ethnographic) and theory without seeking to release it in one of the two directions.[34]

### *Time of History: Traveling Militants and Theories*

This generation of intellectuals came into a world that had already been radically altered by capitalist modernity and forces of European hegemony.[35] They were the products of a modern schooling system in Lebanon, which at the time taught French, and English to a lesser extent, alongside Arabic.[36] Both Waddah Charara and Ahmad Beydoun moved between private and public Francophone schools in their youth. Fawwaz Traboulsi, on the other hand, attended a private Anglophone boarding high school. The choice of where to go for higher education was, as would be expected, determined by the second language one possessed. Beydoun and Charara received grants to study in France, while Traboulsi traveled to England and studied at the American University of Beirut.[37] Sadik Jalal al-Azm (1934–2016), the Syrian philosopher and fiery public intellectual, did his graduate work at Yale University after studying at the American University of Beirut. The Lebanese University, the only institution of public higher learning in Lebanon, was founded in 1951, a bit less than a decade after Lebanon's independence. After exiting from revolutionary political practice, Charara, Beydoun, and a handful of other comrades from Socialist Lebanon would teach at the public university, while Traboulsi would join the private Anglophone universities.[38]

This generation's travels to the metropoles to study their own societies, coming back to lead revolutionary lives before finding sanctuary in the university in the wake of political disenchantment, is a familiar postcolonial story. Yet Socialist Lebanon's militant intellectuals traveled in the opposite direction of some of the best known public intellectuals of their generation.[39] Sadik Jalal al-Azm and Edward Said were detached ivory tower academics who did their graduate work on Immanuel Kant and Joseph Conrad, respectively. Struck

by the 1967 blitzkrieg, they converted. They moved out of the university and into the world, inaugurating a life of public engagement that came to define their legacy. Socialist Lebanon's militants, on the other hand, had always found themselves swimming in political streams before an event—the Lebanese civil war, in the case of Charara and Beydoun—left them high and dry. They moved from the world and into the academy. The crisscrossing lives of these revolutionaries turned academics and academics turned public intellectuals intersected at the Palestinian juncture. The high tides of the Palestinian revolution during the late 1960s and early 1970s brought them together. They either joined the revolution or became its allies before going their separate political and theoretical ways at different points in the next decade.

It is difficult to conceive of the lives of this generation of leftist militant intellectuals without dwelling on their intimate relation to the practice of translation. During the days of militancy, one translated for purposes of political education, as a strategy to give Marxist political arguments a different gloss on a doctrinal point and to anchor a political line in a theoretical ground. Later on, one translated a text to make it available for students in a seminar, and, of course, translation is always one way to earn some income.[40] These translations, especially those associated with the Marxist tradition, were not translated from their original languages (Marx: German; Lenin and Trotsky: Russian; Gramsci: Italian; Guevara: Spanish), but mostly from their French or English translations. At times an Arabic text was produced by simultaneously translating from English and French translations. In the particular case of a translation from a translation, which I will explore further in chapter 2, the metropole's languages, publishing houses, and publications, such as Éditions Maspero, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Les Temps Modernes*, *Historical Materialism*, and *New Left Review*, were pivotal institutional bridges that made, via metropolitan languages, the ideas and experiences of different militants and theorists from the South and the North accessible to each other.[41] I say one, because this globally interconnected world, which was fashioned by the practice and travels of militants as well as the intense circulation and translation of texts, did not always transit through metropolitan universities, periodicals, and publishers. It was also fostered by the art festivals, publications, and intellectual, political, and military institutions of the nonaligned and socialist worlds.

Besides their labors of linguistic translation, these militant intellectuals effected an additional act of translation. The knowledges these militants produced, relying on the transnational discourses of Marxism, Leninism, and Third Worldist radical thought, were not merely representations of their societies but rather interventions in them that were part and parcel of their revolutionary political

practice. They underscored the centrality of adapting Marxist concepts for the formulation of a communist politics attentive to the particularities of their political present, which went under the heading of the "Arabization of Marxism." These were acts of transfiguration that "refunction a text . . . for different demanding-sites," moving away from translation's problematic of meaning and its attendant questions.[42] These acts of linguistic translations from translations and conceptual transfigurations were fueled more by the impediment of revolutionary practice than by a fidelity to an original text. They were not mediations between a self and an other, an attempt to bridge supposed incommensurabilities between cultures, or an initiation of a dialogue between different intellectual traditions. Theirs was not an attempt that sought, as many critical and anthropological works do, to render what seems unfamiliar at first glance familiar or, going in the opposite direction, to denaturalize what we take for granted. They did not aim toward a rediscovery of one's own commitments in a different theoretical language or to reveal the contingency of one's own norms when refracted through a different prism. Rather, the practice of theorizing, which includes translation and transfiguration, was part and parcel of the arsenal of revolutionary politics, which was rendered possible by a deeply held belief in a shared horizon of an emancipation to come.

These practices, discourses, and institutions assumed and produced a global interconnectedness, a political universality of sorts premised on internationalist solidarity, the urgency of political practice, and multidirectional translation—North-South; South-South—that dodged the usual trap of *recognition* and consecration of authors from the colonies by the strong institutions of the metropole. "The structures of power the colonized writer confronts," Talal Asad wrote a while ago, "are institutional, not textual." "When someone pleads with the colonizer to make a judgment in a particular writer's favor, to have him or her translated and read 'seriously,' what is sought," Asad added, is "the modern world culture's transcendent power to redefine that writer's value as 'universal.'"[43] In the case Asad is describing, the metropole's institutions are the gatekeepers that grant an author access to "the universal," enabling the global circulation and multiple translations of the work—even though it is often a universal that always falls short of attaining true universality. Literary criticism in the Anglo-American academy, Rosalind Morris notes, "tends to attribute to the third world literary text an irreducible particularity." "The resistance here," she writes, "is not of or by the third world writer and/or her writings, let alone by the subaltern; it is the resistance of dominance to its possible displacement from the exclusive claim to universality."[44]

These militant intellectuals were fashioned by and contributed to fashioning a globally interconnected world that cannot be captured adequately by an ahistorical deployment of East/West or North/South binaries. Nor was its commonality synonymous with a homogeneity and an epistemological naïveté. Their theories cannot be reduced to a wholesale operation of the importation of Left varieties of modernization theory, even if some of them dabbled in them, and to self-Orientalizing discourses. To do so is to mistake multipolar acts of translation and transfiguration for a one-way colonial imports business. The figure of the internationalist militant intellectual/translator, not that of the westernized discursive comprador, is at the heart of the first part of this book—chapters 1 to 3.

In highlighting these points, I aim to underscore three different pathways to attain universality. The first is the a posteriori outcome of *political articulation*. It is sustained by an ethos of internationalist solidarity that, through traveling theories and militants, and multiple acts of translation/transfiguration, fashions a common world. True, this pathway was premised on positing class as the universal grammar of inequality, but its universality is socially mediated and needed to be activated through the practices of transfiguration and militancy.[45] The second pathway privileges context-less, supposedly a priori universal concepts, say, rights, reason, and freedom, which subsume, and are in no need of, the double movement of transfiguration and militancy.[46] The third—metropolitan institutional consecration—is an outcome of power.

### *Times of the Sociocultural: Civil Wars, Communal Solidarities, and Metropolitan Epistemology Critique*

Difference at the time of Marxist militancy was not yet articulated on the ground of communal—sectarian, regional, familial—solidarities. It was a function of the particularity of the political present that through a diagnosis of the political forces, and attention to possibilities for practice, also steered the militants of Socialist Lebanon away from grounding difference in historicist evolutionary terms, which in communist politics took the form of stagism.[47] Militant Arab Marxism and anthropology articulated mirror images of difference. The first articulated difference in historical terms (historicist stagism, or the anticipation of a revolutionary future), while the second articulated difference in sociocultural terms.

The compressed years of the 1970s revealed clearly the differences between the slow temporalities of academic disciplines and the fast pace of political events. Around the time when metropolitan disciplines were taking stock

of events such as decolonization, the Vietnam War, and the increased racialization of Arabs in the wake of 1967, by interrogating the entanglements of their knowledges with colonial power, particularly by diasporic scholars (e.g., Talal Asad and Edward Said), there was a swift unraveling of a political world, through the sectarian violence of a civil war, that dislodged Marxist concepts—"revolutionary masses," "organic intellectuals," "revolutionary theory"—from the world they were supposed to capture and transform. To put it briefly, by the time these disciplines were slowly beginning the process of their own decolonization from ahistorical assumptions in the mid-1970s, Marxist militant intellectuals were beginning to cast away their revolutionary conceptual arsenal to examine the wartime communal logics. As diasporic intellectuals began their critical forays into the politics of theory, the shocked revolutionaries called into question their own previously cherished theory of politics. At a time when metropolitan disciplines dealing with the non-Western world were emerging from their prehistory, breaking away from the authoritative repetitions of Orientalist structures, the disenchanted Marxists, betrayed by history's promise of emancipation, were entering into a posthistorical world that was characterized by the repetitions of communal wars.

Those years not only witnessed disenchanted Marxists at home and metropolitan critical scholarship going in opposite critical directions (History →←Society/Culture).[48] What these divergent critical directions shared was, as I will develop in chapters 4, 5, and 6, a sidelining of ideological distinctions—Left and Right, progressives and reactionaries—as fundamental criteria of theoretical and political discernment. The autonomy of the ideological was called into question from two radically different corners: the discursive and the sociological. Thinkers in the metropoles, such as Edward Said, who were influenced by Michel Foucault's work, sidelined *theoretically* the ideological distinctions between right-wing authors and Marxists by showing how both groups, despite their ideological differences, partake in the same Orientalist discursive assumptions (chapter 6). While Charara, who was closely observing the unfolding of the fighting during the Lebanese civil and regional wars, noted that despite the ideological divisions separating the fighters on opposite sides of the trenches (Left and Right), the more fundamental divide, which dictated common modalities of practice for both sides, was communal—primarily sectarian, but regional and kin solidarities also played a role (chapter 5).

The Euro-American epistemological critique of Western knowledges of the non-West, which took off in the late 1970s and 1980s, inaugurated what would come to be known as postcolonial studies; it was also contemporaneous with a crisis of Marxism in Europe. Those same years witnessed the ebbing

of the vigorous debates that sought in different ways to think the question of the political—Mao, Gramsci, Althusser—away from economic reductionism. Critical works, sometimes undertaken by former Marxist militants such as Jean-François Lyotard, subjected master narratives, universals, and notions of totality to a corrosive theoretical skepticism.[49] While poststructuralist and postcolonial thinkers were theoretically calling into question the discursive assumptions shared by liberals and leftists for their violence and their exclusions, the disenchanted Lebanese Marxists were experiencing the political breakdown of the Lebanese state and of a common world of ideological distinctions. Theirs was a world fragmented into blocs governed by subfactions of fighting militias in Beirut or by the regimes that increasingly colonized every sphere of social life—political, educational, judicial—and subjugated them to the will of the sovereign. They did not necessarily have a theoretical longing for universals or the application of Western liberal models. Rather, they longed for a dignified life in *common* that escapes oscillating between a world fragmented by sectarian warlords and identitarian communal discourses, on the one hand, and one that is colonized by tyrants who subjugate their citizens for decades on end in the name of the coming battle against imperialism, on the other. The final chapter of the book traces the fork in critical and political agendas in the wake of the communal fragmentation of the militants' common world and the Iranian Revolution between those intellectuals who not so long ago worked side by side in support of the Palestinian revolution.

## *On Method*

Edward Said critically addressed the intelligentsia in the postcolonies, noting that one of the indications of cultural domination resided in its auxiliary status to Western trends.[50] "Impressive evidence for this," he wrote, "is found in the social sciences and, surprisingly enough, among radical intellectuals whose Marxism is taken wholesale from Marx's own homogenizing view of the Third World."[51] Whether gravitating in the Soviet or US orbits, the rigged concepts, which were at the heart of Arab intellectuals' thought and guiding their political practice, risked turning them from emancipators into unknowing dupes partaking in their own domination. Over time this mode of epistemological criticism has gained more and more traction in the scholarship on the Middle East and keeps on adding new objects to its critical mill. The critique of discursive assumptions, whose focal point was the interrogation of modernist, liberal, feminist, and Marxist assumptions about nation, gender, religion, and culture, has more recently extended its terrain to focus on new objects of

investigation: secular and LGBTQ discursive assumptions. The insurrectional acts these modes of reading enabled at first withered away as they became increasingly doxic procedures of a researcher's domain.[52]

Despite the fact that it has become normalized, and hegemonic in anthropology and Middle East studies, this reading practice never ran out of steam. In geopolitical conjunctures, characterized by US imperial interventions and invasions that were buttressed by ideologies of liberation, this defensive and oppositional practice of criticism constituted a much-needed corrective to the enlisting of discourses—such as feminism and liberalism—in military imperial ventures.[53] This critique of the entanglement of discourses, say, Orientalist or universalist, with imperial power did not lose its impetus, precisely because of the sense of political urgency generated by the geopolitical conjuncture that propelled it and bestowed upon this theoretical critique its anti-imperialist *lettres de noblesse*.[54] Moreover, for those of us who teach in the US, and who witness in our everyday lives institutional and personal racist acts of violence against Arabs and Muslims, these critical reading practices, which seek to disrupt the reproduction of racist tropes, at the very least in the classroom, acquire an added importance. "The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology, holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed," Said wrote regarding life in the West, and particularly in the US, "and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny."[55]

These critical reading practices are still much needed as pedagogical tools and *strategic* modalities of public intervention in the Euro-American domestic battles of representation. Having said that, they have become increasingly problematic as a hegemonic theoretical apparatus in the academic fields of knowledge production and in public interventions *about* the Arab world. In the wake of the initial insurrectionary works by Talal Asad and Edward Said, this mode of criticism morphed from a practice that teases out the different layers of mediation between knowledge and power into one of ideological adjudication. The nonintended effect of the Saidian rewiring of the Foucauldian genealogies that marked the power/knowledge couplet (colonial power/imperial knowledge) and imbricated it within a political anticolonial antagonism with a dominant subject (the West) and a dominated one (the Orient) is that it produced a form of discursive-ideology critique that unmasks the rigged discursive assumptions undergirding thinkers' thought to reveal a class of "westernized natives" who are discursively, and at times economically, allied with Empire. The "Oriental" subjects who are fashioned by "Orientalist" knowledges (ontology) put them to use (epistemology), like the colonialists and imperialists,

to undermine from the inside their own societies (politics). Perhaps the most memorable sentence that encapsulates the workings of this modality of criticism that collapsed ontology and politics into epistemology is contained in Leila Ahmed's powerful revisionist critique of the nineteenth-century Egyptian thinker Qasim Amin, who was often hailed as a feminist pioneer in the Arab world. After noting that Amin's work is the rearticulation "of the colonial thesis of the inferiority of the native and Muslim and the superiority of the European" in a "native upper-middle class voice, the voice of a class economically allied with colonizers," Ahmed quips that "far from being the father of Arab feminism, then, Amin might more aptly be described as the son of Cromer [the British proconsul general in Egypt from 1877 to 1907] and colonialism."[56]

Three decades after the insurrectionary critical contraption came into being to criticize the authority, and claims to neutrality and objectivity, of Western knowledges of the non-West, it was repurposed as an ersatz anti-imperialist implement wielded to condemn Arab thinkers and militants from the nineteenth century to our present for internalizing "colonial taxonomies" and being discursive compradors of sorts.[57] What disappeared with this repurposing is the crucial initial concern with the question of the authority of discourses, which Talal Asad was particularly preoccupied with. The question of authority cannot be separated from the loci of enunciation of these discourses' authors, their institutional sites of production, and their spheres of circulation, in addition to their discursive backbone.[58] Evacuating the question of authority risks collapsing the two meanings of representation—re-presentation as portrait (art, philosophy) and representation as proxy (speaking for, politics)—into each other.[59] The irony of the matter lies in the fact that the epistemology critique of Arab thinkers took off at the point of their political and military defeat, and at times imprisonment and assassination, by Israel, the authoritarian regimes, and the rising sectarian and religious political forces. Their words came to be criticized as their worlds began falling apart.

This modality of criticism remains "parasitic" on a particular idea of the West.[60] In an older Maoist jargon the West constitutes the main contradiction for these critics, which is why these critiques cannot account for the complexities and internal divisions of Arab and Muslim societies. Its main move, vis-à-vis those Arab thinkers whose discursive assumptions are dubbed to be in alliance with Empire, is a strategy of inversion that never surrenders its attachment to the West. By only taking up an oppositional stance toward the attempts of the West and "westernized natives" to refashion these forms of life, without dialectically relating these attempts to the internal historical dynamics and contradictions of these societies, this modality of criticism falls very

close to reinscribing the argument that the engine of historical transformation is external to these societies, but instead of welcoming it like twentieth-century modernization theory did, it now has to be resisted.

In fact, the archive of contemporary Arab thought is primarily examined, like the older generation of scholars did, through the anxiety of influence of the West. In the introduction to his magisterial *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Albert Hourani wrote about the pitfalls of focusing on individual thinkers in contrast to schools of thought.[61] In doing so, there is a risk, Hourani wrote, "of giving the impression that they were more important and original than they really were; most of them (although not quite all) were derivative thinkers of the second or third rank of importance."[62] Highlighting this tradition's reproduction of Orientalist and colonial taxonomies, and doubting the originality of secular Muslim thought, underscores, like Hourani, the derivative nature of this tradition. Again, the difference lies in inverting the normative charges associated with this common diagnosis. While Hourani focuses on these thinkers because they are vectors of modernization, the oppositional metropolitan critics underscore the epistemological and ontological violence at the heart of these intellectuals' visions that seeks to bring about Western hegemony. What gets foreclosed in the process is an engagement with modern and contemporary Arab and Muslim thought that does not reinscribe the West as its sovereign subject. Moreover, critiques of Arab and Muslim intellectuals as self-Orientalizing, unoriginal, and plagued by colonial taxonomies reproduce the historicism and theories of lack that are criticized in these thinkers' works by unwittingly reinscribing once more the Arab world as lagging behind, this time around in the production of original thought.

Therefore, if one is interested, like I am in this project, in understanding the travails of this generation of thinkers, the questions they posed, the answers they proposed, and the different positions they were arguing against or aligning themselves with, a practice of criticism premised on unmasking "faulty," or not, epistemological assumptions will not be of any help. What it will do is erase the historicity of these fields of argument and obscure the *character* of these specific interventions. It also forecloses the investigation of how theories, which are embedded in language games and political projects, help fashion the ethos of militant intellectuals and later of disenchanted solitary critics. For instance, in just focusing on universal—say, secular or liberal—discursive assumptions, and aligning them a priori with the US empire and human rights imperialism and epistemological violence, these critical strategies risk reifying these universals by erasing the logics of political practice, the powers of institutions, and the transfiguring acts of translation that repurpose these discourses

and embed them in different projects. It does so through eliding central historical and ethnographic questions. How are they put to use? By whom? In what conjuncture and to what end? How do their international travels change them and their adherents? What projects do they enable and foreclose as they are put to practice? While the unmasking of Eurocentric knowledges parading as universals proved to be salutary against the effortlessly thrown historicist charges of the "backwardness" of non-Western cultures, it also risks naturalizing the conceptual universal/particular distinction on a geographical West/East one.[63] This will again participate in either hailing difference as a form of resistance to the homogenizing power of the West or claiming it to be a traditional, or "pre-capitalist," remainder that needs to be overcome to safely reach the much awaited and always deferred shores of modernity.[64]

In investigating these questions, I will mainly draw sustenance from the methodology developed by the Ludwig Wittgenstein and John L. Austin–inspired work of Quentin Skinner and David Scott's notion of a problem-space. The central tenet of Skinner's method is captured in "Wittgenstein's remark 'that words are also deeds.'"[65] Skinner posited that in order to understand the *historical meaning* of the text, one has to view it as an intervention in argument and ask about the *character* of the intervention[66] through asking questions such as "What is this text doing? What is the author doing in this text?"[67] "How is it positioned in relation to existing arguments? What kind of an intervention does it constitute? What does it accept, reject, repudiate, satirize, ignore in existing discussions?"[68] The import of R. G. Collingwood's "logic of question and answer," put to use in Skinner's work, was its insight that it is helpful to approach any intentional object of the human mind (a building, a piece of music, a philosophical work) as a solution to certain problems, and hence the historian's task is "to find out the questions to which the text was the answer."[69]

David Scott elaborates the concept of a problem-space, mainly out of his reading of Collingwood and Skinner, "though in the background of it," he tells the late Stuart Hall, one can "discern the trace of Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin and Foucault."[70] In *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (2004), Scott notes that

> a "problem-space," in my usage, is meant first of all to demarcate a discursive context, a context of language, but it is more than a cognitively intelligible arrangement of concepts, ideas, images, meanings, and so on—though it is certainly this. It is a context of argument, and therefore one of intervention. A problem-space, in other words, is an ensemble

> of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs.[71]

Moreover, what this concept allows Scott to do is to gauge the temporality of different spaces of arguments, how in a new conjuncture "old questions may lose their salience, their bite, and so lead the range of old answers that once attached to them to appear lifeless, quaint, not so much wrong as irrelevant."[72] In emphasizing the temporality of problem-spaces, Scott is after a rethinking of the relation of past to present, to avoid understanding the past in the terms of the present, to sidestep the "presentism that reads the past as a naive or mistaken version of the present"[73] by reconstructing the character of an intervention in its own space of arguments. Scott, however, is also interested in an additional question following the historical act of reconstruction, that of interrogating the saliency of the reconstructed move for the critic's present. Is the question still worth answering?, he asks. In that sense, Scott adds a normative edge, an engaged posture, to the labors of historical reconstruction, noting the insufficiency of the detached reconstructing of the past practiced by Skinner, "who bows and exits just at the point at which the question arises of determining and judging the stakes in the present of the rehistoricizing intervention."[74] The labors and responsibility of the historian are not to stop at the present's doorstep, by denaturalizing and revealing the constructedness of what we now take for granted.[75] It is not enough to show how things were different in the past, and therefore infer that our present could possibly have different contours; rather, Scott urges the critic to knock on this door and seek "to make the present yield more attractive possibilities for alternative futures."[76]

In this project I will build on Scott's insights, drawing attention to the problem-spaces, not only of different generations of critics but of differently located contemporary critics. While Scott's interest lies mostly in the temporality of problem-spaces, I will put this notion to work to also help us understand the dynamics of synchronous fields of argument in the Levant and in the North American academy.[77] Moreover, in times when oppositional culture in the metropoles is growing farther and farther away from the thinkers and movements of emancipation on the ground in the Arab world—unlike the earlier generation's solidarity and alliance with the Palestinian national liberation movements—these critics are answerable to a variant of Scott's critique of Skinner's detachment. So you've shown from afar how the discursive assumptions that Marxist and feminist militants and thinkers are using are all deeply entangled with power. This reveals that you have mastered the application of critical tool, but is that enough? Can't theory go beyond oppositional critique

toward "positing a new imaginary figure/model of intelligibility," as Cornelius Castoriadis suggested—one that can be tethered to a reimagining of political futures.[78]

## *Coda*

This book is best approached like a musical fugue. Its major voice is the Lebanese New Left. Diasporic critical theorists, like Edward Said and Talal Asad, and the impact that their critical work had on metropolitan disciplines, are its minor voice. It has two more minor voices, which appear every now and then. The first is the work of scholars associated with the South Asian Subaltern Studies collective, who shared in their beginnings a common Maoist and Gramscian lineage with the theorists of Socialist Lebanon but put it to use differently. The second is the 1960s French Left. Socialist Lebanon's militant intellectuals were in touch with some of its factions and kept track of its theoretical productions and militant strategies. As the fugue unfolds, its main subject—emancipation, particularly from colonialism and imperialism—goes through a succession of inversions and counterpoints that are still unfolding in time.

The form of the book reflexively reenacts this generation's dialectic of revolutionary hope and political disenchantment. In part I—Time of History—I reconstruct the coming into being and high tides of the New Left by examining Socialist Lebanon's archive. In doing so, I underscore how the members of this generation were bound together by a collective project of emancipation, which inscribed itself within an internationalist constellation of revolutionary movements. In examining the multiple binds confronting the revolutionary project in part II—Times of the Sociocultural—I move from the reconstruction of a collective project of emancipation to an in-depth examination of Waddah Charara's own militant trajectory and critical work. The scale and focus of the chapters mirrors the transubstantiation of a collective of underground militant intellectuals writing anonymous clandestine texts in the service of the revolution into disenchanted, isolated critics in a wartorn polis.

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# PART I. TIME OF HISTORY

One was dealing with oneself as if under a constant demand, as an employee of History, or an employee of some other power, with many tasks to achieve.

—ABBAS BEYDOUN

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# 1. O Youth, O Arabs, O Nationalists

## Recalling the High Tides of Anticolonial Pan-Arabism

Pick a pen and take note: the Muslims make the pilgrimage to Mecca, the Christians to the Vatican and the national liberation movements to Algiers!
—AMILCAR CABRAL

We will never repeat the past. . . . We will get rid of the past by regaining our rights in the Suez Canal. . . . O citizens—when we build the high dam we also build the dam of honor, freedom, and dignity, and we get rid of the dams of degradation and humiliation and declare all of Egypt one front. . . . All of Egypt will fight until its last drop of blood.
—GAMAL ABDEL NASSER, SPEECH ON THE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOLUTION IN ALEXANDRIA

### *Prelude*

Revisiting *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, a little bit more than two decades after its publication, Albert Hourani made a series of observations on the problem-space the book inhabited, as well as on the alternative directions the project could take, or maybe should have taken. These retrospective historiographical comments, included in the preface to the 1983 edition, fall into two overlapping sets of concerns. First, Hourani draws his readers' attentions to the insufficiency of a "pure" history of ideas and to the need to supplement it "by asking how and why the ideas of my writers had an influence on the minds of others."[1] The histories of ideas and arguments, Hourani suggested, would benefit from an anchoring in social history, an attentiveness to a finer scale of analysis that pays attention to intra-Arab distinctions, and an examination of the processes of mediation of thought via such vectors as poetry, which disseminate it to wider publics.[2]

In the second series of comments, Hourani recalled a guiding assumption of the project: focusing on breaks and discontinuities with the past. "To some extent," he wrote twenty years later, "I may have distorted the thought of the writers I studied, at least those of the first and second generations: the 'modern'

element in their thought may have been smaller than I implied, and it would have been possible to write about them in a way which emphasized continuity rather than a break with the past."[3] Hourani's late interest in the question of historical continuity went beyond his retrospective worry regarding the emphasis placed on reading more "echoes of European thought" (discontinuity) than "echoes of Islamic political thought" (continuity) in the works of Arab thinkers he dealt with, as he put it a few years later in a rich autobiographical interview.[4] It took the form of a call to write about other kinds of writers. Those were the ones not given their due in the book. In the process Hourani alerted his readers to how the historian's present is refracted through the formation of historical objects, and how they are interpreted by making explicit the decisions he made in the early 1960s regarding who to include in his pantheon of Arab thought. "Those," as he put it, "who still lived in their inherited world of thought, whose main aim was to preserve the continuity of its tradition, and who did so in accustomed ways, writing and teaching within the framework of the great schools, the Azhar in Cairo or the Zaytuna in Tunis, or of the Sufi brotherhoods," were the authors who had remained dominant throughout the nineteenth century.[5] "In the present century they have lost much of their domination," noted the veteran historian, "or so it seemed at the point in time when I was writing my book." Hourani's "or so it seemed" gives his readers a clue to how his emerging interest in the question of continuity registers the transformations altering the political landscape in the Arab world in the two decades since he first published his book. "It is clearer now than it was then, at least to me," Hourani wrote, "that the extension of the area of political consciousness and activity, the coming of 'mass politics,' would bring into the political processes men and women who were still liable to be swayed by what the Azhar said or wrote, and what the shaykhs of a brotherhood might teach."[6]

Revisiting futures past in 1983, with an emphasis on continuity rather than its opposite, Hourani subtly revised some of the conclusions of his book's epilogue, "Between Past and Future," which addressed the post–World War II era from the vantage point of the early 1960s. There, the picture drawn was of the passing of a world divided into East and West, and the birth of a new modern world. The West had managed to carry out "its historic mission of creating a new and unified world."[7] "The world was one," Hourani concluded, during the age of independence and national liberation. Not only was it unified on the levels of material techniques and science but, more importantly for our purposes, "politically too the world had become one: there was a single universe of political discourse. There were of course different political systems, but the differences could not be explained simply in terms of regional or national

character or tradition."[8] Differences, during the age of ideologies, were no longer predicated on the *particularities* of region, nation, or tradition. Rather, the differences were themselves contained within a single *universal* terrain of political discourse. "The most important of all changes which came to the surface in these twenty years," Hourani added in his depiction of the postwar era, "was this: the past was abolished whether it were the past of 'westernization' or the more distant past of the traditional societies."[9] The pasts of tradition, and westernization, seemed then to have passed for good to usher in a universal modernity at the pinnacle of anticolonial passions a decade after the coming to power of the Free Officers in Egypt (1952) and in the last hours of the Algerian struggle for national liberation. This was the time that preceded the Islamic revival and the Iranian Revolution. The promise of anticolonial nationalism had not yet been "followed by the crisis of the third-world-state, and the culture wars became identified with chauvinism, ethnic hatred, and cynically manipulative and corrupt regimes."[10]

The militant intellectuals that will take part in founding the Lebanese New Left in the mid-1960s were swept off their feet at a very young age by the tidal waves of Arab nationalisms and their promise of a united popular sovereignty on Arab lands after defeating colonialism, which had divided the Arab people into different state cantons. They grew up in that post–World War II age when the world, as Hourani observed in the early 1960s, had become one. The political, articulated ideologically, mainly between different nationalisms (say, Lebanese, Syrian, and Arab), appeared to have gained a greater autonomy from the social fabrics and cultural lifeworlds that previously articulated differences—what Hourani refers to as region, national character, and tradition. The postwar world that Hourani is describing is a time of modernity that, by abolishing the past of "westernization" and seemingly separating the political from the social and the cultural, especially in the form of Arab nationalism, acquires a higher degree of universality and renders political differences abstract and *commensurable*.

In what follows, I stitch together the biographical, political, and intellectual in a coming of age narrative that underscores the early pivotal events, particularly the high tides of Arab nationalism that marked these young soon to be militant intellectuals, and their own reconstructions of their distant pasts, before they founded the Lebanese New Left and became known as the 1960s generation.[11] "Recalling," in the chapter's title, is both an act of remembrance and a retrospective critical practice, as in requesting the return of a product already in use after the discovery of a manufacturing defect.[12] The products they are recalling are Arab nationalism and its promises of sovereignty and the

modern, single ideological universe of political discourse they inhabited and that contributed so much to fashioning them into political subjects operating outside the boundaries of their own sectarian, regional, and kin communities.

This first chapter is also a "prehistory" of the New Left militant intellectuals who will for the most part found or join Socialist Lebanon (1964–70). I am using "prehistory" in four overlapping ways. First, it stands for the period that predates the time of their Marxist political engagement in underground political cells associated with practices of secrecy and anonymous publishing. Second, it also refers to the time before their deep immersion in Marxist theory: reading it, translating it, and producing it. I therefore mostly rely on their own reconstructions of their pasts in the interviews I conducted with them and in their memoirs to get a sense of the questions, hopes, and desires animating them there and then. Third, I use "prehistory" to refer to the times before the comrades' imaginations were captured by the movement of history whose milestones included such events as the Chinese, Cuban, and Vietnamese Revolutions. Finally, having been born in the first years of the Lebanese civil war (1975–90), a time when the Baʿth had already been in power in Syria and Iraq for more than a decade, I was not fully aware before I began conducting these interviews of the importance of Arab nationalism, and especially Baʿthist ideology and politics, to those militant intellectuals (such as Mahmoud Soueid, Abbas Beydoun, Azza Charara Beydoun, Fawwaz Traboulsi, Ahmad Beydoun, Waddah Charara, and Muhsin Ibrahim, among others) who would later form the backbone of the Lebanese New Left. The matter is not merely an empirical historical "lacuna" on my part. It is more than that. Having been born into times of "Really Existing Baʿthism," particularly in its Assadist incarnation, Arab nationalist politics and ideology was synonymous, from my own generational perspective, with authoritarian regimes and apparatuses of power masquerading as visions of national sovereignty against colonialism. For instance, revisiting the writings of Michel Aflaq, one of the founders and the ideologue of the Baʿth in and for our present, was never a question for me. The virulent debates between different strains of Arab nationalists—say, Nasserists and Baʿthists—were, as far as I was concerned, arcane historical materials. Despite their temporal proximity, they seemed light-years away from my own existential generational standpoint. They were a past past. On the other hand, coming of political age in the 1990s, after the interruption of the Lebanese civil war (1975–90) and in the wake of the hopes, projects, and mostly defeats of this generation of leftists, their past experiences, past projects, past hopes, and multiple political and intellectual transformations seemed alive and worthy of revisiting—enough at least to propel me to undertake this project.

Two caveats before I start narrating: writing about a generation of Lebanese leftist militant intellectuals coming of age in the aftermath of the 1948 Nakba and the rise of Abdel Nasser as the icon of Arab national liberation in the late 1950s requires taking stock of the particularities of Lebanese society's history and politics, namely, the shifting *articulations* of infranational familial, regional, and sectarian grounds with specific modern ideologies (Arab nationalism, communism, Lebanese nationalism) and supranational imaginaries and ties (Shiʿi ties to Najaf, Maronites to Rome and France, for example). A word of caution is due here. In alluding to the articulation of infranational attachments, and supranational ones with modern ideologies such as Marxism, I could be misunderstood as going back to an older Orientalist literature on the area, which marginalized the importance of modern ideologies at work to explain all phenomena through the lens of an immutable Islamic civilizational whole. In an essay published in *Commentary* in January 1976, the British American historian Bernard Lewis wrote:

> For to admit that an entire civilization can have religion as its primary loyalty is too much. Even to suggest such a thing is regarded as offensive by liberal opinion, always ready to take protective umbrage on behalf of those whom it regards as its wards. This is reflected in the present inability, political, journalistic and scholarly alike, to recognize the importance of the factor of religion in the current affairs of the Muslim world and in the consequent recourse to the language of left-wing and right-wing, progressive and conservative, and the rest of the Western terminology, the use of which in explaining Muslim political phenomena is about as accurate and as enlightening as an account of a cricket match by a baseball correspondent.[13]

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), in which this paragraph was cited, and the ensuing moment of postcolonial critique, has debunked the essentialist, ahistorical claims, on which such pronouncements on the Arab and Muslim world claiming its "exceptional" status are founded. In pointing to the peculiar *sociological* profile of these intellectuals and militants, such as the predominance of Shiʿis among the ranks of the Lebanese Communist Party in the 1970s, or of Shiʿi Beirut residents who hail from Lebanon's peripheries among the militant intellectuals of Socialist Lebanon in the mid-1960s, I do not highlight an ahistorical notion of religion, seeing in it the ultimate grid of explanation of an "exceptional" Arab politics. [14] Having said that, I also do not seek to erase the particular sociological profiles of these militants, which includes more than just an upbringing in a particular sectarian community, to

engage in an "abstract" examination of theories and ideologies that does not account for the milieus in which these ideas found anchorage in particular times and places. Rather than isolating supposedly opposed first principles, "traditional" religious loyalty for the "Orientals" versus "modern" political ideologies for the "West," and either assert the distinction to prove the backwardness of the "Oriental" or negate it to assert the modernity of the non-Westerners and undo the "exception," it is more analytically fruitful, I think, to investigate how at different times and places, both in the West and in the non-West, different sociological distinctions and attachments based on, say, religion, region, family, gender, class, and race resonate and articulate with different political ideologies.

Second, after they disengaged from organized political activity, the intellectual militants who form the backbone of this project became distinguished social scientists, historians, and artists. There is no escape from engaging with their work, not only as the main body of material for this project but also to gain a thorough understanding of Lebanese history and its contemporary politics. As a result, in this chapter, and the rest of the work, I will follow Brinkley Messick's lead in using their texts *both* as "sources for analysis and objects of analysis."[15] There is no external detached body of texts that acts as a ground and is relied on to build a context in which these texts were intervening. I use these authors' oeuvre both to delineate the contours of a problem-space and to examine the interventions their texts were performing in a specific conjuncture.

### *Lebanon's Nations and Its One State*

On September 1, 1920, French general Henri Gouraud proclaimed the state of Greater Lebanon, with Elias al-Huwayyik, the Maronite patriarch, standing to his right.[16] The new state was carved out by the French general, assuming the Mandate for Syria and Lebanon after defeating King Faysal's Arab forces and occupying Damascus, from territories formerly belonging to the Ottoman provinces of Syria and Beirut, which were annexed to the semiautonomous Mount Lebanon *Mutasarrifiyya* (provincial government). The new state, encompassing Sunni, Shi'i, and Druze religious communities, eleven Christian ones, and a Jewish minority, was put together by the French around its long-term allies, the Maronite Christians, and *for them*.[17] The new arrangement was imposed on the land's Muslim communities, who had been torn away from the Syrian Arab hinterland, turning them "overnight from a millennium-old ruling majority into a 'minority.' They had become subject not only to the French themselves but to France's client, the Maronites."[18]

A weakened France, in the aftermath of its defeat during World War II, coupled with the Muslim elites' increasing adherence to the new state, produced a majority calling in 1943 for Lebanon's independence from the ailing imperial power. The fruit of this convergence was the National Pact, an unwritten agreement that founded independent Lebanon on a double negative: neither integration into Syria (the Muslims' Arab unionist demand) nor French protection (the Christians' demand). The double negation founding the nation defined Lebanon as a country "with an Arab face."[19] The new country would become part of the Arab world, taking part in the founding of the Arab League. It would also relinquish the West's protection, but not sever its ties with it, while pledging to become neither a sanctuary nor a passageway for colonialism, in the famous expression of Riad al-Sulh, Lebanon's preeminent Sunni leader and prime minister at the time. Lebanon, founded on a compromise between different infranational sectarian communities and their supranational (Arab and Western) imaginaries and loyalties, would continually fail to produce a hegemonic unifying narrative for what it means to be a Lebanese national.

Lebanon was, since its inception, and still is, a house of many mansions.[20] Not all of these mansions, though, would have equal stature in steering the Lebanese state, gaining access to resources, and articulating their vision of the nation. The division of political power since the country's first constitution, which was drafted in 1926 under French Mandate rule, would be allocated according to a system of *provisional* confessional representation. This system of inscribing religious identities as political ones was not entirely new. Mount Lebanon had witnessed different power-sharing agreements between the Maronite and Druze communities in 1845 and 1861, which were imposed by the European powers, "protectors" of Ottoman minorities, to quell sectarian tensions between the two groups. In a political game that was structured by quotas for the different constitutive religious communities of the nation, demographics are key.[21] The 1932 census was the last official census conducted in Lebanon. The 1990 amendments to the constitution, in the wake of the fifteen-year-long civil and regional wars, rectified the previous power imbalance by transferring some of the previous quasi-monarchic executive prerogatives of the Maronite president to the council of ministers and dividing parliamentary seats equally between Christians and Muslims. The country's open secret for a while now has been the retreat in the demographics of Christian inhabitants and the increase of its Muslim population, which forestalls conducting a new official census. The dangerous politics of sectarian population demographics is at the heart of Lebanese internal politics and its imbrications with regional and international ones.[22]

From the particularities of the infranational religious communities and the system of political representation that tied participation in the institutional political game to confessional denominations sprang the precarious Lebanese Republic. The division of the state institutions and resources between competing confessional blocs spared the Lebanese polity from the military coups and the grip of authoritarian rule that shook the neighboring countries in the wake of the 1948 Arab catastrophe. The Lebanese state, torn as it was, and still is, between the different constituencies that compose it and fight over it, did not manage to "rise above" these loyalties, or to articulate itself fully with one of the groups to subdue the others. The Maronite elite, in control of most key positions in the Lebanese state on the eve of independence, put forth a politically and economically (*laissez-faire*) pro-Western Lebanese nationalism that saw itself as part of the "free world."[23] Political movements and ideological currents would, when passing through the Lebanese prism, be predominantly refracted along the lines of the multiple components of the Lebanese polity, and be translated into the political game of sectarian balance. Anticolonial Arab nationalism, in its heyday, was therefore "perceived by some as a threat to the communitarian equilibrium, and by others as an instrument of mobilization against Maronite preeminence. Following from that, Arab nationalism's progress or its retreat became an *internal stake*, with civil war at its horizon."[24] As the late Samir Kassir, a sharp analyst of Lebanese history and politics, put it, "while in Syria, Jordan, or Iraq, the regional polarization had for effect to oppose the governments against society's vibrant forces, rather against the entire society, in Lebanon, it [regional polarization] came to be inscribed at the heart of society."[25] These modern ideological movements, such as Arab nationalism, Syrian nationalism, and communism, were *also* a means to oppose a politics centered around urban notables and rural feudal lords. Lebanon's French birth out of Ottoman ruins catering for an Eastern Christian community against the unionist wishes of its Muslim "national partners," the founding of a political system that divided the state along unequal confessional lines, and the failure to formulate a hegemonic vision of the nation resulted in the country's extreme susceptibility to regional and international developments.

### *The Palestinian Nakba and the Lebanese South*

"If you go to 'Aitarun, you see Palestine . . . Israel, if you go to Marun al-Ras, you see the Hula Plains; and if you go to Rmaysh, you see Palestine," says Waddah Charara a little bit less than sixty years after the Palestinian Nakba of 1948, as he painstakingly describes to me the topography of the villages

surrounding Bint Jbayl—the southern Lebanese town his father's family is originally from—and what they overlook on the other side of the border. "From Bint Jbayl," he adds, "you see Sa'sa'. . . a colony, a settlement, which is *mythic* in my family's stories. . . . I saw it before actually seeing it . . . both my paternal aunts used to talk to me about 1948. Theirs was not a political narration, and most probably their reports were fabricated."[26]

Palestine was not only geographically contiguous to southern Lebanese towns and villages from which one could spot the construction of settlements. The Lebanese bordering villages were integrated in more than one way into the economic, religious, medical, and administrative networks of pre-1948 Palestine. Traders would cross the borders from Yafa to sell their oranges and take wheat, barely, lentils, or corn in exchange, recalls Mahmoud Soueid, who as a child saw Palestinian currency before seeing the Lebanese one. Soueid was born in 1936 in Kfar Hamam, which is located at the southeastern tip of Lebanon, approximately at the intersection of the Syrian Golan Heights and northern Galilee. The village is part of the 'Urqub region, which became known as "Fatah Land" in the late 1960s after the Palestinian resistance established its bases there and used it as a launching pad for its guerrilla operations. His father, a Sunni cleric who studied in Damascus, established a school and a library at the beginning of the twentieth century and became the imam of the poor village, which survived mainly on agriculture. Its residents held Syrian papers before the establishment of Lebanon in 1920, papers they kept even after that date. If someone fell sick in the village they were taken to the Jewish doctor in Hula. No one used to go to Saida. Palestine was closer.[27] The commerce with Palestine was integral to the everyday lives of these southerners, who experienced the Nakba as a severely disruptive event. In his first work of social science, Charara registered how, in the wake of 1948, Bint Jbayl became increasingly incorporated into the commercial and administrative spheres of the recently independent Lebanese state (1943). Around the same time, modern political organizations—the Ba'th—also started attracting some of the town's inhabitants, particularly those who exited "the traditional life cycle such as: teachers, students and a small cohort of citizens."[28]

Born a few years before 1948, the soon to become militants were marked in their early years by the plight of the Palestinians in more than one way. As a result of the geographical contiguity of Palestine and Lebanon, around 100,000 Palestinians who were forcibly expelled by or fled Zionist and Israeli forces took refuge in Lebanon in the aftermath of 1948. The influx of refugees snatched some of these children from their private worlds and provided the impetus for some of their first public acts. Soueid, who was around twelve

years old then, wrote a poem in his school bulletin. Fifty years later he can only remember its first verse: "Honor your guests O Lebanon generously."[29] Accompanied by other volunteers, he carried empty bags and knocked on people's doors in the coastal city of Saida. Residents gave them cans of food, batteries, and clothes that they stocked in one place for some organizations to pick up and distribute to the refugees. Soueid wasn't alone in taking part in gathering aid for the incoming refugees. Wajih Kawtharani (1941–), a member of Socialist Lebanon in the late 1960s and now a retired history professor at the Lebanese University, originally from the southern village of Ansar, was born and raised mostly in Beirut. Kawtharani was very young when the 1948 Palestinian Nakba took place:

> I remember Palestinian refugees coming and living in our neighborhood. I remember we used to gather aid for them at the time. I saw them in the neighborhood. I was six or seven years old. [I thought at the time] there is a problem, these people have been wronged, they have been evicted from their lands and they need help.[30]

Palestine was not a placeholder in their lives for a rightful anti-imperialist, nationalist cause mediated solely through passionate ideological rhetoric. Their geographic and generational position enabled them to see its plains, deal in its currency, visit Jewish doctors, and later on listen to the stories of exodus, write poems, and gather aid for the incoming refugees. During their teenage years, they were swept off their feet by the tidal waves of Arab nationalism that put the Palestine question at the heart of anticolonial struggles in the region. Two decades after the Nakba, they became main Lebanese allies of the Palestinian armed struggle for national liberation before some of them, like Waddah Charara—who theorized the alliance between the Palestinian revolution and the Lebanese Left—became staunch critics of it. That said, we are not there yet, and the militant intellectuals who founded Socialist Lebanon (1964) do not all originally come from southern Lebanon, which mediated an intimate relationship with Palestine.

### *Our Arab Brothers in Algeria, Egyptian Periodicals, and Iraqi Poets*

Certain constitutive events of this generation's political coming of age and their repercussions no longer resonate in our present. Their echoes barely reached the shores of succeeding generations. Algeria's anticolonial star, which ignited passionate anticolonial sentiments, sunk with time. Today only scars remain.

As he unfolds the cardinal nodes of his political awakening that followed the Palestinian Nakba, Wajih Kawtharani highlights the Nasserite tides and the Algerian struggle for national liberation. He goes back in time to a demonstration he joined in support of the Algerian militant Djamila Bouhired, who was arrested, tortured, and sentenced to death on terrorism charges by French colonial authorities in 1957. It is very likely that it was the same demonstration during which Fawwaz Traboulsi (1941–) tried to climb up the wall of the French embassy, to be pulled down by a policeman and hit by a rifle butt on his forehead.

Traboulsi was heir to a different legacy than the southern and Shiʿi one. The son of a Greek Catholic Christian hotel owner from Mashghara—a village in the Bekka Valley—he hails from a different sectarian, regional, and class background.[31] The family's famous hotel was a cosmopolitan microcosm that attracted prominent politicians—including Michel Aflaq, the founder and ideologue of the Baʿth Party that Traboulsi joined while studying in Manchester around 1959—illustrious artists, and members of the haute bourgeoisie from around the world. The hotel did more than that, though. It played a crucial role in developing Traboulsi's consciousness of social differences, through mixing with its workers, particularly an older communist cousin, who worked there during high season. What he shares though with some of his future comrades is descent from a lineage of intellectuals. Traboulsi is the grandson of ʿIssa Iskandar al-Maʿluf (1886–1956), an eminent multifaceted scholar: historian, linguist, editor, and collector of original manuscripts. The scar, from the rifle butt blow, is still visible on Traboulsi's forehead. It acts as a reminder of a young man once captivated by Djamila's "pale, innocent face" and the country of a million martyrs. "I was madly in love with Djamila Bouhired," writes Traboulsi in his memoir. "I even drew a pencil portrait of her that remained on my bedroom's wall for a long time."[32] "And for truth's sake," he recalls, "Beirutis were never as giving toward an Arab cause as they were with the Algerian Revolution: in support, solidarity, and contributions. I remember scenes of Beirut's women taking off jewelry and bracelets to give them as donations."[33] Traboulsi's Algerian passion would lead many around him to mistake him for an Algerian national. Some years later, in 1961, when the "Evian negotiations" between the French colonizers and the FLN began, a delegation of Iraqi communists visited Traboulsi to congratulate him on his country's independence: "They wished me, in high militant seriousness, a quick and blessed return to the homeland."[34]

In one of our numerous interviews, Waddah Charara reacted to my proposition that a number of intellectuals, such as Edward Said (1935–2003), considered the 1967 defeat of Arab armies against Israel to be a watershed moment

in their political consciousness by recounting the story of his first "political baptism."

> The Algerian events had already begun when I was eleven years old. There were already some clashes before the first of November 1954.[35] The 1967 of others was in my case joining a demonstration under the rain probably in January 1953 . . . a demonstration I remember in great detail. . . . My parents had nothing to do with it at all.
>
> We walked out of school and a young man, who was three or four years older than us, stood on a small mound of sand in Burj al-Barajneh—under what is now called the Rasul al-A'zam Mosque that back then consisted of wide stretches of sand populated by goldfinch hunters where we used to go whenever we had a lira and quarter to buy a bird—anyways he stood there and said: "O Youth, O Arabs, O Nationalists, French colonialism is slaughtering our brothers in Algeria."
>
> I understood [then] in the bodily sense of understanding, not merely in the discursive sense. Even though in 1952, when my dad used to come back from work . . . he used to bring home Egyptian newspapers. I remember I was ten years old when I started reading *al-Ithnayn* [Monday], which is similar to *Akhir Sa'a* [The Last Hour], *al-Musawwir* [The Photographer], but it had much more pictures in it. I remember very clearly Muhammad Naguib before Abdel Nasser . . . Abdel Nasser, of course, the smell of paper, ink, the hazy pictures of the [Suez] Canal battle [1956].
>
> So even though there is a partial rupture between, on the one hand, home and its world, essentially my dad's world and the people you talk to there, and what they talk about and the magazines and school, on the other hand, which is a bunch of small kids learning dictation, grammar, "conjugaison" [conjugation of words in French], and a bit of math. . . . A certain translation, a certain investment of the atmosphere at home in this thing [the demonstration] took place that was surprising to me.
>
> I remember this demonstration not only in its rain, the smell of wet clothes, my hair, and the thought that now my aunt is going to shout at me because I left myself under the rain and might catch a cold, and things of that sort, but also because there was some kind of implicit transmutation between these images, ideas, words, and emotions to something I was doing myself. I decided to walk out of school with the protest; some people did not go out. I was overwhelmed by great emotions. This was the baptism.[36]

Abdel Latif Charara, Waddah's father, an Arab nationalist, was a prolific author, linguist, and translator. His many works include volumes on classical and contemporary Arabic poetry, a book on George Bernard Shaw, another on Arab nationalism—*Ruh al-'Uruba* (The Spirit of Arabism) (1947) and republished later on—and translations (e.g., Herbert Marcuse). It was this Arab nationalist and anticolonial sensibility, cultivated through encounters with his father's Arab friends—such as the Syrian poet and statesman Badawi al-Jabal and the Iraqi poet Ahmad Safi al-Najafi—the reading of Egyptian periodicals, and the general atmosphere around the house, that was transmuted into Charara's participation in the demonstration of support to the Algerian national liberation struggle, generating tremendous emotions in the body of the eleven-year-old boy that transpire through the voice of the sixty-five-year-old man as he recounts with meticulous detail what he thought and how he felt on that rainy school day fifty-four years ago.[37] The intellectual hub that Waddah Charara grew up in transcended the frail borders of the Lebanese Republic and took part very early on in the fashioning of his Arab nationalist imaginary and sensibilities. Imagining the Arab nation, from Beirut, was made possible through the shared Arabic language, which tied these intellectuals together and circulated through mass media, such as Egyptian periodicals and, in the age of the transistor radio, through the fiery speeches of Gamal Abdel Nasser broadcast on Sawt al-'Arab (Voice of the Arabs).

### *Pan-Arab Passions: Politics, Sensibilities, and Institutions*

The "Arab Cause," recalls Azza Charara Beydoun, "was more dominant [in our lives] than Lebanese concerns."[38] Charara Beydoun, a retired professor of social psychology at the Lebanese University and feminist thinker, joined Socialist Lebanon shortly after it was founded in the mid-1960s. Although they are siblings, Azza Charara Beydoun and Waddah Charara did not grow up together as a result of their parents' divorce. They also belong to different linguistic-intellectual universes. While he left for undergraduate studies in Lyon (1959) and then went back to France in the early 1970s to finish his doctorate, she enrolled in the American University of Beirut for an undergraduate degree in mathematics and shifted to social psychology after a number of years as a math teacher in Lebanese public high schools. Foreign languages, in the case of these siblings—as in the case of all these intellectual militants—is a crucial matter that provides insight into the readings, influences, and literary sensibilities and imaginaries out of which an intellectual's habitus is fashioned.

One of the instrumental mediums carrying "The Arab Cause" was Sawt al-ʻArab (Voice of the Arabs), the Cairo-based radio station that broadcast a highly charged Arab nationalist rhetoric, the most effective of which were the speeches of Gamal Abdel Nasser. These speeches were a source of political education and induced a generalized popular mobilization in the Arab region.[39] Sawt al-ʻArab was designed, according to Ahmad al-Saʻid, the radio station's best-known presenter and general manager,

> to explain to them [the Arab people] the ideals of the July Revolution, making them aware of the many plots they faced. The main aims of The Voice of the Arabs, therefore, were to liberate the Arab people; to unite the Arab countries; to liberate Arab resources from imperialism's grasp; and to encourage the use of those resources for the development of Arab civilization, science and culture.[40]

These were times, remembers Abbas Beydoun, when borders between Arab countries were thought to have been erased by the engulfing tidal wave of Arab nationalism:

> There was no sense of the borders at the time. This tide seemed as if it is one homogenous force, and it seemed as if there is a unified Arab history that was being made. There was no meaning to the [existing] borders. We were all part of this tide. . . . When communists in Iraq or in Syria talked about some borders, or the Baʻthists, after the failure of the union [after 1961], this talk seemed unintelligible.[41]

The resistance to recognize the borders and specific national affiliations of the different Arab countries during this time were evident in the discourses of Arab nationalist movements that "refused to say, for example, the Syrian people, the Lebanese people, the Egyptian people; they used to say the Arab people in Syria, the Arab people in Lebanon, the Arab people in Egypt."[42]

Arab nationalism is mostly remembered as a world saturated with strong political emotions. Its anticolonial sentiments and nationalist pride were perfectly conveyed by Nasser's demotic speeches; nationalist poems, novels, and songs; political pamphlets; and iconic photographs and portraits, such as those of Djamila Bouhired that Traboulsi hung on his wall. Charara recalled being overwhelmed by great emotions during the Algerian demonstration.[43] Azza Charara Beydoun recalls how as a twelve-year-old she strongly lived through Nasser's speech as he declared the nationalization of the Suez Canal on July 23, 1956. A few years later, the end of the short-lived union between the Egyptian and Syrian republics (1958–61) made her fall

sick: "I had a fever," she recalls. "I took it somatically . . . just so that you know how emotional it was, and I was reading about how people were going to Damascus and talking about how handsome Abdel Nasser was. This is the emotional thing."[44]

The Arab nationalist fervor was not only diffused through the circulation of various media that young men and women read, listened to, and looked at. It also inhabited educational institutions. At some point in the 1950s al-Kulliyya al-'Amiliyya ('Amili College) in Beirut, which was dominated by Nasserists and members of the Arab Nationalist Movement, received a visit from Anwar al-Sadat to conclude an agreement between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the school whereby the Egyptian government would staff the college with Egyptian public school teachers.[45] Wajih Kawtharani was taught by these Egyptian school teachers who mainly taught Beiruti school children history, geography, and the Arabic language. These were subjects that, it need not be emphasized, easily lend themselves to being infused with the Arab nationalist zeitgeist.

Other schools were turned into quasi-political party centers where meetings and ideological education took place simultaneously with the school curriculum, especially during turbulent times, such as the short civil war that Lebanon witnessed in 1958. Recalling the atmosphere at al-Thanawyya al-Ja'fariyya, a Shi'i high school located in the southern city of Sur (Tyre), Abbas Beydoun tells the story of his first political engagements:

> When I was thirteen, I was one of those who were politically active, because in al-Thanawiyya al- Ja'fariyya . . . one of the strange things about this era was that the school itself was a quasi center for the Ba'th Party, not only its teachers, but its administration—Ja'far Sharaf al-Din [the school's headmaster], who was an ally of the Ba'th at the time—and its students. We used to attend party meetings in the classroom, the unit of party meetings was the class/grade, and they were the centers of party talk. The teachers who were party members used to go in, and in the middle of class you could ask about the constitution of the Ba'th and the difference between Arab socialism and communist socialism. . . . There was no distinction between the school and the party center, and it was not thought to be strange—the swamping of all aspects of life with politics during that time used to make it seem normal.
>
> During this period I was a Ba'thist. Since I was a precocious kid, they overlooked my age, and they promoted me especially that my young age was not correlated with how much I knew. Everyone in school was a

> Ba'thist, but they had little interest in the theoretical side of the party, which consisted of a couple of pages, the constitution, and the [Michel] Aflaq readings. It did not take much time to read them, yet only a few had read them. So, at thirteen, fourteen, I was a reference about these things, a *hujja* [authority].[46]

Around 1961, when the union between Egypt and Syria came to an end, the Ba'th was one of the strongest parties in Lebanon, especially in Beirut, according to Mahmoud Soueid. As he was telling me the story behind his leaving the party when a significant group of Lebanese Ba'thists decided to split, protesting the leadership's position in Damascus that backed the dissolution of the Syrian union with Egypt in 1961, Soueid answered my interjection about why he thought the Ba'th was stronger than Nasserism:

> Yes, of course, it was stronger because the party was there before Nasserism came into being . . . and, second, it had an ideology. Nasserism was feeling its ideological way through Nasser's experience; he did not start from a pan-Arabist position. And, third, Nasserism may have become stronger later on the level of the masses but the Ba'th attracted intellectuals. It was either the Ba'th or the Arab Nationalist Movement. There was nothing else, or the Syrian Nationalists [if one decided to go] in another direction. . . . And, of course, we and the Syrian Nationalists were fighting. We had ideological fights, and discussions that spanned whole nights, [discussing] whether [we should aim for] Syrian unity or Arab unity . . . a Syrian nation or an Arab nation.[47]

Muhsin Ibrahim (1936–), who would much later in the 1970s occupy the post of secretary general of the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL)—among the many roles he played in Lebanese and Arab politics—was one of the leaders of the Arab Nationalist Movement at the age of twenty after its first conference in 1956. Ibrahim recalls his early years of engagement:

MI: In 1952–53, when I was around seventeen or eighteen [years] of age, I met the "Arab Nationalist Youth" that would become the kernel of the Arab Nationalist Movement. The first generation: George Habash, Hani el Hindi, and Ahmad al-Khatib. . . . I was considered, on the level of Lebanon, to be the symbol of the second generation. And despite what usually happens with students as part of growing up—you go into a party and then you get out of it—I did not. . . . The Palestinian question was very important for the Arab Nationalist Movement. We were just three years away from the Nakba; all of this generation grew up in this mood.

FB: And Abdel Nasser, what was your position vis-à-vis him?
MI: Abdel Nasser, he came later on. He was still on a trial period.[48]

Muhsin Ibrahim's early leadership experience with the Arab Nationalist Movement is indicative of how a difference of a few years between himself (born in 1936) and those born in the early 1940s—such as Traboulsi, Beydoun, and Charara—plays itself out vis-à-vis political engagement and the relation to Abdel Nasser. Ibrahim was already politically active when the Free Officers took hold of power in Egypt in 1952, and had already assumed leadership positions by the age of twenty when Nasser became the president of Egypt. His Arab nationalist sensibility was not fashioned by what was being broadcast, produced, and achieved in Cairo but, rather, what was taking place in Cairo was being closely monitored in order to formulate a position regarding these developments. The Arab Nationalist Movement later aligned itself with Nasserist politics and for a period of eight years Ibrahim developed, despite his young age, a close relationship with Abdel Nasser, traveling from Beirut to Cairo to meet him once a month on average. The relationship with Abdel Nasser deteriorated and eventually come to an end in the aftermath of the June 1967 defeat against Israel. The Lebanese branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement, with Ibrahim at its head, would undergo an auto-critique around 1968, reshape the organization internally, and adopt the name of Munazzamat al-Ishtirakiyyin al-Lubnaniyyin (Organization of Lebanese Socialists).[49]

The tidal waves of Arab nationalist sentiment did not engulf everything in their way. A majority of Lebanon's Christian population supported the pro-Western politics of President Camille Chamoun (1952–58). "Strengthened by foreign backing, the complicity of the bourgeoisie, and Maronites mobilization," Chamoun, Traboulsi notes, "exacerbated sectarian tensions as no other political leader had done before him. With the majority of the Muslim leaders outside parliament, the Muslim 'street' was massively attracted to the Nasserite and anti-colonialist discourse."[50] While growing up, some of these intellectuals straddled heterogeneous social worlds. At times, the political sensibilities developed at home—in the extended sense of family, neighborhood, and friends—clashed with the predominant atmosphere at school. Some of these intellectuals spent a part of their teenage years in schools where the mood was largely opposed to Arab nationalism. Waddah Charara spent three years in the mid-1950s as an intern in al-Ma'had al-Lubnani—Lebanese College—located in Bayt-Shabab, a Christian village in Mount Lebanon. His Shi'i southern origins from Bint Jbayl, the Arabism of his father, and the Egyptian periodicals lying around the house

were very different from the new setting. When he moved there, Charara was already "armored with Arabism"; it was there

> that what we call Arabism . . . this world of ideas, feelings, opinions, resonances . . . found its formulation. The school's students were practically all children of Maronite immigrants and two or three Syrian Nationalists. . . . And I was, along with two Shi'i sons of immigrants from Tyre, . . . in a certain sense, facing these people. . . . This year I started wearing the *Watani al-'Arabi* [My Arab Homeland] pin that Arab nationalists had made popular and was later adopted by the Ba'th. I also began contacting some relatives who were members of the Ba'th.[51]

Ahmad Beydoun also spent some years in schools with radically opposed politics. Between 1956 and 1958 he was enrolled in a school in Mashmusha—not far from the coastal town of Saida—that is affiliated with a Christian convent. The majority, he recalls, were pro-Chamoun and pro-Phalangists: "There was a hatred of Nasserism . . . this was the atmosphere [at the time]. . . . I used to write Arab nationalist poems on Algeria and Abdel Nasser."[52] Lebanese schools played a central role in fostering and sharpening the sense of belonging to the Arab nation. Whether these schools were receiving direct Egyptian aid, teachers, and visits by Anwar al-Sadat and becoming hubs of political party activity, in case they were pro-Arab nationalist, or whether they were Lebanese nationalist "haters" of Nasserism, they provided avenues to foster Arab nationalist rhetoric and emotions. Arab nationalist belonging gathered in the family and neighborhood surroundings could also be sharpened in the confrontations with Lebanese nationalists in school.

### *The 1958 "Revolution" and Operation Blue Bat*

Camille Chamoun's alignment with Western powers during his presidency—indexed by the Lebanese government getting six million dollars' worth of US arms and economic aid in 1953 and allowing the US Air Force to use Lebanon's air space for reconnaissance missions in 1954—was exacerbated by his support of the Baghdad Pact signed in February 1955.[53] Although Lebanon did not join the pact signed by the pro-Western governments of Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran, it nonetheless refused to take part in the Arab Defense Pact put together in response by Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Chamoun's positions on Arab affairs had internal and regional repercussions. It soured the Lebanese government's relationship with Nasser's Egypt and Syria, and led to the resignation of Hamid Frangieh, Lebanon's minister of foreign affairs, in September 1955

after he "had assured 'Abd al-Nasir [Abdel Nasser] in the name of his government that Lebanon would oppose Western military pacts."[54] More importantly for our purposes was the mood of popular mobilization—mostly Muslim—against the president's foreign policy. The signing of the Baghdad Pact led to violent demonstrations across the country. In Beirut, a student was shot and killed and others were wounded when the police opened fire outside the American University of Beirut.

Chamoun's decisions not to sever diplomatic ties with France and England after the Suez crisis in 1956 resulted in the resignation of the Sunni prime minister, Abdallah al-Yafi, and minister Saeb Salam, both of them major Sunni political figures. Chamoun formed a new cabinet, handing the foreign affairs portfolio to Charles Malik, who was aligned with US foreign policy.[55] In April 1957, the Lebanese Parliament approved the country's adherence to the Eisenhower Doctrine. A couple of months later, the US-backed president organized national elections in which the major Sunni opposition leaders lost their seats.[56] By 1958, the president's politics managed not only to alienate Lebanese Muslims but also to divide the Christians who developed a "third force" to call for neutrality in Arab affairs. Moreover, Chamoun did not deny the circulating rumors about his intention to renew his presidential mandate—an unconstitutional act. The clashes began in the wake of the assassination of Nassib al-Matni, a journalist and editor strongly critical of the regime's foreign policy and corruption. The opposition controlled three quarters of Lebanon after two months of fighting. On July 14, 1958, while the fighting was still going on in Lebanon, the Iraqi monarchy was ousted.[57] On that same day, Chamoun "reiterated his request for a US military intervention within 48 hours, 'or else a second pro-western Arab regime will fall in its turn.'"[58] In less than twenty-four hours the US-initiated Operation "Blue Bat," which "included the landing of 15,000 American soldiers, backed by another 40,000 on the 70 warships of the US Navy's Sixth Fleet, in the first operation of its kind since the War."[59] The Americans ended up not defending Chamoun but choosing his successor, the Lebanese army general Fuad Chehab, elected on July 31, 1958, less than two weeks after the Marines had landed on Lebanese shores. Chehab's name was mentioned in the American-Egyptian negotiations that year and he "fulfilled the condition of Eisenhower, who wanted a military man."[60] By November 1958, the Blue Bat had decamped.

The summer of 1958 is an essential episode in modern Lebanese history and in the coming of "political" age of a generation growing up in the wake of the Palestinian Nakba and through the high tides of Arab nationalism. It witnessed the interlocking of local (sectarian tensions), regional (inter-Arab relations),

and international (Cold War) political strands. Sixteen-year-old Charara was already the Baʿthist official of his high school in Beirut. His older relatives forged his papers to get him into the party. Mahmoud Soueid was posted at the party's radio station, also located in Charara's high school. Soueid was in charge of drafting the radio news bulletin and distributing pamphlets in the capital at night. Soueid and Charara missed each other during that summer. They met later on and took part in founding Socialist Lebanon in 1964.

When the violence erupted, Charara's parents sent him south to Saida, away from the bombings in Beirut. He did not fight in 1958, though he received some rudimentary military training in a public school at the hands of a Palestinian "commando, [this is] before the *fida'yi* label came about."[61] Charara would pass by the Makassed School in Saida, where Maʿruf Saʿd, a local Arab nationalist political leader, surrounded by members of the Arab Nationalist Movement, established his headquarters. Among those around was Muhsin Ibrahim, "although I did not know him at the time," recalls Charara.[62] Ibrahim, who is approximately six years older than Charara, was already a high-ranking member of the Arab Nationalist Movement. Twelve years later, Waddah Charara and Muhsin Ibrahim would lead negotiations and decide to unify Socialist Lebanon and the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, giving birth to the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (1970).

Meanwhile, Fawwaz Traboulsi was an intern at Brummana High School. During his time at the boarding school, located in a Christian village of Mount Lebanon, he had, together with a bunch of his mates, formed a secret Arab nationalist leftist group in 1956 to face the Syrian Nationalists at school. "We went to Beirut in 1958," Traboulsi told me,

> and insulted the US Marines [in their own language] after they landed. We were in a high school that was mostly composed of Arabs and Muslims in Brummana. The atmosphere tensed up, we were accused by the village folk of having arms, and the Syrian Nationalists denounced us and began to conduct quasi-armed rounds around the schools with hunting rifles.[63]

Traboulsi spent the rest of the summer hiding in a northern Christian village. An arrest warrant was issued by a judge after one of the members of the Brummana High School pan-Arabist group was caught with a notebook containing the names of those who contributed money to support the "popular resistance," that is, the opposition forces. In the wake of the short civil war of 1958, the soon to be comrades continued their militancy under the banner of

Arab nationalism, mostly the Baʿth, before exiting and diving into a Marxist political and theoretical universe.

*Autochtones and Fugitives: Generations of Southern Intellectuals*

Arab nationalist thought and sentiments interpellated these young men and women in the first decade after Lebanon's independence from the French Mandate (1943). That said, they were also the products of Lebanese state institutions—public high schools, teachers' colleges, the Lebanese University—and their pedagogical practices, such as learning French and English. In varying degrees they shared the institutional spaces and the cultural and linguistic tools of the Lebanese nationalists they were opposing. This was not always the case for the generation of intellectuals preceding them.

"My father," recalls Waddah Charara, "was one of the first ʿAmili writers who began writing in Lebanese newspapers, contemporary, modern newspapers such as *al-Adib* [The Writer] and *al-Adab* [Literatures]."[64] Abdel Latif Charara belonged to a generation of southern Shiʿi writers who witnessed the withering away of a world, one where "the road to Najaf despite its length and its roughness was more congenial than the road to Beirut or Damascus."[65] The first, as Abbas Beydoun maintains, is

> a trip to a safe haven; where the sons follow in the footsteps of the fathers. . . . It is an internal immigration, while the second, despite its proximity, is a displacement and a journey that is not guided by the knowledge of forefathers and their memories.[66]

The story of transition from Najaf to Beirut is not only one of shifting directions from the centuries-old path to the site of religious learning toward the capital of an all too recent republic in contact with metropolitan fields of cultural production. It is also, for Beydoun, a narrative about the divergent cultural imaginaries of the constitutive communities of Lebanon. The Lebanese nationalist literature articulated by Western-facing—when not residing there—authors such as Khalil Gibran and his cohort, portraying and satirizing life in the mountains of Lebanon where they grew up, was a far cry from the world of the Najaf-trained clerics and their literatures. "My dad," says Abbas Beydoun,

> talked about Arab nationalism, but if you take the titles of his books, *they don't mean anything*. [He wrote a book on] Umm Salama, which is the name of one of the prophet's wives, who was close to Ali, and

> another one on the biography of the prophet, most probably from a Shiʿi perspective.[67]

"They don't mean anything" means that there was no uptake for this type of literature in a national field whose hegemonic references, metropoles, and imaginaries were elsewhere. Their metropole, recalls Abbas Beydoun, was Egypt. "They were," he continues,

> Modernist, but from the other side, not à la Gibran [Khalil Gibran], Mikhail Naimy, and Maroun Abboud. This world was not familiar to them. The modernity of Egyptians . . . they could deal with it more. First, this modernity was an Islamic modernity, while here [in Lebanon] it was a Christian modernity in one sense or another . . . in all senses.[68]

Not only were their upbringings, intellectual references, cultural and literary imaginaries, and practices different from the budding nationalist field, but some of them did not possess any other languages than Arabic, which led to their increasing marginalization as they could not be *à jour* with what is happening in the world, that is, the metropoles. These ʿAmili authors also became separated, as Abbas Beydoun recalls, from their own progeny:

> When I began opening my eyes [to the world] and becoming a mature person, it seemed to me that my dad the writer and intellectual did not suit me. Very quickly I found myself in a different world, maybe one of Lebanese culture, and as a result *we had a problem of language*. In a novel I wrote and published called *Tahlil Damm* [Blood Test] . . . I talked about my dad. His voice used to sound strange to me. It is something that needs a psychoanalyst in order to make sense of. It was as if he was a person that is not there, "*inexistant*" strange and rare, or that he is not going to be repeated. . . . [He was] a person that used to write and read to me, and I never felt any sympathy with what he used to read to me. . . . I never had much connection with his writing, and it is difficult for me to consider myself a continuity to this writing.[69]

Abdel Latif Charara taught himself English and French, which he used to read but not speak, according to Beydoun, and "if you look at the titles of his books, there is one on Bernard Shaw, another one on al-Hajjaj—but then al-Hajjaj, there is something new in this, it is not a Shiʿi subject, it is wider—and a book on Arab nationalism. These three things put him in a different context, a Lebanese, regional, and international context."[70] Through contributing to new intellectual discussions that appeal to audiences beyond the Shiʿi community,

Abdel Latif Charara managed in these times of historical transition to escape the marginalization those intellectuals, like Beydoun's father, suffered. They became, Beydoun recalls, "'autochtone,' local." "They wrote," he adds, "without publishing and consumed what they produced in their own milieu. Their relationship with Lebanese culture was mainly weak."[71]

Communism also provided an alternative community of thought and practice for this generation of 'Amili intellectuals. Husayn Muruwwa (1910–87) is another important figure of that generation in the Lebanese political and intellectual field.[72] While he was studying and living in Najaf in preparation to assume clerical responsibilities in the footsteps of his father, Muruwwa became attracted to Marxist writings and the politics of the Iraqi Communist Party. Subsequently, Muruwwa, like the Iraqi poet Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawihiri, put an end to his religious career. He later became a member of the Lebanese Communist Party's Central Committee and a respected Marxist thinker who taught Islamic philosophy at Lebanese University. Muhammad Charara, Abdel Latif's brother, also got radicalized during the 1940s in Iraq and dropped his religious aspirations in order to become a communist militant and author.[73]

On February 17, 1987, during one of the bleak episodes of the Lebanese civil war, Husayn Muruwwa was shot dead, at the age of seventy-seven, in his home in Beirut. It is widely believed that a radical Shi'i Islamist faction carried out the assassination either by the orders, or under the auspices, of the Syrian Assadist regime. Four years before the collapse of the Soviet Union and eight years after the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, a long time had passed since Jawahiri's fiery poems on the Battle of Stalingrad and the Marxist radicalization of young clerics in Iraq. A long intergenerational journey: from Najaf to the central committees of communist parties in the anticolonial decades of the mid-twentieth century, and into the militant Shi'ism inspired by the Iranian Revolution in the last two decades of that century.

### *Coda: Then and Now*

In his first work, *Transformation d'une Manifestation Religieuse dans un Village du Liban-Sud (Ashura)* (1968), Waddah Charara examined the changes in the ritual of 'Ashura in light of the structural transformations occurring in Bint Jbayl in the wake of the Palestinian Nakba. He notes the shifting of the location of the "religious manifestation" from the private sphere of the family to the public Husayni clubs, and the new participation of Ba'thist students, teachers, and traders in the festivities alongside the religious lector. These party members mapped the Palestinian Nakba on the religious story: the image of al-Imam

Husayn corresponded to that of Palestine, his murderers to "the enemies," his battle to that of survival and progress, and finally the justice of his cause to the political and social content carried by the modern political organization.[74] Charara, in the Arabic abstract to the French text, related its main problematic as follows:

> The confluence between a religious content and a political one in a historical period of transition from one mode of social organization to another is an issue that poses the question of the distinction between the layers of the social structure in "backwards" countries, their degrees of independence, and their evolution.[75]

It is the specific form *modernization* takes in "backwards"—placed between brackets in the original text—countries via the articulation between the religious and political levels that Charara was investigating.[76] In the mid-1950s the Ba'th, he observed, shifted the mythical understanding of the Nakba, which made sense of the event by attributing it to an "evil conspiracy against Arabs," in the direction of a "relative rationalization."[77]

Three years after the end of the long civil and regional Lebanese wars, Charara wrote a brief autobiographical piece "The Faltering Belonging: Segments from a (Pre-) Lebanese Autobiography."[78] In the twenty-five years that separate the two pieces, the beginning of the Lebanese wars in 1975 was a crucial turning point for Charara, witnessing his exit from radical politics and Marxist thought. The author begins by noting how his awakening to belonging to the Lebanese "homeland" took place at the beginning of the war in 1975. He wrote, "As much as I try to, I don't remember that a sense of belonging to Lebanon was a common or desirable thing among the people I grew up with. And these were Lebanese Shi'a, and of their two types: the Shi'a of the southern rural town, and those of the religiously mixed coastal town."[79] It is in this post–civil war context, which saw the fragmentation of the Lebanese polity mostly along sectarian lines, that Charara returned to his memories relating the absence of the Lebanese *national* referent and the predominance of infranational, familial, and regional solidarities in his childhood. The 1948 Nakba is recalled in order to reveal how the loss of the Palestinian homeland was narrated through provincial, self-sufficient (fabricated?) stories by the inhabitants of Bint Jbayl that put the town at the center of the action:

> And what is true of families, and kin, is also true of towns. Stories circulate, as well as storytellers, from one community to the other, without any alteration affecting the stories' structure. The meaning of the event

> [whether related by family, kin, or townsfolk] does not need any action that was undertaken by others to be fully grasped. The town is deemed a unit, in case its inhabitants . . . manage to narrate a story through which they recognize their town and themselves.[80]

From the story of a tentative modernization of a southern town in 1968, we move in 1994 to a story of the strength and parochialism of infranational communal loyalties and the absence of the national referent.

The war, and its aftermaths, triggered a revisionist history of the place of the national referent in the first years of the independent Lebanese Republic. The discovery, or rather the recovery, of Lebanon, and the rethinking of the "Lebanese question" in the wake of the country's implosion and after years of Arab nationalist and radical leftist militancy in support of the Palestinian resistance, is a common trope of this generation of disenchanted leftist militants—both Wajih Kawtharani and Azza Charara Beydoun, by way of example, mentioned it during our meetings. Charara found it, that is, Lebanon, absent among the more entrenched sectarian, familial, and regional solidarities of his own southern Shi'i background, which he refers to as *ahli* loyalties.[81] The awakening to his belonging to the Lebanese homeland would not only be contrasted with the country's infranational communal solidarities but also with their supranational connections, namely, Arab nationalism. Charara, the former Ba'thist, who, in 1968, during the height of his Marxist militancy, interpreted the impact of the Ba'th as one of relative rationalization, inverted his analysis a quarter of a century later. Arab nationalism became the "religion [creed] of the *Ahl* [kin]."[82] Pan-Arab ideological politics were no longer part of a modernization story; they became in 1994 the supranational "religion" of the infranational loyalties whose articulation undermined the intermediary chain: the Lebanese nation. What Charara's post–civil war autobiographical piece elided was the specific articulation of the idea of Lebanese nationalism on the then dominant Christian Maronite pro-Western imaginary of Lebanon, and the peripheral position the Shi'i community and southern Lebanon occupied in the new republic.

Charara's recollections do not only touch on the question of Palestine and Arab nationalist ideology. He also revisits the aftermaths of national liberation and the violent practices of the anticolonial movements he supported in his youth. The aftermaths of Algeria's liberation were marshaled to call into question the reified usage of Frantz Fanon's work in academic fields such as postcolonial and cultural studies. "Worlds, and hypotheses, are erected, while forgetting that Fanon wrote between 1957 and 1962–63 in the fold of the FLN [Front

de Libération National],” he mentions during one of our meetings, “without giving any importance to the social and historical becoming of Algeria.”[83] This comment about Fanon’s contemporary usage in disciplinary settings was thrown in as an aside in the middle of a conversation where he expressed his reservation about a style of intellectual practice he dubbed “studding” (*tarsi‘*). This style, a superficial theoretical rhetoric of sorts is premised on the appropriation of particular concepts and their use without paying attention to both their genealogy and how they articulate with, and relate to, unfolding sociohistorical processes. More importantly, Charara, nearly fifty years later, revisits the violent modalities of practice of the FLN and the internecine fights between Algerian nationalists at the time. After relocating to Lyon (1959), Charara got involved in the Algerian struggle for independence. The young Lebanese student joined the Réseau Francis Jeanson. The Réseau helped the Algerians via a network of couriers that used to transport weapons (though very few), money, and fake papers and direct militants to safe hideouts. “I got to know at the time from a French Algerian woman,” he recalls, “that prostitution rings in France were in the hands of the Front de Libération.”[84] It was also during that time that he became aware of the “FLN’s assassinations of MNA [Algerian National Movement] militants, their forceful extraction of money, and liquidation of thieves.”[85] These practices gave rise to intense feelings of “horror and real disgust” that were quenched by espousing a vision of “political practice as always containing a fundamental share of violence and dirt.” This ideological justification, recalls the veteran militant intellectual, was inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Humanisme et terreur* (Humanism and terror) (1947), which he read around that time. Charara recites from memory in French a line from the book: “It goes something like this,” he says, “we don’t have to choose between purity and impurity but between different kinds of impurities.”[86] Around the same time, he began reading Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, which shifted the terrain of questions he was preoccupied with. The question of violence in politics became sidelined. By immersing himself in the Marxist tradition, Charara began to be captivated by the movement of History.

## 2. DREAMS OF A DUAL BIRTH

### Socialist Lebanon's Theoretical Imaginary

There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.
—KARL MARX

Théorie: ce mot fit emblème. Non seulement pour une collection sévère d'ouvrages difficiles et exigeants, mais pour une génération. "La Théorie de Marx est toute-puissante parce qu'elle est vraie," répétions-nous avec Lénine.
—CHRISTIAN JAMBET

In the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, Susan Buck-Morss published a small book of essays, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (2003), in which she thinks through the possibility of a global leftist politics in the present. The book's main argument, Buck-Morss writes,

> is that Islamism as a political discourse can be considered together with Critical Theory as critiques of modernity in its western-developed form. It asks readers to suspend existing political identities and reconfigure the parameters of their discourse to recognize overlapping concerns. It does this performatively, analyzing the present through the work of contemporary Islamic rather than western theorists. Its touchstones are not Agamben, Žižek, Derrida, or Habermas, but rather, Taha, Gannouchi, Shariati, and Qutb.[1]

The essays call into question the supposed dominance of Western philosophical traditions, whose self-sufficiency is continually reinforced in the present by those thinkers who deem their conceptual resources enough to interpret the world. For instance, Buck-Morss draws attention to the renewed theoretical interest in Pauline Christianity: "By returning to the Western tradition, *yet again* 'putting on the mask of St Paul' (Marx!) in order to speak politically of the rupturing power of the event," she writes in a later piece,

"the pragmatics of his [Alain Badiou's] action reinforces that tradition and obliterates change, weakening the messianic, political power of the present that he intends to affirm."[2]

In engaging Islamist political discourse, Buck-Morss's challenge is not only a theoretical one, which seeks to move beyond the consecrated canon of critical theory and Western philosophical traditions. It is also a politically courageous and generous intervention by a committed public intellectual who, amid the hostile political climate toward Muslims in the West, embarks on an engagement with Islamist political discourse to rethink "the entire project of politics within the changed conditions of a global public sphere" (*TPT*, 5). It's a task she undertakes through calling for translation between political languages, disrupting in the process the discourses of watertight distinctions between "us" and "them" predicated upon timeless cultural essences separating a Western civilization from an Islamic one. In doing so, Buck-Morss goes against the doxas associating Islamism with "dogmatic fundamentalism and terrorist violence that dominate in the Western press" (*TPT*, 49). She puts the accent on the multiplicity of positions taken in, and the vibrant character of, debates animating Islamist spaces of argument while also proposing that Islamism, like critical theory, "inaugurated an autonomous tradition of immanent critique in the Middle East" (*TPT*, 98). Without seeking to defend all positions or movements under the Islamist banner she underscores that Islamism "enables political discourses that are modern in their own terms, rather than as a failed mimicry of the West" (*TPT*, 51–52). Buck-Morss envisages her project as a challenge "to rediscover one's own commitments in a foreign political language, and to ask not only what is lost in translation but also what might be gained" (*TPT*, ix).

Buck-Morss's project of translation and rescue of the critical kernels of thinkers such as the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906–66) and the Iranian Ali Shariati (1933–77) contrasts the new global Left, which she hopes will come about, with an older Marxist one. The picture she paints of Marxist thinkers and militants who were contemporaries of Qutb and Shariati is executed with broad brushstrokes. "A comparison informs us as to how the discourse of the new global Left will be different from the Marxist international one," Buck-Morss writes, "where translation occurred, but heavily in one direction" (*TPT*, 7). "Any Leftist," she continues, "who lived in or visited the 'undeveloped' world at that time will be aware of the degree to which the Marxist Left understood itself as an avant-garde in elite terms, rather than popular and democratic. Despite their radically critical stance Marxists embraced a vision of modernization that had

in common with capitalism and imperialism a conception of the third world as inexorably backward and behind" (*TPT*, 7).

In "Can There Be a Global Left?," the book's final essay, Buck-Morss reiterates her critique of the Arab Marxist tradition as caught in the webs of modernization theory. "When Western critical discourse was adopted by Arabs in the Marxist mode, this absence of a double critique," Buck-Morss writes, "tended to be just as prevalent, as Arab Marxists were similarly adamant that their own societal and religious forms were vestiges of the feudal past" (*TPT*, 97–98). Why does Buck-Morss's admirable enterprise of translating Qutb and Shariati to Western audiences in the wake of the "War on Terror" has to be coupled by a schematic ahistorical critique of Arab Marxist thinkers and militants? Does her sketch of Sayyid Qutb as the immanent critic of Egyptian society necessitate painting his Arab Marxist contemporaries as adamant modernizers ensnared by Western concepts? Doesn't her sketch of Arab Marxists risk paralleling, and giving conceptual fodder to, nativist arguments attacking them for being vectors of a foreign, imported thought—failed mimics of the West?

I will now revisit the history of Socialist Lebanon (SL) with a focus on its labors of, and thoughts on, translation, as well as the uses and authority of its discourses. In doing so, I will touch on how the labors of theory as a mediator of political practice sheds light on the disciplinary uses of theoretical texts. Moreover, unearthing the long-neglected histories of the Arab Left—both as a discursive tradition and organized political practice—through reconstructing the international travels of militants, the global traffic in concepts, and the alliances of political parties, to pick just a few examples, brings to light a complex transnational story whose horizons transcend the frontiers of nation-states and the boundaries of religious traditions. It is also an argument against the easy dismissal of an entire tradition, which in the wake of postcolonial epistemology critique and the Islamic revival came to be characterized as plagued by crude modernizing Western assumptions or accused of foreignness. In recovering this history, my aim is not only to complicate Buck-Morss's sketch of Arab Marxism but more importantly to bypass looking at Arab thinkers as falling into one of two camps: either failed imitators of the West (call them self-Orientalizing if you want) or autochthonous—religious in this particular case—thinkers engaging in an immanent critique of their societies. I will return to Buck-Morss's work at the end of the chapter to think further with her about what she calls historical pragmatics, that is, "the practical implications of theory expressed within specific historical configurations" (STF, 72).

## *Traveling Student Militants: Beirut, Lyon, Manchester*

Fuad Chehab launched his presidential mandate in 1958 by meeting Gamal Abdel Nasser, the president of the United Arab Republic, on the Lebanese-Syrian border. The election of Chehab, the previous commander of the Lebanese Army (1946–58), to the presidency in the wake of the local, regional, and international 1958 crisis put a halt to the previous president's pro-Western and anti-Nasser policies. Chehab adopted a policy of neutrality in Arab affairs and collaboration with Nasser, and he worked in his first years on establishing a politics of national reconciliation. In a speech on November 21, 1960, the eve of Independence Day, Chehab laid out his modernization and welfare program: "He called for 'comprehensive social reform' and the 'building of a new society.' The message was clear: 'those who benefited from prosperity should take care of the deprived Lebanese . . . some should sacrifice and the others should be patient.'"[3] Chehabism came to denote policies of modernization and welfare. The president surrounded himself with a young generation of technocrats and "relied on new institutions: the Bureau of Planning, Bureau of Statistics, Office of Social Development, Water Services of Beirut, and even a Center for Scientific Research, which formed a sort of shadow ministry, all devoted to the president."[4] His statist and egalitarian social agenda, refracted through the Lebanese sectarian prism, would benefit the peripheral regions, as well as seek to redress Christian overrepresentation in state institutions.[5] It constituted a "partial response to the demands of sharing and participation by the insurgents of 1958."[6] The reverse of the developmentalist statist coin was the infiltration of state security agencies into the capillaries and major arteries of Lebanese political life. Chehab's project, Fawwaz Traboulsi writes, "sought to provide the country with an alternative political body by co-opting the armed protagonists of the events of 1958, using the army, the intelligence and the technocrats."[7] The president's mandate ended in 1964, but his personal clout persisted, and Chehabism "spread, continued and eventually ran out of steam under his disciple and successor as president, Charles Helou (1964–1970)."[8] It was in this post-1958 Chehabist national conjuncture that Socialist Lebanon was founded (1964). The two dynamos of the group, Waddah Charara and Fawwaz Traboulsi, already had some years of reading and political experience behind them as well as bouts of study in the West, the first in Lyon and the second in Manchester.

Charara's last two years of high school (1958–59) were reading intensive. His French had become solid enough to plow through theoretical texts and he

had the chance to be taught by gifted teachers. Among those who taught him philosophy, discussed with him, and lent him his books was Hassan Ibrahim—Muhsin Ibrahim's brother—who had just come back from France. Ibrahim had studied with figures such as Jean Piaget, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Daniel Lagache, while working on a dissertation under the supervision of Vladémir Jankélévitch. Around this time, Charara read works by Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ferdinand Alquié, Henri Lefebvre, Merleau-Ponty, and Arthur Koestler's *Le Zéro et l'Infini* (*Darkness at Noon*). The readings were put to use by the seventeen-year-old in political discussions. He left the Baʿth in 1959, in his last year of high school, having spent a year and some months in the party, after engaging in intellectual discussions during which "my weapons were Sartre, Merleau-Ponty . . . and Lefebvre."[9] These "weapons" were wielded in numerous internal discussions about party structure, the relationship of the party to its base, taking state power, and the forms of socialism. These discussions were taking place against the backdrop of the formation of the United Arab Republic in February 1958, and the July 14, 1958, revolution in Iraq that ousted the Hashemite monarchy, bringing to power the Arab nationalist "free officers" six years after the Egyptian Free Officers assumed power in Cairo. On a scholarship in Lyon (1959), Charara collaborated with the Réseau Françis Jeanson and began reading Marx and Engels.[10] Charara ended up working with the Left's student syndicate and joining a workers' cell in the French Communist Party, while studying for a degree in philosophy and a diploma in *la psycho-pédagogie de l'enfance arriérée*—"psycho-pedagogy of retarded children"—on the basis of which he was granted a scholarship; a topic he had no particular interest in pursuing.

Unlike Charara, who quit the Baʿth before his travels, Traboulsi, who was very close to the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) in his school years, joined the Baʿth in 1958 while studying in Manchester. He had refused to officially join the ANM, whose right-wing agenda in the late 1950s centered on the primacy of Arab unity without making room for the social question.[11] "The Arab nation," in the ANM's ideological perspective, "had first to achieve a certain measure of political integration and freedom from Zionism and imperialism before it could turn its full attention to the process of building a democratic and socialist Arab society."[12] The ANM's stagism—union first, then socialism—was criticized by the Baʿth for its betrayal of the Arab masses in the interest of the bourgeoisie. It also did not convince the young man who, "obsessed with dialectics" at the time, engaged in long discussions with ANM cadres, such as King Hussein of Jordan's cousin, who later became prime minister of his country. "Of the questions I asked the latter [the king's cousin]:

Did the Algerian Revolution take place only for freedom, or for both freedom and bread? And he used to insist that bread was not related to Revolution, while I held on to my views about bread and freedom."[13] Traboulsi joined a Marxist wing of the Ba'th Party in Manchester, attracted by the leftist critiques of the ANM and of Nasser that centered on the necessity of tying socialism to the question of Arab unity.[14] Heading there to complete his GCEs (General Certificate of Education) and study painting at night, Traboulsi was welcomed with a workers' demonstration, marching under the slogan "Bosses like tea, so do we!" that demanded a fifteen-minute daily tea break.[15] The young bourgeois man moving from the courtyards of his father's cosmopolitan hotel was shocked by Manchester's industrial misery: "Sugar was still rationed since wartime, and only varieties of brown sugar were available. Most houses lacked indoor restrooms. While workers on morning buses would smoke half a cigarette, keeping the second half for the ride back home."[16] Traboulsi soon dropped his artistic aspirations, studying a little, reading a lot, and militating even more: "I read a lot about plastic arts and economics, as well as socialist writings, from British Fabians to Marxists of all nationalities. In addition to whatever fell under my hands pertaining to the Arab world's politics, history and sociology. I was also especially captivated by the school of British realists in cinema and theater, bustling as it was with the anger and rebellion of the post-Suez war generation."[17] In addition to his Ba'thist duties and solidarity activities with the Algerian Revolution, Traboulsi inaugurated what would become a lifelong relation with, and attachment to, Yemen. He founded, alongside an Iraqi comrade, the kernel of what would become the Union of Yemeni Workers in the United Kingdom. "In the cold, humid houses, inside of which the sons of 'Happy Yemen' were packed by the dozen, I listened to many stories narrating the double tragedy of its sons' migrations: they flee the imamate's oppression through Aden to fall prey to industrial exploitation and English gangs' racist provocations."[18] Back in Beirut, after managing to stretch his A levels for two and a half years in England, Traboulsi enrolled as a student of political science at the American University of Beirut. He had his membership in the Ba'th frozen because he maintained contact with a group of Lebanese Ba'th cadres, which included Mahmoud Soueid, his future Socialist Lebanon comrade, who had left the party after Syria's secession from the United Arab Republic (1961).

Examining the travels, interests, and practices of Charara and Traboulsi reveals how the intellectual and political activities they took part in transgressed national, class, linguistic, ethnic, generational, and disciplinary boundaries: joining the French Communist Party; working with Yemeni immigrants in

Manchester; studying painting, philosophy, and psychology; engaging in student syndicate militancy; collaborating with the Réseau Jeanson; meeting Syrian, Iraqi, and Egyptian militants, party officials, and intellectuals. In engaging in these practices, these young militant intellectuals traversed a variety of social, political, and intellectual worlds that they were not necessarily groomed to inhabit. These travels and displacements helped fashion a political subjectivity that defied the logic of expertise and professionalization, one that was imbued with an internationalist sensibility and intently focused on its present (Arab unity, the Algerian anticolonial struggle, Yemeni immigrant workers, student syndicates). Modernization, backwardness, religion—the themes that will form the conceptual backbone of a retrospective epistemological critique of Arab Marxists—were not part of the constellations of questions that animated their pursuits. They were driven by political questions to which they sought answers in their numerous engagements, ideological conversions, and theoretical elaborations.

Early on, the readings of these future intellectuals were extensive and not circumscribed by disciplinary boundaries. These transdisciplinary readings—psychology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, Marxist theory, aesthetics, economics—were mobilized to both understand their present and to intervene politically either in internal party debates or on its fringes. Theory, particularly Marxist theory, in the late 1950s was the new "weapon" of choice they deployed against their own very recent past and against their Arab nationalist comrades. In a couple of years, by 1961, the theoretical weapon was no longer wielded individually and internally (the Baʿth's Marxist wing). Marxist theory occupied center stage of Arab nationalist debates in the wake of the first pan-Arab significant setback, nearly a decade after the Free Officers reached power in Egypt.

### *A Fateful Disunion*

1961 constituted a critical year for the Arab unionist project. On September 28, 1961, a coup d'état in Syria dissolved the union with Egypt, which had been promulgated in 1958. The three-year union was a difficult time for the Baʿth. President Nasser insisted on "having parties in Syria agree to dissolve themselves as a condition for the unification of Egypt with Syria. The only organization Nasser would allow was the 'National Union,' to be copied from the Egyptian experience."[19] Nasser's high-handedness in controlling the National Union, and growing opposition inside the Baʿth Party to its agreement to dissolve itself, led to criticism of the United Arab Republic, which "intensified following

the dismissal of party representatives and supporters from their government positions."[20] Prominent leaders of the Baʿth signed the manifesto in support of the dissolution of the union between Syria and Egypt in 1961. These were tense times for the Baʿth. Mahmoud Soueid was one of the Lebanese cadres who left in the wake of 1961.[21] "We left," says Soueid, "because the party in Damascus applauded the secession and we were unionists. How can an Arab nationalist party support the secession? There was a lot of shouting, screaming, and clashes. It was very harsh. We kept on meeting for some time while claiming that we are the party but they had everything, including the press, in their hands. Bit by bit, we dissolved and nothing remained."[22]

Military coups brought the Baʿth to power on February 8, 1963, in Iraq and a month later, March 8, 1963, in Syria. By that time Traboulsi's membership in the party had been renewed and he had established links with the emerging leftist trend, whose main ideologue at the time was the distinguished Syrian Marxist thinker Yasin al-Hafiz (1930–78), editor in chief of *al-Baʿth* newspaper. This trend adopted Marxist theoretical tools to call into question Aflaq's version of Arab socialism. Its manifesto, *Some Theoretical Principles,* was adopted in the party's Sixth Conference (1963). It denounced "the party's previous belief in the utility of private property and condemned it as a petty bourgeois socialism."[23] Arab socialism, according to the Sixth Conference's proceedings,

> was a negative and incomplete response to the challenge of local Communism. It warned that such an attempt might lead to a nationalist chauvinism, which rejects the universal intellectual heritage of socialist thought. Arab Socialism, the conference added, has remained, on the whole, partial and without any scientific content. Assessing the impact of the party's distorted image of socialism, the conference pointed to the dominance in the party organization of bourgeois elements and the prevalence of a petty bourgeois mentality in party ranks.[24]

Fawwaz Traboulsi was appointed to a committee to formulate the proceedings of the Sixth Conference, headed by the party founder, Michel Aflaq (1910–89), who "refused to sit on the same committee as the AUB student, who was supported by his leftist opponents in the Syrian and Iraqi regional leaderships."[25] Traboulsi was expelled from the party on the eve of the Seventh Conference (1964) after writing a "'Letter to the Comrades' protesting the party's relinquishing of the socialist option, and severely criticizing the Baʿthist coup in Iraq, especially the persecution of communists and the war against the Kurds."[26]

### *Founding Socialist Lebanon: The Time of Theory*

Socialist Lebanon was founded in 1964 by seven intellectuals in the folds of the Chehabist modernization experiment, which provided a time of internal stability, and out of a leftist opposition to it. The mid-1960s for members of Socialist Lebanon were times of intellectual ferment, of intense reading, discussions, and translations and writings. In the decade before the Lebanese civil war (1975), and prior to the radicalization of the ANM, which decried the postcolonial regimes as petty bourgeois after the 1967 defeat, and the beginnings of Palestinian armed struggle from the country's southern borders, Socialist Lebanon was an intellectual hub, which had no visibility on the national political radar. In its first years, the small group of militant engaged in intraleftist skirmishes whose favorite target was the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP). These skirmishes took place on the pages of the bulletin they began putting out in the fall of 1966 under their own name, Lubnan Ishtiraki (Socialist Lebanon). The bulletin was produced underground, without obtaining a license from the Lebanese state, and was reproduced using a Roneo machine.[27] The portable Roneo machine the group bought could be closed "like a suitcase" and was mostly kept in Traboulsi's apartment. Keeping the Roneo in a safe place and away from the Lebanese authorities was essential since the bulletins and tracts produced by the machine were the main "public face" of the emerging underground organization.[28] The bulletin was not produced in large numbers. At first probably a few dozens were produced and, according to Traboulsi, "later on a few hundred copies in its heydays and it was delivered by hand by members or partisans who made sure the 'contact' was 'secure' before they revealed themselves to him/her and started handing them the *nashra* [bulletin] which played the role of pretext for lengthy discussions supposed to prepare their joining a 'circle' of partisans."[29] The mimeographed bulletin was the medium through which Socialist Lebanon circulated its analyses and theories, as well as the main tool used in the recruitment of partisans.

Before I examine what those texts were about, and how they sought to interpellate their readers, in this chapter and the next, I will now look into the processes through which their militant intellectual habitus—reading, writing, translating—was fashioned. Fawwaz Traboulsi recalls the group's joy when Ahmad Beydoun and the late Hassan Kobeissi joined in the fall of 1966, a year and half after the beginning of the project:

FT: Work had started on Socialist Lebanon. The first newcomers were Waddah's colleagues Ahmad [Beydoun] and Hassan [Kobeissi]. . . . They were a great catch, "une grande revelation," and they were friends. . . . There was

a "frenzy" of reading, and some competition. There was one that read more than the others. Waddah's distinction, which one has to acknowledge, resides in an exceptional, discipline that we had nothing to do with. . . . Reading *Le Monde* was a duty and taking notes from it.

FB: That's only him, or all of you?

FT: The whole atmosphere became like this. I was a bit of a deviant because of my Anglo-Saxon side, which is a bit more empirical.

FB: So they all used to buy *Le Monde*?

FT: Yes, yes, and there is always a book, always Maspero's publications, which were read in different degrees by different people.[30]

In conjunction with the reading of dailies, periodicals, *gauchiste* publications, and Third Worldist texts, Socialist Lebanon emphasized the reading of the primary texts of the Marxist tradition. "We did not really discuss a lot of secondary readings," Traboulsi recalls; "there was an idea: *how* should the mother texts—*ummahat*—of Marxism be read?"[31] The emphasis on establishing a direct affiliation with the main sources of the tradition, a *retour aux sources* of sorts, was a theoretical and political move to be understood in the context of the practices of Soviet-dependent communist parties, such as the Arab CPs including the Lebanese Communist Party and their "theoretical poverty" in the eyes of SL's intellectual militants. During our first meeting, Ahmad Beydoun fleshed out, in his poised manner and slow articulate speech, one aspect of the idea of the retour aux sources while providing a synopsis of the relationship of SL's relation to the Marxist corpus, emphasizing the cohabitation of different trends in the organization:

AB: In reality, Socialist Lebanon had many things. First there was a great sense of theoretical self-importance and a theoretical contempt of communists [LCP]. When I look at it now, I realize it was not built on such a solid base, we were not so advanced . . . but we used to consider ourselves light-years away from the LCP theoretically. So there was this thing, this sense of self-importance, with a lot of eclecticism. We did not force ourselves to choose, and this lasted for a while with an accent, an emphasis on a particular movement—each year or two maybe or every six months. I can't now delimit these periods for the five to six years spent in this experience.

We had a general Leninist heading, but we didn't say that we were a political party. We had read *What Is to Be Done?* well and discussed it, but we had certain issues, or problems, that were implicit with democratic centralism. We did not acknowledge its problems. Our way out was through saying

that we are an organization and not a party and therefore it's not a problem if we did not apply all the criteria of democratic centralism in the Leninist formulation.

There was another heading, that we didn't name as such then, but you could call a *Marxisme Marxien*, a fundamental Marxism that used to be nourished through a direct relationship with the texts of Marx, and not fourth-degree people.

FB: [Such as] Soviet scientists?

AB: Not [Andrei] Zhdanov, or [Joseph] Stalin, or anyone of that sort. A direct affiliation to *Capital* and the *Manifesto*, this is the second point. We didn't hate Trotsky, we had a real sympathy towards him, especially because of his problems with Stalin, and of course a total enmity towards Stalin. From there onwards, there is something Cuban, Castro, Che, etc., something Maoist and something Italian . . .

FB: Was there a division of labor, say, between the "theoretician" and the "politician"?

AB: No, things didn't work this way. There was one [Waddah] who worked more than the others, and had an older relationship to this line of work than the others, because he had a tight relationship to the UNEF and the French Communist Party.[32] He was a Ba'thist beforehand too. . . . Fawwaz we used to consider the Leninist of the group, the class analysis guy, and the one with organizational conceptions. That's how things were.

The gist of what I want to tell you is that we did not feel the urgency, or the need of settling [on a trend]. We didn't even know how much we were with the Italians or the Cubans and how much we were against them; these were not clearly determined, and for Maoism it's the same. In reality, what we used to call theoretical superiority was a diversity of sources with a knowledge, as I was telling you, of these sources that is relative and with the selection determined by our subjects, the Lebanese and Arab ones.[33]

Socialist Lebanon was a loose space in both the organizational sense of not adhering to the strictures of democratic centralism and in the ideological sense of allowing multiple intellectual influences inside the group without declaring a full allegiance to any of the directions. This is how Beydoun put it during our second meeting, when I brought up again the issue of SL's intellectual interlocutors and ideological horizons:

AB: No one said I am Trotskyist, for example, or I am Maoist, or I am Guevarist.

FB: But how did Guevara, Castoriadis, and Lenin blend together?

AB: This is the issue. There was a presumption that we concentrate on our situation. Where are we? Where can we work? And at the same time understand what is happening beyond us, particularly in the Arab world with an emphasis on movements of political change, or insurrectionist movements; and, of course, with a concentration on what would necessarily make you gravitate towards it, because it constituted an event, such as the defeat of 1967. However, at the end of the day, how each one used to read the things he was working on was partially left to his own discretion. There was no real control of these things. . . . For example, Marx, OK Marx; Lenin, OK Lenin, but also Trotsky, Althusser, Foucault's early work, even [Jacques] Lacan. . . .

FB: I was told that you used [Pierre] Bourdieu in writings against the [foreign language] failing grade?

AB: Even Bourdieu, of course . . . *Les Héritiers*, for example. This book I discovered as soon as I arrived in France in 1963, it was published in 1964. . . . It shook me tremendously, and I felt as if something lit up.[34]

In "The Coming Battle of Secondary School Students," published in the fifth issue (April 1967), the anonymous SL writer argues that Lebanese schools are necessary institutions for the reproduction of social inequality in the country. The student protests, SL wrote, are the result of the internal rural-urban migration, and the clash between the new generation of students from destitute backgrounds, on the one hand, and the curriculum, which was put in place for different kinds of students, on the other. Eliminating students as a result of their low grades in foreign language examinations, continued the editorialist, was the *sieve* of the ruling classes "to bar the barbarian invasions of the sons of the petite bourgeoisie, some of the workers and the peasant classes," limiting them from reaching the echelons of the administration.[35]

The plethora of theoretical texts that SL members were reading found its way into their analysis of the situation, but were not all cited in the bulletin. Browsing through the issues, one will not stumble on citations of Fanon, Lacan, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Althusser, but on authors from the revolutionary tradition solely: mostly Lenin, as evidenced in the texts chosen and glossed over in the "theoretical education corner" of the bulletin, some Cuban references, and more Mao in the last years of the bulletin (1969–70) after the inauguration of Palestinian resistance operations from southern Lebanon (Fig. 2.1). Bourdieu was not mentioned in the text, nor was the essay signed. Our present academic culture would put the underground revolutionary organization on a plagiarism trial, since its members subscribed to a collectivist ethos. Bourdieu's critical sociology of the French educational establishment was translated into

# لبنان الاشتراكي

العدد الخامس

نيسان ١٩٦٧

**في هذا العدد**


* الافتتاحيه
* معركة الطلاب الثانويين المقبله ، ص٣
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الافتتاحية

**في وجه المناورات الطائفية**

**ليكن شعارنا : البرجوازى اخو البرجوازى، مهما كان دينه! والعامي ( العامل ، الفلاح ، الموظف ، الحرفي ، ...) اخو العامي ، مهما كان دينه!**

طوال الشهر الماضي ، كانت "المواد المتفجرة" في السياسة اللبنانية عبارة عن سلسلة متصلة، لم تنته بعد ، من المناورات الطائفية يمكن تلخيصها بما يلي :

١) خطاب البطريرك المعوشي في ٢٠ اذار المنصرم ، ضد "العناصر المخربة" معلنا ان لبنان (لبنانه هو) امة تؤمن بالله وتنبذ الاشتراكية والشيوعية، داعيا الذين لا يشاطرونه هذا الايمان الى سلوك "طريق البحر المفتوح امامهم".

وسرعان ما تجاوب مع البطريرك الثلاثي الرجعي ( اده ، شمعون ، جميل ) ، فكانت مذكرة رئيس الكتائب احتجاجا على "تدخل سفير ج.ع.م. في الشؤون الداخلية اللبنانية"، والعمل على انشاء جبهة برلمانية معارضة من الكتلويين والكتائب والوطنيين الاحرار.

٢) تزايد نشاط "حزب الهيئة الوطنية" الداعي الى ما يلي :

— تعديل الدستور.

— "عدالة التوظيف"، نظرا لانه "لا يجوز ان تكون المراكز الرئيسية في الادارات العامة والمصالح المستقلة من نصيب فئة دون غيرها".

— الاحتجاج على "عدم التكافؤ في الحكم بين سائر الفئات اللبنانية" ( اى سائر الفئات الطائفية)، والدعوة الى منح رئيس الوزراء سلطاته كاملة، "فلا تتجاوز بعد الاجهزة عليه ...".

٣) الضجة التي اثيرت ، وما زالت تثار، حول انتخاب الشيخ حسن خالد كمفتي للجمهورية وحول زيارته للقاهرة وتصريحاته العديدة هناك وهنا . وكل ذلك في محاولة لجعله "بطريركا" للمسلمين ، والمتحدث الرئيسي باسمهم . ولعل خير دليل على هذه المحاولة البيان الذى اصدره "زعماء الاحياء" البيروتية، يعلنون فيه الغاء زيارتهم التقليدية لنواب بيروت بمناسبة عيد الاضحى ، وتسليم كل قضاياهم للمفتي مباشرة .

٤) التعبيد لعودة موسى الصدر من جولته بين المهاجرين اللبنانيين في افريقيا . وبالمناسبة ، فان المحول الرئيسي لهذه الجولة هو اسرة كامل مروة ، والغرض منها ، فضلا عن الدعوة للحلف الاسلامي — تاليب الاحقاد الطائفية حول مقتل كامل مروة على اعتبار انه عمل طائفي (سني يغتال شيعيا) . والمتوقع ان يعاود موسى الصدر حملاته المالوفة لتحويل كل مشكلات الجنوب ( التي هي مشكلات تخلف واستغلال ) الى مشكلات طائفية حول "حقوق الشيعة" ( في التوظيف خاصة) واقامة مجلس ملي شيعي مستقل .

ان كل هذه المناورات على تنوعها وتعارضها سطحيا ، تلتقي عند قاسم مشترك بينها . وهو انها محاولات

FIGURE 2.1. *Socialist Lebanon*, Issue 5, April 1967.

Arabic three years after its publication, and put to work by militants to provide an analysis of how the Lebanese bourgeoisie uses foreign language grades to perpetuate its rule and to underscore the importance of supporting the student movement. Theory in practice in 1967 Beirut was put to use, unlike how we use it today in our academic worlds, without any reference to its creators.[36]

This double erasure of authorship was related to legal, political, and theoretical issues. Some of the members were public school teachers at the time, which made it legally difficult to write under their own names while calling for a revolution against the state, their employer. It also served them well politically because the veteran, and much larger, Lebanese Communist Party—founded in 1924—and the other parties they were subjecting to a ruthless critique on the pages of their bulletin could not assess the size of the new organization. The erasure of Bourdieu and company's names, on the other hand, was an integral part of the means of production of revolutionary authority. Charara mentioned during one of our conversations that his militant voice was partially a consequence of not wanting to be taken for a *farfelu* (eccentric, wacky) intellectual tinkering with culture, in contrast to a revolutionary grounding political practice in a Marxian theoretical analysis.[37] Their collectivist ethos permeated leftist political and artistic practices at the time.[38] At the heart of these collective endeavors was an attempt to transform the relations of production and to rearticulate intellectual and political practice away from the bourgeois notion of the individual author, the tortured romantic genius, and the fetish of the name of the master. In addition to reworking relations of production, these collectives strove to circulate their works outside of the market, by bringing them to the people in noncommercial venues such as factories, public spaces, and universities in order to circumscribe turning them into a commodity with an exchange value that would eventually overcome its use value. While Socialist Lebanon initially included prices on their underground bulletins, the organization ended up distributing it for free.

### *Winds from the South and Back*

In *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, Kristin Ross notes that in the years directly before May 1968, those coinciding with events such as the bombing of Hanoi by the Americans in December 1966, "it was the North Vietnamese peasant, and not the auto-worker at Billancourt, who had become for many French militants, the figure of the working class. . . . [he] provided the transitional figure, the relay between the 'intimate' colonial other, the Algerian of the early 1960s, and the French worker during '68."[39] Ross then proceeds to investigate "the sites

and discourses that allowed the geography of a vast international and distant struggle—the 'North/South axis'—to become transposed onto the lived geography, the daily itineraries of students and intellectuals in Paris in the early 1960s" (*May '68*, 82). François Maspero's bookstore La Joie de Lire in Paris and his publishing house were two such important relay sites. Maspero's bookstore, which opened its doors in 1956 and closed down in 1975, "coincides almost exactly with the rough twenty-year span—from Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and the Bandung conference in the following year to some time [*sic*] in 1975—the period during which the periphery became the center of interest to European, and particularly French, intellectuals" (*May '68*, 82). Maspero's publishing house began its activity in 1959 and stopped in 1982.[40] During the high tide of anticolonial struggle, François Maspero's publishing house was known, in Ross's words, as

> a "wind from the South": The press that tracked the ruin and collapse of Empire, that regularly gave voice to South American, African, and Asian political theorists and testimonies, the press that first published Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre*, with its preface by Sartre, as well as works by Ben Barka, Giap, Cabral, Che Guevara, Malcolm X and others. . . . It was largely because of the Editions Maspero, and because of the editorial direction followed by *Le Monde Diplomatique* and *Les Temps Modernes* during those years—these three publications shared many of the same authors—that one of the great *gauchiste* particularities of the time became palpably evident: theory itself was being generated not from Europe but from the third world. Not only was the figure of action, the militant peasant and freedom-fighter, a third world phenomenon—this, after all, was to be expected according to a standard international division of labor in which Europe and the West are the thinkers and the rest of the world doers, the men of action. But "the wretched of the earth"—Mao, Guevara, Fanon, Cabral and others—had become in this era of *gauchiste* reversal the thinkers as well. (*May '68*, 83–84)

Éditions Maspero also published continental theory works, notably Althusser's *Pour Marx* (For Marx) and *Lire Le Capital* (Reading Capital), which he coauthored with his students Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Pierre Macherey, and Jacques Rancière. Both volumes, which were published in 1965, were read, discussed, and put to use by Socialist Lebanon. These three gauchiste publications—books by Maspero, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and *Les Temps Modernes*—were pivotal in the readings discussed in Beirut at that time.[41] Ahmad Beydoun complements the account provided by Traboulsi above, noting, "Fawwaz guided

us to *New Left Review* and *Monthly Review* and until now I still have tens of these issues. . . . We were continuously following *Les Temps Modernes*, sometimes *Esprit* and *Critique*. *Le Monde Diplomatique* [we used to follow] with full diligence; we used to keep all the old issues."[42] The group's dominant Francophone imaginary, which followed the world's events through a close reading of *Le Monde* and *Le Monde Diplomatique* and sharpened its theoretical skills and political analysis via devouring Maspero and Le Seuil books and following *Les Temps Modernes*, was also enriched by Anglophone radical publications.

The peculiarity of the trilingual horizon (Arabic, French, and English) of Socialist Lebanon is predicated on the Lebanese educational system, which alongside Arabic teaches a second foreign language, or two, the most common during the 1950s being French, which was adopted as the main foreign language by Lebanese public schools at that time.[43] This trilingual imaginary would also prove to be crucial in expanding the range of available works for translation: Fawwaz Traboulsi on the Anglophone side, and Hassan Qobeissi and Waddah Charara on the Francophone, were among the most prolific translators of the group. The Parisian "wind from the South" traveled back to the South, to nourish SL's intellectual-political project. These Third Worldist metropolitan publishing houses were not only bringing the peripheries into the metropoles but also worked as a bridge, one that made the ideas and experiences of different militants from the South accessible to each other. French and English mediated between these different Third Worldist militants, who most probably would only have access to each other's writings through the former colonizer's language.

The Parisian publishing houses—Le Seuil, Maspero, and Minuit—also played an additional role when it came to the particularity of Arab politics. Socialist Lebanon, which emerged out of Arab nationalism's orbit, read and translated into Arabic the writings of Egyptian Marxist thinkers who put out systematic critiques of Nasser's regime from its Left. Anouar Abdel Malak (1924–2012), Hassan Riad (the pseudonym of Samir Amin, 1931–2018), and Mahmoud Hussein, the nom de plume of the duo Adel Rif'at (1938–) and Bahgat al-Nadi (1936–), wrote in French, published in Paris, and resorted to pseudonyms to escape retribution from Nasser's regime in the wake of the crackdown on the Egyptian Communist Party, which began on January 1, 1959.[44] These insurrectionary works highlighted how the caste of nationalist officers gave rise to a state bourgeoisie that exploits and dominates Egyptians while appropriating the social surplus for its own benefit, failing therefore to fulfill the necessary task of primitive accumulation needed for development. Abdel Malak's *Egypte, Société Militaire* (1962) was the first book Waddah Charara

translated shortly after it came out, after he had returned from France (1963). It appeared in Arabic without the name of the translator and with a modified title coined by the publisher of the Beirut press Dar al-Taliʿa—*Egypt, a New Society Built by the Military*—instead of *Egypt, Military Society,* to dampen the critical bite of Abdel Malek's title. French publishing houses in this particular case were a haven for Egyptian Marxist critics, enabling their work to escape Nasser's censorship and creating a bridge connecting them to their comrades in Beirut. What couldn't be published in Cairo in Arabic was published in France and translated back into Arabic in Beirut with the hope that it would circulate in the Arab world.

### *Diagnosing the Present, Acting Now*

In its May 1969 issue, the journal *Dirasat ʿArabiyya* (Arab Studies), a vibrant forum for discussing contemporary Arab culture and politics published in Beirut, featured a forty-one-page essay titled "Madkhal li-Qira'at al-Bayan al-Shuyuʿī" (An Introduction to Reading *The Communist Manifesto*, hereafter IRCM).[45] Under the author's slot in the journal's table of contents, the editor wrote, "Prepared by 'Socialist Lebanon's' study circle." The "Introduction" counters economically determinist readings, authorizes antievolutionary positions, and develops SL's perspective on the centrality of translation for political practice. "The point of view adopted by the *Manifesto* regarding the succession of political stages," Socialist Lebanon writes, "is of crucial importance":

> It rids Marxism of the charge of evolutionism, which dominated Marxist writings for a long time, and is still prevalent in a number of works by communist parties. And perhaps the most significant position premised on evolutionism is the one that calls for the support of the national bourgeoisie because the history of the society in which the communist party is militating hasn't passed through all the required stages: . . . feudalism, capitalism, socialism. . . . And since this society hasn't passed through the capitalist phase, and its bourgeois political leadership, this means that the ambition of any group that belongs to the working class or the petite bourgeoisie to constitute the leadership of the period is illegitimate because its aim is not consistent with the [logic of] succession of stages. (IRCM, 47–48)

In an essay revisiting the history of Arab communist parties after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Iraqi social scientist Faleh A. Jabar writes that the five-stage Stalinist schema—"primitive communism, slavery, capitalism, and

lastly communism, socialism being the first stage (or transitory phase of the latter)"—established the theoretical ground from which questions arose.[46] "What role could be found for the anti-colonialist nationalists?" communists were asking, and "what road should the 'revolution' follow: a capitalist path, a move toward socialism, or a third way that involved gradual change?"[47] The ideological battle lines of the 1960s, he continues, focused on whether communists ought to "burn stages" or adopt an "evolutionary" view of history in answering the following kinds of questions: "Was the national bourgeoisie, as a social class, capable of carrying out the required tasks? And, if so, to what extent should it be supported? Or if this class was impotent, should the working class step in as it had done in the October 1917 revolution to undertake both democratic (i.e., capitalist) and socialist tasks at one and the same time?"[48] It is as a response to this conjuncture that the militant intellectuals of Socialist Lebanon anchored their antievolutionary positions, which called for the autonomy of the working class and its capacity to "burn stages," in a retour aux sources to the *Manifesto*. In doing so they short-circuited Stalinist interpretations and undercut the official Soviet doxas of the time to announce that the positions calling for a historicist logic of stages, predicated on an economic reductionism, are not authorized by Marx's text. "If the forces of production, as well as their continuous development, lead to the shattering of the relations of production and to toppling the political regime that maintains them, then the fall of the regime also results in pushing the forces of production forward by removing all obstacles that were hindering their development," Socialist Lebanon observe, warning against a reductionism that does not pay attention to the fact that the "political structure plays an important role in the development of the forces of production" (IRCM, 48).

At the heart of SL's interpretation of the *Manifesto* is an argument against the historicist "not yet" that relinquishes the working class and the revolutionary act to the "waiting room" of history since the objective conditions of the moment are not ripe for its autonomous action.[49] In their refusal to wait for the revolution, they were insisting on the "now" as "the temporal horizon of political action," which the anticolonial nationalists had also done before them against the "not yet" of the colonizer. The difference was that in the late 1960s, more than a decade and a half after the Free Officers came to power in Egypt, and more than five years after the Ba'th Party established its rule in Syria, Socialist Lebanon's "now" was a postcolonial one par excellence. They refused to subordinate revolutionary politics to an alliance with, and support of, the national bourgeoisie, "traditional leaders" such as Kamal Jumblatt, the leader of the Druze community, who founded the

Lebanese Socialist Party, and to Arab nationalist regimes that also brandished the flag of socialism. In fact, the Lebanese organization made sure to draw their readers' attention to the "inaccuracy" of some of the widely circulated slogans of these actors. Socialism, they assert, is not "the society of sufficiency and justice. If dignified living and sufficiency and justice are some of the consequences of a socialist society, it is first and foremost the collective control of the producers over the means of production" (IRCM, 74–75). The unnamed author of this particular definition of socialism they are countering is no other than President Abdel Nasser.[50] This generation of militant intellectuals, who came of political age as Nasser's anticolonial star was rising in the 1950s and experienced the secession between Syria and Egypt in 1961 as a bitter personal blow, became by the late 1960s Marxist critics of the anticolonial nationalist regimes in power, the national bourgeoisie, and last but not least the pro-Soviet communist parties.

Socialist Lebanon's emphasis on the present moment also came across through inscribing their struggle in a globally shared contemporary horizon of the people's struggles from China to Cuba and by calling for a thorough diagnosis of the present's particularity. "What is the characteristic of our present era?" is a question that every communist has to ask, Socialist Lebanon assert, as they supply the direction of their answer: "[Starting] from here, a point which Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao have recurrently come back to is clarified, and that is that the answer to this question cannot be general, and cannot be repeated, even if the circumstances preserved their general outline. Every Marxist work has to come back to this question with regards to its country and its circumstances, and to do so again with every transformation in its conditions and those of the rest of the world" (IRCM, 43). Communist politics in Socialist Lebanon's interpretation is given its coherence, overall general direction, and particular shape by an analysis that is attentive to the particularities of its present. The absence of this capacity for analysis, whose aims are simultaneously to rise above the particularities of disparate problems—say, in the syndicalist militancy of the student, worker, and peasant sectors—and unify them in a general political project that is grounded in the specificity of the situation, results in the disintegration of revolutionary practice. "The practice that pulls together all the isolated issues, and highlights the condition of their political realization," they affirm, "is theoretical practice or political analysis (we are momentarily using the two expressions interchangeably)" (IRCM, 71). If the analysis of the particular characteristics of the present are forgone, the party will be transformed into "splintered sectors, each working on its own without any relation to the others but attending central committee meetings and discussing

the general 'line' that does not generalize anything but a bunch of slogans that should work in Bolivia and Sudan as well as in Lebanon, which means that they are not valid in any country" (IRCM, 71).

### *Transfiguration, Translation, Pragmatics*

The emphasis on the diagnosis of the particularity of the present forecloses for Socialist Lebanon the possibility of a general and repeatable answer that cuts across times and spaces. In doing so, the Lebanese militant group was clearly arguing against viewing Marxism as a direct translation of a body of theory to disparate particular situations that are themselves not generative of theoretical elaborations, but passive recipients of a "revealed" universal discourse. Tackling head-on the question of translation in the Marxist tradition, Socialist Lebanon's critical posture is not one that emphasizes the unmasking of a particular parading in the guise of a universal, say, some of Marx's nineteenth-century Eurocentric formulations, even though they are not oblivious to them. As a matter of fact, they begin their "Introduction" with a reflexive move that stresses the spatiotemporal axis of difference separating their context of reading and interpretation from the time and place of the *Manifesto*'s writing:

> What is taken for granted is that *The Communist Manifesto* did not treat the problems we are suffering from nor did it "predict," as it is said, the enormity of the problems that colonized countries (those colonized by the West) would face. Rather those countries are only mentioned in the *Manifesto* in rare places, and with a name, which is not considerate at all: "The barbarian countries"! And it was not written on the eve of a national liberation revolution, but a month before the outbreak of the 1848 revolution in France, i.e., on the eve of the first workers' revolution that destroyed the bourgeois monarchy and laid the foundations for the Second Republic . . . Moreover, the *Manifesto* was written in the mid-nineteenth century, i.e., in a period when European industry had not yet witnessed the biggest share of transformations, which would change the face of Europe and the globe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Besides, the workers' movement had not yet traversed the great number of experiences that it would endure during the next fifty years. (IRCM, 38)

In this opening paragraph, placed under the heading of "Why Do We Read *The Communist Manifesto*?," Socialist Lebanon firmly assert the difference separating the contours of their present from the *Manifesto*'s time and place of writ-

ing, deny any supposedly predictive quality to the Marx-Engels text, while ironically referencing and translating Marx's "barbarian countries" into the colonized ones. While they were certainly far from epistemologically naïve, subscribing to every letter of Marx's text, Socialist Lebanon's critical posture did not circumscribe itself to debunking the politics of theory. They did not throw the baby out with what they perceived as the Eurocentric bathwater because Marxist thought for them was more than a body of knowledge to be scrutinized for Eurocentric and Orientalist assumptions. For one it was a powerful analytical tool that helped them understand their colonial modernity and the class contradictions internal to their societies against other political forces such as Arab nationalists who were dealing with the meanderings of *The Arab Spirit*, and its resurrection—Ba'th means "Resurrection" in Arabic. More importantly, Marxism held a key to understand these societies, on the one hand, and a tool to effect their revolutionary transformation toward the horizon of social justice, on the other. It was a theory of political practice; Socialist Lebanon was fond of quoting Lenin's maxim, "Without revolutionary theory, there is no revolutionary practice." This is why the gist of their intervention does not lie in unmasking the particular hiding behind the universal, but in arguing that by not taking into consideration the spatiotemporal characteristics of Bolivia, Sudan, and Lebanon—the particular—one traffics in hollow universals that have no traction and are too general to be of any use.

Failure to translate is to transform Marx's oeuvre to a *lettre morte*. There is no way then of being a proper communist without engaging in a translation of Marx and Engels's works, one that does not constitute an inauthentic copy of the original, a particular distortion of the universal text, or a failed mimicry of the West. On the contrary, translations are generative and constitutive not only of Lebanese Marxism but of the communist tradition of thought and practice. "Innovative socialist revolutions," write Socialist Lebanon, "have been tied to novel theoretical thought: the Bolshevik revolution and Lenin, the Chinese revolution and Mao Tse-Tung, the Vietnamese revolution and Vo Nguyen Giap, the Cuban Revolution and Che Guevara" (IRCM, 71). In SL's interpretation, Marx's oeuvre constitutes the foundational text of the tradition, which *authorizes* socialist political practice and thought. It does not, however, stand as the untroubled transhistorical universal to the particular glosses that come in its wake. Rather, Marxism cannot be separated from the circulation and translations across time and space of Marxist works, including the numerous returns to Marx's oeuvre itself. The universality of Marxism is constituted through, and is a product of, the multiple acts of translations and does not precede them. Just think for a moment of Socialist Lebanon in late 1960s

Beirut going back to Marx after having just read Giap, Fanon, and Althusser, who himself was rereading Marx in the wake of such figures as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Lenin, Gaston Bachelard, Mao, and Gramsci to get a sense of the distance we have traveled away from a view of Arab Marxists as ensnared by modernization theory and engaging in unidirectional acts of translation of Marxism characterized as a Western critical discourse.

At the heart of Socialist Lebanon's acts of translation lies the question of political practice, of providing new knowledges that authorize forms of revolutionary politics and participate in the formation of novel political consciousness and subjectivities. The "Introduction" was written for and used in theoretical education circles after the newly founded Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP, 1969) approached Socialist Lebanon with a request for such a text. Marx, Lenin, Mao, Trotsky, Guevara, and others were read in French or English and translated into Arabic from these translations under the temporal pressure of political practice, sometimes comparing the translations in two different languages, or different translations in one of these languages while working on the Arabic text.[51] Their labors of translation from translations driven by the impediment of practice, whether working with Mao or Marx, bypassed the distinctions between original and copy, universal and particular. The question of linguistic difference, of fidelity to the original language, mattered less than the capacity of accessing, interpreting, and putting to practical use authoritative discourses about the analysis of class, imperialism, and guerrilla warfare.

These acts of translations and transfigurations, which were fueled by the impediment of revolutionary practice, were not mediations between a self and an other. Theirs was not an attempt that sought, as many anthropological works do, to render what seems unfamiliar at first glance familiar, or, going in the opposite direction, to denaturalize what we take for granted. Susan Buck-Morss's reading of Qutb and Shariati, which works toward a rediscovery of one's own commitments in a different theoretical language as well as revealing the contingency of Western norms when refracted through the prism of Muslim thinkers, is in line with this approach. That is because their world of the late 1960s and 1970s was neatly divided into the two camps of Left and Right, progressives and reactionaries, national liberation movements and colonialism. This was a time when young, militant intellectuals in Lebanon would debate national liberation movements in Latin America, as well as the minutiae of strikes and syndicates in some European factory, when the students of the American University of Beirut would demonstrate in protest against the war in Vietnam. This world, wrapped in one overarching *canvas* on which clear fault lines

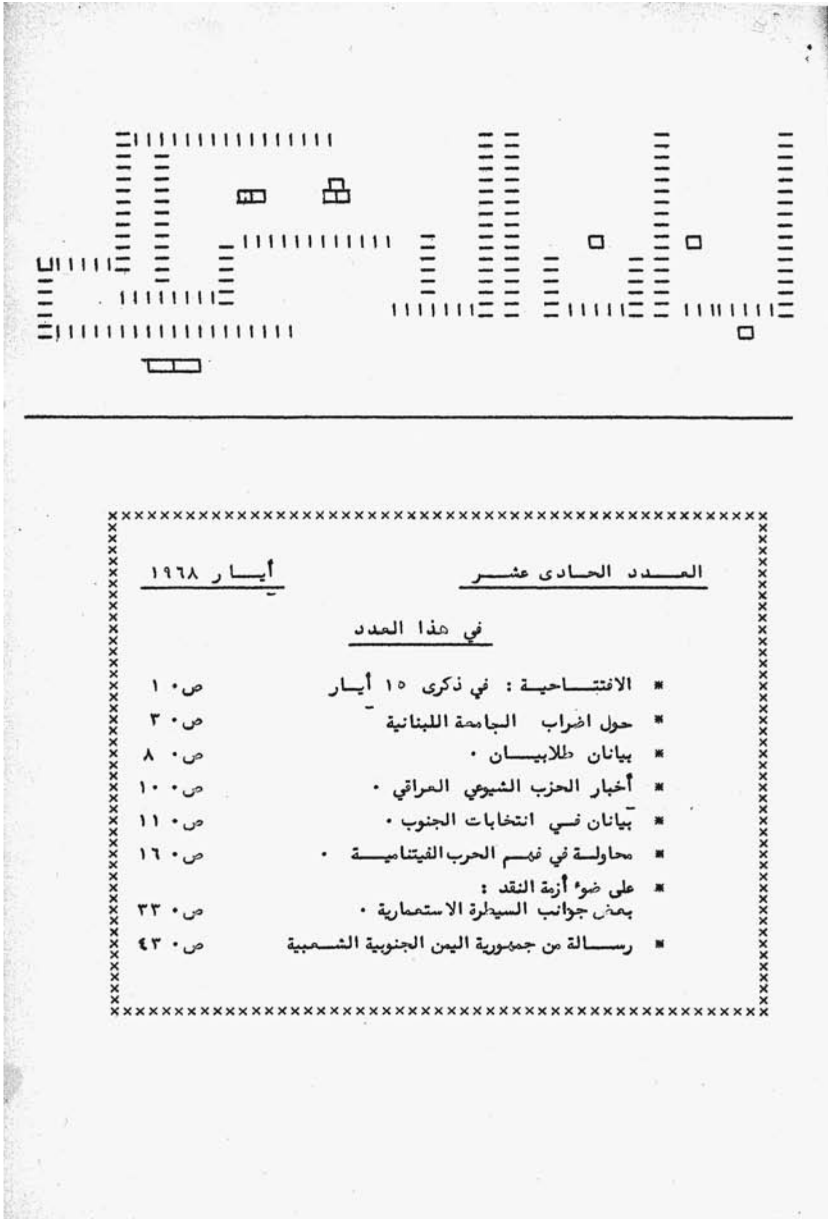
were drawn between Left and Right, has vanished. Theirs was a world that was eclipsed by the rise of the questions of community, by which I mean the resurgence of infranational sectarian, regional, ethnic, and familial solidarities, and the emergence of an array of militant political forces grouped under the banner of political Islam. Some of them, like Charara, were among the first to take note of the entanglement of political practice in the cobwebs of communal solidarities that relegated the march of the working classes toward brighter tomorrows into futures past (Fig. 2.2).

In the opening pages of *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (2003), Susan Buck-Morss revisits her own trajectory as she pithily identifies the ebbing away of that old political world:

> In the 1970s when I was a student, Marxism in its multiple variants—Western Marxism, Marxist humanism, Trotskyism, Leninism, Maoism, Fanonism—provided the common discursive terrain in which critics of exploitation and domination could agree (often vehemently, even violently) to disagree. The secular Left throughout the Middle East was a vibrant part of that conversation. . . . Part of the postcolonial reality since the end of the Cold War has been the disintegration of the discursive unity provided by Marxism, for which some of us must confess feeling not a small bit of nostalgia. (*TPT*, 7)

Buck-Morss's translations take place in the wake of the disintegration of this common ground. Her project of translation takes place on a different plane than the one Socialist Lebanon undertook, whose unified world linked Hanoi to Cuba by way of Paris. Her translations are not actions that are undertaken under the urgent pressure of political practice, which seeks a revolutionary theory to ground and guide it. Translating Qutb and Shariati into English in New York produces very different kinds of analytical and political effects than translating Marx and Giap into Arabic in Beirut. I would like to think more with Buck-Morss about her crucial insight that "our forms of critique are actions that themselves affect history," which is central to her more recent essay, in which she returns to Qutb and Shariati (STF, 67). Buck-Morss writes:

> If we do *not* rescue the progressive moments in present-day religious writers—Qutb, Shariati, and so many others—whose political actions we have neglected even to see, but who belong objectively to *our* time and who are, in the uncomfortable sense our *contemporaries*, if we continue to ignore their highly influential work, abandoning them on the field of political imagination, then we allow their legacy to be taken



العدد الحادى عشر — أيار ١٩٦٨

في هذا العدد


* الافتتاحية : في ذكرى ١٥ أيار — ص٠ ١
* حول اضراب الجامعة اللبنانية — ص٠ ٣
* بيانان طلابيان ٠ — ص٠ ٨
* أخبار الحزب الشيوعي العراقي ٠ — ص٠ ١٠
* بيانان في انتخابات الجنوب ٠ — ص٠ ١١
* محاولة في فهم الحرب الفيتنامية ٠ — ص٠ ١٦
* على ضوء أزمة النقد : بعض جوانب السيطرة الاستعمارية ٠ — ص٠ ٣٣
* رسالة من جمهورية اليمن الجنوبية الشعبية — ص٠ ٤٣


FIGURE 2.2. *Socialist Lebanon*, Issue 11, May 1968.

> over by those all too eager to appropriate it for their own hegemonic projects. A relevant anecdote: Nathan Coombs writes, 'When *Culture Wars* approached me to review a release from Verso's Radical Thinkers series, I responded "great give me Ali Shariati." But Shariati was not in the collection. (STF, 79)

Buck-Morss's call for engaging these intellectuals qua political theorists, and not merely as native, local intellectuals whose lives and works are framed through concepts and methods developed by the "theorists" of the Euro-American pantheon, is a necessary one. Her juxtaposition of the theoretical labors of Qutb and Shariati with those of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin on the same page, in a montage of fragments from different intellectual traditions, produces salutary effects. Buck-Morrs's textual montages jolt some readers out of complacent intellectual habits; despite the different theorists from the South that the Marxist tradition produced, some readers still expect "abstract," "universal" theory to be produced up North and "concrete," "particular" thinking to take place in what is now called the Global South. What concerns me is rather how Buck-Morss envisages the pragmatic effects of her rescue of those progressive moments in the corpus of religious thinkers. How would reading Shariati today by an American critical theorist, such as Buck-Morss, or his incorporation into Verso's Radical Thinkers series alongside Louis Althusser and Gillian Rose, help disarm those other readers who would like to appropriate his work for hegemonic, or other, ends? Shariati's oeuvre has been read, commented on, argued with, and mobilized in Iran and the Arab world for more than four decades now. Moreover, forms of critique, and their transnational travels, may produce multiple theoretical and political effects depending on the questions asked by those reading publics and the stakes animating their communities of argument. In saying "our rescue saves Shariati from appropriation by Iranian reactionaries as a tool of the ruling class," Buck-Morss is simultaneously attributing too much power to one reading of the work, which is isolated from the space of arguments in which this work has been discussed for a few decades now, and holding on to a too limited view regarding the potential pragmatic effects of traveling theories (STF, 80).

## *Coda: Here and Elsewhere*

> To raise the question, for example, of whether having a refrigerator, for American society, necessarily implies the destruction of another country and, after that, one's own destruction. "We start with Vietnam," he says,

> "in order to get to things that would be almost entirely French . . . to show, in the end, that it is clearly capitalism itself which is at stake."

These are the comments of a filmmaker from a discussion between a collective of filmmakers and the audience composed of workers at Rhodiaceta—a chemical factory—after the screening of *Loin du Vietnam* (Far from Vietnam) (1967). The director in question is Alain Resnais, the talented director who produced landmarks such as *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) and *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad* (1961). The collective Société pour le Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles (SLON) included some of French cinema's well-known directors, such as Jean-Luc Godard, Agnès Varda, Claude Lelouch, Joris Ivens, and William Klein, in addition to Resnais and Chris Marker (*May '68*, 88–89). Kristin Ross notes that Vietnam and the Third World generally were viewed mostly in terms of class relations in France: "Global solutions to the problems of the third world could only be found in the radical transformation of the Capitalist world system and its replacement by a new economic order" (*May '68*, 89). "The third-worldist perspective Maspero had helped make available to French readers," she writes, "became the means, in his view, for reconceptualizing the French national situation" (*May '68*, 85). Maspero's views, like the comments uttered by Resnais of the film collective, take as their starting point that "'everything is linked' and that one cannot analyze Gaullism, capitalism, or syndicalism in the France of 1966 as though it were a phenomenon isolated from the rest of the world" (*May '68*, 86).

The idea that "everything is linked" undid the East/West distinction and nationalist imaginaries by providing one language to articulate the struggle of workers in French factories and Vietnamese fighters against American imperialism. In France, Maoism provided the "theoretical justification" for the merging of anticapitalist and anti-imperialist themes that Vietnam allowed by "loosening [the French Communist Party's] emphasis on the French proletariat by acknowledging the possibility of other political agents—peasants or farmers" and by emphasizing "the Third Worldist geopolitical organization of the World along a North/South axis—the one etched by the international division of labor" (80).

In Beirut, the "Chinification of Marxism" and the reading of Fanon as Waddah Charara recalled were spurring him and the group to think through a theoretical and political project that would "adapt" Marxism to Lebanese specificity: the Arabization of Marxism was on the table. Charara was asked if the intention behind the "Introduction to Reading *The Communist Manifesto*," which he had written, was to produce a Lebanese Communist Manifesto. "There was a dream that a number of people, including myself, had," he answered:

> And it was a dream of a dual birth. The birth of a contemporary history from the womb of a local subjective history: Arabic Islamic [history] whose meaning was very different from the one it took later on and that this same history be born and at the same time from a general, common, universal human womb. . . . These two simultaneous births, and most likely we did not give ourselves the necessary tools to understand them, remained closer to a metaphor than to a concept. And even the metaphor remained foggy.[52]

Maoism and Vietnam enabled French students, intellectuals, and workers to realize that they were in the same fight against a common enemy and that they could not delink their domestic problems from the rest of the globe. Maoism and Vietnam in Beirut, especially after the June 1967 defeat of the Arab armies and regimes, provided a spur for the translation of Marxism to other southern contexts and for a popular guerrilla struggle against colonialism (Israel) and imperialist interests.

Looking at it retrospectively, the frenzy that captivated the members of Socialist Lebanon during their early revolutionary years of selfless immersion in reading, discussing, writing, and translating would prove pivotal for the fashioning of their intellectual habitus. The work ethic and discipline required to plow through dense theoretical texts and to follow the minutiae of global political developments from Prague, to Algeria, and Vietnam, as well as the labors of tying theoretical analysis to practical political situations, will help not only in the formation of a political subjectivity and a cultural capital but also a fostering of intellectual dispositions, which will remain long after the revolution's passing. Moreover, their intense focus on their political present, on reading whatever was useful in understanding it and revolutionizing it, widened their intellectual horizons toward transdisciplinary readings that escaped the logic of specialization and disciplinary boundaries.

The political defeat of a generation of revolutionaries produced a distinguished generation of intellectuals. The underground militants of the 1960s later became the distinguished professors, public commentators, and writers of the 1980s onward. The exit from organized political practice retained from the past the generalist's approach to reading and writing, dodging the logic of specialization. Ahmad Beydoun wrote poetry, a film script, and essays on linguistics and the sociology of culture in addition to his historiographical works. Waddah Charara wrote on themes ranging from popular culture, to cinema, Arab heritage, and Islamic studies, to translating French poetry, on top of his sociological and historical works. Abbas Beydoun became a distinguished

poet, a novelist, and cultural critic. I asked the latter if it was clear to him that he would become a poet during the days of militancy:

> It was not clear to me what I would become. I was writing poetry. I wrote a collection, a lot. I started very early, but it wasn't clear to me what I was going to write. So at the same time, I would write poetry, stories, even theater, and it was all dependent on what I was reading at the time. . . .
>
> There were these varied options for someone who fundamentally needed a very long time before acknowledging that one has something that is *private*, before we even talk about specialization.[53]

After they quit organized political activity and found or developed their own individual interests, their period of militancy will be mostly recast as one of selfless political immersion, and the exit from it will be into a discovery or recovery of private passions.

But why today should we revisit SL's founding moment in the mid-1960s? Is it to argue for the saliency of their answers for our present? It is needless to point out that the national, regional, and global conjuncture they were working in half a century ago is not ours today. Their heated debates about whether the working class ought to "burn stages" or ally itself with the national bourgeoisie reach our shores as faint echoes from a lost world. So much has changed since then. So why return to Socialist Lebanon? Is it to denaturalize a present, permeated by communal discourses and attachments by excavating a past when politics was imagined and practiced differently? Sure, but my historical reconstruction is not fueled by a Left melancholy to a time when class-based politics had a thicker ontological density and when the lines were clearly drawn between the forces of progress and those of reaction.[54] I am trying to carve a path between a corrosive Left melancholy that disparages an uncertain present, on the one hand, and banishing this past's relevance to our present by dismissing this Marxist generation's critical labors and practice on the basis of their vanguardism or modernizing politics, on the other hand. What I am also after is a rescue of Socialist Lebanon's *ethos*, which shone through their indefatigable tracking of their global present, dodging the logics of professionalization and expertise, what Jacques Rancière calls the logic of the police. By following the minutiae of the secondary school student strikes in Lebanon while reading Bourdieu, analyzing at length the reasons for the defeat of the Arab armies in 1967, translating Fidel Castro's speeches on the defeatist line of the Venezuelan Communist Party, and publishing communiqués from a revolutionary Iraqi workers' organization, Socialist Lebanon's political imaginary was not locked on the tired East/West or South/North path. This ethos also shone through

their sustained attention to the specificity of the conditions they were diagnosing and working in. For all their attention to the global unfolding of events, they were not frequent-flying international experts, or parachuted humanitarians on a mission, but committed translators and militants enmeshed in the fabric of their own societies, and accountable to them, whose theoretical acumen was part and parcel of their political project. The path Socialist Lebanon cleared half a decade ago is no longer recognizable to us today. Their dream of a dual birth, on the other hand, has certainly lost nothing of its luster.

# 3. JUNE 1967 AND ITS HISTORIOGRAPHICAL AFTERLIVES

> When the June war broke out I was still in Paris. . . . I felt something like a quake mixed with shame, which pushed me to quickly escape to Beirut. . . . And for months, in an atmosphere of depression and despair, I thought, every now and then, of committing suicide. But it was forestalled first by a sense of responsibility towards a wife and three children and some remainder of a metaphysical trust in the revolutionary potential of the Arab people.
>
> —YASIN AL-HAFIZ

> At the time the Vietnam peace movement was gaining momentum but for me the Palestine issue seemed more crucial.
>
> —MASAO ADACHI

There is no doubt that 1967, which marks the swift military defeat of Arab armies against Israel, has a ubiquitous historiographical presence. It is *the* turning point par excellence. You will find it referenced in Arabic newspaper articles, in Arab Human Development Reports from the United Nations Development Programme, and in the critical literature discussing artistic, intellectual, and political trends.[1] The use of the date of a military defeat as a marker for different genres, and not, for instance, the date of events that are internal to these fields of practice, is symptomatic of the saturation of Arab cultural scenes with politics, whether it is conceived as a national struggle against colonialism or a critique of discrimination based on sexuality, gender, and race. Artists and intellectuals often comment on the overbearing presence of political concerns. A few years ago, Hamed Sinno, the front man of the Lebanese pop band Mashrou' Leila, mentioned in an interview that it is very difficult to escape politics where he comes from.[2] Sinno echoed Jalal Khoury (1934–2017), the committed Lebanese theater director and playwright who more than four decades ago noted that "our world is asphyxiated by politics."[3] More than fifty years of age separate the two. Sinno was born in 1988, in the last years of the Lebanese civil war, a few years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, while

Khoury was at the vanguard of Lebanese political theater in the late 1960s. That said, both agree on the difficulty of artists escaping politics in our part of the world. Pierre Bourdieu's theories on the increasing autonomy of cultural fields away from sociopolitical contexts, and external constraints, find their limit in the neocolonial and postcolonial Arab world.[4]

Works on Arab intellectual history in English adopt post-1967 thought as a marker for contemporary Arab thought.[5] In Ibrahim Abu Rabi''s *Contemporary Arab Thought*, the post-1967 era is characterized by a variety of transformations that are hard to square with the historical event of the military defeat as their turning point.[6] In addition to mentioning the impact of 1967 on intellectual production, Abu Rabi' writes about "the Arab project of modernity [coming] to a standstill" (18); "most Arab states have experienced more not less authoritarianism since 1967"(22); "the social and economic transformations since 1967" (23); the "rise of the Gulf States to religious and economic prominence after 1967 mainly in the 1980's and 1990's"; the Islamic revival post-1967 (28); the "mode of production dominant in 1967 in the Gulf" (24); and capitalism after 1967. In this narrative post-1967 becomes the master key to unlock intellectual, political, social, and economic transformations in the Arab world. It's a master key that is without much heuristic value, one that plots structural transformations in societies and modes of production on the same plane as the event of a swift military defeat, without any distinction between different registers of analysis.

Suzanne Kassab's deployment of 1967 is much more focused. The intellectual and political crisis experienced in the wake of the military defeat, she argues, brought on two, increasingly bifurcated, responses:

> One the one hand, the search for totalizing doctrines, especially religious after the demise of the Left and of secular nationalism, and, on the other hand, the radicalization of critique. The first trend was the result of a deep yearning for a holistic vision that could offer an indigenous, nonalienating worldview and mobilize the necessary forces toward a way out of the humiliation and the oppression. The second was the outcome of a painful confrontation with the limitations and dangers of holistic views as well as of the growing realization of the vital need for critique in the face of multiple forms of oppression.[7]

Kassab has done an admirable excavation of critical strands in contemporary Arab thought. Her work reveals the multiplicity of critical positions—for example, Marxist, liberal, feminist, Islamist—in contemporary Arab thought, standing as a much-needed corrective to the reduction of this tradition's complexity to a

stark ideological binary between secular nationalism and religious politics. Her comparative perspective, which ties in the motifs of Arab debates with global postcolonial conversations, undoes their exceptionalist treatment, which is so often their lot. It is also an invitation to carve new South-South intellectual paths that steer off the much trodden peripheries-metropole highway.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will revisit once more Socialist Lebanon's theoretical and political practice. In doing so, I have four aims. The first is to unearth a very early tradition of critique of the authoritarian regimes that predates the 1967 defeat. Second, to complicate the historiography that crowns 1967 as the turning point, which generated a bifurcation between holistic doctrines and critique. I do so by underlining the radical hopes that accompanied the political rise of the New Left in the *direct* aftermath of 1967, which combined an adherence to thick ideological traditions, such as Marxism, an engagement alongside the Palestinian revolution, and a commitment to critique.[8] The dominant framing of 1967 as the double marker of transition and bifurcation, I argue, is less the result of the direct post-1967 conjuncture and more of the 1980s, when most of these militant intellectuals lost their political organizational moorings and their hope in the revolutionary masses to become detached, isolated critics squeezed between the Scylla of authoritarian regimes and the Charybdis of communal solidarities and Islamic militant movements. As the political-social questions of the 1960s focusing on the transfiguration of Marxism—its Arabization—to guide political practice gave way to the political-cultural questions of *asala* (authenticity) and *turath* (Arab-Islamic tradition), quite a few of the 1960s leftists rediscovered the heritage of the earlier generation of *Nahda* (Renaissance) liberal thinkers, such as Taha Husayn and ʿAli ʿAbd al-Raziq.[9] The Arab liberal tradition, which they thought had been superseded by Marxism in the 1960s, proved to those former revolutionaries to be much more prescient in addressing the challenges they were facing from both state and society.

Third, unlike the most famous post-1967 self-criticisms, and here I have in mind the works of Sadik al-Azm and Adonis, which coupled the courageous ethical injunction of taking stock of one's own defeat with a culturalist critique that laid the blame on the "traditional" nature of Arabs, Socialist Lebanon focused on examining the social composition of these regimes, their ideologies, and more importantly the logics undergirding their technologies of rule and governing their political and military practices.[10] Critical diagnosis of actual practices of *power* is what they did.

Fourth, and to go back to our present, these very early Marxist critiques raise crucial questions regarding the question of minorities in the Arab world and

the mobilization of the Palestinian question by the regimes to legitimize internal power struggles and repress political dissidents. These two questions—minorities and the struggle with Israel as necessitating a permanent state of emergency—will later be taken up by the Arab liberal critique against the leftist and Arab nationalist anti-imperialists. Socialist Lebanon's work does not only reveal how early and prescient their diagnosis of the regimes was but also how it was embedded in a Marxist project that combined it with a critique of imperialism. After the defeat of the Left, these external (imperialism) and internal (regimes) critiques bifurcated. Liberals, mostly democracy advocates and culturalist critics of their societies, opposed anti-imperialist nationalists and Islamists who focused only on the geopolitical game of nations and the regimes' place in it. The Arab revolutions (2011–), by reintroducing grassroots mass political mobilization, ignited, for a moment at least, the hope of transcending the impossible choice between national sovereignty under a tyrant and a hope for democracy brought about by foreign occupation. Collective political practice brought back the possibility of articulating an antiauthoritarian and anti-imperialist politics from one position, before the regimes, communal internal divisions, and the never ending interventions thwarted the possibility of emancipation. Even if the first wave of revolutions have now ebbed, post-1967 as a dominant historiographic trope can no longer stand as the undisputed marker of contemporary Arab thought. It is now a category of the past. Post-2011 also urges us to cast a fresh look on how the analytic and historiographical categories of historians reproduce the categories of practice of key intellectuals of the earlier generation who were marked by the 1967 military defeat.[11]

In excavating this alternative genealogy of contemporary Arab thought and politics, which does not assume 1967 as the cardinal and only historiographical turning point, I, of course, do not seek to deny the centrality of the defeat. In fact, I will discuss how it constituted a watershed moment for academics both at home and in the diaspora, such as Sadik al-Azm, Edward Said, and Talal Asad, jolting the first two out of their ivory towers and into an engagement alongside the Palestinian revolution. In doing so, I reclaim a different genealogy for 1967, one that argues that the political moment of 1967 was central, and constitutive, for diasporic strategies of criticism—Asad's and Said's—that ushered in the critiques of the entanglement of Western knowledges with power. What I am after is a double move that seeks to displace the monopoly of 1967 as the marker of contemporary Arab thought at home and to reinscribe it as a cardinal moment for the intellectual and political projects of diasporic intellectuals.

The end of the union between Egypt and Syria in 1961 is now largely forgotten. This event, which exists outside of the contradiction with colonialism and imperialism, was crucial for this generation of militants. It constitutes the first major setback of the anticolonial nationalist regimes, less than a decade after the 1952 Egyptian Revolution. This intra-Arab event ushered in the first immanent critiques of the regimes that pointed out the gap that separates their pan-Arab ideologies from their practices that could not sustain a union for more than three years. It inaugurated an early critical reflexive turn that found in Marxism a critical theory and a weapon of political transformation, which by conjugating together the internal class contradictions of these societies with an anti-imperialist agenda was more conceptually sophisticated than Arab nationalist ideologies.

Some of the comrades who founded Socialist Lebanon in the mid-1960s came from this cohort of disenchanted Arab nationalists. Ahmad Beydoun (1942–), who had lost the links he had with the Arab Nationalist Movement and was immersed in a Baʿthist atmosphere through his friends at Lebanese University, remembers the dissolution of the union as being a terrible and decisive event. Nearly fifty years after the establishment of the union in 1958, he draws my attention during one of our conversations to "something which the generation younger than us cannot imagine," most probably alluding to my generation's world, born during the Lebanese civil and regional wars (1975–90), a time of heightened Christian/Muslim sectarian tensions, Syrian military interventions, and Israeli invasions (1978 and 1982).[12] It seems light years away from the hopes of Arab unity that Abdel Nasser ignited in their hearts. "And that is," he adds, "how terrible the dissolution of the union was for us. It was a blow that changed the meaning of the world for us. The political history of the last three or four generations does not really stop sufficiently at that date. They stop more at 1967. For us, 1961 was decisive." It is this disenchantment "which gave rise to the desire and the need to know these societies that are called an *umma* [Arab nation]."

Turning their gazes inward from nation to class, these young intellectuals saw in Marxist theory and practice the answer to their desire to know and the appropriate tool to effect the revolutionary transformations of their societies. "The question of society," Beydoun presses on, "was the true and effective mediator of [Marxist revolutionary] theory." The year 1961 ushered in an early reflexive moment that turned away from nationalist rhetoric against external enemies toward criticizing the "progressive" regimes in power and diagnosing

the internal political contestations lodged at the heart of these societies. It laid the first bricks of what would come to be known after 1967 as the New Left.

Muhsin Ibrahim's presence, demeanor, and speech are as close as possible to those of a godfather of the Lebanese New Left. He began our conversation by asserting:

> I am going to give it to you from the beginning. There is no New Left in Lebanon without a previous political foundation. Nothing fell on us called the New Left. The issue wasn't that the Lebanese students observed the French students's revolution [May 1968] and decided to do something similar. Its is that of the [Arab] nationalist movements . . . and some of the intellectuals of the Syrian Nationalist Socialist Party . . . the Ba'th Party and some of those who split from the Lebanese Communist Party. These are the birth pangs of the 1960s.[13]

By the time the comrades came together to found Socialist Lebanon they had radicalized their critique of the Arab nationalist movements and regimes. Early on, SL unmasked the Arab chauvinism of the Syrian Ba'th, which they knew from the inside, that was used against non-Arab minorities but cloaked itself in a progressive political rhetoric. The first issue of their bulletin—dated mid-September 1966—ends with an article entitled "Notes on the Last Agreement between the Kurdish Revolution and the Iraqi Government."[14] After enumerating some of the points of the agreement—recognizing the Kurdish nationality in the "temporary constitution," recognizing the language as an official one alongside Arabic in majority Kurdish areas, parity between Arabs and Kurds in educational delegations and scholarships, and so forth—SL assesses reactions to it, including the Ba'th's:

> Behind a leftist rhetoric that claims to take the unity of Arab toilers as its starting point, and considers all actions against it a service rendered to imperialist interests, lies the clear chauvinist position of the declaration: the Kurdish movement is a separatist one that distracts the Arab and Kurdish masses from their main enemies: imperialism, the forces of reaction, and the oil monopolies. It is therefore at their service. Moreover, the Kurdish movement is headed by "tribal and feudal and reactionary sectors" that are backed by international colonialism, the British petroleum companies, and the reactionary rule in Iran. All these accusations are put forth without a single piece of evidence to back them up.[15]

Socialist Lebanon, which supported Kurdish self-rule within Iraqi territory, denounced very early on the Syrian Ba'th's use of *takhwin*—to accuse someone or

an entire group of treason or collaboration with imperialist or foreign powers, or both—one of the most commonly deployed tropes of political excommunication that was used mostly but not exclusively by Arab nationalist regimes and their acolytes. This political charge has had a long shelf life and even wider range of applications encompassing individuals, political parties, and entire communities. Arab communists were often the targets of Nasser's accusations of treason.[16] Ethnic or religious groups, such as the Kurdish movement in this case, were often accused of being the internal agents, or doing the work, of imperialism, seeking to divide and weaken the nation's body from within. For instance, Bashar al-Assad draws on this long tradition when he characterizes the Syrian revolutionaries as foreign-backed rebels, noting in the first months of the Syrian uprisings (2011–) that in the face of conspiracies that are multiplying like germs, the body's immune system has to be strengthened to resist them. The predominance of the national question then, during the global age of decolonization, and its persistence throughout the contemporary Arab world via the Arab-Israeli struggle and the direct foreign economic and military interventions in the post–Cold War era, provided fertile terrain for the regimes in power to appropriate the critical language of anticolonial emancipation in order to enhance their power, crack down on dissidents, undercut all forms of institutional political and civic life, and, of course, legitimize their own rule. In the case of minorities, as Socialist Lebanon argued vis-à-vis the Kurdish movement, anticolonial nationalism was a veil for an Arab nationalist chauvinism that sought to tie its own internal other with foreign imperialist agendas.

In addition to criticizing the politics of treason, Socialist Lebanon took issue with the obverse form that the predominance of the national question took, which is the mobilization for the liberation of Palestine and the fight against anti-imperialism to legitimize their own action, achieve or expand power, and interrupt revolutionary politics. "Concerning the slogan of 'liberating Palestine,'" they write,

> this is not a new one [slogan] for these movements [nationalists]. It was, and still is, the demagogic call that is brandished by all these movements to interpellate the masses to get to power or to keep it. The result has always been the suppression of the masses' consciousness and their movement as well as forbidding them from forming their revolutionary parties that truly represent their interests (this is what happened in Egypt, in Iraq, and what some fear might happen in Jordan).[17]

Socialist Lebanon engaged in acts of immanent critique that diagnosed the gap separating the regimes' progressive professions of faith regarding the two legs

they stood on—the national question and the socioeconomic one—from their practices of rule. When it came to the latter, SL contrasted the promise of socialism with the privileges accrued to those in power. "The rule of the Ba'th in Syria is the rule of the rural segment of the petite bourgeoisie that appropriates surplus production through the army and the state apparatus."[18] These appropriations take the form of different kinds of income and privileges such as high salaries; army cooperatives that "provide them with everything they need—from the pin to the car—at cost value"; rent control and interest-free loans to buy apartments; automatic promotion of officers by one grade upon demobilization and receiving thereafter a monthly salary corresponding to their new rank while keeping all their previous privileges. To all of this should be added the additional incomes and privileges that come from being part of power, such as favors rendered to one's family and bribes received for facilitating transactions with the state.[19] The "military administrative bureaucracies" ruling Syria and Egypt foreclosed the possibility of political practice for the masses in their respective countries. Not only did they presume to speak for the entire nation, they also depoliticized the Palestinian cause by rendering it a military issue: an injustice that was caused by a military defeat and will be resolved by a military victory. This perspective provided the adequate ideological justification for "consolidating the army's role, which was considered the only force capable of resolving the Palestinian problem."[20] It was also used as the main excuse for the army's failure to resolve the predicaments of the national democratic revolution and for its taking the biggest share out of the national budget.

Socialist Lebanon also condemned the foreclosure of the masses from political practice by the top-down technological and economic development strategies. The development question, SL affirmed, cannot be resolved through these means and with foreign aid since it is a social problem. "Solving the question of backwardness—the Chinese model is clear on this front—cannot take place unless the wretched masses accept to make big sacrifices," they write, "which are accompanied by a consciousness of knowing that these will result in building factories and irrigating lands that will produce later on work, food, clothing, education, and health. It is obvious that these sacrifices and this consciousness cannot take place without the masses' popular organizations whose power is in contradiction with that of the military."[21] The regimes, whose raison d'être is the national question and to a lesser extent the development of their societies, banish the masses from the center of political practice by rendering the first a purely military affair to be undertaken by the army and the second a technocratic one to be solved by experts. Moreover, the regimes are characterized by an "enmity to popular organizations"[22] and strive to cancel their role in these

two domains "while representing themselves as expressing the interests of the wretched masses by bringing into being organizations that are loyal to them."[23] The regimes' practice vis-à-vis "the new colonialism," on the other hand, is one characterized by wavering and an incapacity to exit from the capitalist market. "They are not able to break free from its hold and they are not able to ally themselves with it . . . [new colonialism] has more loyal allies represented by feudalism and the bourgeoisie and even the petite bourgeoisie that still retains right-wing organizations (the Muslim Brotherhood . . . )."[24]

Socialist Lebanon's verdict on these regimes is prescient and damning. They are a failure on the national, regional, and international fronts. The reason why they didn't fall after the swift and devastating defeat in June 1967 is because "the confrontation with colonialism still provides the advanced [*al-mutaqaddima*] (and even the backward) regimes an effective popular defense that refuses to let go of what nationalist forces have achieved in terms of independence. . . . This is exactly what these regimes understood and they began to call for restricting the battle to this aspect only."[25] A few years later, Anwar al-Sadat relinquished Nasser's statist economic policies and followed that with a visit to Jerusalem that buried the national question. The Assadist dynasty began its policies of economic liberalization in the 1990s, "followed by ambitious privatization initiatives in the mid-2000s."[26] It still seeks to draw its legitimacy from the national question.

### *1967: Personal Watersheds, Fellow Traveling, and Diasporic Institution Building*

We owe the birth of two of the best known Arab public intellectuals of the 1960s generation to the 1967 defeat: Sadik Jalal al-Azm (1934–2016) and Edward Said (1935–2003). Unlike SL's militant intellectuals, who had nearly a decade of militant experience behind their backs in 1967, al-Azm and Said were detached academics for whom the defeat constituted a personal watershed moment. Said wrote:

> And 1967 brought more dislocations, whereas for me it seemed to embody the dislocation that subsumed all other losses, the disappeared worlds of my youth and upbringing, the unpolitical years of my education, the assumption of disengaged teaching and scholarship at Columbia, and so on. I was no longer the same person after 1967; the shock of that war drove me back to where it had all started, the struggle over Palestine. I subsequently entered the newly transformed Middle Eastern

landscape as a part of the Palestinian movement that emerged in Amman and then in Beirut in the late sixties through the seventies.[27]

Said, whose first and only attempt at political writing had been on the Suez crisis of 1956 submitted to the Princeton newspaper during his undergraduate years, wrote "The Arab Portrayed."[28] This piece was printed in a special issue of *Arab World,* "the Arab League monthly published in New York," guest edited by Said's close friend Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, the Palestinian academic and future member of the Palestine National Council (1977–91).[29] This special issue, Said noted, was "intended to look at the war from an Arab perspective. I used the occasion to look at the image of the Arabs in the media, popular literature, and cultural representations going back to the Middle Ages. This was the origin of my book *Orientalism*, which I dedicated to Janet and Ibrahim."[30]

The productivity of defeat did not only take the form of making public intellectuals out of detached diasporic academics. The defeat also produced new institutions, periodicals, and publications. In 1967–68, Arab American scholars wary of the founding in 1966 of the Middle East Studies Association "soon after the closure of the American Association for Middle Eastern Studies, and the overlap in the leadership of the two bodies" and fearing that "MESA was simply a continuation of the earlier pro-Washington and pro-Israel organization," established the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, "which organized a series of annual conferences and publications under the leadership of Ibrahim Abu-Lughod. For several years these were scheduled to conflict with the MESA meetings."[31] "The 1967 war had shocked" these diasporic intellectuals "into realizing that the scholars speaking about the Middle East in the United States, even the minority who seemed sympathetic to the Arab World, were not *from* the region, and did not speak *for* the region."[32] In the wake of the war they "began to challenge the style of academic detachment with which establishment scholars maintained both their status as experts and a silence about controversial issues, especially the Palestine question" as well as the construction of the Middle East as an area of study.[33] These diasporic intellectuals not only contested the styles of academic writing, and their flagrant elisions, but, more importantly, also turned their critical gaze toward a more fundamental level, to the politics inherent in the metropole's construction of its objects of knowledge, noting that the Middle East "was a colonial conception, which, by including Turkey and Iran with the Arab countries, minimized the much stronger common culture of the Arabic-speaking world."[34] Following up on "The Arab Portrayed," Said articulated a critique of Orientalist scholarship in 1974 at the Association of Arab-American University Graduates conference.

Sadik al-Azm, the Yale-trained philosopher, born to an upper-class Damascene family, was, like Said, a detached academic teaching at the American University of Beirut.[35] "If someone had predicted before the defeat of June 1967 that one day I would be producing the type of writing which I later did produce," al-Azm mentioned thirty years later, "I would have thought him mad."[36] al-Azm highlighted the gap between the "revolutionary" economic and political agendas of the Arab liberation movement and its "conservative" superstructural side, which did not tackle Islamic thought, characterizing it as reproducing "values of ignorance, myth-making, backwardness, dependency, and fatalism" and impeding "the propagation of scientific values, secularism, enlightenment, democracy, and humanism."[37] He went on to publish two of the most controversial and widely circulated works, even though officially banned by many countries in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat—*Al-Naqd al-Dhathi ba'd al-Hazima* [Self-Criticism after the Defeat] (1968) and *Naqd al-Fikr al-Dini* [Critique of Religious Reason] (1969).[38] These two books, now considered classics of post-1967 modern Arab political thought, are much indebted to the works of the Syrian Marxist thinker Yasin al-Hafiz, who early on focused on the analysis of culture and values in an effort to move criticism beyond the monopoly of the geopolitical grid. The year 1968 also witnessed al-Azm's expulsion from the American University of Beirut on the grounds of his writings and for signing a petition calling for the withdrawal of the American army from Vietnam.[39]

In the wake of 1967 Socialist Lebanon continued their critiques of the regimes in power while Said and al-Azm moved away from their disciplinary areas of expertise toward forging new modalities of public criticism. Intellectuals in the metropole, such as Said, intervened by calling into question the assumptions on which the West's knowledges of the non-Western world are built. This was a critical labor that, as Talal Asad put it, subjected these *Orientalist* works to the same scrutiny they used to subject "Oriental" peoples and languages to.[40] They turned the West's critical gaze on itself. The questions of colonialism that these diasporic thinkers tackled were tied to their experiences of everyday racism and the refusal of wide swathes of Western societies to understand the justness of Arab political causes, particularly when it came to the denial of solidarity to the Palestinians' struggle for national self-determination.

Things were inflected differently in the Arab world. The questions spurred by the defeat, there and then, were of course of a more direct political and military nature. Why were we defeated? How do we move forward from this point? What are the most suitable ideologies and organizational forms that should be adapted in reorganizing the struggle in the wake of the defeat? These were all

hotly debated issues. The ideological and political problem-space was crowded with religious, Arab nationalist, and communist answers to these questions.[41] It was in this emotionally saturated, politically charged atmosphere that, Sadik Jalal al-Azm, influenced by al-Hafiz's work, steered away from widespread interpretations and prognoses that explained the defeat by external factors, blaming it on US imperialist conspiracies and the shortcomings of the Soviet Union, when not interpreting it as a divine punishment for having lost the proper Islamic way.

What is important to stress is how in both these problem-spaces—the metropolitan and the Arab—what was at stake was to isolate an internal cultural layer for critique. Diasporic thinkers called into question Western culture for its racialized portrayal of Arabs, while critical intellectuals at home isolated "traditional" Arab culture as the root of the defeat. It was a critique of culture that took the form of the problem of *race* and cultural imperialism in the supposedly enlightened metropoles of this world and the problem of *religion* and social conservatism in the supposedly socialist progressive Arab countries. What was also shared by both critical agendas was their *oppositional* character to hegemonic positions whether in Orientalist representations of the Arab world or in the widely circulated arguments in political literature after the defeat that blamed it on external factors. In both cases, these intellectuals saw their critical public interventions and staged them against prevalent cultural and political doxas of the time.

This is where their similarities end. al-Azm's critique was a jeremiad of sorts, a prophet lambasting his people for their traditional ways that brought this ignominious defeat upon them. Said's critique speaks back to the West that dehumanized Arabs through the cultural products of Western consciousness. For al-Azm—a vanguardist modernist critic—the Arab, a culprit of his own defeat, must change his own ways, while for Said, the diasporic oppositional intellectual speaking back to the white majority, the Arab is a victim of cultural imperialism that must resist and tear down the webs of Western racism.[42]

The critique of Arab cultures for their "lacks"—democracy, individual rights, women's rights—and the critique of "Western consciousness" for its webs of cultural imperialism that dehumanize the "Oriental" became increasingly widespread from the 1980s onward. While these two critiques where *theoretically* at odds with each other, the critics that produced them were politically in solidarity. Both Said and al-Azm became fellow travelers of the Palestinian revolution in the wake of 1967. The militant hopes initially generated by the Palestinian resistance in the late 1960s and the political solidarity with it would receive their first blow just a few years later when it clashed with the Jordanian army (September 1970). In the wake of the Iranian Revolution (1979) and

the defeat of the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon (1982), which ushered in a wave of militant religious politics, the secular political space of anti-imperialist solidarity, premised on the presence of the feda'yi as the revolutionary subject, crumbled. The concept of anti-imperialism was stretched by Islamist militant movements to include cultural decolonization, while cultural critics in the metropoles increasingly called into question the colonial epistemological assumptions of modernist intellectuals. The defeat of the revolutionary subject, whose presence and institutions enabled political solidarity amid theoretical divergence, will result in an increased narrowing of the space separating theoretical critiques from political positions. Diasporic intellectuals and critical thinkers at home will increasingly part ways, but we are not there yet.

### *A Failed Arab Modernity or a Military Defeat of Postcolonial Regimes?*

To get a sense of the distinct contours of SL's minoritarian critical labors, against the best sellers of contemporary Arabic thought, I will take a small detour via al-Azm's *Self-Criticism after the Defeat*. al-Azm dedicated a little bit more than a third of the volume to analyze samples of "the tendency of evading responsibility [for one's actions] and blaming it on others, which clearly manifested itself after the June 5th defeat."[43] The logics of justification, he underscored, are not only deficient analytical grids but also symptoms of deeper underlying traits permeating Arab culture. The revolutionary youth, he wrote, "are politically revolutionary, however, deep down, they are conservative socially, religiously, culturally, ethically and economically, except in rare cases."[44] The gap between the theory and practice of the Arab revolutionary reveals an incomplete, if not aborted, revolutionary transformation. al-Azm's strategy is wedded to a staunchly modernizing historical progressive agenda. Revolution means overcoming the "dark image of the past" and initiating a rebellion against past generations.[45]

When tackling the Arab progressive regimes, he emphasized their "ideological confusion" and their "centrism," as well as their ambiguity concerning the question of secularism and the scientific nature of their socialism. "There is no doubt," wrote al-Azm, "that the excuse for the existence of progressive and socialist regimes in the Arab world is the revolution against this weight of backwardness carried by the Arab human being . . . and not refraining from revolutionary socialist measures against it out of 'consideration for the people's religious feelings' . . . and the preservation of traditions."[46] In contrast to SL's diagnosis, which centers on power by analyzing the technologies of rule that

substitute the people's political practice with top-down military and technocratic solutions, al-Azm's lament is precisely that the advanced regimes are failing to adequately fulfill the promise of getting rid of their citizens' backwardness. They are failing not because they are negating the political practice of the people (SL) but because they are conceding too much to their religious feelings and traditions.

al-Azm's culturalist diagnosis deploys all the binaries of modernization theory that are absent from Socialist Lebanon's political analysis: tradition/modernity, religion/science, superstition/reason, backwardness/progress. The two accounts differ not only in isolating different grounds for explanation—power and culture—and how this entails a divergent understanding of what constitutes progressive political practice and who is supposed to carry it out. It is also a difference between the deployment of rough and ready reifications, such as "the traditional characteristics of the Arab personality," and an empirically informed analysis of the many privileges of army officers, the mechanics of their co-optation of the political process, and their instrumentalist use of anticolonial sloganeering to consolidate their own internal powers.

Socialist Lebanon's analysis not only dodges the binaries of modernization theory, it also escapes another prevalent binary trap, which usually comes hand in hand with the former: internal versus external factors in the analysis of the 1967 defeat. al-Azm's inward turn toward culture (internal factors) is an ethical injunction to take responsibility for one's actions. His call, though, remains caught within the same nationalist matrix of the regimes—us/them—whose valences he inverts. Instead of blaming "imperialism" for the Arabs' defeat, he lays the blame on the "Arabs" themselves. The nationalist form of the question "why were we defeated?" takes its unified subject for granted—the Arab "we"—whatever the answer one gives. Socialist Lebanon's diagnosis of the regimes and the class composition of Arab societies displaces the nationalist subject that delimits the possible answers in a binary matrix of us/them, internal causes/external ones to the political plane.

Socialist Lebanon was not preoccupied with questions of modernization, but with the coupling of the national and social questions on which an *autonomous* left could be built—one that not only faced national issues but also the more covert economic domination of foreign capital and the local bourgeoisie. From their perspective, 1967 was not a failure of Arab modernity. It was a military defeat of the regimes that would come to constitute their own *historical chance*.

In the absence of masses, SL's theoretical virtuosity, which positioned itself to the left of Arab nationalist regimes and the Lebanese Left, managed to draw attention to them within these wider political circles. It will result in their merger with the radicalized Lebanese branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement led by Muhsin Ibrahim in the wake of the 1967 defeat. Before I address the union, I will now sketch the contours of SL's critique of the Lebanese Communist Party, which brings out early on the question of the autonomy of leftist political practice. This question will become increasingly significant as we move on into the 1970s and will go through different theoretical and political iterations, until Charara's final disenchantment in the first months of the civil war; but let's linger for a while in the hinge years of the late 1960s.

In June 1959, one of the historic leaders of the Lebanese Communist Party, Farajallah al-Helou, was arrested and tortured to death in Syria by the anticommunism department of the United Arab Republic; "the Lebanese communists considered Nasser to be merely a dictator and essentially a representative of the greedy Egyptian bourgeoisie."[47] The Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party had opposed the union between Egypt and Syria in 1958 and refused to disband after its establishment.[48] A couple of months before the killing of al-Helou, in March 1959, Nasser—in a similar vein to Aflaq's Ba'thist positions—declared Arab communists to be "[foreign] agents who neither believe in the liberty of their land or their nation, but only do the bidding of outsiders."[49] The anticolonial and anti-imperialist agenda of pan-Arab movements marginalized the communists by advocating socialist politics plus a nationalist agenda, in contrast to the communist parties, which could not escape the Soviet orbit. Even before the emergence of Third World and national liberation movements, Arab communist parties received what could possibly be their hardest hit when they followed Moscow in accepting the UN partition of Palestine in 1947. Their earlier anti-Zionist stances had to be forgotten after their acquiescence to Moscow's decision, which "not only pulled the figurative rug from under the Arab communists, but also reinforced their isolation in the Arab world and essentially forced them into the role of apologist for their prime support, the Soviet Union."[50]

The Palestine question, the relations with Arab nationalist liberation movements and the new national military regimes of the 1950s and 1960s, and the allegiance to the Soviet line were major issues plaguing the Lebanese Communist Party by the mid-1960s. Moreover, both the Syrian and Lebanese parties had been under the Stalinist command and the personality cult

of the Syrian secretary general, Khalid Bikdash, who had ruled the party since the early 1930s.[51] By 1964,

> discontent was formalized with an explicit request that a party congress be convened to question the party's leadership. While the malcontents were purged from the party, dissension within party ranks continued, culminating in the party's fragmentation and the formation of a number of splinter groups.[52]

Not long after the founding of Socialist Lebanon in 1964, Waddah Charara and Christian Ghazi joined "the Leninist Movement," an opposition current inside the LCP.[53] This movement, Traboulsi recalls, "combined in a strange mix its renovating Italian communist influences critical of Stalinism and a loyalty to Khalid Bikdash's leadership and his continuing tutelage over the LCP. . . . These comrades [Charara and Ghazi] stayed there for a few months and came back disappointed."[54] After their attempt to work from the *inside* of the LCP, the comrades reunited again and began producing their bulletin.[55]

Socialist Lebanon, as we saw earlier, subjected the nationalist military regimes to a leftist critique, showing how their nationalizations failed to bring about a socialist revolution, producing rather a new state bourgeoisie of military officers and bureaucrats. The LCP, whose overall crisis became more acute in the wake of 1967, exacerbating the conflict between a senior pro-Bikdash old guard and a rising new generation of cadres, was subjected to a different strategy. The militant intellectuals' strategy focused on the old pro-Soviet party's *theoretical poverty* and its lack of autonomy.[56] In the first SL editorial, titled "Socialist Lebanon and the Left," they wrote:

> The theoretical aspect has to be given an important position that is being avoided by the current Left. Why is it avoiding it? Because it sheds light on its laziness and rashness, and on how it throws itself into the facile. And because it reveals its subscription to predominant ideological precepts which are those of the petite bourgeoisie, such as: reforms are a positive step and one ought to ally oneself with the nationalist wing in power.[57]

This editorial was a reply to early criticisms of the group that accused it of breaking the ranks of the Left and stigmatizing their intellectualism. The theoretically lazy Left dabbled in reformist petit bourgeois precepts, according to SL, which would keep it in a state of dependency. The only solution to rescue the Left from tailing behind nationalists, and to build an *autonomous* Left, was to give theoretical formulation its due, for it is supposed to guide political action. A little more

than a year later, SL criticized the performance of the Front of National and Progressive Political Parties, Forces and Personalities two years after its inception.[58] The two feet on which leftist action stood, for SL, were the national question (anticolonialism and anti-imperialism) and the social question. While the front had succeeded in the first, it failed in the second. The front's national politics

> represented a wide current comprised of different sectors that refuse the direct domination of American Imperialism, or the humiliating, overt dependency to a force [the US] protecting Israel. . . . Within these limits the Front's actions were clear, positive and effective. This aspect, however, despite its importance, and while assuring that one ought to hold a solid position vis-à-vis its issues, is nothing but a nationalist position that rests on the refusal of direct domination or its manifestations. Moreover, the social groups that can adhere to such a position are relatively large; and their adherence does not at all lead to a specific social, or political, position regarding the confrontation of imperialist domination hiding in the economic sphere. Some of the groups that refuse to insure American capitals see no fault in drowning the Lebanese market in European commodities and having it suck up a wide share of Lebanese investments. . . .
>
> As soon as social problems emerge that are the result of the organization of Lebanese society and its deep problems, and therefore require a precise analysis and relatively isolated positions, the Front reveals another face, which is characterized by hesitancy, disintegration, and running away, unmasking the true character of this group. And it is clear that the greatest number of problems, and those that touch the most the establishment of a solid leftist action, are related to the second aspect, the social aspect.[59]

In both its critiques of the regimes and of the communists, Socialist Lebanon emphasized the project of auto-emancipation of the people, and of the autonomy of the Left, against the regimes' foreclosure of political practice and the Left parties' dependency on "nationalist forces" such as the Progressive Socialist Party, led by Kamal Jumblatt, the Druze leader and descendant of a political family of landowners. The anxiety the social question produced in the dependent and reformist Lebanese Left, which highlighted the national question and an antisectarian secular politics, will be revealed once more in its excision from the transitional program for reforms the Lebanese National Movement presented at the beginning of the Lebanese civil wars (1975). But for now, SL was fond of repeating that theoretical elaboration was an essential feature for

building an autonomous leftist political practice. "The Theoretical Education Corner," an irregular rubric in their bulletin, was the ideal place to weave theoretical discussions into the analysis of a present political situation. "The corner" constituted a double intervention: didactic and political. It elucidated theoretical texts through shedding light on a specific political situation and in the process inserted a critical wedge between what it claimed the Marxist corpus truly said and how the LCP understood it—discrediting it.[60] Their theoretical critiques of the Nasserite regime, and the Left, which were inaugurated before the defeat, had a much greater political impact in an altered problem-space characterized by questions revolving around a theoretical renewal in the direction of more "solid" and "scientific" theories than Arab nationalist foggy rhetoric, a rethinking of the modalities of political struggle and the agents that will carry out the task of emancipation—popular war of liberation/Palestinian commando operations or conventional warfare conducted by the armies of Arab regimes. Socialist Lebanon's leftist critiques resonated with the disaffected Arab nationalists after the "fall of the regimes" who were in the process of severing their ties with Nasser, substituting Marxism-Leninism for their Arab nationalist socialism.[61]

### *State and Revolution*

The second half of President Charles Helou's mandate (1964–70) witnessed a wave of Lebanese polarization around Arab regional issues. Lebanon, which did not fight in the 1967 war, dived straight into the conflict with the establishment of the Palestinian guerrilla resistance in its southern towns and the inauguration of military operations from its borders.[62] The Palestinian resistance post-1967 became a local player in Lebanese politics, putting on the table again the question of the content of Lebanon's national identity. In 1958, the question was posed as an alternative between the anticolonial national liberation pan-Arabism of Nasser and the pro-Western (Eisenhower Doctrine) Lebanese nationalism of the state and the majority of Lebanon's Christian population. After 1967, it revolved around Lebanon's involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict and specifically whether the country ought to allow the Palestinian resistance to launch operations from its borders.

The masses rallying around the resistance, as witnessed in the tens of thousands marching in the funeral cortège of Khalil al-Jamal, its first Lebanese martyr who fell in Jordan (1968), constituted a moment of hope for the Left. The rallying was read as a sign of the Lebanese masses' radicalization around national

ideological lines. Their embrace of the Palestinian resistance was an omen of transcending the politics of urban notables, ruling families, and rural landowners that dominated the Lebanese Parliament. There were other signs as well, such as the Lebanese southerners' welcome of the guerrillas' implantation in their villages, which challenged the authority of the landowning political families and the Lebanese army on its southern borders.[63] The ʿArqub area in the south was baptized the "Arafat trail," in comparison with Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh Trail.[64] It also became known as Fatah land.

State and revolution, and their ideological and sectarian constituencies, faced each other and clashed on a number of occasions from 1968 onward. Israel adopted a strategy of destabilization and disproportionate "retaliation" in the wake of Palestinian guerrilla action, exacerbating the country's internal polarization, in what would later be considered as the years leading to the 1975 war.[65] On December 28, 1968, an Israeli military unit destroyed on the ground thirteen Lebanese civilian aircrafts belonging to Middle East Airlines after Palestinian commandos hijacked an Israeli plane to Athens. In the summer preceding the airport raid, "Lebanese villages in the south came under heavy shelling. This led to the widespread destruction not only of homes but of crops and orchards which had served as the principal means of livelihood" for southerners who moved to safer areas in the suburbs of Beirut.[66] The repercussions of the attack on the air fleet exacerbated the polarizations, inaugurating a political crisis and the resignation of the government (January 16, 1969). Rashid Karami, the newly appointed prime minister, called on the Lebanese Parliament to recognize the right of the Palestinians to fight for the liberation of their homeland—a not uncontroversial statement amid the internal polarization.[67] The situation deteriorated on April 23, 1969, when "the army opened fire at a massive demonstration in solidarity with the Palestinian resistance in Saida and Beirut, leaving a number of dead and wounded. The violent reactions to the army's behavior—especially in his home town, Tripoli,—prompted Karami to resign."[68] Syria also became a player in the 1969 crisis. By the end of September, the army attempted to control the situation after a series of confrontations with the Palestinian resistance, as a result of which Syria closed its borders and imposed severe economic sanctions on Lebanon.[69]

On November 8, 1969, the Cairo Agreement was signed between the PLO and the Lebanese army under the auspices of President Nasser, temporarily relieving the tension, with Syria opening its borders, and the formation of a new cabinet on November 26. The agreement, ratified shortly afterward in the Lebanese Parliament, legitimized the resistance's actions on Lebanese territory.[70]

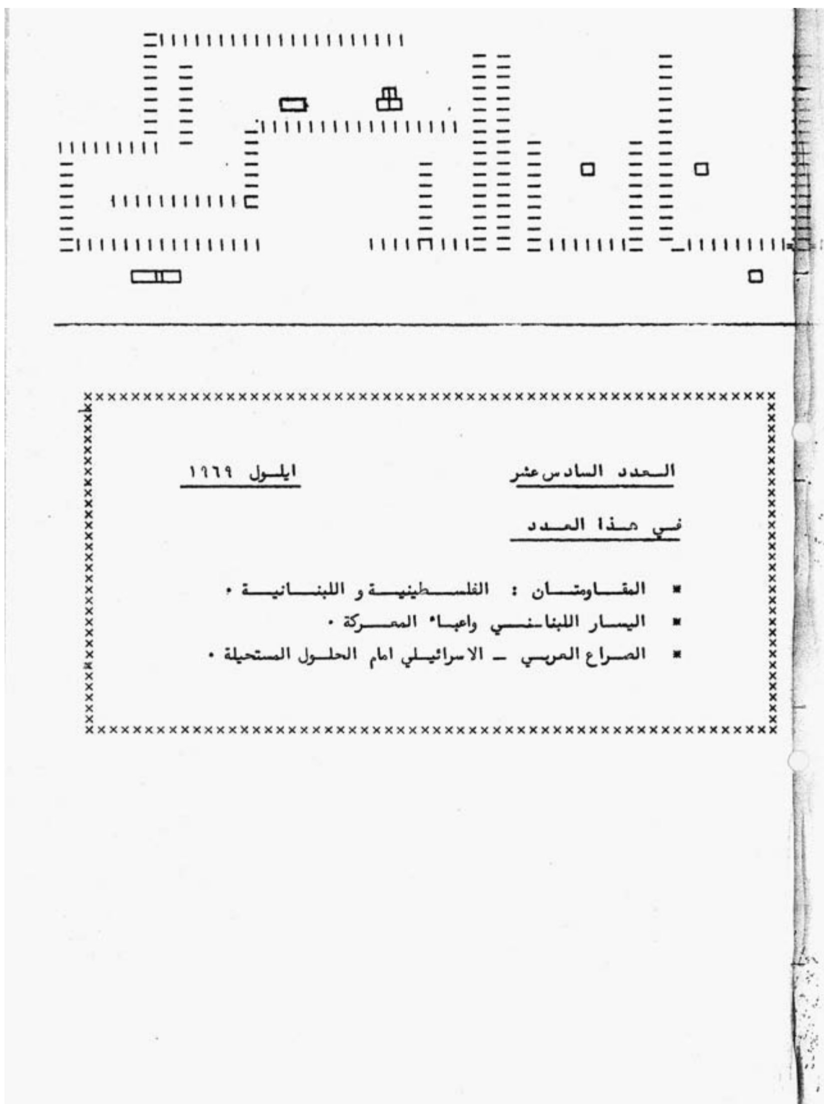
The Cairo Agreement would come to signify the national division on the Palestinian question even though most Lebanese parties accepted it. A solution of last resort, it generated political resentment, which led to clashes between Christian Phalangist militants and the resistance.[71] After 1971, Lebanon became the *only* vital space for the resistance, in the aftermath of its clashes with the Jordanian army (1970–71), resulting in its defeat and the relocation of the PLO's command to Beirut. Around the same time, the Syrian regime also shut its borders to Palestinian guerrilla activity.

Around forty years later, Waddah Charara recalled these times:

> [The years] 1968–69 constituted the peak of mythification and religiosity in Socialist Lebanon. We began working [in 1964] with Fawwaz [Traboulsi] and others on the issue of renewal of [Lebanese president] Chehab's mandate. For four or five years we were fishing for syndicates, workers, and student demonstrations as well as tackling problems of the National Front and the LCP. These were our problems.
>
> In 1969, we entered a different epoch. It is important that this different epoch be looked at from its internal side, i.e., how we were seeing it and experiencing it. At this time one was twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, not an old man, but with already ten to twelve years of "militantisme," part of them in the French Communist Party, in contact with European Marxism. . . . And then there was this tremendous internal shock, where it was revealed to us, after what was called "the defeat of the regimes," i.e., Nasserism, that *this was our historical chance*.[72]

### *Two Resistances: The Palestinian and the Lebanese*

"The ruling Lebanese interests cannot acknowledge the links that tie its farmhouse, Lebanon, to the region's causes," wrote the anonymous author—Waddah Charara—of "The Two Resistances: The Palestinian and the Lebanese," a central piece from 1969 that captures the height of Socialist Lebanon's activist fervor (Fig. 3.1).[73] The long and scathing article against the Lebanese authorities located the Palestinian resistance as the external revolutionary agent that will detonate the contradictions of the system. "The Lebanese position," wrote Charara, "i.e., the authorities' position, is clear, Lebanon is of the Arab region: its economy and the prosperity of its financiers and merchants rise on the role they play in that region. Lebanon, however, is on the margin of the Arab region when it comes to political problems threatening to destabilize those who rule it" (1). "*The Lebanese entity,*" continued SL's major theorist contemptuously, "is



العدد السادس عشر

ايلول ١٩٦٩

في هذا العدد

* المقاومتان : الفلسطينية و اللبنانية .
* اليسار اللبناني واعباء المعركة .
* الصراع العربي – الاسرائيلي امام الحلول المستحيلة .

FIGURE 3.1. *Socialist Lebanon*, Issue 16, September 1969.

the fortified haven for the domination of a banking-commercial bourgeoisie that would not have existed if not for the role it plays in the imperialist pillage operation of the Arab region. This is Lebanese independence. And this is the unique position that God under his sun did not create anything like" (2).[74]

The main diagnosis constituted a strong indictment of the Lebanese state's politics of neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict and of the country's laissez-faire capitalist system. It was into this situation—characterized by Lebanese economic integration into, and political isolation from, the Arab world—that the Palestinian resistance made its entrance. It unmasked the real face of the Lebanese regime, for "how can a regime that plays the role of the watchdog of imperialist dependence agitate an entire people for a national battle? And how can the Lebanese system, which survives on the remains of imperial interests, go through this battle that will put its banks, agents, and summer resorts in danger?" (5).

At the heart of this theorization is a view of the Lebanese sectarian political system as devised by French imperialism. This system is what preempts the elaboration of a class-interest driven political practice. Charara writes:

> The sectarian formation, which was made the geographic and political basis of Lebanon, is able to stifle every form of political maturity that carries the masses to fuse with the Arab region's battle against imperialism. This is not only because it puts every political discord to the test of civil war, but because it stifles every disagreement by annulling its true political aspect—a conflict of interests within the framework of power—by making it subservient to the sectarian conflict that conceals and fragments the issues pertaining to power. This makes political opposition, whether it wants to or not, acquire a sectarian dimension. In this situation, there is no "national" party that "covers" the Lebanese territory and no Lebanese ideology and no Lebanese history. (2)

The homogenizing force of capitalist expansion, which is supposed to drown the ecstasies of religious fervor and of chivalrous enthusiasm in the icy water of egotistical calculation, stopped at the gate of Lebanon's sectarian political fort.[75] "Sectarian and regional distinctions," SL writes, "bring to the attribute of the 'citizen' . . . other attributes that dominate it: the Sunni from Beirut, the Maronite from the Mountain, the Shi'i from the South or Baalbeck"(2–3). The coming into being of the abstract Lebanese citizen that would follow an interest-based politics was prevented by the political system that produced a "hybrid citizen; organized political practice stops at his door without being able to pass its threshold" (3). In brief, the commensurability and political

equality between abstract citizens that is supposed to come into being with the generalization of exchange in a capitalist mode of production is thwarted by a political system assembled by imperial interests.

The effect of the presence of the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon was not merely quantitative, that is, not just another item on the agenda of the Lebanese Left. Rather, it is the anti-imperialist detonator that is working toward overcoming the imperial legacy of disjunction between capitalist economic integration and sectarian political isolation. “The public that fought the battle in 1958,” wrote Socialist Lebanon in the second article of the same issue,

> fought it with loyalty to the feudal lords, [and] <u>a sectarian, familial, local loyalty</u> that was enhanced by their representing a Nasserite, Arabist tendency. <u>While the [current] rallying around the Palestinian Resistance rises on the remains of that loyalty</u>.
>
> The event in itself carries a potential that allows, and this has been proven, the breaking of traditional sectarian loyalties, transforming them into national loyalties, that will fragment the base of the sectarian right whatever the sect it belongs to. Does the fact that the main transformation is happening among Muslims lessen its value? Not at all. The sectarian knot is not solved in one go, and if the entry point to its dissolution <u>is revealing the conflict [i.e., its political nature] on the Muslim level</u> the next level would certainly reveal its true nature when the Muslim Right finds its natural ally in the Christian Right.[76]

In the large demonstrations in support of the Palestinians on April 23, 1969, during which the Lebanese army opened fire, killing and wounding a number of protestors, it became clear that Muslim public opinion had turned, embracing the resistance and insulting traditional political leaders (Abdallah el-Yafi and Adnan al-Hakim) and the grand mufti of Lebanon, Hassan Khaled. The Palestinian agent, which acted as a solvent of sectarian loyalties, contributing to rearticulating politics along national lines, was enhanced by a second factor:

> The conflict does not take place on the closed internal level. The factor that is detonating it is not “Lebanese.” . . . It is far more reaching, and it shall extract the conflict from its “Lebaneseness”—i.e., from its specificity, and hence its sectarian nature—to posit it on the level of the whole region. And therefore the poles of the ruling alliances can no longer contain it within the sectarian frame <u>because it reveals their common positions despite their different sects. And this position is not only in contradiction with the continuity of Palestinian Resistance in Lebanon but also with</u>

the rest of the Arab people (qua people) on which the Lebanese bourgeoisie relies to assure its continuity by living off them and cashing commissions on their account.[77] (16)

The revolution would neutralize the bourgeoisie's sectarian tricks and defenses, revealing that the heart of its politics is "interest based and political and can no longer veil itself with sectarianism (7)." Revolutionizing the Lebanese polity and the solidarity with the Palestinian resistance were not envisaged as a bloodless undertaking. Yet the impact of the revolution, SL predicted, would transform the clashes "from a sectarian conflict into a civil war" (17). "If democratic national rule cannot be reached without a civil war," they wrote, "the 'real coordination' with fida'yi action cannot [also] take place without exposing the southern region to an Israeli invasion" (17). Socialist Lebanon's, and Charara's, 1969 prognosis was right in predicting the coming conflict and wrong in predicting its nature. Six years later, a civil war erupted, splitting the country along sectarian lines. Israel invaded in 1978 and pushed the PLO and leftist militants away from the borders.

The fall of 1969 was a long way from the theoretical and ideological skirmishes of the mid-1960s between Socialist Lebanon and the Lebanese Communist Party on the proper understanding of the Marxist canon and its diverse political translations. In the years leading to the civil war, the revolution altered the Lebanese political landscape and the Left's role in it. A year later, in 1970, Socialist Lebanon would fuse with the much larger Organization of Lebanese Socialists, establishing a unified organization that became known as the Marxist-Leninist Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL).[78] The years leading to the civil war witnessed a number of splits from the young OCAL, which played a pivotal role in the Lebanese National Movement when the fighting broke out in the spring of 1975.

Sitting in his office in *al-Safir* daily in July 2008, Abbas Beydoun reminisces about the beginnings of the collaboration in 1969 between the Organization of Lebanese Socialists (OLS), which he belonged to, and Socialist Lebanon, before their union. Around this time, "I founded a Lebanese [rubric] in *al-Hurriyya*, which did not exist earlier. I wrote it through an understanding and alliance with Socialist Lebanon, and predominantly with Waddah, with whom we had a developed relationship."[79] And around the same time, he adds,

> I wrote a theoretical text that is similar, parallel, to a Socialist Lebanon text called "The Two Resistances," mine was called a look at the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese reality, something of that sort. The theorization was the same. They were both based on a frightening idea: it was

> the theorization of the civil war. [It ran along the lines] that this was a prosperous country, which can't generate a revolution for a number of reasons . . . because it has benefited from Arab defeats and it has a certain level of economic leisure, etc. . . . No true revolution was possible here unless it comes from the outside.[80]

In a similar vein, Muhsin Ibrahim, who was at the head of the OLS, dubbed the Palestinian resistance the lever that will lift the Arab national liberation movement.[81] On the fortieth day commemorating the assassination of George Hawi, the former secretary general of the LCP, which took place in Beirut on June 21, 2005, Muhsin Ibrahim issued an auto-critique of the Lebanese National Movement's involvement in the 1975 war, which centered on two major points, or faults as he called them. The first consisted in Ibrahim's acknowledgment that in supporting the Palestinian struggle, the Left went too far in burdening Lebanon with the military weight of the Palestinian cause. And the second was that the Left "deemed it easy to board the civil war's ship, under the illusion of cutting short the road to democratic change."[82] A major figure of Socialist Lebanon commented on Ibrahim's auto-critique. Ibrahim, he said, uses the same idea found in "Two Resistances," but flips its valence. In the late 1960s the resistance was the detonator, the lever, the catalyst that in alliance with the Left would explode the system. In 2005, Ibrahim, the major political leader of the Lebanese New Left, observed that the Left went over the top by overburdening the country with its support of Palestinian militancy.

### *1967's Historiography Redux*

To get a sense of how SL's revolutionary high hopes, carried by the tidal waves of the Palestinian revolution, were framed in the scholarship of the time before 1967, which came to be read as symptomatic of the bifurcation of critique from ideology, let's revisit Anouar Abdel Malak's introduction to his edited volume *Contemporary Arab Political Thought*, originally published in French in 1970.

> Everything accentuated despair. . . . And then, from the heart of the night, there came a gleam of hope. The people of the tents, the anonymous men and women, children and old people of Palestine embarked upon the only valid course open to a nation stripped of its homeland and faced with that ethnic, cultural and political racism which lies at the core of all imperialism. The people of Palestine endowed themselves with resistance

> organizations charged with the co-ordination, definition, and pursuit of a campaign of armed national liberation.[83]

The coming into being of the New Left and the Palestinian resistance, and the revolutionary hope they generated in the wake of 1967, gets excised from the smooth narratives that associate 1967 with the end of Arab modernity, or the hinge moment between nationalism and Islamism, when ideology bifurcated from critique. Even if one discounts the covert critical work of revolutionary organizations like Socialist Lebanon, a number of the critical public intellectuals at the time were either militants, like Yasin al-Hafiz, or fellow travelers of Marxist and Palestinian political parties. In the wake of the defeat, al-Azm joined the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and had a brief political experience. The vital need for critique was not detached from a political engagement for Palestinian emancipation and a subscription to thick ideological traditions such as Marxism, but in a lot of cases was wedded to them. In fact, Samir Kassir compared the defeat of 1967, which acted as a catalyst to leftist thought and practice, to the cultural desolation in the aftermath of the 1982 Israeli invasion. He rereads the same history through the hegemonic religious/secular binary of his present. Post-1967 is split into two: 1967–1982 corresponds to the efflorescence of socialist and secular thought generally, while the rise of religious politics takes over after 1982, which Kassir dubs the endpoint of the Arab Nahda.[84]

The historiography around the 1967 defeat is a magnet for the deployment of the mythological language of Nahda (Renaissance) and Nakba (Catastrophe)—Arab impotence, stagnation, and defeat, which bestows meaning and provides a certain frame of reference to understand the event but not necessarily to diagnose it. Different authors dubbed the military defeat a second Nakba and the endpoint of the second Nahda.[85] "The June 1967 war was the most serious event in modern Arab history," wrote Faysal Darraj, the Palestinian literary critic, in 1989:[86] "Israel's establishment was an expression of the defeat of the Palestinian people and the impotence of the Arab regimes in a certain historical period when they were dependent on colonial forces. But the June defeat was an expression of the defeat of the Arab revolution as a whole."[87] Other thinkers posited 1967 as the second event, in the wake of colonization, that led to a collective Arab neurosis. "It is important to understand well the two historical stages of what I call the neurosis of the Arab world," Georges Tarabishi writes:

> First, there was colonization, the shock with the West constituted by the arrival and victory of Napoleonic troops that shook the Arab street for

> the first time. Later, the encounter with Israel, and the totally unexpected defeat of 1967, led to a second collective neurosis. The Arab world, the Arab street, were completely undone and the culture became entirely Salafi.[88]

In a more recent text, Darraj underscores that 1967 "resumed in different circumstances the defeat of Muhammad Ali Pasha in the nineteenth century."[89] The year 1967 is taken as a singular event, a turning point on all levels, but also a contemporary expression of a deeper structure of defeat that has been plaguing the Arab world since the Napoleonic invasions. Structure and event are both present in the historiography of 1967, which is simultaneously the most serious event in modern Arab history and a resumption of Muhammad Ali's defeat. What this mythological language forecloses is alternative historical and social scientific inquiries that diagnose and attempt to articulate the past's relationship to the present.

A similar evacuation of history takes place in the work of postcolonial scholars who criticize Arab modernist thought from the Nahda to the present for being trapped in a colonial epistemology of progress. The secular modernist intellectual and the postcolonial academic are both trapped within the progress/backwardness (defeat) binary. If the former laments the backwardness of the Arab social structure and its production of a successive string of defeats, the later laments the attachment of the former to ideologies of progress and civilization and their critique of backwardness:

> Sadik al-Azm criticized, in his book *Self-Criticism after the Defeat*, the Arab social structure, which is invariable in its defeats: for it was defeated in the Ottoman period, and it was defeated in the period preceding independence, and it was defeated even more in the period of "independence states."[90]
>
> . . .
>
> The proper question is the following: What makes Arab intellectuals, from Najib Azuri to Taha Hussein, and from Constantine Zurayk to Yasin al-Hafiz and from Mahdi Amil to Fawzi Mansour and Saadallah Wannous, confront a society that firmly combines defeat and backwardness?[91]

The critic of epistemology, on the other hand, puts some of the same names together to show how these intellectuals share colonial epistemological assumptions with US discourses about the backwardness of their own societies:

> In reality, post-1967 Arab intellectuals quite visibly have struggled with the "failure," of their own societies and states, often implicitly agreeing

> with the developmental discourse found in the assessments of *Bootstrap* [a 1953 United Nations Jordan valley development project pamphlet]. The editorial in English-language dailies such as the *Daily Star*, *Kuwait Times*, *Arab News*, or, *al-Ahram Weekly*, written by mainstream indigenous intellectuals, analysts, journalists, and activists, confirm such an observation. In fact, the discomforting verisimilitude between Arab and American criticism reveals the double colonizing move performed by the very epistemology that will be under examination in this book. Like in *Bootstrap*, intellectuals from Constantine Zurayk, Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, and Nadim Bitar to Hisham Sharabi and Hazim Saghiyah might agree that the disempowerment of the Arabs cannot be separated from their cultural and political illiteracy.[92]

To recapitulate, I excavated in this chapter a minoritarian tradition of critical diagnostic Arab thought that focused on actually existing relations of power. Socialist Lebanon's heterodox Marxism, revolving outside the Soviet orbit, examined the ideologies, logics, and practices of rule of the progressive regimes. The history of this minoritarian tradition calls into question the historiographical molds that take June 1967 as their sole anchor. The diagnostic thought that Socialist Lebanon produced provides us with an alternative conceptual universe from the prevalent ideological jargon of "remedies" and "deficits," and the mythological one of collective neurosis, a multiplicity of catastrophes (Nakba) and endpoints of successive Renaissances (Nahda). Having said that, Socialist Lebanon did not only produce a critical diagnosis of the regimes in power. In the aftermath of the 1967 defeat, the critical and theoretical work they were producing gained in ideological power. It interpellated the Arab nationalists who were increasingly steering toward Marxism as Palestinian armed struggle took over the mantle of anti-imperialist confrontation from the discredited "progressive regimes." With the formation of the Organization for Communist Action in Lebanon (1970), SL's militant intellectuals were catapulted into a different modality of political practice at a time when the resistance was increasingly becoming a key player in the tense years leading to the outbreak of the civil and regional wars.

Historiographical accounts, which anchor the bifurcation of Arab thought into holistic doctrines and reflexive critiques in 1967, skip the revolutionary high tides that directly followed the defeat. These high tides conjugated—not always easily, as we will soon see—the thick Marxist ideologies that hailed the Palestinian fida'yi as the new revolutionary subject with a commitment to critique. The bifurcation, I suggested, is better read as a product of the conjuncture produced

in the wake of the Lebanese wars (1975–90), the Islamic revival and the Iranian Revolution (1979), and the defeat of the Palestinian revolution (1982). That is when the mediation between revolutionary theory and political practice was finally severed. The much-coveted revolutionary subject was either mired in the webs of communal solidarities, converted into a militant Islamist universe, or defeated. No one was left to carry out the project of emancipation. Critique was all that was left on the table. History, it seemed, had exited its own stage.

# PART II. TIMES OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL

The war was a total social fact as much as it was
a political one, and may be more so.
—WADDAH CHARARA

The passage to Islam was a putting
into practice of Maoist principles.
I went into Islam, like some go to the factory.
But here in Lebanon, no one goes to the factory.
There are no factories, or so few of them.
—ROGER ASSAF

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# 4. PARADOXES OF EMANCIPATION

## Revolution and Power in Light of Mao

Organization is the form of mediation between theory and practice.
—GEORG LUKÁCS

There are two ways of making investigations,
one is to look at flowers on horseback
and the other is to get off your horse and look at them.
—MAO TSE-TUNG

The turn to Marxist theory and practice came in the wake of a political failure—the scission of Syria from the United Arab Republic (1961)—and a military defeat (1967). Marxism constituted a powerful critique of both Arab nationalist ideology and the practice of the "progressive" regimes. It was the tool that enabled disenchanted Arab nationalist militants to turn their critical gaze inward to dissect both their society's class composition and the modus operandi of the regimes. Moreover, Marxism worked. The successes of the Chinese, Cuban, and Vietnamese Revolutions fueled the hopes of the militants who joined the Palestinian Resistance or oscillated in its orbit. Socialist Lebanon was critical in theory of communist stages of development, modernization theories, and the top-down development projects of the national liberation regimes. Having said that, their theoretical virtuosity, which led to their political visibility and merger with the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, reinscribed in practice a vanguardist pedagogical mode of politics.[1] They brought the gift of theory to the much more numerous and veteran militant Lebanese branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement. The Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (1970–) would be plagued by splits and expulsions from the beginning. The party members could not agree on internal organizational questions and on external ones concerning the modalities of political practice they ought to engage in. Questions of autonomy and discipline as well as what constitutes political practice, where it should take place, with whom, to what end,

and in whose name shook the young organization from the start. The union brought together militants with different organizational legacies, theoretical genealogies, styles of political practice, and sensibilities toward party discipline and hierarchy who clashed along these lines. The early splits from the OCAL (1971–73) turned the critical gaze inward for a second time, this time to subject Marxist theory and politics to an auto-critique. In this chapter, and the next, I move from the reconstruction of a collective project of emancipation (SL and OCAL), in which Charara played a significant part, to the in-depth examination of his own militant trajectory and critical work.

A couple of years after the foundation of the OCAL, at the height of the social, political, and military polarization that preceded the outbreak of the fighting, Charara subjected the three main components—organization, theory, and political practice—of the revolutionary machine to critique. The people were still, for the time being, the revolutionary subject of History, but they too showed increasing complications. This critique was formulated in a translated and transfigured Maoist idiom when Mao Tse-Tung's thought was, in the wake of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, at the apex of its global influence. The Maoist critique of the party, theory, and practice rearticulated the meanings of power and emancipation as it addressed the political and epistemic dimensions of the question of representation. The vicissitudes of political practice opened up questions that bear a family resemblance to those that would later be taken theoretically in the academy by the labors of critique grouped under the umbrella of postcolonial studies. For now, questions of power, emancipation, and representation were articulated from militant grounds as an auto-critique and a political critique of the OCAL. Charara's Maoist episode put forth a "postcolonial" Marxism that attempted to conjugate the salience of communal solidarities—sectarian, regional, and kin—with class struggle and the possibility of revolutionary militant political practice.

The reflexive, auto-critical dimension and its prescient postcolonial tenor reveal once more a minor tradition of contemporary Arab thought that was forged by militant theorists whose distinctive interventions stand outside the canonized figures and thematics of contemporary Arab thought. The character of the Maoist auto-critique, while highlighting the resilience of communal solidarities, escapes the culturalism of figures like Sadik al-Azm. Moreover, this minor Marxist tradition, which sought to incorporate communal relations into class struggle, was not interested in restricting its intervention to criticizing Marxism for its Eurocentric discourses. It did that, but it was more invested in attempting to forge a theoretical idiom that enables the pursuit of militancy in the wake of realizing the saliency of communal contradictions internal to

the masses that complicate revolutionary practice. Retrospectively, Charara's Maoist interlude constitutes the first episode of a very early unraveling of leftist political practice as it stumbles upon both the top-down modalities of practice of leftist parties and the recalcitrance and reproduction of communal relations. Charara's militant experiences, particularly his observation of the failure of the worker and teacher-student movements at the time, as well as his dissertation research on modern Arab intellectual thought, revealed to him the complexity of Arab histories and the multiple solidarities at work in Arab societies in comparison to the poverty of theoretical languages that attempt to subsume them by a few concepts. Maoism was the theoretical idiom through which he articulated his early disenchantment with the belief in the political powers of theory and accounted for the multiple logics, temporalities, and solidarities at work in Lebanese society that foreclose the possibility of a revolutionary teleology while retaining the militant's hope in emancipatory political practice.

### *The Workers' Sector and the Blue Pamphlet Splits*

Soon after the unification between the Organization of Lebanese Socialists and Socialist Lebanon, and after adopting a loose organizational structure for a short while, the nascent organization shifted to a Marxist-Leninist form: democratic centralism.[2] In 1971 a major scission—that of the workers' sector—shook the OCAL. The split took with it a substantial number of militant intellectuals who came from Socialist Lebanon who were ill at ease with the strictures of organizational forms associated with official pro-Soviet communist parties. "What was left was an organization whose true effective body was constituted by the Organization of Lebanese Socialists," recalls Abbas Beydoun, a member of the Politburo at the time. Moreover, those who left, Beydoun adds, were "of the same weight as Waddah [Charara], Ahmad [Beydoun], Fawwaz [Traboulsi], and Muhsin [Ibrahim]; you are not talking about us, who were the 'little ones' of the Politburo."[3] The adoption of democratic centralism soon erupted in disputes over decision-making and prerogatives. "The first dispute," wrote Traboulsi, who was a proponent of democratic centralism,

> took place between the rapporteur of the "Workers Sector," a member of the Politburo, and the committee responsible for the sector mostly composed of the intellectual cadres of Socialist Lebanon. It revolved around their mutual prerogatives: Is the committee's power superior to that of the rapporteur or vice-versa? The Politburo settled the matter by supporting the rapporteur as a representative of the higher committee

> [the Politburo] over the lower one. And after going back and forth it was decided that either the Workers Sector committee abides by the Politburo's decision or be subject to an organizational sentence. The committee unanimously refused to follow the Politburo's decision, which then issued a resolution to freeze the membership of its constituents.[4]

What exacerbated matters was the fact that the Politburo member, an OLS member initially and more of an "on the ground militant," did not come from the same theoretically imbued context as SL's militant intellectuals. Enmeshed in the organizational dispute, and highlighted through it, were the heterogeneity of the two recently unified groups: the democratic heritage and very loose organizational structure of militant intellectuals and the "disciplined traditions" of the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, "which were inherited from the Arab Nationalist Movement."[5] The split brought out the question of the place theoretical abilities ought to play in assuming leadership positions. In a thick ideological political practice such as Marxism—where theoretical virtuosity endows its bearer with political authority—it was difficult for intellectual cadres to bow down to the decisions not only of a politburo member but also of one who wasn't perceived to be of the same theoretical caliber. This was especially the case since it seemed "as if there was a promise to hand over the unified organization to the cadres of Socialist Lebanon to educate it since they were accomplished and superior in this domain."[6] This first split was followed up with a great amount of labor around the four corners of Lebanon to recuperate the OCAL's energy in its wake.[7]

The split of the majority of Socialist Lebanon's constituency a short time after the fusion left its marks on Charara: "They went out in the spring-summer of 1971 and I traveled right after. My travels were partially motivated by this."[8] A fellow member of the Politburo recalls the surprise provoked by Charara's decision to leave directly after the split to pursue a PhD in France, despite the fact that he was at the forefront of upholding the Politburo directives against the worker's sector: "I don't know what was the reason behind it. No one told him no. Although this thing was very 'frappant' [striking], not only surprising. . . . Waddah was not one of those people you say to, what are you going to do. So he went."[9] "He came back a very different person," the comrade adds, "adopting things similar [to the positions of the] Gauche Prolétarienne against democratic centralism, and with a position exactly opposed to the one that led to the organizational crisis."[10] Charara finished his dissertation, entitled "Le Discours Arabe sur L'Histoire" (The Arab discourse on history), in 1972, came back, and headed an opposition movement inside the organization that

would split in 1973, two years before the beginning of the Lebanese civil war. After a number of meetings with the dissenting comrades, Charara formulated the opposition's political, organizational, and theoretical positions in a lengthy document (ninety-six pages), which came to be known as *al-Kirras al-Azraq* [*The Blue Pamphlet*,] that declared the group's independence from the OCAL. *Al-Hurriyya*, the weekly political magazine and mouthpiece of the OCAL at the time, published a four-page article on July 16, 1973, entitled "A Communiqué from the Politburo of the OCAL Announcing the Expulsion of the Boyish Leftist Band of Apostates [*al-Murtadda*] of Marxism-Leninism."[11] The dissenting group, which called for direct action among the masses and not through institutions, such as syndicates or Marxist-Leninist parties, and for "fusion [*iltiham*] with the Palestinian Resistance,"[12] did not survive long after the split and its members went in different directions. Some comrades adhered to the Lebanese Communist Party, some joined Fatah, while others went home.[13] The scattering of a substantive number of OCAL dissenters between different factions of the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese Communist Party can be understood in light of Traboulsi's retrospective assessment: "While the first split [of the Workers Sector] brought up issues pertaining to organizational structure, and the second [*The Blue Pamphlet*] focused on the modes of militancy, they were also, and especially, bringing out the question of the raison of d'être of the organization in comparison to two references: pan-Arab [*qawmi*] and leftist, i.e., in reference to the Palestinian resistance and to the Lebanese Communist Party."[14]

Some of the dissenters, he added, "deemed that the Lebanese situation does not warrant an additional new communist organization to the left of the Communist Party, so they directly adhered to the Palestinian resistance."[15] Others "realized the weight and popularity of the Communist Party and its importance in the life of the working class,"[16] therefore canceling the justification for the OCAL's existence. The two stronger forces eroded the national and socioeconomic feet on which the OCAL stood.

The prewar years were not exclusively marked by the polarization around the Palestinian resistance. They were also years of mobilizations around socioeconomic questions in the privileged sectors of leftist militancy: peasants, workers, and students.[17] November 1972 witnessed the strike of Ghandour's biscuits and chocolate factory workers. The twelve-hundred-strong workforce at Ghandour's, the largest nonunionized force in Lebanese industry, Traboulsi relates, demanded "a wage increase, equal pay for men and women workers, the recognition of the shop floor committee, and their right to trade union organization" (167). Police opened fire at the workers' demonstration, killing

"Yusuf al-'Attar, a militant of the OCA's Workers' Committees, and Fatima al-Khawaja, a member of the LCP, and wounding 14 others" (168).[18] Approximately a month after the demonstration, Ghandour fired all his workers. He later opened shop again, reemploying all of them except for a hundred whom he considered to be at the head of the protest. "The outcome of the Ghandour battle," Traboulsi, the historian, writes, "left only frustration and resentment. The trade union attaché at the US embassy noted that the demonstration and the general strike had been a 'moderate success' for the Left, which had managed to go on the offensive and win the 'propaganda war.' However, he concluded that neither the Left nor the trade unions had secured any gains for the workers" (168). The Ghandour strike was followed by the strikes of tobacco farmers in the south and a number of strikes in the educational sector, notably by public school teachers, which included violence between the state apparatus and the protesters, in what would prove to be the last months of a struggle conceived along the lines of an *opposition* to the state before the outbreak of the fifteen-year-long civil and regional wars. The year 1972 saw the strike of sixteen thousand public school teachers, "demanding a wage increase, the right of trade union organization and retirement after twenty-five years of service" (170). The strike lasted two months, and ended when the government stopped paying their salaries. It picked up again from January to July 1973. While 324 teachers lost their jobs, the network of solidarity with the teachers covered all of Lebanon, as "their sit-ins and hunger strikes became a rallying point for all social movements" (170). In January 1973, "a procession of thousands of tobacco planters occupied the offices of the Régie in Nabatiyeh, demanding a 20 percent increase in the purchase price of their products. The following day, the army shot at the demonstrators and killed two peasants" (166).[19]

Waddah Charara wrote *The Blue Pamphlet* in the spring of 1973, in the wake of all of these events, weaving a reexamination of what was called for on the theoretical, political, and organizational levels, the causes for failure as well as the direction for future political action (Fig. 4.1). Charara observed these mobilizations closely. At times, he took a more active part in them, such as attending the public meetings held by the striking Ghandour workers, until he was forbidden by the OCAL to do so.[20] "Why weren't the largest demands-based mass movements," he wrote, that represent "the interests of the main popular classes able to snatch one partial benefit from the authorities? Why could the authorities resort to violent oppression without falling apart, or at least leading to a change in the government?"[21] Two years before his exit from Marxism, Charara engaged in an auto-critique from within the boundaries of

المجموعة المستقلة عن «منظمة العمل الشيوعي»

توضع وجهة نظرها

- منظمة العمل الشيوعي تنتهي الى خط تحريفي ، قطري ، اصلاحي .
- الخط الديمقراطي والمسألة الوطنية .
- في سبيل خط وطني جماهيري .

FIGURE 4.1. Front cover of *The Blue Pamphlet*.

the tradition, repositioning himself in an ultraleftist, fervently pro-Palestinian Maoist position.[22]

### *The Twilight of the Organizational Idol*

In the wake of the 1967 Arab defeat against Israel, and the ensuing reexamination of the causes leading to the defeat of the Arab armies by political parties and intellectuals, the Arab Nationalist Movement previously gravitating in Nasser's orbit proposed resorting to popular armed struggle to fight imperialism in Arab lands. Socialist Lebanon participated in the argument regarding the direction of the Arab liberation movement. After emphasizing that for Marxists the question ought not to rest on the principle of violent confrontation but rather on the suitability of this form of struggle for the present, Socialist Lebanon reached the following conclusion:

> We asked a question about the meaning of proposing the slogan of armed struggle in the current period. Now is the time to answer that what is meant by it is the deferral of the primary task of Arab struggle: <u>the building of Marxist-Leninist parties, which history has not devised any alternative to, for leading the liberation of oppressed masses to victory!</u>[23]

Socialist Lebanon, which was still loosely organized, distinguished itself from the calls for "armed popular struggle" positing the Marxist-Leninist party as the sole agent of emancipation of the masses. Three years after the small group of intellectuals merged with the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, the opposition inside OCAL came to perceive organizational practices as a means of oppression. The organization's leadership, Charara wrote, "sees in every act of political accountability a risk with uncertain consequences. And this has been consolidated after the 1971 split: since the leadership has seen it a result of some comrades' desire to discuss with no limits!" (*The Blue Pamphlet*, hereafter cited as *TBP*, 4). In this veiled auto-critique Charara accused the leadership of evading the discussion of important political events such as Anwar al-Sadat's decision to expel all Soviet experts from Egypt, the issues of contention in the Syrian Communist Party, and the Ghandour workers' strike.[24] Additionally, the splinter group accused the Politburo of "suspending the internal regulations, interfering in the details of organizational issues, establishing special relations with specific members, in addition to using arguments of safety, security, and secrecy for no valid reasons." "In one word," Charara summarizes, "the organizational relationships have become a means of authoritarianism, abuse, and isolation" (*TBP*, 6).

Charara and his comrades reproached the OCAL's leadership not only for their internal authoritarianism but also for adopting a certain form of political action that went hand in hand with the organizational dimensions of the crisis. The organization, whose primary objective was to lay the foundations of the working class's leadership for emancipation, had reduced its struggle, according to the splinter group, to a politics "from above." The OCAL's contribution in the "Rally of National Parties and Forces" had begun to monopolize all of the organization's political activity.[25] The leadership began to increasingly think that "the only 'struggle' is the one that takes place in meetings of leaders and 'generals' while the main work which takes place in the midst of the masses diminishes" (*TBP*, 15). "The disdain for mass struggle" produced internal repercussions as well, since the leadership started to think that it is the organization and "what it sees is correct," forgoing discussion, political confrontation, and "the rules of organizational relations that permit the comrades to present their views and differ from those of the leadership" (*TBP*, 15). In the summer of 2008, Charara remembered the state of the OCAL when he returned from France:

> When I came back I didn't have any idea of what had happened to our work, to the organization. I came back and found out that Muhsin Ibrahim had made a "bande à part" [separated himself] in a complete way, with a personal link to Arafat and Kamal Jumblatt. And what is called the organization is practically living off this relationship, to which it had no link, and over which it had no control. No one knew what was said, what was happening, and all the attempts to move the OCAL from its student base to popular, workers, rural bases were either stopped, or no longer had any political echo.[26]

Charara's substitionist critique underscored that the organization had been reduced to its leadership, while mass struggle and militancy had been reduced to private meetings with the "generals" of progressive political parties.[27]

The telos of the organization's practices had long forsaken emancipation. This form of politics from above was driven by the increase in the organization's institutional share of power. "When the organization reaches syndicate positions," Charara wrote, "its pretense of democracy ends, and it begins fearing the students' interference in issues that concern them" (*TBP*, 34). Moreover, these political strategies of reaching power, which begin by alienating and fearing those the party seeks to represent, are refracted internally by an increasing stratification of relationships. "Members of cells are not supposed to distribute communiqués," Charara writes, "a task that is delegated to the 'lightweights,' as

someone describes the members of assemblies and circles" (*TBP*, 33). This political practice, which was predicated

> on reaching power—externally—and on an increasing importance of ranks and relations of power internally, renders the talk about the point of view of the working class, the popular masses, and the national battle empty. And it enables, behind the mask of Marxist jargon, a petite bourgeoisie whose horizon of ambition is constituted by the state apparatus to move forward; a bourgeoisie that glorifies in talk workers and peasants while it does its best [in practice] to retain the differences between itself and them. (*TBP*, 35)

Charara's harsh critique underscored how particular—petit bourgeois—interests had occupied the party, turning Marxism into an ideology that is deployed to serve its own interests. In doing so, it reproduced in practice the relations of power it claims to eradicate in theory. It is not hard to see a continuity between Charara's critique of the OCAL and Socialist Lebanon's earlier critique of the "military-administrative-bureaucratic" regimes during the mid-1960s as apparatuses of power that foreclose the masses' political practice while speaking in their name.

The question of autonomy, of taking part in putting together a movement of auto-emancipation, that is neither dependent on nor subjugated to parties outside of it, whether they are state bureaucracies, nationalist parties, or sectarian formations, has been at the heart of Charara's thought since the 1960s. Decades later, he drew a retrospective distinction between Socialist Lebanon's critical theoretical labor and its political practice: "We didn't have a problem with the critical aspect of things. . . . Tracking inconsistencies, contradictions, ignorance, and deviations from Marxism and Leninism. This was work we had fun doing." Having said that, the political task of building "an autonomous sociopolitical force," Charara continued, "proved to be an astronomical task, particularly that the work was being done by thirty to forty people maximum including about ten of them in cells, and the rest were students, and some were teachers."[28] The expansion of the small and loose group of militant intellectuals into a wider organization in the turbulent years leading to war witnessed the fall of the "organizational" idol, once theoretically assumed to constitute the transparent vector of people's emancipation. It became the vector of a "petite bourgeoisie" in its bid for power with the other constituents of Lebanese society rendering Marxist ideological positions its Trojan horse.

Today, in the wake of the defeat and sclerosis of Arab leftist parties, it is not difficult to be swayed by *The Blue Pamphlet*'s prescient critique of instrumental

and top-down politics and leadership unaccountability, which turned progressive parties into the means of production of new elites. Muhsin Ibrahim remains till today the secretary-general of the practically nonexistent OCAL, nearly fifty years after it came into being. Having said that, if one brackets the seductive reading of the 1970s from the present perspective of a Left in ruins, we get a more nuanced picture of the conditions of possibility of political action in a particular conjuncture. These very tense pre–civil war years, whether on the Palestinian front or on the socioeconomic one, and the mobilizations that ensued polarized the Lebanese polity. Fawwaz Traboulsi, one of the very few SL militants who did not leave the OCAL in the early years after the union, and stayed on as the number two in command after Muhsin Ibrahim till the mid-1980s, recalled the beginnings of their emergence on the "official" national political field. "The battle of Ghandour [fall 1972] opened up a new period in the life of the organization," wrote Traboulsi, "during which we had to cooperate with the other leftist parties in a mobilization that took larger dimensions than the [usual] factory ones and which surpassed our capacities to carry it by ourselves."[29] "As a result," he continued, "our relationship to Kamal Jumblatt and the LCP improved after a period of boycott, estrangement and mutual accusations that reached the extent of student fights between us and the latter, which were not devoid of violence" (*PYMR*, 134). It was in this context that the OCAL emerged on the national political scene when it was invited to the meeting held by the Rally of National and Progressive Parties—the precursor of the Lebanese National Movement—to protest the severe draft law limiting the freedoms of political parties.

Traboulsi gestured in his memoir to his ambivalence during this hinge moment (1973): "We entered the Left's front [the Rally of National and Progressive Parties] from the door of our militancy at the level of the base. But, is there a possibility of reconciling base-militancy and participation in action 'from above' and public political life?" "This was the question," Traboulsi recalled, "that would trouble us, or rather trouble me personally, and characterize my positions and behavior with much wobbling and hesitancy" (*PYMR*, 135). Muhsin Ibrahim, the veteran of official Nasserite politics, on the other hand, called for the "political fructification" of theoretical analysis.[30] Ibrahim is less concerned with questions regarding the modalities of political practice and its autonomy that troubled Charara and Traboulsi, Socialist Lebanon's founding dynamos, and divided them on the cusp of the war. Rather, Ibrahim's position is articulated as double avoidance: of the endless discussions of intellectuals (theory without a practice), on the one hand, and political opportunism (practice without theory), on the other hand. With the beginning of the Lebanese

civil war, Muhsin Ibrahim became, alongside Kamal Jumblatt and George Hawi (the assistant to the secretary general of the LCP), one of the main leaders of the Lebanese National Movement, the coalition of leftist and pan-Arab parties that were allied with the Palestinian Resistance.

### *Power and Emancipation along Maoist Lines*

As Marxist political parties became—alongside the bourgeoisie and imperialism—the targets of critique from within the tradition, the meaning of emancipation and power were also rethought. The nodal shift in the rethinking of emancipation and power according to Maoist lines was related to the crisis in political and epistemic representation. If the Marxist-Leninist political party was no longer the representative of the working classes, its reaching power no longer constituted a revolution; it was merely a substitution of one ruling class by another, retaining the "differences" between itself and the masses. Maoism, wrote Charara, meant that

> conflict between the masses and their enemies, takes place in interpenetrating, camouflaged, or overt forms in *all* of society's cells and its institutions. The masses taking the reins of power is not therefore an unforeseen rupture that puts the leadership of the masses' movement in charge of state power, giving it suddenly the task of eradicating from above the relations of oppression and exploitation. Rather, the mass line is present in the conflict in all positions of social power from the narrowest to the widest. (*TBP*, 91)

Power was no longer a thing that was solely concentrated in institutions of rule and at the nodes of capitalist production. Charara's Maoist critique, by extending the domain of conflict between the masses and their enemies into all corners of society and making it internal to all institutions, rearticulated the horizon of emancipation away from the mere fact of seizing power. The political question was clearly no longer monopolized by who was in power. The extension of power and struggle to all cells of society and the stress on the insufficiency of increasing one's share of power in institutions to constitute emancipation was translated in *The Blue Pamphlet* by an emphasis on new forms of struggle that put the masses' practice as the mainspring of political action. Maoism meant "the foregrounding of the masses' own struggle on any pretense of leadership that builds itself outside of its own movement" (*TBP*, 89). The organization that put its own interest before that of the masses and outside of their movement was to be overcome by the masses' formulation of

their own political project in light of their own practice. For this practice, wrote Charara, in a direct echo of Mao, "always contains a true kernel, behind all phenomena, that ought to be deduced and returned to the masses," (*TBP*, 90).[31] Foregrounding the masses' own practice also entailed a rethinking of the role of intellectual vanguards. "An illusion that has always flirted with professional 'intellectuals,'" Charara wrote, "is to try and spare the masses any experience, or to take their place in digesting their own experience" (*TBP*, 74). The intellectuals were to become the editors/formulators that take in the word of the masses, reformulate it, and give it back to them—and not to be the originators of thought.[32]

### *Estranged Intellectuals*

Maoism's emphasis on the logics of political practice and the relations of production cleared the path for questioning the powers of political and epistemic representation. Charara's critique of the OCAL's internal organizational structure and its relationship with the masses brought out Maoism's critique of the politics of delegation, and of expertise, premised on the distinction between those who have knowledge and those who lack it.[33] I now turn to his auto-critique of how leftist militancy articulated the relationship of theory to practice and his reflexive account of why it did so, which is driven by two fundamental ideas. The first is Charara's critique of the imputed power of theory, that is, its performative political powers. If Lenin said "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement," Charara, who spent about a decade immersed in militancy and in practices of reading, translating, and writing, particularly during the intellectually fervent years of Socialist Lebanon, came to the realization that revolutionary theory does not necessarily guarantee the coming into being of a revolutionary movement. What may seem to some today like an obvious realization is not exactly so. The theoretical and political conjuncture of the times placed a lot of weight on the political value of theory. Louis Althusser for one, whom Charara had read carefully and put to use, wanted "to guarantee an autonomy for theory that would make it capable of investing Marxism with the theoretical edge to generate political renewal."[34] The radical post-1967 conjuncture in the Arab world was characterized by a turn away from Arab nationalism to Marxism that was fueled partly by the latter's theoretical sophistication. Even today, critical scholars who warn of the ontological and epistemological violence of discourses still subscribe to a strong belief in the powers of theory that supposedly, and without much friction, will produce predictable effects in the world.

The second is Charara's observation regarding the ruggedness of the social terrain and the complexity of practices and political events in comparison to the poverty of theoretical languages that attempt to subsume them. He came to this deduction via several routes. It was the result of his close observation of mass movements, the consequence of leftist militant practice, and his Maoist turn, which highlighted the focus on practices and the empirical idea of investigation.[35] It was also the result of his close reading of Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, the Egyptian historian who chronicled Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, for his dissertation work (1972). What al-Jabarti revealed to him was the gap between the richness, complications, and contradictory aspects of historical events and the poverty of the ideological discourses that came to dominate Arab discourses on history and politics.[36] The gap between theory and practices was now wide open in both directions: by severing the direct highway that tied theoretical virtuosity to revolutionary practice, and by highlighting the complexity of practices that cannot be adequately captured by mastering a few big concepts. Charara's political experiences, his theoretical persuasion, and his historical excavations led him away from theoretical abstractions and into much more empirically inclined sociological and ethnographic modes of analysis that he will develop fully in the wake of the Lebanese civil and regional wars. Having said that, he noticed very early on the gap separating the revolutionary ideological political line—its anti-imperial *content*—and its practices, modes of operation, and communal *forms* of mobilization. Just a few months before the founding of the OCAL, in a sequel to "The Two Resistances," he had a moment of doubt regarding the revolutionary potential of the Palestinian resistance, which he had theorized a few months earlier. Charara underscored "the rupture" between the resistance's supposed role as a detonator of Lebanese contradictions and its material fostering of "traditional political actors," whose base rises on personal, familial, and regional loyalties.[37]

He put these two ideas to work in his auto-critique of the political practice of militant intellectuals, starting from the founding of Socialist Lebanon. The cornerstone of the account given for the "disease that has infiltrated all parts of the organization" was the origins of its constitutive members, who were for the most part "marginal intellectuals" (*TBP*, 17). In this first reexamination of Socialist Lebanon—and the Organization of Lebanese Socialists—Charara remarked that the former's practice "did not coincide with work to extend militant roots in the ranks of the popular movement" (*TBP*, 17). Socialist Lebanon's work mostly grew "in the cracks of [other] political parties' positions, that is their contradictions. . . . What 'Socialist Lebanon' did not realize, and it is also the case for the 'Organization of Lebanese Socialists,' is that

the correctness of political critique does not constitute a foundation to build a militant organization and to form militants" (*TBP*, 17). In other words, drawing attention to the LCP's theoretical poverty via the intertextual theoretical practice that Socialist Lebanon engaged in, as we saw all along, was no longer a guarantee for building an autonomous popular movement. To get an idea of the strength of the idea tying theoretical prowess (or the political line) to political efficacy, it is worth revisiting the interview Fawwaz Traboulsi gave to the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) in October 1977, in which he affirmed that "the correctness of our [OCAL] political line accounts for our influence on the masses and within the front [the LNM], disproportional to our numerical situation."[38] In Traboulsi's vanguardist reasoning, good theory accounts for political influence on both the masses and other leftist parties despite the organization's small size.

Charara extended his auto-critique of militant intellectuals beyond the reduction of political practice to political critique, noting that their relative privileges compared to peasants resulted in an increased *distance* between them—inhabiting the "language and culture of professional party member politicians"—and the effective everyday issues and struggles of the masses (*TBP*, 18). "The organization's ranks and before it those of Socialist Lebanon and the Organization of Lebanese Socialists," wrote the fresh PhD graduate from France in an accusatory tone, "are swarming with those pursuing a university education in order to improve their social and economic conditions of living. And this [situation] results in distancing them from the masses' ranks where they aspire to militate" (*TBP*, 17). This distance between the intellectuals and the masses resulted in the former's engagement in a "cultural" critique of the dominant political practice that "veiled itself with Leninism." "And there is no doubt," added Charara, "that our cultural critique is a result of the weak relation that linked us to the real struggles taking place in our society" (*TBP*, 18).

Charara argued that they were held captive by an "imaginary image" of workers that in fact carries "the features that are really those of intellectuals, but transposed into the factory" (*TBP*, 23). Workers were seen only as workers, that is, as a homogenous group produced by factory relations, not only because of the bookish character of these intellectuals' knowledge of workers but more importantly because of their sociological profile. These militant intellectuals broke their relations with their villages, their families, and the parliamentarians of their areas. Moreover, they accessed their jobs by passing an exam or holding a degree "independent of traditional relations," and joined a "homogenous milieu composed of employees who like them have left the countryside and their relationships with their families" (*TBP*, 23). The estranged militant intellectual

who speaks in the name of the masses is a product of an internal migration to the city whose means of livelihood were mediated by abstract, institutional means that broke away from the regional, kinship, and sectarian forms of solidarity that mediate the Lebanese citizens' relationship with the state and the market. Yet "when these traditional relationships still play a role in the intellectuals' conditions," Charara wrote, "they [the intellectuals] make efforts to hide it so that it does not devalue them and their merits" (*TBP*, 23). Briefly put, the image of the "abstract worker" is a consequence of the intellectual's abstraction from multiple attachments and mediations, whose haunting presence is capable of generating streams of anxiety.

Charara also put his critique of the estrangement of militants from the masses into practice. He followed Mao Tse-Tung's recommendation that "since [intellectuals] are to serve the masses of workers and peasants, intellectuals must, first and foremost, know them and be familiar with their life, work and ideas."[39] He relocated in the spring of 1973 to Burj Hammud—a multiethnic, multinational, working-class suburb northeast of Beirut—and lived there until the outbreak of the fighting in 1975 made it impossible for him to stay there. Charara's établissement in Burj Hammud took the form of making connections and working with groups of rural migrant workers from ʿIrsal, a northeastern Lebanese town on the border with Syria, as well as with a number of factory workers in the surrounding area during this time. Charara's Maoist period, and his établissement, was premised on his own physical displacement into a working-class neighborhood where he engaged in everyday investigations and political practices with the people living and working there. It was an effort to learn from them and to overcome the gap between intellectual and manual labor. In contrast to Socialist Lebanon's textualist phase, when the emphasis was on the translation and transfiguration of texts to produce an adequate theory of one's political present, the militant intellectual during this last period of militancy, not the texts, traveled with the hope of both reconfiguring himself and the masses. "After all," Kristin Ross writes in her discussion of the établissement of French Maoists, "as Mao was fond of asking, how can you catch a tiger cub without entering the tiger's lair?"[40]

### *Revisiting Sectarianism*

In the spirit of Maoist self-criticism, *The Blue Pamphlet* revisits in a postcolonial mode Socialist Lebanon's theoretical premises on which their political analysis and practice were built:

> The political axis of analysis was, and still is, the presupposition of a European-like capitalism that eradicates all inherited relations from the precapitalist formations, such as family ones and relations of political "feudalism" . . . and this main presupposition is bolstered by another one in conjunction with it, [revolving] around a working class which as soon as it enters the factory gains a class homogeneity [and] gets rid of its clan solidarities [*al-'asha'iriyya*]. (*TBP*, 19)

In the moment of auto-critique Charara irons out Socialist Lebanon's intricate theoretical work, as well as his own emphasis on the necessity of translation and transfiguration of Marxism. Nonetheless, he draws our attention to the increasing salience of the question of sectarian-regional-kinship solidarities and the Marxist metanarrative that tried to take stock of the problem of communal ties that divided the masses and hindered their practice according to their own economic interests. Charara's target at the height of his populist glorification of the masses is to show how the Marxist metanarrative, which predicated revolutionary practice on overcoming the different forms of social solidarities, was the product of estranged intellectuals. He continues:

> And the persistence of this imaginary image has transformed it into a fixed political mode that we try to transpose to all phenomena, squeezing into it all important events. So we understood the national movement, and its kernel the Palestinian Resistance, as the realization of what capitalism could not achieve in the sphere of social relations. We were under the illusion that the Resistance's main role was to eradicate the fragmentation of the popular masses by the sectarian, regional, and kinship relations, i.e., we practically put the resistance in the place of the Lebanese capitalism we dream of! (*TBP*, 19)

Charara is referring to "The Two Resistances" (1969), his key text, which was built on a series of dualities that sought to account for the blockage of revolutionary practice by noting the disjunction between the economic infrastructure and the political superstructure. Lebanon, he had argued, is characterized both by the propagation of the universal laws of capitalist expansion in the economic sphere (commensurability) and the sectarian political brakes of the political system that were devised by French imperialism, which impede the birth of the interest-based politics of citizens (incommensurability). This duality is also inscribed at the heart of Lebanon's exploitative relationship with its Arab neighbors. Lebanon is economically integrated into the Arab world, thriving on the investment of Palestinian capital after the 1948 Nakba and

exports to the Gulf countries while being politically isolated from Palestine, via its politics of neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The ruling alliance itself reproduces this duality since it is conceived as the partnership between the banking and commercial bourgeoisie of the coast and the landowning families of the mountains. The hybrid Lebanese citizen—for example, Sunni from Beirut, Maronite from the mountains—is also the outcome of this dual structure, which combines the universality of the bourgeois notion of citizenship and the particularity of sectarian and regional affiliations.

Sectarianism, in "The Two Resistances," plays a very different role whether we are talking about the Lebanese ruling alliance or the people. Sectarianism, by splitting the Lebanese citizen, is responsible for stifling class-based politics. The split needs to be overcome for a "mature," interest-based political practice to take place. If we shift our analytical gaze to the composition of the Lebanese regime, we get a different picture. The split between universality and particularity is not internalized in its "hybrid" subjects. Rather, it becomes a sociological feature of the two groups—the bourgeoisie of the coast and the landowning lords of the mountains—that constitute it. Socialist Lebanon does not attach a sectarian attribute—Christian or Muslim—to the Lebanese bourgeoisie. Sectarianism is not treated as an essential component of the Lebanese bourgeois identity but as a veil that masks its defense of its privileges. During his militant days, Charara's analysis had to provide an account of the particularity of Lebanese sectarian politics and loyalties on a Marxian ground that takes class politics and exploitation as the universal underlying realities that explain the Lebanese social formation. He was faced with a puzzle of how to square the proliferation and multiplicity of apparent infranational loyalties and political divisions with a notion of politics that is predicated on the contradiction between Labor and Capital. The differential distribution of his universal/particular binaries (economic integration, commensurability, banking-commercial bourgeoisie; and political isolation, incommensurability, political feudalism, hybrid citizens) and the different meanings sectarianism acquires are his answers to the conundrum of explaining along class lines the multiple sectarian allegiances and divisions within the frame of one exploitative system.

Sectarianism has different ontological weights and plays a variety of roles in "The Two Resistances." It is at the same time the backbone of the Lebanese political structure, one of the main sources of identification of Lebanese citizens, and a mask covering class exploitation. Sectarianism is both a form of political power that fashions hybrid citizens and paralyzes their political practice and a veil that covers up the interest-driven politics of the banking-commercial bourgeoisie. The Palestinian resistance, the anti-imperial Arab agent par excellence

after it made its entrance into Lebanese politics, will contribute to the overcoming of the system's duality. Its intrusion into Lebanese politics unmasked the bourgeoisie's exploitation, which can no longer veil itself with sectarianism, and refashioned the sectarian subject into a revolutionary one.[41]

Two years before the war, Charara, under Mao's sign, recodes his previous theoretical and political quests to be on the lookout for the external agent that will overcome the fragmentation of the masses along nonclass lines, as an act of estranged intellectuals. Charara inverted his previous analysis, noting:

> We have neglected a key issue, which is that clan, family, neighborhood, and sectarian relations are relations of class struggle that are no less acute than exploitation relations in the factory, even if their forms veil themselves and differ. Since those who play the role of middlemen do not only receive a concrete material price for their roles, they often join the ranks of the commercial and financial bourgeoisie: since it allocates to them positions, jobs and supports their notability and their power. So that the fusion becomes complete between the "upper" middlemen (members of Parliament, important electoral keys, and high-ranking employees) and the bourgeoisie itself. . . . Working to reveal the forms of this struggle and investigate the issues it revolves around is a hard task that is awaiting our initiation, because it has long remained, and still is, on the margin of intellectuals' interests, especially those who are party-members. (*TBP*, 81–82)

Charara's widening of the definition of struggle to engulf social, institutional, and political dimensions beyond the exploitation of labor enabled what was previously seen as an obstacle to class struggle to be repositioned as part of it. Expanding the notion of class struggle to encompass the multiple communal forms of solidarity, though, is not merely a numerical addition of clan, family, neighborhood, and sectarian components to class. The forms of communal solidarity are politically *polyvalent*. They can constitute a "vital agent in curbing resistance against exploitation and oppression" (*TBP*, 81) without being

> fully geared to the advantage of the agents [between the bourgeoisie and the working class] and through them to the bourgeoisie and its power. For the masses, with their "class instinct" as Lenin says, use this weapon to their advantage. In a number of factories, the familial and local solidarity is overturned against the factory owner and the agent, and workers use it as a strong pressuring measure on the factory owner to retract a dismissal decision, a wage deduction penalty, or to consolidate a strike. . . .

> To rely on these relations of solidarity, and to work such as the masses will benefit from them against the agents, against the commercial and financial bourgeoisie and against the authorities, is a line we should not deviate from in expanding the people's struggle. (TBP, 82)

Two years before the war, Charara the militant, noting the growing opacity of the masses, and the growing complications lodged at the heart of the revolutionary subject, recast the scope and modality of political militancy away from its restriction to workers qua workers, seeing in the "traditional relations of solidarity" a potential to be exploited and mobilized in the struggle of the masses against both the bourgeoisie and the political authorities. "This is the revolutionary content of 'dealing with reality as it is,'" Charara wrote, "and of dealing with the exploited and the toilers first, and not from the perspective of the petite bourgeoisie only" (TBP, 82). This expansion of the domain of class struggle underlined the equivocal and political polyvalence of these communal forms. They are at the same time an integral part of class struggle, a form of its manifestation outside of labor exploitation, *and* a weapon that can be mobilized either by or against those who hold economic and political power. The political polyvalence of the masses-as-they-are, so to speak, complicates revolutionary teleology.

In the wake of realizing the false prophecies of his previous theoretical analyses and political lines regarding the historical *forces* that would deliver the Lebanese working class of its fragmentation, Charara revised his analyses of Lebanese capitalism, subjected the OCAL and the Lebanese Left to a scathing critique, and radicalized his political position, calling for a "people's war."[42] Before the outbreak of "real" violence, resulting in his crisis and disenchantment, Charara wallowed in the glorification of the masses' violence:

> The people's war is not an armed struggle launched by an isolated or adventurous "vanguard." It is the eruption of the violence carried by the masses who throw it in the face of its enemies, in various forms inside all the spaces of the social order. It finds its unity and reaches its prime form in the direct confrontation with the imperial-classist domination and the political power that embodies it on a general level. (TBP, 90)

*The Blue Pamphlet*, a couple of years before the official beginning of the war, bears the marks of the tension between the critic's scalpel, which dissects the internal contradictions of the masses, and the remainder of the revolutionary's hope in them as the subjects of emancipation, which glorifies their violence.

### *Coda: The Origins of Sectarian Lebanon—*
### *The Right-Wing's Mass Line*

During his établissement in Burj Hammud, Charara pursued his investigations of the disjunction between theory and practice, the politics of representation, and the paradoxes of emancipation. In March 1975, a month before the official date of the beginning of the Lebanese civil and regional wars (April 13, 1975), he published *Origins of Sectarian Lebanon: The Right-Wing's Mass Line*.[43] This brilliant, polemical, and long-neglected book is an intervention against the theorization of sectarianism by liberal, technocratic, secular, and Marxist politicians and intellectuals. Charara develops his earlier auto-critique and confronts head on the different theories that deploy secularism as an ideological mask and an instrument that will soon be vanquished by an external agent. He writes, "Employment, science, technology . . . sectarianism dies in the same way old empires did under the hooves of barbarian invaders . . . and sectarianism's barbarians come from Europe, a new 'land between two rivers' that exports the epidemic that decimates the ancient man, making him into a colorless employee, an intellectual that has dusted off the mountain's residues, and a technician with the passions of a calculator" (*Origins of Sectarian Lebanon*, hereafter OSL, 7). All these accounts of sectarianism are premised on a historicism—the European barbarians—that Marxist accounts partake in: "This "outside," Charara writes, "shares with the modes that preceded it and follow it, the fact that it forms the necessary direction of History's movement. It also shares with them history's apparition fully armed and in full gear from Jupiter's head, the god of gods in selected quotes from Hegel and Engels" (OSL, 8). The Left iterations of these theories make sectarianism an ideological mask that falsifies the underlying "real" social conflict. Sectarianism is then conceptualized as an instrument of sedition and division by you name it—landowners, Ottoman interests, the fighting imperial powers, and the local bourgeoisie. "In the beginning was unity and innocence," Charara writes ironically about the theoretical tropes organizing the accounts of sectarianism as the weapon of choice exploited by outsiders to divide the nation's citizens, and wielded by both outsiders and insiders to weaken working-class solidarity.[44]

Charara's book does not only criticize these dominant accounts of sectarianism that see it as a top-down phenomenon that was "created" by foreigners and elites to delude and divide the masses and that will soon vanish. It revisits the nineteenth-century Maronite peasant movements in Mount Lebanon against the sheikhs and lords—*muqata'ji*—mediated through his own reading of Mao and Gramsci to propose that sectarianism was constituted from below through

the political practice of the peasants. Charara's compressed history charts the movement of Lebanon's Maronites from the position of subalternity to dominance (*OSL*, 40) through the formation of a Maronite social and political force, a historical bloc, composed of peasants and led by traders, artisans, and clergymen (*OSL*, 74).

Amid the resistance to the lords, Charara writes,

> new relations were forged. Those relations made Europe, Capitalism, the Church, and the commoner's political and military organizational forms intertwined threads which are tied together at the juncture of the peasant's movement. This is how a deep-rooted mass line, which was tightly connected to popular struggle then, was constituted. This mass line carried the Lebanese political formation with its fixed features, namely sectarianism. This means that sectarianism is historically concomitant to the Mass Line that founded present-day Lebanon and not an incidental that can be cast off. This highlights the contradiction that can be designated as "The Right-Wing's Mass Line," which is at the heart of continuing political contradictions whose network form the superstructure of the Lebanese formation. (*OSL*, 97)

Charara's narrative charts how, in a very complex historical conjuncture characterized by capitalist penetration, European imperial interventions, Ottoman reforms, and Egyptian campaigns, the Maronite peasants' revolutionary practice against their lords fashioned Maronite political sectarian solidarities.

Charara's book is a very early constructionist argument that underscores the modernity of the phenomenon of political sectarianism against the widely circulated culturalist arguments that repeat ad nauseam the trope about essentialist, primordial loyalties that supposedly overdetermine Arab politics. The US-based historian of the Middle East Ussama Makdisi will make a similar argument about the modernity of sectarianism twenty-five years later.[45] Despite the similar conclusions Makdisi reaches about the modernity of sectarian relations of political solidarity, the character of the two interventions are very different. The post-*Orientalism* antiessentialism of Makdisi's work deploys a constructionist approach against Orientalist culturalist tropes that de-rationalize, look down on, and make an exception of Arab politics by highlighting the fatalism of "tribes" fueled by their atavistic passions. His is a culturally progressive move that marshals historical transformations and breaks to undo the imputed timelessness of a "traditional culture" that produces repetitive bloody episodes that are out of sync with an imputed civilized "modernity." In brief, Makdisi's postcolonial antiessentialist move marshals

historical discontinuities against timeless culture—modernity against tradition—to undo a particular colonial logic that singles out Arabs to classify them according to what makes them different, in this case sectarianism.

The character of Charara's much older intervention is very different. *Origins of Sectarian Lebanon* was written on the eve of the Lebanese civil war, after a decade and a half long parenthesis of political militancy that would soon be closed off for good. "The theoretical and political urgency of these questions," he writes in the last sentence of the book, "are fostered by the harshness of defeat and the determination of struggle" (125). It is a rethinking, born out of militancy, that underscores that sectarianism is neither a mask nor a tool that is contingent on a "pure social struggle" that is imposed on it from above by powerful players. Sectarianism, Charara argues, in a remarkably counterintuitive move, is not external to revolutionary practice, nor is it an impediment to it; rather, it is the result of it. The modernity of the phenomenon in Charara's account is not all that there is to the story. Rather, what is important is the fact that sectarian solidarities are not the result of false consciousness and top-down ideological imposition. Charara's and Makdisi's work on the same historical period, which underscores the modernity of sectarianism, constitute very different interventions. Makdisi marshals history to make a theoretical point against Orientalists and Western pundits that underlines that sectarianism is not a fatality. Charara, in contrast, is not concerned with the dichotomies of essence/construction and culture/history. The deep popular roots of sectarianism are highlighted to show not only the thinness of leftist accounts but also, in the wake of political losses, the recalcitrance of sectarianism in practice in contrast to its critique in theory.

Charara's account of practice and theory in nineteenth-century Mount Lebanon is written as a mirror image of his own auto-critique of militant experience a century later in *The Blue Pamphlet*. In contrast to the top-down modalities of leftist militancy, which seek to represent the masses—epistemically and politically—and end up hijacking their initiatives and reproducing the modalities of power they sought to overcome, we are presented with an account of grassroots practice that breaks free from the old relations of subjugation to fashion new modes of practice, organization, and relationships. For instance, instead of leftist parties' practice, which is premised on gaining power through increasing its institutional share of power, we are presented with an account of the Maronite Church as reworking existing relations. The Maronite Church's historical transformation made it into an institution with deep organic roots with its peasant base, which made it the only party that fulfilled "organizational, military, ideological and economic functions" (*OSL*, 107). "The Church didn't undertake its

political role," Charara writes in a direct echo of his critique of the Lebanese Left, "by taking over a centralized power that has fully formed and autonomous apparatuses. Rather, it worked on creating these apparatuses, or worked on readjusting the existing ones to the demands of the current tasks" (*OSL*, 108). The nineteenth-century Maronite Church, which was the major source for intellectuals then, looked at through the Mao-Gramsci prism is the mirror image of the twentieth-century Leninist vanguardist party. Last but not least, Charara underlines the feeble character of Lebanese nationalist ideology—in contrast, say, to Marxist theory—that was the offspring of the constitution of Maronite sectarian identity, despite the fact that the Christian bourgeoisie had long separated itself from its nineteenth-century peasant base. The theoretical thinness of this ideology, which wavers between an economic integration with the Arab world and a political isolation from it, with its dependency on Western powers, does not impede its practical effects. "To refute Lebanese ideology based on its 'incoherence,' its 'crudeness,' its 'feebleness,'" Charara writes, "does not rob it of its effective and practical source that nourishes it, even if its tongues are Michel Chiha, Sa'id Akl, Charles Malik, and Kamal al-Haj" (*OSL*, 121). Lebanese nationalist ideology is the mirror image of Marxist theory. A theoretically thin and incoherent ideology is much more practically effective than a thick Marxist theory and political analysis that he once thought held the key to a successful emancipatory practice. The evolution of the Lebanese formation, argued Charara, reproduces the sectarian line:

> Each time intellectuals of a certain sect (in the wide Gramscian sense), regardless of their inclinations, meet with its toilers—peasants and workers—the sectarian form plays the role of the unifying reference. This is practically always true regarding the Druze, whose peasants' conditions have not stopped deteriorating. It is also the case with the Shi'a during their last "demands movements" in 1974. The "progressive content" [of the demands] is neither an exception nor a new feature. We have seen that the Maronite movement had a content, and was based on practices, that both carried an effective revolutionary potential that surpassed, in its political practices and its organizational forms, what the other movements have achieved till today. (*OSL*, 114)

Charara's Maoist episode stretched his Marxist analysis to its limits by revealing the paradoxes of emancipation, the impossibility of teleology, as well as the disjuncture between theory and practice. *Origins of Sectarian Lebanon* showed how peasant emancipatory political practice in the nineteenth century that contested the dominant order managed to rework the relations

of production, the political and military modalities of organization and ideologies, and paradoxically give rise to a right-wing sectarian political formation. Nineteenth-century Maronite peasants' practice was revolutionary, but it ended up producing a sectarian formation and a right-wing ideology and politics. The mid-1970s Left, as we will soon see, reversed the equation—revolutionary and anti-imperial ideological demands were articulated on, or did not manage to break free from, sectarian constituencies.

# 5. EXIT MARX/ENTER IBN KHALDUN

## Wartime Disenchantment and Critique

When the community no longer raises objections, there is an end, too, to the suppression of evil passions, and men perpetrate deeds of cruelty, fraud, treachery and barbarity so incompatible with their level of civilization that one could have thought them impossible.
—SIGMUND FREUD

Le désespoir est une forme supérieure de la critique.
—LÉO FERRÉ

In *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory*, Enzo Traverso observes that the significant defeats the Left has suffered in the past did not break the tradition's spine. The hope in a revolutionary utopia, which provided both a historical perspective and a shared horizon of expectation, sustained the tradition through its many defeats. Traverso dates the exhaustion of the tradition's stock of revolutionary hope and the exit of History from the stage with the downfall of the communism:

> When communism fell apart, the utopia that for almost two centuries had supported it as a Promethean impetus or consolatory justification was no longer available; it had become an exhausted spiritual resource. The "structure of feelings" of the left disappeared and the melancholy born from defeat could not find anything to transcend it; it remained alone in front of a vacuum. The coming neoliberal wave—as individualistic as it was cynical—fulfilled it.[1]

Traverso's canvassing of global political transformations, from Left internationalism to the neoliberal wave, reinscribes the disaggregation of the Left's "structure of feelings" with the end of the Cold War. Similar historiographical markers are also put to use by keen observers of ideological transformations in the Arab world. "The fall of the Soviet Union," Michaelle Browers writes, "was a decisive event for socialist forces throughout the world and certainly

Arab socialism is no exception. Much of the political discourse of 'popular' democracy, the revolutionary party and Frontal politics, has given way to a more 'liberal' discourse of pluralism, human rights and civil society."[2] Browers, who is writing more than a decade before Traverso and is focusing on the transformations of political languages in the Arab world, highlights how the problematic of liberal democracy displaced the exhausted family of progressive languages that were preoccupied with revolution. This state of exhaustion not only affected the Marxist tradition as a grid of analysis and a set of conceptual tools but also had a detrimental effect on Marxist-grounded politics. Marxist-Leninist organizations such as Arab communist parties, but not exclusively so, were by the early 1990s shaken by debates revolving around questions ranging from whether they ought to change their names to the relevance of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" in the party's political agenda as well as measures of democratization internal to the organizations.[3]

Waddah Charara's trajectory is doubly contrapuntal vis-à-vis Traverso's and Browers's accounts. It presents a very early unraveling, with the beginning of the Lebanese civil and regional wars (1975–90), of the hope generated by the historical perspective of revolutionary utopias. It is also an exit from Marxist militancy and ideology that displaced the question of the political away from the centrality of class politics toward the investigation of the socio-logics and modalities of power of infranational solidarities as he observed the division of the Lebanese masses into their different Christian and Muslim sectarian constituencies. Charara did not substitute one ideology (Marxism) for another (liberalism). Rather, as we will soon see, he examined how the political could not extricate itself from, and carve out, an autonomous sphere outside of communal relations of solidarity. It is not the collapse of communism that eclipsed the faith in History, but the fragmentation of the revolutionary subject along communal lines that foreclosed the possibility of autonomous political practice.

The critical distance Charara took from the warring camps was a very rare move at the time. He was probably the first of his cohort of leftist militants to pay attention to, and theorize, the communal logics—predominantly sectarian, but also regional and kinship based—and the modalities of power at work in the Lebanese civil war and their impact on thick ideological politics. Reinserting his intervention into the problem-space of the 1970s Left before the ebbing away of revolutionary tides reveals to us how divergent his solitary and farsighted diagnosis of the war was from the positions of leftist political parties and former comrades. Charara was a bellwether of sorts for the waves of disenchantment to come of leftist intellectuals around a decade and a half before the fall of the Soviet Union. With the waning power of the Left in the following

years of the war—the Syrian military intervention in 1976, the assassination of Kamal Jumblatt in 1977, the withdrawal of the PLO after the Israeli invasion of 1982, the increasingly inter- and intrasectarian nature of the war, as well as the rise of Islamist political forces—a number of leftist militants would experience successive waves of disenchantment. During his Maoist interlude (1972–75), which witnessed mobilizations and military clashes between the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese authorities (May 1973), omens of the devastations to come, Charara took stock of a decade of Marxist militancy. His corrosive auto-critique targeted the building blocks on which he, alongside his comrades, sought to inaugurate a revolutionary political project. In brief, the political party he cofounded was no longer the collective agent of emancipation; his militant intellectual comrades no longer constituted a revolutionary vanguard; and revolutionary theory was no longer the royal road to effective practice. Disenchanted with the party, militant intellectuals, and revolutionary theory, Charara turned to Maoism, placing his ultimate militant wager on the masses. Despite the acknowledgment of the difficulty of holding on to a teleology of emancipation, his militant catechesis took the form of a romantic mythologization of the masses, whose revolutionary violence makes History unmediated by the authoritarian apparatuses of the party. Retrospectively, one could map the salient objects of Charara's revolutionary trajectory before disenchantment and their accompanying practices along the following lines: *revolutionary theory* (Socialist Lebanon, 1964–68, translation/transfiguration); *revolutionary organization* (Socialist Lebanon/OCAL, 1969–71, political union); *revolutionary masses* (*Blue Pamphlet* movement/solo militancy, 1972–75, établissement). Waddah Charara, who is of Shiʿi descent, was in the first months of the fighting still living on and off in Burj Hammud where he had relocated in 1973 for his établissement.

In a country where national consensus is a rare currency, April 13, 1975, stands in for the beginning of the civil and regional wars that lasted until the end of 1990. On that day a car fired shots at a congregation of Phalange partisans in front of a church in ʿAyn al-Rummana, a Christian suburb east of Beirut. The shootings wounded a number of people, "to which the Phalangist militiamen reacted a few hours later by machine-gunning a bus heading for the Tall al-Zaʿtar refugee camp, killing 21 Palestinians. Fighting broke out throughout the southeastern suburb of Beirut between the Phalange and the Palestinian resistance and their Lebanese allies."[4] Charara continued to commute between Beirut and Burj Hammud until September 1975. Around the end of the month, on either September 24 or 25, Charara took a cab to Beirut with Fares, his flatmate at the time, leaving everything as is in their apartment.[5] This proved to be

his last day in Burj Hammud. "Things exploded a bit after that," he recalls, and "Black Saturday happened . . . and I never saw the apartment again and the books of course. Everything was gone. This [établissement in Burj Hammud] was the last attempt to contact people and to call for something."[6] The "Black Saturday" massacre took place on December 6, 1975, when, after discovering the bodies of four young men associated with the right-wing nationalist Phalange Party, Christian militiamen established checkpoints in Beirut, stopping cars, lining up and murdering "some 200 innocent Muslims, mostly port workers."[7] On January 18, 1976, the Christian forces attacked Karantina, a northeastern multiethnic (Kurds, Armenians), multinational (Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese), predominantly Muslim working-class suburb under the control of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which is contiguous to Burj Hammud. After conquering Karantina, the militias massacred hundreds of civilians. Two days later, the Lebanese National Movement and Palestinian forces attacked the Christian coastal town of Damur south of Beirut, and committed a massacre against its inhabitants. The outbreak of the civil war in the spring of 1975 closed off for good Charara's nearly two decades of militant life (1958–75): seventeen years of militancy inaugurated on the eve of the 1958 clashes, a stint of radical activism bracketed by two civil wars.

Charara, who was stunned by the sectarian forms of the killing, destruction, and pillaging, began to take stock of the logics governing the wartime practice. In the opening paragraphs of "Hurub al-Istitbaʿ" (Wars of Subjugation) the opening chapter of a book of essays carrying the same title, (February 1976, hereafter cited as WS), he wrote,

> Numerous phenomena have come to dominate the surface of our lives in the past ten months, phenomena where blood mixed with cut limbs, and hot ashes with spilled viscera from pierced bellies. . . . Spectators used to close their eyes in horror at the movie theaters whenever [Luis] Buñuel and [Salvador] Dalí's blade would cut through a cinematic eye in "*An Andalusian Dog*." We now began tallying sliced eyes. And between one round and another, laughter filled the theaters showing "action movies" with pity: *Bloody Mama* is evil because she killed three or four policemen![8]

Charara compared the violence, pillaging, and battles in Lebanon from April 1975 to February 1976 with the differential responses of moviegoers to violent scenes in Luis Buñuel's *An Andalusian Dog* (1929) before the war and Roger Corman's *Bloody Mama* (1970), shown during the war. They had an audience whose everyday lives had become so exposed to bloodshed that the

meaning of violent scenes in movies was experienced as comic relief. Inasmuch as the radical change in the everyday life of moviegoers had led to their recoding of the movies' original messages, the war would also have a great effect on Charara's theoretical and political positions, his authorial voice, and the location from which he wrote. The sectarian form the violence took in the first few months of the war brought a very early and final disenchantment with the masses as the subjects of History and with emancipation as a horizon of political practice. Charara also radicalized and extended his earlier critique of the OCAL to encompass the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), the front of leftist and Arab nationalist parties, led by Kamal Jumblatt, who fought alongside the Palestinian resistance against the Lebanese nationalist, overwhelmingly Christian, parties.

### *The Lebanese National Movement: Parties of Rule or Parties of Revolution?*

In the fall of 1977, a MERIP writer asked Traboulsi, "Could you give an overview of the Lebanese National Movement?" The LNM, he answered,

> seems unique in the Arab world, in that it's the first time any Arab people has come to the defense of the Palestinian resistance. We believe we are unique in that sense, but the defense of the Palestinian revolution is a Lebanese patriotic duty. We have been struggling for years to have Lebanon play its role, and pay its share in the Arab liberation movement and its anti-Zionist struggle. One characteristic of the Lebanese regime prior to the war was a very flagrant contradiction between its economic integration in the Arab world and its political and cultural isolation from the Arab world. We have struggled to put an end to this. The term "isolationist" is scientific, denoting those currents, groups and political forces that believe they can live for the rest of their lives depending economically on the Arab world while isolating themselves politically and culturally.[9] This isolation has always meant a policy not of independence but of subjugation to Western imperialists.[10]

Traboulsi leaned on Socialist Lebanon/Charara's theoretical heritage in reformulating the critique of the Lebanese system put forward in "The Two Resistances" (1969), which now became a centerpiece of the Left's wartime ideological arsenal. He also touched upon the transitional program for reforms proposed by the LNM, which "gives priority to the setting up a secular state and abolishing confessionalism in political representation. This is the most essential demo-

cratic achievement to be struggled for because it affects the interests of the wide Lebanese masses."[11] The transitional program put forward by the Left did not address the socioeconomic question.

Much later Traboulsi provides an explanation in his memoir: "Jumblatt did not want to scare the bourgeoisie, and especially its Muslim wing, since he was predicting to win it over to his program of political change; he ended up being disappointed."[12] Socialist Lebanon's early analysis of the anxiety generated by the social question in a Lebanese Left dependent on an alliance with powerful political leaders with a sectarian constituency, like Kamal Jumblatt, was, and still is, prescient.

Waddah Charara lambasted the LNM's proposal for reforming the Lebanese system. In "Reform from the Center" (November 1975), he wrote:

> If the masses are supposed to be the water that the militants ought to circulate in with the happiness of the swimming fish, in this case the "masses" in the text are the water that drowns the fish, i.e., the problem. Of what masses is the text talking about? If the question was posed before the last civil war, and notably the last two months (since mid-September), it would have seemed an exaggeration that need not be investigated. But the program seeks to mobilize masses that are sundered by a sectarian civil war as wide as the masses themselves. (*WS*, 117)

Charara in this passage borrowed Mao's exhortation to militants to relate to the people like a "fish to water" to highlight the gap separating the Left's ideological languages of representation of a unified revolutionary subject—the masses—and their sectarian divisions. "When the program talks about the 'Lebanese' masses' that are looking forward to a 'national progressive regime,'" he wrote, "it is in general talking about one group, or one direction within this *Muslim* group" (*WS*, 119). Charara reiterated in this essay his long-standing critique of top-down reform programs, instrumental modes of militancy, and external ones that kept the political outside of, and separate from, the social formation. These external modes of political party militancy, he noted, focused on seizing a share of power "without tackling its foundations, forms, and functions or concentrated on widening power in sectors that the state could not dominate" (*WS*, 132). These political parties, concluded the disenchanted Marxist, are "'political' parties, in the narrow sense of the word, i.e., **parties of rule** and not parties of **social revolution**" (*WS*, 132).[13]

Charara's harsh and minoritarian critique not only separated him politically from Fawwaz Traboulsi and Muhsin Ibrahim, who held leadership positions during the war, it also distanced him intellectually from former comrades like

Aziz al-Azmeh, the Syrian historiographer and Islamic studies scholar, who offered a contrasting interpretation of the events.[14] al-Azmeh offers an account that recapitulates again Charara's "The Two Resistances," the theoretical text with multiple political and academic afterlives in both Arabic and English, while arguing against the prominence of sectarian solidarities. "Through the Palestinians," he writes, "the Lebanese entity was reinserted into its Arab context and deprived of that artificial isolation which had hitherto served to maintain the political safeguards necessary for its international economic role."[15] "Attempts to set up sectarian Shiʿi organizations were very short lived," al-Azmeh notes:

> The "Movement of the Disinherited" of the Imam Musa as-Sadr, as well as his military organization, Fityan Ali, had hardly got beyond a few mass rallies when the Shiʿis decided they did not want to star in a bad melodrama and opted for the leadership of men like George Hawi of the CP, a Greek Orthodox from the Matn, or Fawwaz Trab[o]ulsi, of the OCAL, a Catholic from the Southern Biqaa (PF, 62).

Political radicalization did not only occur among the Shiʿa but was also at the heart of the transformation of the Sunni community. "Yet it should be noted," al-Azmeh asserts, "that not all of the largely Sunni organizations took this leftward secular and radical trend" (PF, 66). That said, he continues, "such residues of traditional confessionalism are unimportant in any effective sense today yet such movements have participated emotionally and, in some cases, militarily, with the left-wing forces which are grouped around what has been termed the cause of the Palestinians" (PF, 66–7). al-Azmeh's analysis, like Charara's, takes the Lebanese sectarian communities as the units of analysis but draws the opposite conclusion by giving prominence to the ideological factor over the sectarian and to the presence of Christians at the head of communist parties whose body is considerably Shiʿi.

### *The Breakdown of a Common World*

In the introduction to *Wars of Subjugation* (1979), Charara writes, echoing Émile Durkheim, that "the war [Lebanese civil war] was a total *social fact* as much as it was a political one, and maybe more so" (*WS*, 10). The essays that are assembled in the book abstracted themselves from the course of events and the political divisions in order to examine "the social dimension (or the socio-historical as Castoriadis says) [which] reveals the unity of the implicit rules that

govern the warring parties and tear Lebanese society apart. . . . for it was not a civil-communal [*ahliyya*] battle in vain, and it did not lead to a relative fusion of the different forces into two sectarian groups randomly" (*WS*, 11). The outbreak of the fighting revealed to Charara the close intertwining of the domain of the political with the logics of communal—sectarian, regional, familial—solidarities, which makes the labors of conceptual subsumption and ideological generalization difficult.

The "war," he observes, was in fact a multiplicity of small, local wars that cannot be subsumed under one general category. In a small country, where the citizens' sect and place of birth are inscribed on their state IDs, the act of killing, the former militant observes, is a direct unmediated act that targets for the most part "faces, names and belongings" that are well known (*WS*, 231). The fighting that erupted in the different parts of the country did not constitute "one, common war, rather there were as many wars as there were fronts: the war of ʻAyn al-Rummana-al-Shiyah, the war of Dikwana-Tall al-Zaʻtar, the war of Miryata-Irdi, the war of Tripoli-al-Qibba" (*WS*, 231). "If there is no doubt," Charara affirmed, "that these local wars are nurtured by common political elements, what is sure is that these common factors did not replace the local enmities and did not eliminate the harshness of revenge" (*WS*, 231). "Wars of Subjugation," will proceed to diagnose the multiple modalities of operation of the communal relations of solidarity, which undermine the possibilities of a politics that rests on a common, unified ideological criteria.

Charara's diagnosis of the entanglement of the political in the multiple webs of the social fabric leads him to rethink the operations of power in dialogue with Gramsci, whose work he translated, and by reactivating concepts from Ibn Khaldun's work. The Lebanese civil wars, he registers, reveal that the politics of sects, families, regions, professions, political parties, and Arab regional politics carry heterogeneous, and independent, "codes of internal relations and rules of internal hierarchy" (*WS*, 233). "The difference of criteria and their variety (despite the intertwinement of some of them)," he notes, "raises difficult obstacles in the face of power as hegemony and not as dominance" (*WS*, 233). Power qua hegemony presupposes a political leadership that generalizes an encompassing set of criteria that covers multiple professional and administrative spheres, concealing in the process the basis of its power, while dominance is content with an "an external possession of instruments of power: armed forces, administrative apparatuses, a share of production" (*WS*, 233). In his deployment of Gramsci to make sense of wartime practices, Charara is far from positing a stark either-or scenario, where in a particular social formation power either solely operates as hegemony or as

dominance. Power operates differently depending on the different articulations of hegemony/dominance. At the deep end of the spectrum, when hegemony's capacity to generate a "common sense" is at its weakest, and the necessity of direct domination is at its apex, "power takes a form that Ibn Khaldun knew perfectly that of *iltiham* [fusion] and *istitba'* [subjugation]" (*WS*, 233).[16]

Gramsci's elaboration of his conceptual arsenal—such as hegemony, historical bloc, war of position, war of maneuver—that Charara drew on during his militant phase took place in the wake of the failure of socialist revolutions in Western Europe in the 1920s. His critique of "economism," by turning his analytical gaze to the political and ideological terrains and investigating the relationship between hegemony (consent) and domination (force), was an attempt to understand capitalist societies' sources of resilience.[17] Gramsci and Charara were both forging new concepts in the wake of political events that challenged an older theoretical understanding. That said, the Lebanese civil wars, which resulted in the fragmentation of Lebanese society into its infranational—sectarian, regional, kin—components and the breakdown of the Lebanese state, was the obverse of capitalist society's resilience against revolutionary transformation as a result of the moral and intellectual leadership of its dominant class. The external modality of power at work in Lebanese society, a formal dominance, as Charara dubbed it, does not target the internal social bonds of dominated groups. The subjugating power does not seek to fashion new subjectivities. It is content with subjugating a group or a community while leaving their internal relations, hierarchies, and codes intact.

The Lebanese civil wars were attempts at mutual subjugation while none of the warring sides engaged in attempts at interpellating actors from the opposite side of the trenches. Charara proceeds to diagnose the fighters' practices as they relate to land, bodies, and commodities with the foundational trinity of political economy in mind. It is the "deep nature" of the conflict, Charara writes, in reference to its social dimension, that accounts for its "barbarism" (*WS*, 235). In the battle for subjugation, the destruction of the adversary's material and moral forces—primarily its bodies and properties—tops the list of missions to accomplish. "The political body, when dominance [in distinction to hegemony] is in effect," Charara notes, "is not a general abstract labor power that has been emptied of its individuality, its desires, its attachments and had its power to symbolize excised, before turning it into a disciplined tool of production and consumption" (*WS*, 235). Rather, it is "a body in 'solidarity,'" a carrier of both attachments to and detachments from family, sect, and neighborhood (*WS*, 235–36). The personal body, the point of intersections of multiple attach-

ments and detachments, then becomes the site of a semiotic interrogation with the aim of revealing the side it belongs to. In becoming a symbol, it also becomes a body for defacement and mutilation, since what the killers are after in liquidating an individual is his belonging to his sect. Defacement "is a summoning of the sect's large body" (*WS*, 236).

Concrete communal belongings that mark bodies and property mediate all relationships in a wartorn capitalist society where liquidated individuals are stabbed multiple times and property destroyed. When the body is a stand-in for communal belongings, commodities become part of "the owner's body (the owner = the sectarian group). The owner is therefore not addressed from the perspective of his position vis-à-vis power and production, and their relations" (*WS*, 236). As for land, it acquired in the conflict a "mythological 'place'" that took the form, more predominant on the Christian side, of cleansing it from "the 'foreign' patches that contaminate the pure metal" (*WS*, 237). Here, too, Charara emphasizes, that what was at work in the sectarianization of geography was not solely interest driven, functional, and pragmatic practices that are part and parcel of winning a battle. "Expulsion," he writes, "comes hand in hand with all forms of abuse, and humiliation, and the symbol regains its power and efficacy: bulldozers are used so that there is not a single wall—not even a tin wall—left standing, and empty, fissured houses are burned down by a purifying fire so that no trace of impurity is left" (*WS*, 237).

Charara's interpretations of wartime violence, which combined ideology, politics, and economics with magical and ritualistic behaviors—killing and defacing; looting and destroying; evicting and burning down to purify—led him to call into question the distinctions of social theory that are built on separating these spheres from each other. Charara noted that these distinctions—say, between magic/ritual and capitalist economies/ideological politics—are not suitable to analyzing the situation. "We were summoning up capitalist distinctions," he added, "without any critique or differentiation (even if they reached us through Marxism)" (*WS*, 238). Note that in this passage he did not refer to these distinctions as Western, modern, or Enlightenment, but as capitalist, ones. The form of Charara's critiques of Eurocentrism, like his earlier one in *Origins*, is less to show how the "universal" categories of history, social theory, and political economy cannot escape their European origins.[18] Rather, faced with the urgent question of how to interpret wartime violence, he begins by criticizing social theory's binary distinctions before turning to forging a new conceptual universe.

Charara reactivated Ibn Khaldun's concepts to account for how power operates during the Lebanese civil wars, but it was Marx that predominantly supplied the theoretical ground for why it did so. His account of the multiple and heterogeneous foci of power at work in Lebanon that foreclose the possibility of articulating a political project that abstracts itself from these sites, generalizing in the process a set of common criteria, was not a return of sorts to a theory of the essentialist culturalist attributes of Arab societies, or a historicist move emphasizing the persistence of precapitalist remainders in the present. "Is capitalism's metal (and its parliamentary democracy) different from the one the people of the backwards country, their relationships, and their world, are made [of]?" "The matter is not sure," he answers (*WS*, 239). The entanglement of the political in the social was not an account of a failed, or backward, modernity but the form modernity took in Lebanon:

> Sectarianism, familialism, and regionalism were not the "remainders" of precapitalist social relations. And while all of them were based on elements that predate capitalism, they only rose to prominence in organizing social and political life inside the movement of capitalist expansion on the one hand, and inside the formation of the Lebanese state with its frontiers, administration and hierarchies on the other hand. (*WS*, 250)

The former Marxist militant elaborated an account of the working of Lebanese capitalism that underlined the relative autonomy of small-time producers and the processes of formal subsumption of labor that boosted communal relations of solidarity by incorporating them into the relations of production. Capitalist production in Lebanon was wary of "uprooting the artisan or the peasant from their relations [of production] and from 'liberating' these producers from them" (*WS*, 239). The reason why capitalism did not eliminate the world of artisan labor and small and family-owned farming by transforming them into wage laborers "was not, of course, [because of] the sentiments of capital and its compassion." Rather, it was because the artisan and the peasant "own an effective tool of pressure on the landowner and through him on the apparatuses of rule and its politics" (*WS*, 239). If the landlord's family wishes to play any political role, it has to "grant, even if partially, peasants' demands, whether related to leasing the land or taking charge of its crops" (*WS*, 240). "Moreover, the bourgeoisie," wrote Charara, moving from the peasant-landlord relation into analyzing the constitutive features of Lebanese capitalism, "resorts to expand its sphere of exchange and to break the link that ties production

to local consumption (through developing commercial capital) without resorting to stripping the peasant and the artisan of their means of production, and without paying an exorbitant political and ideological price for it, which is the formulation of a sharp class consciousness" (*WS*, 240).[19] The Lebanese commercial bourgeoisie therefore did not extract its surplus at the point of production, which was done by "autonomous" producers, but in the sphere of circulation and marketing under its control, such as by exporting to neighboring Arab countries. In the case of both the landlord-peasant relation and the bourgeois-worker relation, capital's Lebanese path did not "free" the laborers from everything but selling their labor power. Lebanese peasants and artisans retained some degree of control over their means of production, which therefore preempted the development of class consciousness.

Moreover, production units are characterized by "a weak division of labor," which means that the "labor of abstraction that capitalism performs on social relations and on labor power specifically is still preliminary" (*WS*, 243). Labor still relied on an artisanal unit of production and "the worker, in this case," added Charara, "is not transformed into an 'appendage' to the machine or production" (*WS*, 243). Therefore, inherited skill still plays its role and "the village (and kinship generally) has retained its function in professional preparation" (*WS*, 243). The dominant social relations, Charara wrote, have moved from society into the units of production, as in the cases when Lebanese capitalists make use of family hierarchies by "appointing a small-time notable in his family or village as a foreman in the factory supervising one of its divisions. And the small notable will participate in choosing some of his divisions' workers from his family or clan" (*WS*, 245). This resulted in controlling worker absenteeism and confrontations with factory owners through family relations. Moreover, the Lebanese bourgeoisie makes use of sectarianism to pit workers against each other, as when "using certain workers [from a different sect] as supervisors over others . . . and distributing wage benefits along sectarian lines; increasing wages along sectarian belonging . . . and this way, part of the workers is controlled and the other subjugated" (*WS*, 245). Therefore, "the (Lebanese) bourgeois organization of labor" concluded Charara, "consolidates at the end of the day the relations of solidarity that it seeks to subjugate" (*WS*, 245). And "if this subjugation is an essential element in its [bourgeois organization of labor] strategy, it is also simultaneously," Charara wrote, "an essential element in the workers' resistance to capitalist relations of production. And this is because subjugation preserves the familial and sectarian relations of solidarity" (*WS*, 245). While Charara noted how these relations of solidarity, which are used to control and divide workers by the bourgeoisie, work also in the opposite direction to re-

sist the latter, recapitulating his analysis in *The Blue Pamphlet* (1973), he did so in the wake of the civil war as a detached social scientist in a constative manner. The days of militancy are over.

In the following section, entitled "Solidarity Relations against Capitalism and the State," the author wrote as if he had just realized that his analysis—springing from a Marxist ground and addressing privileged political economy themes—was entangled in what he was in the process of leaving behind. He wrote: "These phenomena [relations of solidarity] are not restricted to the domain of production (and if we emphasized their effectiveness in this particular domain, it is because this domain is privileged in the official leftist analysis, fostering deep-seated political illusions). Rather, they surpass it [the domain of production] to [affect] the different aspects of social life" (*WS*, 246).[20] That done, Charara proceeded to explore the other manifestation of these strengths and transformations of the relations of solidarity, such as in Lebanese modern cities that rearticulated the function of *iltiham* (fusion) that keeps family, and group units, cohesive, by inscribing it within a market, "which is not only different by its extension from the past one, but also in the tendency of economic values to dominate, and in its internal hierarchization depending on the relation with imperial centers, and by its inscription within state relations" (*WS*, 247).

Charara's diagnosis of the Lebanese state paralleled the one he put forward about capitalist production. The loyalty to the state remained a "formal" one that does "not touch the internal relations of these groupings, and does not work on changing their forms and logics, despite the transformations it effects on their general function" (*WS*, 251). This "formal adherence" had serious consequences for the state, which had to share its citizens' loyalty and its sovereignty on its own territory with

> the leaders of family-regional-sectarian groups and their blocs, with the *millet* blocs and their councils and institutions (hospitals, property and schools), with the armed wings of these blocs (armed clans, armed strongmen, militias), in addition to the rule's retinue, and the agents or friends of civilian and military apparatuses that are concerned with "general" security, i.e., the sharing of allegiances leads to the sharing of organized and legitimate violence with the state—which is the one that "should" monopolize this violence, in a legal framework that generalizes the European experience. (*WS*, 251–52)

It was in opposition to this *common* modality of power that governs and divides Lebanese society and reaches its maximal limits in times of civil war that Charara proposed, fleetingly, without much elaboration, the *logic* of the state:

"and one cannot transition from the logic of subjugation to the logic of the state but through a different socio-historical foundation" (*WS*, 12). The former Maoist militant retains his apprehension of top-down politics, however. Transitioning to the logic of the state cannot be the result of a political imposition from above. The problem is that this sentence does not designate a subject that could potentially lay this new foundation.

Charara's formulation of the question of the social fabric primarily in the guise of sectarianism in the beginning of the civil war not only entailed the acknowledgment of the primacy of these communal solidarities in the face of ideological programs. More importantly, it attempted to underscore how these forms of solidarity were transformed historically and produced and reproduced in the present. "Killing, pillaging, defacing, and destroying," Charara underscored, "are at the heart of our contemporary 'traditions and habits' . . . and are not remainders from the past but are constitutive of the present we build every day" (*WS*, 230). *Wars of Subjugation* was a hard-hitting intervention against the attempts of the Right and the Left to evade responsibility for sectarian violence that drew on nationalist/culturalist and historicist registers, such as these acts are not part of "our traditions"; these are "mistakes" on the way to building bright futures; these are a consequence of "precapitalist remainders" that will soon melt into thin air.

In *Origins* (1975), the Lebanese sectarian structure was the paradoxical outcome of the masses' political practice, while in *Wars of Subjugation* the political could not escape the communal—sectarian, regional, and family—structure.[21] In order to avoid falling back on a metaphysical cultural essentialism that reifies sectarianism, Charara, as we just saw, emphasizes the modernity of these relations and grounds his account in a Marxian account of Lebanese capitalism's trajectory—formal subsumption—and the formation of Lebanon's sectarian state, as well as the rearticulation of these forms of solidarity in the wake of rural-urban migrations and their insertion in a capitalist economy. The arguments of the two books can be schematically represented in the following way. *Origins*: masses/hegemony/diachrony/history, and *Wars of Subjugation*: social fabric/dominance-subjugation/synchrony/structure.

Charara's works right before and right after the war articulate two notions of the political that are in tension with each other. The first is a celebration of the masses' autonomous political practice that remakes their world as it refashions their own subjectivities. It is a romantic, populist notion that highlights the primacy, autonomy, and creativity of political practice from below. It is anchored in a critique of the division between manual and intellectual labor and of top-down and instrumental politics, whether carried out by states, left-

ist parties, organizations, or experts. The second notion, which is implicitly articulated in *Wars of Subjugation*, pits the logic of the state against the civil war's logic of subjugation. It reasserts the need for a politics that is grounded in common criteria that rise above the particularities of infranational communal solidarities. Ahmad Beydoun captured Charara's oscillation between a militant celebration of the autonomy of the political against the instrumental top-down practice of organizations and a disenchanted observation of its entanglement in the social fabric in the title of his review of *Wars of Subjugation*: "Waddah Charara: 'The Democracy' of the State or 'The Depth' of Freedom?"[22] Beydoun returned to, and rearticulated, Charara's oscillation as one between *"la politique-expression"* (a politics-as-expression) of the revolutionary subjects' practice and "*la politique-maîtrise*" (politics-as-mastery) of the murderous infranational divisions of the social fabric by a transcendent state.[23]

### *From Zahi Cherfan to Waddah Charara: Death of an Organic Intellectual, Birth of a Ṣuʿlūk*

The opening passage of *Wars of Subjugation*, in its literary tone, its references to Buñuel, Dalí, and *Bloody Mama*, bears witness to a departure in form, content—the artistic references—and the locus of enunciation in the writings of one of the most influential New Left Marxist militant intellectuals of his generation. In October 1974, seven months before the outbreak of the civil wars, Zahi Cherfan—Waddah Charara's pseudonym—wrote the following:

> Just from enumerating some of the new phenomena [one can realize] the extent of actual victories that the student movement achieved in facing the authorities. Some of its elements, in Beirut, Baalbek, Saida, Tyre, Nabatieh and Tripoli no longer bother with the democratic legality and its interior minister. These elements no longer stand vulnerable in the face of oppression forces trained by the authorities to exert direct bodily violence, and no longer believe that violence is a monopoly of the reactionary authorities in the service of stability, the hotels, and the factory owners. (*WS*, 147)[24]

In this passage, Charara evaluated a certain line of action undertaken by the student movement, while taking it "upon himself to rectify 'deviations'" in its path.[25] Less than a year before the outbreak of the war, his coordinates on the political plane are precise. Charara/Cherfan is writing from a militant leftist position, critically assessing the movement so that its actions may yield more fruitful results in the future. The militant imagined his community of readers

and the role his written interventions were predicated to play. Ahmad Beydoun outlined the contours of the militant position Cherfan/Charara occupied: "There is a good thing that is starting and we have to make sure to put it on the right track. . . . Obstacles on the way are numerous, and the errors we committed and those we may commit are likely not the product of chance. . . . But it is unacceptable that our efforts come to an end . . . or to put it briefly 'there is always something that can be done' (Sartre)."[26] Beydoun, who also withdrew from leftist practice at the beginning of the war, alluded to how Charara's militant position "exacts from the text a heavy theoretical price," noting that it "seems forced to 'pave' the ground under the feet of the student movement to the extent of surprising whoever reads 'Wars of Subjugation.'"[27]

Charara's earlier prewar essays, either unsigned or written under his pseudonym, were activist interventions. They were analyses of specific situations geared toward either evaluating a certain line of action or formulating political positions, and at times they were used as theoretical education texts. When writing was in the direct service of the people's cause, it de facto excluded certain subjects and forms that might detract from the pressing and primordial political task. It left no room for the militant writer to dabble in analogies, artistic references, and a prose that might eat away at its political yield by distracting the reader. Linguistic "flourish" may detract from the seriousness of the matter, relegating the militant to the status of an intellectual who tinkers with culture in distinction to a revolutionary who formulates political positions. Moreover, Charara adds, "Why use these metaphors when you were convinced that analysis that takes for its base economics and grand transformations is self-sufficient? Its intelligibility is within it. So why borrow and use analogies from other fields like cinema, theater, poetry?"[28]

One of the first pieces Charara wrote after he put an end to militancy was a text in two parts relating his experience as a public school teacher. It weaves together autobiographical threads, an analysis of the Lebanese educational system, and a close observation of the minutiae of power relations inside schools as well as insightful comparisons between schools and political parties.[29] We have come a long way from the unsigned articles of Socialist Lebanon. Not only did Charara's prose become denser with analogies, casting a much wider net of references, but he also moved from not signing texts at all and using a pseudonym to writing autobiographical pieces. Engaging in this genre of writing would have been unimaginable, or, if that is too strong, unlikely only a few months earlier, when he was still one foot soldier of History, albeit a distinguished one, among others.[30] Wartime disenchantment established the conditions of possibility of thinking and writing about his personal and collective

pasts, distilling experiences into texts as well as venturing into new registers of political analysis, subjects, and styles of writing.[31]

In "Marxism and Form," a review essay mostly addressing *Spectrum*, a collection of texts by Perry Anderson, Stefan Collini observes how in the 1960s and 1970s, when "it was possible for Anderson and his collaborators to believe that history was on their side, that the proper union of intellectual labor and working class militancy would help bring about the socialist supersession of capitalism," Anderson's writing "did not feel the need to make any concessions to those who were uninitiated theoretically or unsympathetic politically."[32] "The task was too urgent," he adds, "the stakes too high, and in any case the 'bourgeois' media were too complicit with capitalism and its political outriders."[33] While these essays retain their brilliance today, Collini continues, "one cannot help noticing how the whiff of sectarianism, of laying down the 'correct' line *now* hangs about some of these articles like stale cigarette smoke."[34] In going over Anderson's trajectory, Collini, the intellectual historian, notes that with the changes in the political landscape taking place in the 1980s and 1990s, a time when it became much less convincing to think that history was on one's side, Anderson "appears to have undergone something of a political or intellectual crisis . . . leading not just to reassess the prospects of the left in a world dominated by neo-liberalism but also, one may infer, to reconsider the function of his own writing."[35] He then asks, "Yet to what readership, so much of the world having changed, does Anderson now address himself, and from what vantage point, so many of the old doctrinal certainties having shriveled, does he now write?" Collini answers, "Olympian universalism," a designation that he sees fitting Anderson's commitment to Enlightenment reason and the scope of his work. Anderson is a "universalist in the geographical as well as philosophical sense, attending impartially to developments in all parts of the world."[36]

Collini's review reminds us that transformations in intellectual labor accompanying the ebbing away of the 1960s revolutionary tides are not an exclusively Arab affair. Having said that, if Anderson reinvented himself as an Olympian universalist, for whom and from where was Charara writing after his disenchantment? The first person plural Charara uses throughout *Wars of Subjugation* is, to say the least, problematic. Who does this fictitious "we" refer to? It cannot refer to the Lebanese Left since he is overtly critical of it. Moreover, his exit from the Left was not accompanied by a right-wing conversion. To put this loss of identification in the words of Ahmad Beydoun, whose ties to Charara were strong at the time, "we were forced," he recalls, "as a result of the *diagnosis* to take a great distance from the National and Palestinian camp, and of course [regarding] the other camp [the right-wing and Christian parties] it was taken

for granted. So, we found ourselves . . . against all sides. Very early on, there was an impossibility of identification with any of the sides in the war, because of the war itself."[37]

The shift from class-based investigations into the conceptualization of communal relations of solidarity led to a reconfiguration of Charara's style of critical analysis, his theoretical universe, his horizon of expectation, and his redefinition of the function of intellectuals. It dislocated power from its previous possessors, the dominant classes and the state, to lodge it in the logic of the social fabric. The Lebanese civil war ended the militants' wagers on designating a revolutionary subject that will carry out the task of emancipation. The acknowledgment of the incapacity to a carry out an autonomous, common political project that is not enmeshed in the logics of communal solidarity signaled the unraveling of a utopian future of emancipation as the horizon of expectation of political practice.[38] Consequently, Charara developed a form of immanent critique and rearticulated the role of the intellectual in congruence with the substitution of class by community. The critic is the one who took up the role of "unmasking subjugation whenever it is cloaked with 'modern' ideologies or *asala* [authenticity]" (*WS*, 12). This rearticulation of the role of intellectuals as unmaskers of the logics of practice that lie beneath the surface of political discourse, regardless of its ideological colors, led to a stance of "permanent critique." This is not, he asserts, because of an incapacity "to be 'positive,' but because it is hard to articulate division and contradiction in the language of *belonging* that shortly after will turn into multiple oratory arts: laudation, eulogy and satire" (*WS*, 12). "The war," recalls Ahmad Beydoun, "very early on revealed itself to be a new situation, a new story, a new logic. It was over [for us]. We could not work in this situation, so we started to become 'individuals' (*afrad*), we disbanded, and each of us, approximately, became by himself."[39]

In the opening paragraph of his review of *Wars of Subjugation*, Beydoun highlighted the minoritarian position occupied by Charara who "stands alone in a desolate tight spot," who does not abide by the rules of production of Lebanese political discourses. "For amongst the protocols of competition in this field—cluttered with dullness," adds Beydoun sarcastically, "is that the valiant knight does not stand aside, but always in a *known group*, never reaching the battleground having forgotten his father's name, because he has to declare his linage before attacks and retreats: 'I am Ali son of Hussein son of Ali. . . .' And Waddah Charara has no lineage . . . or at least he declares that what he is saying cannot be spoken in the 'language of affiliation.'"[40] Beydoun's text brought out the solitary and impossible position Charara occupied by writing from a

nonaffiliated position in the first years of the war, noting the refusal of engagement with his work. Lebanese political languages, he wrote "are fences, and no one is interested in getting closer to another—through dialogue—or bringing him closer. . . . And Zayd's son and ʿAmr's son may fight and later become like brothers again. However, neither fighting nor fraternizing owes anything to the rhymes [*ahaji*z] they exchange between them."[41] Beydoun reactivated the vocabulary of Arab patrilineal lineages to describe the fragmentation of shared spaces and idioms of public discourse, when in times of war texts like a coat of arms bear the insignia of the "tribe." The passing of the "masses" went hand in hand with those who seek to represent them, the family of organic and vanguardist intellectuals. The organic intellectual was dead and replaced by the tribe's poet singing his kin's glories. Charara and Ahmad Beydoun were among the first of this cohort of militant intellectuals to become "individualized" in reference to their double dissent from their leftist political parties and their communities. They refused, after their disenchantment with the Left, to retreat into the fold of sectarian identities, which would have entailed for both of them to start writing as Shiʿi intellectuals, not necessarily from within the religious Shiʿi tradition but from within the sectarian perspective of the community's interests.

In his historiographical magnum opus, Beydoun associated the standpoint of the critical historian who does not seek to write Lebanese history from the standpoint of his own community with that of the *saʿalik* in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic era. If Charara's sociological immanent critique took the form of unmasking the logics of subjugation that are cloaked in a multiplicity of ideological languages, whether secular or religious, Beydoun's develops a historical form. The critical historian in his reading is the one who steers away from writing a history whose matrix is the "ego-ideal" of the community. Immanent historical critique is another name for the disjunction between the community's own narrative of itself and the historian's account. This disjunction, writes Beydoun, "transforms the historian into an individual; that is, into a *suʿluk*, in the old tribal terminology. We prefer the term *suʿluk* to 'citizen,' which was invented by the French Revolution." This is because in Beydoun's account the labor of abstraction that produces the "citizen" through abstracting him from his attachments, and inserting him in a world of interchangeable citizens, did not take place. This individual qua historian is the exception and not the norm, which makes him a suʿluk. That said, continues Beydoun, "he did not fall from a cloud. He finds his place of birth in a relatively recent social sphere; this lumpen-State (the actual State) that is at the crossroads of the communitarian lines of struggle, and that tends, in reality or ideally, to separate itself from these

lines. The communitarian historian weaves a totally smooth, total myth. The individual-historian is led by his methodology to put his finger on the fault lines of communitarian myths."[42]

Beydoun provides an alternative genealogy of the critical, dissenting "individual-historian" away from an account of modernity that emphasizes the coming into being of a society characterized by abstraction, commensurability, and interchangeability whose political form entails equality between citizens. The shape of Lebanon's postcolonial modernity renders the "individual-historian," who is the product of the modern "Lumpen State," closer to the pre-Islamic sa'alik, outcasts who, either by choice or expulsion, were no longer members of their tribes. Beydoun's association of the critic with the individual qua su'luk, in the wake of Marxist disenchantment, is the Lebanese answer to Anderson's "Olympian universalism." It urges us to inquire into the political, social, and economic conditions of possibility of adopting an "Olympian universalism." Another way of putting this is to ask, from where can you adopt an Olympian position? And to whom? The critic as su'luk is another acknowledgment of the difficulty of articulating a critical discourse that could assume a hegemonic function in a wartorn, communally divided country, where there are no "citizens" and no common political community.

In Charara's case as well, the acknowledgment of the multiplicity of criteria of power, which work according to the logic of subjugation and preempt the formation of a hegemonic political Left, steered his critical project in new directions and into new forms of articulating critique. In the wake of his observation of the failure of political abstraction and commensurability, and the incongruity of wartime practices with the categories of social and political theory, Charara relinquished the labors of theoretical abstraction that seek to conceptually subsume the discourses and practices it studies. This new modality of critique builds on Charara's Maoist phase, during which he also discovered the empirical richness of al-Jabarti's historical works, which clearly revealed to him the poverty of the theoretical discourses of towering contemporary Arab thinkers—such as Abdallah Laroui—and scholars of the Arab world who sought to subsume a very rich, contingent, and contradictory history under a few concepts.[43] In the wake of the war and his exit from militantism, he leaned on his Jabartian-Maoist heritage to fashion a form of immanent critique that confronted the coherence of the self-proclaimed discourses of political parties and communities with the contingency and multiplicity of historical events, discourses, logics, and practices that fashioned them. This form of immanent critique, as it is put to use, for instance, in Charara's detailed work of historical sociology on the formation and rise of Hizbullah, the Lebanese Shi'i militant party,

and its ensuing clout over its community bears a number of traits in common with Nietzschean/Foucauldian genealogies.[44] It seeks to disrupt the coherence of the account the group, in this case the Shiʿi Islamist military party, gives of itself, emphasizing contingent events that led to its formation, destabilizing the certainties of the group's own version of its rise and subsequent achievements. In brief, it seeks to emphasize the contingent, historical, prosaic elements in contrast to the heroic and epic dimensions in the Islamist political party's own self-image.

Charara's texts are notoriously difficult partly because of the author's methodological dictate to stay as close as possible to the thickness and dispersion of the materials he is working with. It is a reflexive method that strives toward finding the most adequate form to represent the modern transformations and fragmentations of societies divided by communal solidarities. If political universals, in the form of hegemonic projects, are preempted by proliferating logics of subjugation that tear states, societies, and institutions apart, preventing the formation of a totality, then it would be difficult to apprehend the state of division through a set of abstract universal concepts that pretend to subsume these incommensurable multiplicities. The end product is a chameleonic language that is differently colored by the language and internal references of the materials it is working through. Ibn ʿArabi's precept "Know your God, the Knowledge of a Chameleon" became one of Charara's methodological guiding lights.[45]

Orphans of the revolution, Charara and Beydoun became Lebanese citizens in a wartorn polis and "public intellectuals," without a public at the beginning of the war. Their early disenchantment and articulation of the centrality of communal solidarities during the civil war raises historiographical, theoretical, and political questions. First, it calls into question the predominant historiographical signposts that are deployed in writing histories of the international and Arab Left that seek to ground their narratives in landmarks that supposedly parallel the internationalism of the tradition and those events that are elevated to the rank of global events—the implosion of the Soviet Union. These sweeping narratives associated their global historiographical markers with grand ideological shifts as well: Marxism to liberal democracy or to neoliberalism.

Second, it raises the theoretical question of where do you fashion a critical project from, and how you do it, once you acknowledge that community is the problem, so to speak, without becoming a liberal, like some of their former comrades. The sociological and historical immanent critiques they formulated retained at their core Marx's commitment to the formulation of a reflexive

critique. Unlike liberalism's grounds of persuasion, which rest on a belief in the context-less universalism of reason, the Marxian tradition emphasized that the persuasiveness of ideas "depended on historical and situational factors like *class*."[46] It is the Marxian tradition's "emphasis on the social mediation of rational plausibility" that generates its deep theoretical engagement with the question of translation, which, through its theoretical mapping of a society's mode of production, social structure, and so on, ought to guide emancipatory political practice.[47] In noting that community displaced class as the main category of social mediation, they inhabited the difficult position where they couldn't fall back on a liberal celebration of context-less reason, while their own theorization also foreclosed the possibility of Marxist emancipatory political practice. It is this attachment to reflexivity after the passing of revolutionary hopes that makes them, to me at least, more sophisticated and interesting than Arab and non-Arab Marxists who, like Perry Anderson, retreated to an Olympian universalism and a defense of abstract, context-less reason against authoritarianism and religious politics.

In becoming critics of communal relations of subjugation and the mythohistories Lebanese communities spin about themselves, their reflexive critical practices, which took stock of their diagnosis of the difficulty of economic and political abstraction, moved away from critical theory's powers of conceptual subsumption. Their critiques became increasingly distant from the critical theory that they spent the past two decades of their lives reading, translating, and writing. Paradoxically, it is their commitment to reflexivity and to diagnosing the contours of their present, which they developed during Socialist Lebanon's days, that contributed to marginalizing them from the cosmopolitan world of traveling theory, as they increasingly articulated critique in a sociological and historical mode. This is why I focused on *Wars of Subjugation* and Beydoun's sharp reading of it. This volume marks Charara's initial movement away from Marxist concepts and into his Khaldunian-inspired analysis of the logics of operation of communal solidarities. In it one detects the movement of thought at critical hinge-moments, when the labor of beginnings, of clearing the conceptual ground, and making the case for a new interpretive idiom is performed on the ground of, and by engaging, the earlier—Marxian—one. The traces of these labors would soon vanish from view, erasing the historicity of the problem-space from what would become a normalized paradigm had initially emerged.

Last but not least, their diagnosis raises questions that still plague Lebanese political practice. If community is the main category of social mediation, and the logics of subjugation are still at work to varying degrees depending on the

local, regional, and international conjunctures between the different communities, then engaging in politics always entails deciding whether practice ought to be articulated from within these communities' boundaries while relying on their solidarities, or outside of them, like the 1960s Left half attempted to do. I say half because its autonomy was compromised with its alliance with the more powerful Kamal Jumblatt, who had a double life, one inside and the other outside the Lebanese sectarian system. Jumblatt's duality was nicely captured by a distinguished representative of the prewar establishment's political club. In the aftermath of the last parliamentary elections before the war (1972), Saeb Salam, four-time prime minister of Lebanon, said of Jumblatt, who was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union (1972): "We welcome Kamal Jumblatt, the son of the noble Lebanese house and the leader of the esteemed sect [the Druze]. We, however, utterly refuse to deal with him as a promoter of strikes and sabotage and the protector of the Left and communism, and the exploiter of popular causes."[48]

### *Coda—Marxism in Crisis: Antitotalitarianism, Nationalism, and Post-Marxism*

The first years of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 coincided with the antitotalitarian moment in the French intellectual field that cut short the leftist and Third Worldist militancy of the 1960s' shifting intellectual and political preoccupations to the support of dissenters from the Soviet Union and issues of human rights. In *Wars of Subjugation* Charara digressed a little from the diagnosis of wartime violence to ironically note that if the capitalist metropoles practiced their "barbarism in 'Sun My' or 'My Lai', that's imperialism. . . . The Archipelagoes of political concentration on the other hand do not concern us, for we are in the national democratic phase, and we befriend those who befriend us, like Vietnam" (*WS*, 227).[49] I was intrigued by the use of "Archipelagoes" in this fleeting critique of the Left's silence on the violence perpetrated by its own camp, and whether it was a reference to Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*. Charara, it turned out, had read the book on his rooftop in Burj Hammud as soon as it came out in French, during his years of Maoist militancy (June 1974).[50] The publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* had a tremendous effect on France's intellectual field:

> Unable to ignore so unimpeachable a source, Dreyfus and Dostoevsky in one, non-Communist intellectuals underwent a Damascene conversion. The scales fell from their eyes, exposing them not only to the true

> enormity of "real socialism," but to the realization that the worm was in the bud. Not Stalin or Lenin, but Marx—and, in a flight backwards, Hegel and Rousseau (possibly Plato)—was the progenitor of the *univers concentrationnaire*. Contra Sartre, [Raymond] Aron, Camus and Castoriadis had been right all along.[51]

The "gulag effect" was spearheaded by former militant intellectuals of different generations. Both Claude Lefort (1924–2010), a student of Merleau-Ponty's and cofounder with the Greek polymath and revolutionary Cornelius Castoriadis of Socialisme ou Barbarie (1949–65), and the younger André Glucksmann (1937–2015), member of La Gauche Prolétarienne (1968–73), produced book-long essays on Solzhenitsyn.[52] The two commentaries "reprimanding other intellectuals for not listening to Solzhenitsyn, and developing political philosophies proclaimed in his name . . . were highly influential in the developing critique of totalitarianism."[53] The Solzhenitsyn years, from the mid- to late 1970s, left their mark on newspapers (*Le Nouvel Observateur*), journals (*Esprit*), and scholarly works such as that of the anthropologist Pierre Clastres and on François Furet's influential *Penser La Révolution Française* (1978).[54] Michel Foucault's oeuvre also stands witness to the mood of the age. The first edition of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) "compares the Gulag and the West's disciplinary institutions, which he describes as an 'archipel carcéral.'"[55] The new media "stars," a number of whom were former '68ers, of this anti-Marxist intellectual movement who became known as "les nouveaux philosophes" made the cover story of *Time Magazine* in the autumn of 1977 with the title "Marx Is Dead," the international press "betraying evident pleasure at the discovery (at long last!) of a group of young, handsome and militantly anti-Marxist French intellectuals."[56]

Back in Beirut, the circuits of traveling revolutionary theory and militants were also interrupted, although it was less as a result of theoretico-political waves. The fragmentation of the subject and agent of revolution along communal lines and the resurgence of identitarian binaries in the wake of the Iranian Revolution foreclosed both the politics of internationalist solidarity and the mediation between theory and practice that the earlier practices of translation and transfiguration had enabled. A decade had passed since the Marxist and anticolonial publications published by Maspero were read, discussed, and translated by eager twenty-something men and women in Socialist Lebanon circles. In the early 1980s, François Maspero ended up selling his publishing house, which became Éditions la Découverte, after he stipulated that the name

be changed. The internationalist circuit of Left traveling militants also came to a halt. The Dziga Vertov Group, which included the Swiss-French director Jean-Luc Godard, spent three months in 1970 shooting in Palestinian refugee camps in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon in preparation for a film in support of the revolution that was to be titled "Til Victory: Thinking and Working Methods of the Palestinian Revolution." It was commissioned, and partially funded, by the Information Service Bureau of Fatah. In mid-1980s Beirut, after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the defeat of the Palestinian resistance (1982), and the increasing inter- and intracommunal divisions, circulating was fraught with many more dangers for westerners, including potential kidnappings by the newly formed Islamist groups.

These political transformations, which had started to bring the earlier decades of Marxist internationalist militancy to an end, were not confined to the Arab or Muslim worlds. In the first lines of *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson, working from another part of the world, revealed how nationalism, one of the perennial thorns in Marxism's side, had made another cut in the leftist internationalist fabric:

> Perhaps without being much noticed yet, a fundamental transformation in the history of Marxism and Marxist movements is upon us. Its most visible signs are the recent wars between Vietnam, Cambodia and China. These wars are of world-historical importance because they are the first to occur between regimes whose independence and revolutionary credentials are undeniable, and because none of the belligerents has made more than the most perfunctory attempts to justify the bloodshed in terms of a recognizable *Marxist* theoretical perspective.[57]

The globally interconnected world, united by the ideological coordinates of emancipation from capitalism and imperialism and fashioned by the internationalist solidarity networks of militants and the labors of conceptual transfiguration, had begun its disintegration from different corners.

Charara's wartime theory of the difficulty of achieving hegemony in societies that are deeply divided along communal lines, where it is difficult to separate political practice from the social foundations on which it rises, reveals the limits of post-Marxist theories that, in the mid-1980s, supplemented the last great Marxist debates of the 1970s. These theories, and here I have in mind Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's distinguished contributions, sought to move beyond a class essentialism by deconstructing and reactivating Marxist categories and dissociating the notion of antagonism from its class referent.[58] As a result, the political actors and social movements that

can potentially carry out emancipatory struggles have been multiplied, beyond the contradiction between Labor and Capital and the proletariat as the presupposed universal subject of revolution. Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical project rested on asserting the autonomy of political activity and a hegemony that constituted a politically specific universality as a result of a contingent articulating practice:

> As we argue, only one particularity whose body is split, for without ceasing to be its own particularity, it transforms its body in the representation of a universality transcending it (that of the equivalential chain). This relation, by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it, is what we call a hegemonic relation. As a result, its universality is a contaminated universality: (1) it lives in this unresolvable tension between universality and particularity; (2) its function of hegemonic universality is not acquired for good but is, on the contrary, always reversible. Although we are no doubt radicalizing the Gramscian intuition in several respects, we think that something of the sort is implicit in Gramsci's distinction between corporative and hegemonic class.[59]

Charara's analysis signaled the difficulty of a hegemonic articulation in a political terrain saturated by communal solidarities that form an integral part of capitalist relations of production and of the modus operandi of the workings of the Lebanese state. *Origins of Sectarianism* signaled the difficulty of the Maronites in the twentieth century both to represent their own interests and to craft a hegemonic pro-Western Lebanese nationalism that is economically integrated into, and politically separated from, its Arab surroundings. The clashes of 1958 and the wars that began in the mid-1970s bear witness to that. More recently, Hizbullah, the militant Shi'i Islamist political party and militia, attempted to articulate a hegemonic vision of Lebanon along the lines of its own agenda of a "Culture of Resistance," in alignment with the Syrian and Iranian regimes, against the Israeli breaches of Lebanese sovereignty and the dictates of US foreign policy. In all of these cases, the condition that Laclau and Mouffe describe, in which a "particular social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it" to form a "hegemonic universality," failed. The divisions of the Lebanese state along its confessional lines, by enmeshing political practice in the multiple webs of the social fabric, ensured the prevalence of multiple countervailing powers that has till now foreclosed the emergence of dictatorial or authoritarian regimes, such as the ones ruling neighboring Arab countries. The obverse of that coin is that those

same countervailing powers, whether they are represented in the state apparatus or not, have, through their mutual attempts at subjugating each other, produced a constant oscillation between civil wars and "cold civil-communal peace"—and thus have so far preempted the formation of a totality that could be represented by a particular political force.[60]

## 6. TRAVELING THEORY AND POLITICAL PRACTICE

### Orientalism in the Age of the Islamic Revolution

I speak of "occidentosis" as of tuberculosis. But perhaps it more closely resembles an infestation of weevils. Have you seen how they attack wheat? From the inside. The bran remains intact, but it is just a shell, like a cocoon left behind on a tree.

—JALAL AL-E AHMAD

Our culture was felt to be of a lower grade.

—EDWARD SAID

My dear friends, you should know that the danger from the communist powers is not less than America. . . . Both superpowers have risen for the obliteration of the oppressed nations and we should support the oppressed people of the world.

—AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI

In the span of a few years (1972–76), as he confronted organizational crises at the heart of the OCAL he helped found (1970–), militant setbacks (1972–73), and the eruption of fighting (1975–), Waddah Charara attempted to take stock of the fast-paced unfolding of events he took part in, and observed, in a politically saturated, polarized society. Leaning on theoretical resources from the Marxist tradition Charara's works from that period called into question the Left's theories of the workings of capitalism and sectarianism in Lebanon. In his late militant years (1973–75) Charara's populist Maoism first turned "backwardness into an advantage" by celebrating the revolutionary potential of the masses as they are, enmeshed in their communal forms of solidarity in their neighborhoods, outside of an imaginary idea of the "factory worker" devoid of attachments.[1] He attempted to resolve the militant's conundrum by stretching the notion of class struggle so that it encompasses communal solidarities while acknowledging how including these forms redefines the notion, foreclosing the possibility of emancipatory teleology. Second, it showed the founding paradox at the heart of modern Lebanon, by underscoring how sectarianism is a modern outcome of nineteenth-century Maronite peasants' struggle against their lords.

Both these accounts celebrate and highlight the primacy of political practice from below and, in *Origins of Sectarian Lebanon*, its capacity to fashion subjectivities and new military, economic, and political forms of organization. The autonomy of the political, and of the masses' own initiatives, were advanced as an internal, minoritarian, oppositional argument against top-down organizational forms, and against vanguardist and instrumental political practices. It also targeted a common Marxist theoretical trope that takes the form of designating the agent, for example, capitalism or the Palestinian revolution, that will get rid of difference—sectarianism as a brake on revolutionary politics—and pave the way for a "difference-free" emancipatory political practice. After the outbreak of the fighting, he underlined again the poverty of social and political theory in accounting for the logics of power, and the forms of violence, at work during civil wars.[2] Ibn Khaldun's accounts of fusion and subjugation supplemented Mao's and Gramsci's emphasis on the political and the operations of hegemony. Charara moved from a celebration of the autonomy of the political will of the masses against a vanguardist Marxism to the practical realization of the structural primacy of the social fabric over the political and the ideological. This last move foreclosed the hope of an emancipation-to-come. Political practice no longer made History. It became hostage of the social fabric's structural times of repetition.

Charara inhabited an impossible position that did not easily align itself with the axes of theoretical and political positioning either in Arab cultural spheres or in the Western academy. It was an anti-anti-imperialist political position that articulated an immanent critique of communal politics—and adopted a genealogical approach to the history of Arab societies and discourses while leaning on their own theoretical resources—coupled with a muted attachment to a horizon of emancipation from the communal logics of subjugation. It was, at one and the same time, *politically* critical of the Left and subsequent Islamist militant anti-imperialist forces, *theoretically* Arab-Islamic, and *normatively* attached to an overcoming of the permanent civil wars produced by the logics of subjugation. Charara's impossible position will be at odds with the anti-imperialism of diasporic thinkers, like Edward Said, who subjected the West's knowledges of the non-West to critical scrutiny, revealing their entanglement with power, and of the majority of his former comrades at home who splintered in different political directions in the wake of the fragmentation of the revolutionary subject into its infranational communal solidarities and the high tides of militant Islamist political practices after the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

This chapter takes the critical reception of Said's *Orientalism* as its focal point, to chart the theoretical and political divergences that separated Left

militant intellectuals at home from diasporic critics who were initially brought together by their support of, and engagement with, the Palestinian revolution in the wake of the 1967 defeat. In doing so, I also highlight Charara's solitary position along these cardinal axes that came to delimit the different positions of thinkers and intellectuals. Charara's critiques of Eurocentrism, and the modernizing distinctions of social theory that separate myth and ritual from politics and economics in the face of the salience of communal forms of solidarity, have much in common with Arab diasporic modalities of criticism and with the South Asian ones that will inaugurate the field of postcolonial studies in the Anglophone academies. Having said that, these agendas of criticism, operating in different problem-spaces and arising from different personal and political experiences and sensibilities, will become increasingly at odds with each other. For instance, both Charara and Ranajit Guha, the inspiration behind the Subaltern Studies collective, who were also influenced by Gramsci's and Mao's thought, used the same expression, "dominance without hegemony," to diagnose their respective postcolonial modernities. Having said that, this term does different labors for these two thinkers. For Guha, "dominance without hegemony" is imbricated within a historical project critical of the postcolonial state that reveals the continuities between the rule of colonial and national elites. Charara's argument in *Wars of Subjugation* about the imbrication of the political in the social was formulated in the aftermath of the state's breakdown and the acknowledgment of the impossibility of revolutionary practice during a sectarian civil war. As the subaltern historians posited the subaltern as the new revolutionary subject, Charara was affirming the impossibility of identification with any of the warring parties.[3]

Charara's critique of the Lebanese and Palestinian anti-imperialist Left, and his focus on the logics of subjugation and the mutating resilience of forms of social solidarity, will come to clash with the anti-imperialist critique of Eurocentrism that singled out the epistemological layer for criticism, catching like wildfire in the wake of Said's *Orientalism* (1978). This critique unmasked how Western concepts, artworks, traditions, and disciplines reified non-Western difference and marked it as inferior and backward. It revealed the entanglement of representations of non-Europeans in the colonial enterprise. These critical strategies also showed how modern "universal" categories could never escape their own European particular origins. Therefore, their deployment across the globe by Westerners and non-Westerners was not part and parcel of a universal process of modernization but an imperial act of epistemological and ontological violence. To put it briefly, they injected history into the culturalist reifications of Orientalists to undo the exceptionalism of the "Orient" and

foregrounded the culturalism of unmarked universal categories. Both these strategies are acts of theoretical anti-imperialism—they are defensive vis-à-vis non-Western societies and extend the critique of Western imperialism beyond the economic and the political to the discursive.

The critical works of Said and Charara, who were both writing in the mid- to late 1970s, shared an important feature. They both sidelined the ideological dimension of the political by uncovering deeper and more fundamental planes than the ideological one that organizes the difference between Left and Right, progressives and reactionaries. They did it from different angles, though. The first showed how, in practice, the political could not extricate itself from the *social fabric*, while the second argued in theory how it could not extricate itself from *discourse*. The primacy of the social fabric, and of the discursive, sidelined the political and rendered the ideological more or less epiphenomenal to what came to be posited as a deeper structural ground. Moreover, both authors posited that modalities of operation of the social fabric, and of Orientalist discourses, managed to both transform themselves historically while reproducing themselves. The communal forms of solidarities are modernity's offspring, whose articulation is transformed with the modern state, capitalist penetration, and urbanization, while retaining their function. *Orientalism*, in Said's text, can digest and incorporate works by different traditions and authors—for example, Oswald Spengler, Darwinism, the Freudian tradition—and transform itself from textual hermeneutics to area studies modernization theories while retaining its structural knowledge-power features.

This is where similarities end. At a time when diasporic intellectuals were theoretically criticizing their disciplines for their culturalist reifications, militants and intellectuals at home were discovering, and confronting politically, the problem of the social fabric. To put it somewhat crudely, when the Manchester anthropologist Emrys Peters was dealing with genealogies of Shiʿi families, equilibrium models, and trying to account for historical change and reproduction, Socialist Lebanon's militant intellectuals, many of whom came from southern Shiʿi villages—the same area Peters was doing fieldwork in—were reading Marx, Althusser, Gramsci, and Foucault to formulate a revolutionary project.[4] Anglophone metropolitan academic fields, as I have noted earlier, were theoretically "belated" vis-à-vis the readings of Lebanese New Left militant intellectuals. That said, belatedness is not only an "abstract" temporal marker that connotes a before and an after. It is a function of power that inscribes itself temporally. When anthropologists and literary critics drew on these same theoretical resources in the mid- to late 1970s to subject their disciplines to critique, these by now disenchanted militants had already left these

theories behind to home in on understanding the communal violence that was tearing the country apart.

In the wake of the Iranian Revolution, the politics of culture will come to occupy center stage, adding further complications to the multiple communal politics at work. Diasporic oppositional intellectuals had to increasingly face the problem of the politics of representation of Islam. This took the form of opposing increased racialization and discrimination where they lived, and an anti-imperialist, anti-interventionist stance against multiple strands of imperial liberalism, feminism, and so on. Whether on the internal front or the external one, the diasporic oppositional position could be articulated within a theoretico-political jargon of binary opposition: colonizer/colonized; empire/resistance, self/other; majority/minority; secular liberalism/Islam. Things were not nearly as clear-cut and easy in the Arab world. For instance, the aftermaths of the Iranian Revolution witnessed the formation of militant Islamist parties that confronted the anti-imperialist Left. By the late 1980s the Lebanese Left had lost its ideological, political, and military confrontations with the nascent Islamist groups. Militants and thinkers had to confront a host of political and military powers—foreign interventions, Arab regimes, militant Islamist political parties, and infranational communal forces—that could not fit neatly into the anti-imperialist binary matrix.

With every intra-Arab major event that will take place, starting with Lebanese civil war or even the Jordanian Black September until the Arab revolutions, without forgetting the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the pan-Arab political consensus around "Empire" as the main contradiction, which reached its zenith during Nasser's reign, will slowly erode. The Syrian revolution will reveal the moral and political bankruptcy of the Arab and international anti-imperialist discourse that denied its solidarity to Syrian revolutionaries from the beginning on the basis of a geopolitical support of a "progressive," "anti-imperialist," "secular" regime. All of these events, forces, and powers could hardly be squeezed within the binary matrix of diasporic intellectuals who have developed the *theoretical* critique of Empire at the time when leftist and secular nationalist *political* anti-imperialist forces were being sidelined by Israeli invasions, authoritarian regimes, communal forces, and militant Islamists who took from them the anti-imperialist mantle.

Even when oppositional diasporic intellectuals such as Said were critical of the authoritarianism of regimes and of communal infranational politics, these practices did not constitute for them an *event in theory* that steered them toward a conceptual investigation of the modalities of power at work. Their criticisms remained ideological ones that condemned the abuses of power and

corruption of authoritarian rule, or called for upholding values such as freedom of speech and human rights, but did not displace Empire as the main object of their political and theoretical cathexis.

In other words, this is a story of the dispersion and fragmentation of a generation of intellectuals, both at home and in the diaspora, who were brought together by, and became political allies and fellow travelers, of the Palestinian revolution in the late 1960s. The military defeat of 1967 snatched academics at home and in the diaspora, like Edward Said and Sadik al-Azm, from their professional lives and threw them into the political fray.[5] The meteoric rise of the Palestinian revolution, as the alternative revolutionary force in the wake of the defeat of the "progressive regimes," brought together the new political converts, as well as the militant intellectuals of Socialist Lebanon. It won't take much time before the two academics and the militant intellectual (Said, al-Azm, and Charara), who were united in the wake of 1967 by their solidarity with the Palestinian revolution, will go their separate political and theoretical ways. The relationship of al-Azm, a fellow traveler of the Palestinian New Left, with the revolution deteriorated after the events of Black September in 1970, during which it clashed with the Jordanian army. al-Azm wrote a book lambasting the failure of the Palestinian experience in Jordan.[6] It caused him several problems. He lost his job with the PLO's Research Center (Markaz al-Abhath al-Filastini) in Beirut, which he took part in founding, after Arafat considered him persona non grata, and he was forced to use a pseudonym whenever he published pieces in *Shu'un Filastiniyya* (Palestinian Affairs).[7] Very early on, Charara theorized the revolutionary potential of the Palestinian resistance, dubbing it the detonator of Lebanese contradictions in 1969, calling a few years later on the masses to fuse with it at the height of his Maoist phase of militancy (1973). In the wake of the civil and regional wars, he would grow increasingly distant from and severely critical of the military and political practices of the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon. Unlike al-Azm and Charara, whose critique of the Palestinian revolution pertained to its intra-Arab practices in Jordan and Lebanon, Said will resign from the Palestinian National Council much later (1991) in protest over the terms the PLO agreed to for going to the Madrid conference, before becoming a vocal critic of the Oslo accords (1993) and their legacies.

### *Fragmentation and Conversion of the Revolutionary Subject*

In the wake of the Lebanese civil and regional wars, the posited Arab revolutionary subject began its division into its infranational, regional, familial, and sectarian components. A couple of years later, the Iranian Revolution of 1979

and its regional aftershocks brought to a close the anticolonial age of national liberation inaugurated by the Egyptian Free Officers in 1952, nearly thirty years earlier. What took place in Iran proved that Islam, to the chagrin of a couple of generations of modernization theorists, could be an endogenous revolutionary force. Why go to Marx, a nineteenth-century European thinker, when you could politically mobilize the masses through their own autochthonous tradition? Moreover, a decade and a half after its rise, the Palestinian revolution was defeated in the wake of the brutal Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982).

These thirty years, from the Egyptian Revolution of July 1952 to the June 1982 invasion, would constitute the thick ideological interlude during which political questions, namely, anticolonial ones, were negotiated for the most part on a common discursive ground, which began its splintering by the late 1970s. It was this age of thick ideological politics that produced the demand for intellectual labor and theories to guide political practice toward achieving socialism, Arab unity, and national liberation, as well as arguments about the appropriate organizational forms this practice ought to take: Would it be a loose collective leadership? A Marxist-Leninist democratic centralism? Or a more a Maoist inspired mass line? The most appropriate modes of militant struggle were also debated: Should it be conventional warfare by the regular armies of the nation-states? Or should one adopt a national popular liberation war, and follow the foco theory of revolution? Whether they understood themselves as a Leninist vanguard, Gramscian organic intellectuals, or swimming like a fish in the masses' waters following Mao Tse-Tung's aphorism, the labors of militant intellectuals were predicated on the presence of the people, a universal subject and agent of emancipation. This fragmentation not only destroyed the societal and discursive ground from which their theories rose but also dispensed with the role of the progressive committed intellectual and the revolutionary militant intellectual: Where does he speak from? And to whom does he address himself after the fissuring of the masses—the revolutionary subject—into a multiplicity of regional, familial, sectarian, and religious loyalties?

From the 1980s onward, the stark secular/religious and modernity/authenticity binaries would come to replace the earlier multiplicity of ideological shades. The vigorous arguments in the 1960s and early 1970s on the most appropriate forms of socialism would soon be perceived as faint echoes of a vanished world. One can get a glimpse of these larger historical transformations in following the successive theoretical and political turns of Georges Tarabishi, the prolific Syrian thinker (1939–2016). Tarabishi, who started out as an Arab nationalist and a member of the Baʿth Party, later steered toward Sartre and Marxism, the title of his first book (1964).[8] Sartre's positions in the wake of the

June 1967 war, which did not express solidarity with the Arabs' cause, shocked the Sartrean Arab intelligentsia. "In a few days," Tarabishi recalls, "his [Sartre] aura crumbled."[9] With the beginning of the Lebanese civil and regional wars in 1975, Tarabishi took refuge in Freudian psychoanalysis: "He [Freud] helped me to stay alive intellectually and psychically, he was a protecting father against all this barbarian auto-destruction."[10] In the 1980s Tarabishi began reading and commenting on the Islamic tradition (turath), engaging in a "struggle against Islamism," and founding, in 2007, a decade before his death, the League of Arab Rationalists.[11] Dwelling in the ruins of the Left and having lost their revolutionary organizational moorings, some of these former revolutionaries would retreat to guard the Enlightenment's temple.

If militant intellectuals of the late 1960s attacked the Arab regimes and revolutionaries for not being radical enough, three decades later some would withdraw to a defense of liberal and democratic ideals. "Don't you agree with me that some old Marxists have taken off their cloaks and put on secularist and sometimes fundamentalist ones?" al-Azm was asked in 2007. "This is true," he replied, affirming that with the failure of socialist experiences, a majority of Marxists have "retreated to the second line of defense."[12] In a retrospective gesture, al-Azm tells his interviewer that his generation of Marxists thought they were defending "a more advanced set of values" than "human rights, social justice, democracy and the rotation of power," which were brought forth by the French Revolution and the "liberal revolution."[13] al-Azm then points out that a substantial number of Marxist intellectuals staged a defense of these values "in the face of a 'Medieval Talibani' march . . . we are now faced either by the emergency and martial laws [of the postcolonial regimes] or the Taliban model."[14] Unlike Charara's immanent sociological diagnostic critique, al-Azm's description of the political situation is an ideological lament mapped on a secular/religious Enlightenment grid. al-Azm sees in the retreat to liberalism—a historicism in reverse—an insurrectionary ideological language that calls for the defense of the "values" that are threatened by state authoritarianism and the forces of "medieval" religious forces. His diagnosis was not uncommon in the years preceding the Arab uprisings. Samir Kassir, who defined himself as a secular, westernized, Levantine Arab, wrote the following:

> If it is primarily a consequence of the democratic deficit, the rise of political Islam could not constitute an answer to the impasse of Arab states and societies. While it is a resistance to oppression, it [the rise] is also born from the failure of the modern state and the ideologies of progress

> and in this sense it has a resemblance to the rise of fascisms in Europe. Actually, the social conduct of Islamist movements reveals a number of analogies with fascist dictatorships once the religious veil that envelops them is uncovered.[15]

While al-Azm (1934–2016) and Kassir (1960–2005) belonged to two different generations, separated by a quarter of a century, these two intellectuals were bound by a common affiliation to a defeated leftist tradition and the vision of total emancipation it sustained.

Shifting the analytical gaze inward toward the culture of these societies, inaugurated as a minoritarian position in the wake of 1967 and propelled then by the ethical impulse to take responsibility for one's defeat, became more and more normalized, and at times acrimonious, among some disenchanted leftists. Some, such as the Tunisian ex-Marxist al-Afif al-Akhdar (1934–2013), welcomed foreign military operations during the US invasion of Iraq (2003) as the solution to the deadlock of "unenlightened religious culture" and authoritarian rule.[16] In 1965, three years after Algeria's independence, al-Akhdar took part in the meeting between Che Guevara and Abu Jihad at the Hotel Elité in Algiers.[17] Forty years separate the victory of the Algerians against French colonialism (1962) and the American occupation of Iraq (2003). Forty years also separate the meeting of Al-Akhdar with Guevara in Algiers from his celebration of the US missiles on, and the invasion of, Iraq. The harsh prose of this veteran of national liberation struggles, Marxist ideologue, and militant alongside the Palestinian resistance from 1962 until he left Beirut for Paris in the first years of the Lebanese civil war (1975–90) is not his alone.

Facing those disenchanted leftists who had elected the question of culture and modernity as "the main contradiction" were their ex-comrades who remained attached to the question of politics and empire as the central contradiction, critically aligning themselves at points, as fellow travelers, with nascent militant Islamist parties, such as Hizbullah and Hamas, who took on board the national question. The fracturing of the Marxist ground of total emancipation from colonialism and imperialism, economic exploitation, and tradition split the inheritors into those coalescing around the first leg of the tripod, focusing on geopolitical analysis (game of nations), the balance of powers, and imperial intervention (external causes), and those emphasizing culture, sectarianism, and religion as the internal impediments to progress (internal causes). In the splitting of the Marxist inheritance between culture and geopolitics, the socioeconomic question found no heirs. The calls of the very few who claimed it were muffled in a setting saturated by questions

of authenticity/modernity, authoritarian rule and civil wars, and relentless imperial interventions.

### *Reading* Orientalism *in the Wake of the Iranian Revolution*

If Said published "The Arab Portrayed" in the wake of the 1967 defeat with a focus on the Arabs, by 1981 he would put out *Covering Islam*, which tackled the image of Islam in the West, particularly in the US, and the different uses it is put to.[18] From 1979 onward, a string of events, including the Iranian Revolution, the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat (1981) in the wake of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt (1978), and the aftermaths of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979), will increasingly put "Islam" at the center of media, policy, and scholarly attention. Said noted in *Covering Islam* the "critical absence of expert opinion on Islam" (18), highlighting in the process the experts' failure to understand that "much of what truly mattered about postcolonial states could not be easily herded under the rubric of 'stability'" (22) and how the area programs that house modern scholars of Islam are "affiliated to the mechanism by which national policy is set" (19). Around the same time, "Islam," long the preserve of Orientalists, emerged as an object of anthropological inquiry. Talal Asad opens "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," an essay that realigned the coordinates of the field, by saying that "in recent years, there has been increasing interest in something called the anthropology of Islam. Publications by Western anthropologists containing the word 'Islam' or 'Muslim' in the title multiply at a remarkable rate. The political reasons for this great industry are perhaps too evident to deserve much comment."[19]

The 1980s inaugurated the battle for the representation of Islam that took place on several fronts: the academy, the media, and policy centers. Ayatollah Khomeini is the icon par excellence of this decade, which heralded the post–Cold War politics of culture. A few months before his death in 1989, Khomeini addressed both the Eastern and Western camps. On January 1, he sent a long letter to Mikhail Gorbachev, the general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, which he concluded by noting that "the Islamic Republic of Iran as the greatest and most powerful base of the Islamic world can easily fill the vacuum religious faith in your society."[20] A few weeks later, on February 14, 1989, he issued his famous death sentence against Salman Rushdie, which alongside the burning of *The Satanic Verses* in Bradford, England, a month earlier, increased the hostility toward Muslim immigrants and saw the proliferation of discourses about Muslim "fundamentalism," "violence," and "integration" into the "host" society.[21] By the end of the 1980s, the battle for the representation of Islam was

a no longer a matter of "how we see the rest of the world," as Said's subtitle to *Covering Islam* had it. It gradually became an integral part of internal politics in Europe and increasingly in the US after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

"Maybe the biggest catastrophe that befell Arabs is Marxism as a set of foreign templates," said Maroun Baghdadi (1950–93), the young and talented Lebanese movie director in February 1979, to his interviewer Hazem Saghieh (1951–), a journalist at the Beirut-based *al-Safir* daily. "Until now, Marxism did not manage to find a place for itself in the Arab world."[22] The Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), which was founded in 1924, had been around for more than half a century when Baghdadi underscored Marxism's exogenous status. Having said that, this statement was not really an affront to the longevity of the LCP. Its shock effect, so to speak, comes from the fact that it was asserted only a decade after the birth of the New Left by one of its members. Both intellectuals, Baghdadi the movie director, and Saghieh the journalist, were previously associated with the OCAL.

As a result of a historical contingency, Said's US-based critique of Marx and contemporary Third World radicals was contemporaneous with the rise of the question of culture, one symptom of which was a wave of conversion of Marxist militants into supporters of political Islam in the wake of the Iranian Revolution. This conversion was particularly prominent among Lebanese and Palestinian Maoist militants and intellectuals, for whom swimming in the waters of the masses entailed this time around an exit from Marxism into the authenticity of the masses' creed. Roger Assaf, the prominent Lebanese theater director, who did his Maoist établissement in the Palestinian camps in the 1970s, was one of the converts. Assaf told his interviewer: "The passage to Islam was a putting into practice of Maoist principles. I went into Islam, like others go to the factory. But here in Lebanon, no one goes to the factory. There are no factories, or so few of them."[23] Nicolas Dot-Pouillard draws our attention to the fact that "the intellectuals of Fatah's Student Brigade began integrating a non-Marxist intellectual corpus: Ali Shariati, and particularly Ibn Khaldoun" before the Iranian Revolution.[24] I quote at length from Dot-Pouillard's interview with Nazir Jahel, a member of the brigades, who taught at the Lebanese University:

> For us, what did Maoism and the passage to Islamism entail: it was reading our history, in order to transform it; reading our culture, our history, through apparatuses and conceptual tools that we could fashion ourselves through a return to traditions (turath), to history, to Islamic thought. We read Mao, Lenin, Gramsci, all the Marxists, but we also began reading Ibn Khaldun. . . . We reinvented a vocabulary with *Ghalaba*

[predominance], *'Assabiyya, Mumana'a* (resistance, refusal), Hadara (civilization). . . . All of this led us bit by bit to Khomeini, to Islam. Because Khomeini constituted an effective mass discourse, a popular discourse that articulated the intellectual dimension with the popular aspect.[25]

The conversion from Marxism into a Khomeinist militant Islam via Maoism's vector retained its Third Worldist anti-imperialism, but rearticulated it through Arab-Islamic conceptual tools. The conversion was both a personal and theoretical act of cultural decolonization as well as a political alignment with the Islamic masses, under the leadership of Khomeini, as the new revolutionary subject.

Souheil al-Kache, another member of the brigades who was swept by the tidal waves of the Iranian Revolution, criticized modernist Arab thinkers for reproducing the classifications of Orientalists, while underlining how for Islamists these two groups share the same theoretical framework and are associated with foreign political, ideological, and cultural interests.[26] In opposition to the sapping of Islam by colonialism and its internal agents, the Islamist discourse asserts, according to al-Kache, the continuity of the Arab and Islamic Self throughout history, refusing the narrative of its defeat by the West. This emphasis on the historical continuity of the self enables a politics of cohesion in the face of the central issue: "that of foreign domination, particularly on the cultural level."[27] The discourse of the Islamic Awakening, al-Kache argues, constitutes the resolution of the West's cultural domination since it affirms the Muslim Self, as a discourse of the master that escapes the resentment of the dominated. This discourse, he writes, stands for the end of the contradiction with "Orientalism and its shadow, the modernist Arab intellectual." Its fundamental concern in its hostility to Orientalism, he adds, is a political one, but it also leaves its marks on the methods and hermeneutics of Arab political thought. In advocating an affirmation of Muslim identity as a voluntary action, the "Muslim Self" is resuscitated "while ignoring the Other (the West). This Other then sees the universalism of its culture contested. Al-Khomeini is the best illustration of this discourse."[28] The revolutionary fervor of some of the converts to and fellow travelers of militant Khomeinist political Islam will subside in the wake of the Iran-Iraq War, and Khomeini's "quasi-total elimination of the Marxist Left and the Islamo-Marxist one in Iran."[29]

Marxists like al-Azm, who did not exit the tradition like Charara and Beydoun, or were not swayed by the Iranian Revolution, will increasingly become on the defensive. "Former radicals, ex-communists, unorthodox Marxists, and disillusioned nationalists" have come to form, in the wake of the Iranian

Revolution, "a revisionist Arab line of political thought," wrote al-Azm in his review of *Orientalism*.[30] "'Their central thesis may be summarized as follows: 'The national salvation so eagerly sought by the Arabs since the Napoleonic occupation of Egypt is to be found neither in secular nationalism (be it radical, conservative, or liberal) nor in revolutionary communism, socialism or what have you, but in a return to the authenticity of what they call 'popular political Islam'" (234). The set of conditions that confronted *Orientalism*'s eastern travels couldn't have been more fraught. At a time when Marxists were being politically and ideologically attacked from their eastern flank, so to speak, came an additional theoretical blow, this time, though, from New York. In his afterword to *Orientalism*, written in 1994, Said wrote the following on the reception of his book in the Arab world:

> Moreover, the actuality I described in the book's last pages, of one powerful discursive system maintaining hegemony over another, was intended as the opening salvo in a debate that might stir Arab readers and critics to engage more determinedly with the system of Orientalism. I was either upbraided for not having paid closer attention to Marx—the passages on Marx's own Orientalism in my book were the most singled out by dogmatic critics in the Arab world and India, for instance—whose system of thought was claimed to have risen above his obvious prejudices, or I was criticized for not appreciating the great achievements of Orientalism, the West, etc. As with the defenses of Islam, recourse to Marxism or the "West" as a coherent total system seems to me to have been a case of using one orthodoxy to shoot down another.[31]

Indeed, al-Azm and Mahdi 'Amil spent a lot of intellectual energy on these few pages of Said's book, strenuously attempting to extricate the moor (Marx) from the charge of Orientalism. Marx's views on British rule in India in Said's work were put to work to reveal how a non-Orientalist's writings on Asia first reveal his "humanity" and "fellow feeling" for the suffering inflicted by colonialism to be shortly hijacked thereafter by Orientalist discourses when Marx posits that the British destroyer is also the creator of a new modern society. "The idea of regenerating a fundamentally lifeless Asia," wrote Said, "is a piece of pure Romantic Orientalism." Marx's humanity has succumbed in Said's reading to the "unshakable definitions built up by Orientalist science."[32] al-Azm's tone in his defense of Marx is harsh:

> I think that this account of Marx's views and analyses of highly complex historical processes and situations is a travesty. . . . Marx's manner of

> analyzing British rule in India in terms of an unconscious tool of history—which is making possible a real social revolution by destroying the old India and laying the foundations of a new order—cannot be ascribed under any circumstances to the usurpation of Marx's mind by conventional Orientalistic verbiage. Marx's explanation (regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with it) testifies to his theoretical consistency in general. . . . Like the European capitalist class, British rule in India was its own grave digger. There is nothing particularly "Orientalistic" about this explanation. Furthermore, Marx's call for revolution in Asia is more historically realistic and promising than any noble sentiments that he could have lavished on necessarily vanishing socioeconomic formations. (226–27)

al-Azm's strategy of defense lay in reinscribing Marx's views on Asia within his overall progressive historicist framework, undoing in the process any essentialization of East and West as a product of Orientalism's "ahistorical bourgeois bent of mind" (228). Marx, wrote al-Azm, "like anyone else, knew of the superiority of modern Europe over the Orient. But to accuse a radically historicist thinker such as Marx of turning this contingent fact into a necessary reality for all time is simply absurd" (228).

Said was most probably referring to al-Azm and Aijaz Ahmad, and maybe others, regarding the defense of Marx.[33] He may have not been mistaken in pointing out the dogmatic character of some of their defenses. Nevertheless, their harsh responses, al-Azm's at least, are not adequately and fully captured by just dubbing them dogmatic critics defending their guru and guarding the orthodoxy. They may be doing so, but what Said's reading overlooks is the character of the intervention Marx performed for these militant intellectuals in their respective fields, and how an epistemological critique of Marx's Orientalist discourses came hand in hand with, and could possibly be mobilized in, the intellectual and political battles they were fighting in the difficult conjuncture of the late 1970s and early 1980s. At a point when Marxism was attacked by the purveyors of authenticity for its foreignness, Said's critique, which repositioned Marx from the thinker of emancipation to one who is discursively complicit with Orientalists, could, to say the least, not be warmly received by cornered Arab Marxists. The discursive ground, on which ideological differences were organized, was being called into question simultaneously by the political heralds of authenticity calling for nativist solutions and the theoretical critics of Eurocentric epistemology.

Said, who never tired of calling for secular criticism and of drawing attention to the domestication of radical theories, and whose hypersensitivity to

closed systems and dogmas needs no further exploration, was as far as possible from nativists of all ilk in the East as well as poststructuralist pieties in the North American academy.[34] He, in fact, had much more in common with Marxists, such as al-Azm and ʿAmil, than the fraught reception of *Orientalism* reveals. To say the least, they were in agreement on the question of secularism and religious politics. Here, however, I am less concerned with pointing to convergences and divergences than in fleshing out how political and theoretical developments led to the emergence of a fork in critical agendas between thinkers at home, who were attached to an emancipatory theory of politics under attack, and diasporic oppositional intellectuals in the metropole, who inverted those terms to focus on the politics of revolutionary theory and its entanglement with power. What I am after is an examination of the different analytical and political effects produced by traveling theories hopping from Paris to New York to eventually land in Beirut.

In the years following the Israeli invasion (1982), Mahdi ʿAmil (1936–87) wrote a hundred-page-plus polemic against Said's book entitled *Does the Heart Belong to the Orient and the Mind to the West? Marx in Edward Said's Orientalism* (1985).[35] Hassan Hamdan, who was academically trained as a philosopher in France and wrote under the pseudonym of Mahdi ʿAmil (the Laboring Mahdi), was, and still is, regarded as the most prominent theoretician of the Lebanese Communist Party. ʿAmil, who had joined the party in 1960, was later elected to its central committee in 1987, the year of his tragic assassination. ʿAmil's ambitious theoretical project ran counter to al-Azm's Marxist historicism. He had "meshed Althusserian influences with conceptualizations of the periphery inspired from dependency theory" in an effort to break away from historicist readings of Marx through his theoretical development of the characteristics of a colonial mode of production.[36] ʿAmil's conceptual labors were as far as possible from epistemological naïveté. He sums up the overall argument of his *Theoretical Prolegomena* in the introduction to the third edition of the two volumes (1980) as an attempt to produce a "scientific knowledge of the mechanism of capitalism's colonial development in Arab societies" and of the national liberation movement, which is the peculiar form class struggle takes in this case, as well as "the tools of production of this knowledge."[37] Reflexivity was at the heart of ʿAmil's project, which sought to produce a theory that thinks the conditions of possibility of its own conceptual building blocks as it is thinking its object. ʿAmil's lengthy and at points repetitive Marxist critique of *Orientalism* begins by pointing to Said's idealist move, which affiliates Orientalism to Western thought in general rather than rooting it in the particularity of its historical class character. The title of the first chapter says it all: "The

Nation's Thought or That of the Dominant Class?" 'Amil's defense of Marx, in a similar vein to al-Azm's, is keen on shifting the terms of the debate from Said's categories of Orientalist Western thought to those of bourgeois thought. The exclusion of the historical class character of this body of knowledge, in 'Amil's reading, "banishes the possibility of existence of its opposite, which gives it a totalitarian aspect by which it occupies the whole cultural space."[38] In doing so, he seeks to steer back the conversation from one that rests on common discursive formation of European knowledges to one grounded in opposed ideologies.

More importantly for our purposes, 'Amil points to how *Orientalism*'s critique of Marx and contemporary Marxists is in line with the positions of his nativist political opponents in the Arab world. "The main ideological weapon used by counterrevolutionary forces in their counterattack on the advanced positions they began to occupy in the strategic historical horizon," wrote 'Amil in his characteristic tortuous theoretical prose, "is to portray this thought [Marxism] on the basis of the Self/Other binary, or that of East and West. As if it [Marxism] is bourgeois imperialist thought, since it is, like its class antithesis, Western thought."[39] Again, Said, of course, would have protested, as he did later on, that he didn't hold nativist views, of the Western thought is only valid for the West and Eastern thought for the East, but what I am after is less Said's retrospective views and more the political and theoretical stakes animating the problem-space into which *Orientalism* landed at a particular time and place. Not any time and place, for that matter, but the place to which its author is intimately related, and a time when he was becoming more and more immersed in public political and intellectual interventions.

Nearly five years after al-Azm's observation on the resurgence of a politics of authenticity, 'Amil criticizes Said in the wake of the progress of what he dubbed the "counterrevolutionary forces." On May 18, 1987, during one of the bleak episodes of the Lebanese civil wars, 'Amil was shot dead on the street. Like Husayn Muruwwa, who was assassinated on February 17, 1987, it is widely believed that 'Amil too was shot by Shi'i Islamist militants. Under the biographical details corner of the book's third edition (2006), published by the LCP's printing house, the publisher wrote that 'Amil was assassinated for "his commitment to the struggle for a unified, secular and democratic Lebanon." "He was called," the blurb continues, "the Arabs' Gramsci, since he was the only one in the Arab world who tried to construct a comprehensive scientific theory of the Arab revolution, and perhaps, of the revolution of underdeveloped countries, more generally."

In the wake of *Orientalism*, Marxists and liberals in the Arab world continue to be critically targeted by the rise of postcolonial studies in the North American

metropoles, which would collapse the question of the political into its epistemology critique. What these quarreling critics shared, and what constituted the condition of possibility of a postcolonial critique, was an attachment to, and an interpretation of, a body of theory drawn primarily from the corpus of European thinkers. Their difference was located in how they both conjugated the relationship of theory to politics. If the age of national liberation (1952–82) was characterized by a high demand on theory as a guide for political practice, as the biographical blurb on the back of ʿAmil's book tells us, the eclipse of the revolutionary subject and the rise of postcolonial studies would inaugurate the age of the politics of theory. It is not because they are dogmatic critics, although some may well be, that these thinkers singled out the passages on Marx in *Orientalism*; it is rather because, as Said would surely agree, traveling theories disable certain critical paths and open up new ones, stifling political projects while potentially boosting others, despite the best intentions of the secular critic.

Ending the story of *Orientalism*'s Marxist reception at this point will only reveal a set of resistances to the text. There is more to its travels than that. In the second section of his review of *Orientalism*, al-Azm productively and strategically puts Said's insights to use to debunk the claims of Arab nationalists and of, mostly ex-Marxist, "Islamanic" intellectuals who had fallen under the spell of the Iranian Revolution. In this section, which is expanded from the five pages of the text's initial English version to twenty-six pages in the later Arabic iteration, al-Azm mobilized Said as an ally to counter antihistorical and nativist anti-Western pronouncements of Arab intellectuals.[40] "One of the most prominent and interesting accomplishments of Said's book," he wrote, is its critique of

> Orientalism's persistent belief that there exists a radical ontological difference between the natures of the Orient and the Occident. . . . This ontological difference entails immediately an epistemological one which holds that the sort of conceptual instruments, scientific categories, sociological concepts, political descriptions and ideological distinctions employed to understand and deal with Western societies remain, in principle, irrelevant and inapplicable to Eastern ones. . . . This ahistorical, antihuman, and even antihistorical "Orientalist" doctrine I shall call *Ontological Orientalism*. . . . This image has left its profound imprint on the Orient's modern and contemporary consciousness of itself. Hence Said's important warning against the dangers and temptations of applying the readily available structures, styles, and ontological biases of Orientalism upon themselves and upon others.[41]

al-Azm's *Ontological Orientalism* shares with Said the analytical and political worry of always pointing to the "Oriental" exception, eliding history, politics, and economics altogether to reproduce tautologies such as "Islam is Islam, the Orient is the Orient."[42] Said and al-Azm worried about the elision of historical transformations, which mask the contemporaneity of social dynamics, of the vast social, political, and economic shifts that did and still work on and in the area. Said's concern to get rid of Arab exceptionalism and to put Arabs back in history was applauded in *Ontological Orientalism* by al-Azm, who sought to uncover the claims of those who have fallen "in the temptations against which Said has warned," engendering "what may be called *Orientalism in Reverse*" (231).

al-Azm's reading of Said's work as fundamentally an antiessentialist critique enabled him to use it to counter Arab nationalist Ba'thist thinkers who "proposed to study 'basic' words in the Arabic language as a means to attaining 'genuine knowledge' of some of the essential characteristics of the primordial 'Arab mentality' underlying those very words" (231). It also enabled him to take a stab at the post–Iranian Revolution revisionists, such as the famous Syrian poet Adonis who, in the wake of 1967, like al-Azm, professed culturalist critiques of Arab backwardness. Adonis wrote after the Iranian Revolution that the "Western essence is 'technologism and not orginality'" and that "'the peculiarity of the Orient' 'lies in originality' and this is why its nature cannot be captured except through 'the prophetic, the visionary, the magical, the miraculous, the infinite, the inner, the beyond, the fanciful, the ecstatic', etc." (236). al-Azm concluded his review by alluding to recent debates on whether the "Islamic Republic" can be qualified as democratic, citing "the conservative 'Orientalistic' logic" of the prevailing argument that "Islam cannot accept any additional qualifiers since it cannot be but Islam" (236). As Ayatollah Khomeini, quoted by al-Azm in the last sentences of his review, put it, "the term *Islam* is perfect, and having to put another word right next to it is, indeed, a source of sorrow" (237).

Orientalism in reverse put the accent on the unmasking of essentialist assumptions in Arab thought and Islamic thought that point toward its self-sufficiency and its implicit and sometimes explicit superiority to its Western counterpart. al-Azm mobilized Said to shift the lens of critique from imperial discourses on the "Orientals" to the latter's own knowledge of themselves. These Arab thinkers share the same essentializing traits and methods of Orientalist scholars while reversing the normative value judgment to the benefit of the Orient, which comes out triumphant in its face-off with its materialist, decadent Western counterpart. *Orientalism in Reverse* is then not the self-

Orientalizing that Said warns against, and that al-Azm, with his critique of the backwardness of Arab society, can easily fall into, and is not merely Occidentalism, which is the reification of the West.

al-Azm's resistance to *Orientalism*'s treatment of Marxism, as well as his productive use of some its insights, are, of course, part and parcel of the same response to the newly emerging political conjuncture. On the one hand he was attempting to leave a breathing space for his historicist Marxist critique (of "backwardness," "religious obscurantist thought," and "tradition") by disentangling Marx from Orientalism, and implicitly himself from the charge of self-Orientalization—one that could too easily be used against him by the postrevolutionary currents. On the other hand, he uncoupled Said's epistemological and ontological critique from the West's will to dominate and reversed the terms to undo the antihistorical and self-congratulatory currents in Arabic thought of both the earlier nationalist and more recent Iranophile strands. *Orientalism in Reverse*, by inverting the terms of Said's work, from a criticism of the West's knowledge of the non-West to the internal criticism of the then current politics of authenticity in the Arab world, reveals clearly the emerging fork in critical agendas—that will solidify subsequently—between al-Azm and Said, whose births as public committed intellectuals we owe to the 1967 defeat and who were brought together personally and politically by their engagement alongside the Palestinian revolution in the late 1960s.

### *Coda: Culture and Imperialism*

There are more interesting critical readings of Said's work that are not theoretical attempts to salvage Marx or Enlightenment thought from the charge of Orientalism, or to show how his binary divisions between East and West reinscribe in practice a certain nationalist logic. These readings underscored how Said's binaries, which focus on imperialism and the resistances to it, do not take into account the different modalities of power at work in colonized and postcolonial societies.[43] In the last pages of *Orientalism*'s introduction, under the subheading "The Personal Dimension," Said borrows Gramsci's words about the importance of "knowing oneself" through compiling an inventory of the historical processes that have deposited an infinity of traces on the self as a starting point for a critical elaboration. *Orientalism*, Said then notes, is an attempt to "inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals."[44] This practice of self-knowledge, like Freudian psychoanalysis, has an emancipatory aspect. The critical

awareness of colonialism's constitutive traces is a first step toward neutralizing their grip on the self.

Said's pathbreaking work, and this is not unrelated to its appeal, is a theoretical work with a therapeutic edge. By diving into the multiple sedimented layers of the inexhaustible Orientalist archive, while making a strong case for its repetition in the present, and rendering visible the patterns of its entanglements with power, Said's text contributes to undoing their hold not only over disciplines but also on colonial and postcolonial subjects. Postcolonial theory has a therapeutic dimension, particularly for diasporic subjects who experience everyday and institutional racism in their metropolitan homes. Said's theoretical practice, like psychoanalysis again, is not a normative one. The Lebanese and Palestinian Maoists who converted to Islamist politics in the wake of the Iranian Revolution—and for some, such as Roger Assaf and Munir Shafiq, who were born into Christian families, this entailed a religious conversion—were also critical of the cultural domination of the West. Their critique of the multifaceted dimensions of imperialism entailed a personal and political conversion that inscribed them in a nativist ideological universe.

Both Said and the Maoist converts to Islamism retain Western imperialism at the heart of their attachments. Said fought it through acts of theoretical deconstruction of its hegemony and a political alignment with the Palestinian national liberation movement. He held the tension alive between his critical theoretical practices and his national liberation politics. The Maoists, on the other hand, underwent a process of conversion to militant Islam that came to form the unified ideological and political, and at times personal, ground of their anti-imperialism.

al-Azm and ʿAmil retained Marxism at the heart of their attachments. They attempted to salvage it from Said's critique and its association by Islamists with Western Orientalism and forms of cultural domination. They tried hard, in desperate political times, via different theoretical strategies to defend Marxism's promise of universal emancipation. They clashed with Said theoretically and Islamists politically. ʿAmil was assassinated by Islamist militants. al-Azm retreated in subsequent years to a defense of Enlightenment values, holding very critical views of Islamist politics. In the last years of his life, he supported the Syrian revolution against the brutal Assad regime, steering away from his earlier hardline critiques of religious politics.

In the wake of his very early disenchantment with revolutionary politics, Charara turned into a harsh critic of leftist and anti-imperialist politics. This was compounded by his observation of how these emancipatory discourses

were put to use by political parties, national liberation movements, and regimes to strengthen their hold on power and silence their opponents. His early observation on the difficulty of establishing hegemony in a country divided by multiple communal solidarities put him at odds with Said's views on two main points. The first was Said's emphasis on the strength and effectivity of the webs of imperial power-knowledge discourses. The second was Said's theoretical silence on the multiple modalities of power and rule at work in these societies that are not part of the matrix of Empire. Charara called into question very early on the poverty of the categories of Western social theory to account for non-Western forms of power. Unlike the Maoists, whose nativist *ideological* concerns led them to fashion a political vocabulary from the resources of the Arab-Islamic tradition, Charara turned to some of the same resources, but for heuristic and *theoretical* reasons. His turn to Ibn Khaldun was coupled with an implicit normative horizon that saw in the logic of the state—which he didn't articulate—and more broadly in the logic of the autonomous functioning of institutions an antidote to the pervasive logic of subjugation. Unlike al-Azm, his immanent critique of the societies was never articulated in the reified stock phrases of modernist intellectuals that posit "religion" and "culture" as a problem and the Enlightenment or "democracy" as the panacea.

I illustrate some of these points, and bring this chapter to a close, with Ahmad Beydoun's generous review of Said's *Culture and Imperialism*.[45] After lauding the comprehensiveness of the work, and some of its brilliant readings, Beydoun notes that Said's defensive position, especially that he lives in the West, is very precise in its diagnosis of the different manifestations of Western racism.[46] Having said that, Said's work, Beydoun continues, is less precise when it comes to looking into, and analyzing, the suffering the dominated underwent at the hands of their rulers and fellows. Not taking the modalities of power at work in these societies and their cultures, alongside imperial ones, Beydoun writes, leads to "theoretical disasters in understanding historical catastrophes. This is the case in [Said's] dubbing Saddam Hussein no more than an 'appalling figure.'"[47] Beydoun's critique shows the limits of Said's binary matrix—colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed, imperialism/resistance—to diagnostically apprehend the complexities and catastrophes of postcolonial Arab history. Beydoun notes how the theoretical emphasis on showing how Orientalists invent their Other, to assert the superiority of their own self-image, is an easy inversion of the racist position that locks the colonized in ahistorical essences. Difference in a larger scale is neither an ahistorical essence nor an invention of colonizers. He

finds theoretically wanting the confinement of the critique of power to imperialism. Toward the end of his review, Beydoun remarks that the vital question is whether there is a possibility for a critique of the practices of the colonized and the oppressed that finds its sources in their own culture—and not in the acts of imperialists—that both escapes essentialization and would not be dubbed an act of racism or self-racism.

# EPILOGUE

There is no theory of subversion that cannot also serve the cause of oppression.
—JACQUES RANÇIÈRE

What gets from the territory onto the map?
—GREGORY BATESON

## *Authority of Theory*

Attempts to think the relationship of theory to the world have suffered from a priori fetishization of its political performative powers. This hegemonic image of theory's a priori powers in, and on, the world is shared by critics who occupy divergent ideological positions: anxious reactionaries who fret about the decline of the West, epistemology critics who think that the discourses of Arab intellectuals make them complicit with, or vectors of, imperial epistemological and ontological violence, and those calling for abandoning critical theory after it became a weapon in the hands of conspiracy theorists and climate-change deniers. Bruno Latour, for instance, paints a picture of a world, a West to be more accurate, turned upside down, a world where danger no longer comes from ideology posturing as fact, but "from an excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact disguised as bad ideological biases!"[1] The conspiracy theorists may be deforming the critics' arguments, but Latour, drawing on a military analogy, notes that they are appropriating "our weapons."[2] The weapons have moved into the hands of the wrong party and are now aimed at wrong targets. It is time to stop manufacturing them.

Constructionist skepticism, after all, was not initially devised by critical social scientists to undo reifications and essentialized and naturalized accounts, and later on moved into the world. Syrian Baʿthist ideologues and officials refused to recognize Lebanon's sovereignty by marshaling constructionist arguments. Lebanon's borders, they claimed, were artificially designed by imperial powers, which carved it out of greater Syria. The Baʿth condensed its constructionism into two mantras repeated ad nauseam: "One people in two

countries" and "Unity of path and destiny." The Iraqi Baʿth marshaled similar constructionist arguments to prepare and legitimize its invasion of Kuwait. Constructionist skepticism is one of the oldest tricks in the book of Arab nationalists, which, rest assured, they did not appropriate from Bourdieu's critical sociology. Needless to assert, there was nothing emancipatory in the Baʿthist breed of skepticism. It was not, in essence, an antiessentialist move against the fabulations and invented traditions of Lebanese and Kuwaiti nationalist ideologues. It was an ideological tool of political power that was marshaled by much larger and powerful countries (Syria and Iraq) to call into question the right to sovereignty of their much smaller neighbors (Lebanon and Kuwait).

Latour's calls, and those of the epistemological critics of Arab intellectuals, are not entirely new. They share similar structural features, and anxieties, with earlier debates about relativism, which an older generation of critics like Allan Bloom dubbed a disease carried by philosophy that has infected politics.[3] "The practical efficacy attributed to academic philosophy and social science—both to destroy and save its object of analysis—quite belies its actual power and role," John Gunnell writes.[4] Holding critical theory's corrosive skepticism responsible for the increasingly precarious and friable world we inhabit, whether it is done from the Left or the Right, partakes of the same short-circuiting of thinking the relationship of theoretical discourses with the world that forgoes an investigation of the former's authority in its zones of deployment and intervention.

Doing fieldwork in theory calls into question the assumptions of scholars, who simultaneously give too much and too little practical efficacy to theory. They give it too much by attributing radical transformations in the world—whether it is the breakdown of a common world or the ontological violence that threatens life forms—to its own internal workings and discursive assumptions. And they give it too little, because they do not investigate how, in particular conjunctures, theory may be appropriated, transfigured, and embedded in various political projects, endowing it with ideological force and authorizing practices. Granting critical theory both too much and too little are the result of adhering to a metaphysical image of theory that assumes that the practical effects it will produce in the world are contained a priori in its epistemology. Theory, then, is cast in either the heroic role of saving the world or the bad one of destroying it. I hope I am not understood as calling for abandoning the reading practices of epistemological critics altogether and for reverting back to a celebration of universals such as human rights as the harbingers of emancipation. This would be to revert to the same metaphysical thinking that mistakes theoretical questions that are contested

politically for philosophical ones that can be settled a priori once and for all by a "better theory."[5]

### *Difference in Theory*

Earlier generations of Orientalists and anthropologists, who mapped Christianity and Judaism onto the West and Islam onto the Middle East, elided, as a consequence, the discussion of Judaism and Christianity in the region.[6] They saw Sephardic Judaism and Eastern Christianity as being in the area but not of it, their histories being tied to European history. Today, the plurality of intra-Arab and intra-Islamic religious, ethnic, and communal differences remain invisible and cannot constitute the matter of theoretical reflection for a binary grid that sifts people through a mesh that separates the westernized native from the nonwesternized one and the secular-liberal Muslim from the pious one. What counts as difference and what does not? Whose lives, discourses, and practices are interesting and subject to the minutiae of anthropological understanding and translation? And who is incorporated into (by Orientalists), or criticized for being an agent of (by epistemological critics), the West?

The overdetermination of critical scholarly works on the Middle East by the injunction of speaking back to hegemonic Western discourses is clearly revealed in the different theoretical engagements with the question of difference. Roughly speaking, there is a form of difference—Islam—that one seeks to understand, via ethnographic close-ups and a deep engagement with the complexities of that tradition, and understandably so, in Islamophobic times, when Muslims are increasingly targeted and racialized.[7] And then there is that other form of difference—community, mostly sectarian, but also ethnic, regional, or kinship based—that one seeks to deconstruct and explain away by zooming out to shed light on the structural forces (imperialism, capitalism, modern states) that construct it. In the first case, the discourse of the critical scholar is close to the discourse of the subjects of study. In the second, it takes its distances.[8]

Both of these contrasting theoretical treatments of difference highlight the modernity of the phenomena they are investigating. One form that imperial discourses of power take is asserting that one cannot be a practicing Muslim and a modern subject, that the process of reaching the much coveted shores of modernity necessitates jumping ship and converting out of Islam into secularism.[9] Critical scholarly works counter these discourses of power by contending that one can be both a Muslim and modern. Alternatively, they show how the Islamic tradition is inside-outside modernity, by making a case for how

Muslims have been conscripted by the powers of Western civilization, to draw on Talal Asad's felicitous phrase, without eradicating difference.[10] Another form that discourses of power take is asserting that conflicts in the Arab and Muslim worlds are fueled by atavistic religious, ethnic, and sectarian hatred that are as far as possible from a modern world that overcame its wars of religion centuries ago. Against these discourses, oppositional scholarship highlights the modernity of communal solidarities, but this time around not to highlight that a subject can be both attached to his community and modern since this literature rarely bestows its ethnographic, charitable understanding on those subjects. It is worth quoting at length Lara Deeb's courageous reflexive consideration of how writing in, and for, a US audience on the Middle East impacts the objects of study, the scale of analysis, and the methods and theories at work. "For the most part," Deeb writes,

> this critical scholarship addresses sectarianism in its political, institutional, or legal registers rather than in the social or interpersonal realms. Why is there so little attention to the latter? Perhaps, as scholars of the region, we hope that we can move beyond the category by demonstrating that sectarianism is socially and historically constructed and maintained through institutional and political-economic processes. Perhaps acknowledging that people care about sect feels a bit like airing a family secret, or venturing into the messiness of discrimination and prejudice that we wish didn't exist, or a betrayal of activist efforts that we support. Perhaps we fear that writing about how sect matters at an interpersonal or affective level will contribute to those seemingly intransigent assumptions that sectarianism is unchanging or primordial. But much as we want to escape or deny it, the fact remains that *sect matters* to a lot of people in their daily lives, not only in relation to politics, networks, legal status, or the material realm but in their interpersonal interactions.[11]

Deeb's rich panoply of possible explanations for the neglect of work on sectarian subjects are instances of psychic disavowal, which operates according to the formula: "I know very well, but still . . ."[12] I know very well that sectarianism matters, but still I can't write about it because it is a thorny issue and I want to wish it away, or I am afraid that in doing so I will be betraying my own politics. More importantly, the disavowal of sectarian matters is related to the fear of consolidating an already impressive archive of Orientalist discourses, and the anxiety generated by the potential of having one's critical work *appropriated* by imperial policies that lean on such discourses in setting

out their agendas. These anxieties about consolidation and appropriation of scholarly discourses produced and circulated in imperial centers about a major area of Western military intervention result in what Deeb called "representational paralysis."[13] The critical metropolitan scholar of the Middle East is split and endowed with a form of double consciousness, which can be mapped onto the binary spatial-temporal structure of fieldwork and writing. He knows, for instance, from his own everyday encounters during fieldwork that sectarianism matters. And he also knows very well that writing about these issues in English for a Euro-American audience is a potential minefield. Double consciousness results in a disavowal that itself results in representational paralysis or theoretical diversion.

This same double consciousness, conjured by the justifiable anxieties of consolidation and appropriation, and which results in disavowal when it comes to one's work, is also responsible for the drive to censor, which takes the form of critique, the discourses of those intellectuals, militants, and artists in the Arab world who steer away from the critique of empire to address those same issues of authoritarianism, sectarianism, and gender inequality.[14] If the Muslim subjects and discourses are understood, sectarian ones are disavowed, and the liberal/leftist/feminist/queer/secular varieties are subject to criticism or critique. In this theoretical economy of handling difference, those who are seen to bear the least coefficient of difference do not get understood or redeemed as modern, or deconstructed as modern, but get hailed as accomplices of Empire. In splitting these subjects into two—"westernized natives," "liberal Muslims"—they conjure back into being specters of "culture" that are used to adjudicate on the representative nature, and therefore the validity and political import, of these discourses.[15]

If we shift our attention for a minute from geopolitical notions of Empire and the idealist predication of the subject as consciousness to the materialist predication of the subject as labor power, we get a very different picture of how what is constituted as difference relates to power.[16] Julia Elyachar's brilliant ethnography *Markets of Dispossession* shows how, by the late twentieth century, international organizations, the Egyptian state, and nongovernmental organizations attempted to produce new economic value by transforming the social networks and culture of Cairo craftsmen into value.[17] Nineteenth-century British colonial rulers such as Lord Cromer, twentieth-century modernizers, and historians of labor, Elyachar argues, put the indigenous cultural practices on the side of tradition, backwardness, and impediments to progress and development. Culture, which was thought to be an obstacle to modernity, was later incorporated into the market as a new source of economic value.[18]

## *Coda*

For as long as I can remember, I have witnessed intellectuals and critical theorists slide from critique to loss and melancholia after having witnessed a political defeat or experienced a regression in the state of affairs of the world. Some Arab Marxists criticized liberalism, or thought that they had transcended it, as the revolution was just an arm's length away, before they suffered a string of defeats. In their wake, they rediscovered the works of nineteenth-century Arab liberals and mourned the margins of freedom that the prenationalist regimes enabled. Pierre Bourdieu spent a good deal of time as he was chiseling out his theoretical cathedral from the body of classical social theory, critically analyzing how the institutions of the welfare state reproduce social inequalities, before emerging from his theoretical workshop into the world of politics and strikes to staunchly defend those same institutions. Wendy Brown eloquently issued an appeal to resist left melancholy in the late 1990s before ringing the alarm about neoliberalism's hollowing out of liberal democracy a couple of years ago.[19] I can go on and on about critics of liberal multiculturalism mourning its loss, or potential loss, as chauvinist nationalism cast its ominous shadow over large parts of capitalist liberal democracies. What is common to these theoretical moves is a retreat to a second line of defense, in the wake of political setbacks, not theoretical critiques. This retreat seeks to defend what one took for granted and criticized earlier for its enmeshment in grids of power—domination, exploitation, exclusion, you name it. They index a regression in practice from the promises of a dignified life and equality, as well as a radical tightening, and fencing off, of the boundaries of political communities.

This retreat is in tension with the positions of some of these same thinkers—Bourdieu and Brown—against the collapse of the space of intellectual inquiry to that of political engagement and for preserving the autonomy of thought and the unexpected paths it may lead one toward.[20] This call is a generous and sensible one. I am also mindful that this call to separate thought from politics has certain political, economic, and institutional conditions, mainly that it is much more amenable to be achieved in liberal capitalist societies—for now at least—that have more stable political governance (not as prone to coups, civil wars, occupations), relatively autonomous educational institutions, more legal guarantees for freedom of expression, and economic conditions, such as salaries, grants, prizes, that allow some intellectuals to lead a more or less comfortable middle-class life. As Bourdieu reminded us in *Pascalian Meditations*, his last major work, *skholè* (leisure in Greek and the etymological root of school and scholastic) is the condition of existence of all scholarly fields.[21]

Thinking in politically saturated and precarious conditions, in a police state, during civil wars, in underfunded, failing educational institutions under the weight of bureaucratic inflation and political interferences—when speaking your mind, and parrhesiastic speech, can cost you anything from a mild phone call by a security officer to your life—is a different game altogether. The uncharitable readings, condemning tone, and accusations of unoriginality that contemporary Arab intellectuals are subjected to by epistemic critics could be partly understood as a result of the latter's embarrassment because of their "theoretical unsophistication"—read, they still believe in progress or that liberal democracy is a good thing—and "old fashioned" Enlightenment positions.[22] This, as I mentioned earlier, reproduces a historicist progressive logic in practice as it criticizes it in theory, contributing to reinforcing the trope of a "belated" Arab world. More importantly, though, its conflates the labors of the situated and accountable critic with what it takes to be the most updated version of critical theory, whose cognitive superiority enables it to be parachuted into Buenos Aires, Seoul, and Beirut to become operational in capturing these societies as soon it hits the ground.

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# Acknowledgments

From the time the idea of this book germinated till its completion, a little bit more than a decade passed. Researching, and writing about, the 1960s New Left and its becomings in the times that span the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq and the Arab revolutions (2011–) was punctuated by a seesawing of intense political moods. Despair was washed away by revolutionary tides before receding, leaving in their wake those fortunate enough to survive the counterrevolutionary ordeal scattered and bereft. Revolutionary passion and political disenchantment moved out of the archive of theoretical texts and experiences I was writing about to lay claim on the present, mandating in the process a modulation of the major keys in which this past was cast and recast. I could not have kept on working and completing this book without the many gifts received along the way.

I am deeply grateful for the intellectual generosity of all the members of the 1960s generation of leftist militant intellectuals who took the time to share their own political experiences, answer my questions, and in the process help me work through the intergenerational blind spots that cropped up during our exchanges over the years. I would like to thank a few of them in person without whose offerings this work would not have been possible. I had very generative exchanges with Azza Charara Beydoun, Muhsin Ibrahim, Wajih Kawtharani, and Mahmoud Soueid. Reading Fawwaz Traboulsi's works and articles in the mid- to late 1990s was an integral part of my own political education. I later learned from him in person when he served as an external examiner on my master's thesis and have been in close, and enriching, conversation with him ever since. Ahmad Beydoun granted me full access to his personal Socialist Lebanon archive; without his trust and generosity, this book could not have been written. Abbas Beydoun's dialogues with Husayn Muruwwa were a source of inspiration. Reading the dialogues, it was hard to shake off the sense that as he sat down with the old man a few months before his assassination, he was very much aware of being a scribe to a vanishing world, as he came to terms with a share of his own inheritance. Beydoun's vivid, detailed recollections and the uncompromising honesty with which he revisited his own militant past were

a gift to this project. In the autumn of a life of intellectual sparring, a time of treason of many "secular" bishops of Arab culture, the late Sadik al-Azm stood up for the Syrian revolution. His fiery public writings were matched in private by a gentle and dialogic sensibility.

I have been in conversation with Hazem Saghieh for nearly two decades now. Those exchanges have seeped in more than one way into the veins nourishing this book. From Hazem I also learned how to sustain warmth and cordiality amid heated political exchanges and intellectual differences. The initial ideas for what years later became this book emerged in conversation with the late Joseph Samaha. I learned from him in more ways than I can now remember since we first met in the late 1990s. Joseph's sharp analytical prose, his ethico-political disposition to not sell short his opponent's positions, and the sheer conceptual firepower of his arguments took the art of political editorials to unmatched heights: ephemeral sculptures of the "here" and "now." Waddah Charara concluded our initial interview by saying that he is less interested in future meetings in making speeches on "intellectuals" and "revolutions" than he is in being "questioned" and "shaken"—playfully borrowing Henri Calet's words "do not shake me, I am full of tears" before swiftly adding, "not ideological tears, though." These words capture something of Charara's intellectual dispositions that are difficult to discern if one is only acquainted with his complex scholarly works and trenchant political commentaries. In the numerous exchanges I had with him, I experienced firsthand an openness to critical dialogue and a deep ethnographic attunement to listening to, and mulling over, his interlocutors' words. I cannot help thinking that these deep antihierarchical dispositions are carryovers from his Maoist past. I cannot thank him enough for his generosity, which enabled a string of exchanges that began more than a decade ago as an expression of a desire for questions.

This book began as a dissertation in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University, under the supervision of Brinkley Messick, who exuded a tranquil confidence in the potential of the project, which kept me going as I was feeling my way around my materials. I also learned from him how to go through texts with a fine-tooth comb looking for the worlds they construct, the practices they authorize, and the devices planted inside of them to preempt potential criticisms. Timothy Mitchell was generous enough to join my dissertation committee, and offer valuable feedback, in its last stages. I was fortunate to benefit from Rashid Khalidi's encyclopedic historical knowledge, close reading, and generosity with his time and suggestions. Meetings with Rashid always left me energized and recharged to resume the solitary labors of writing. Taking a graduate seminar with Talal Asad on "re-thinking the idea of tradition" and

working as a teaching assistant in Elizabeth Povinelli's large lecture class on "the interpretation of cultures" were indelible formative experiences.

Nadia Abu el-Haj offered invaluable guidance, incisive comments that always tested the limits of my own argumentation, and friendship. I have learned so much about close reading and immanent criticism from her razor-sharp mind, and am forever in her debt. Ghassan Hage has accompanied all my projects from very early on. For the past two decades, he has offered a treasured friendship and an uncompromising critical eye with a talent for dismantling hurdles of all kind. I encountered David Scott's critical thought shortly after moving from Beirut to New York. Its resonance was immediate and its purchase incontrovertible. This book took shape in conversation with his work. Over the years, David offered unflinching support, criticism, generosity, and friendship, which were pivotal to carry out my work.

I later on held a postdoctoral fellowship at the Europe in the Middle East–The Middle East in Europe program (EUME), where I was affiliated with the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics at the Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science at the Freie Universität Berlin. I cannot thank Georges Khalil enough for his ongoing hospitality, interest in, and critical engagement with my work. The year I spent at EUME, which made Berlin a hub for critical work on the Middle East, was memorable on so many fronts, not least because it coincided with the seismic event of the Arab revolutions. I was also fortunate to be part of a vibrant cohort of EUME and Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin fellows that year. My thanks especially to Elias Khoury, who read a chapter of this book, provided valuable comments, and generously shared elements of his militant and intellectual trajectory, as well as to Toufoul Abou-Hodeib, Kamran Asdar Ali, Gülhan Erkaya Balsoy, Behrouz Ghamari-Tabrizi, Hannan Hammad, Tamer el-Leithy, and Zeynep Türkyılmaz. Cilja Harders ensured that I felt at home at the Center for Middle Eastern Politics, and immediately integrated me into its intellectual life, where I worked on my book, and shared many ideas and meals with Naoual BelAkhdar, Malika Bouziane, Anja Hoffman, and Katharina Lenner.

My time as a Harper Fellow at the Society of Fellows at the University of Chicago was one of intellectual effervescence, a collegiality bordering on solidarity, and warm friendships. This wouldn't have been possible without Hussain Agrama, Orit Bashkin, Greg Beckett, Fred Donner, Noha AboulMagd Foster, Roxana Galusca, Daragh Grant, Haytham Ibrahim, Reha Kedakal, Julia Klein, Satyel Larson, Mark Loeffler, Birte Loeschenkohl, William Mazzerella, Benjamin McKean, Yasmeen Mekkawi, Elham Mireshghi, Deb Neibel, Don Reneau, Geneviève Rousselière, Lauren Silvers, Karl Swinehart, Zhivka Valiavicharska,

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At the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill I had the good fortune of working with, and learning from, many colleagues and students. My thanks especially to Jean Denison, Mark Driscoll, Carl Ernst, Juliane Hammer, Lori Harris, Emma Harver, Julia Haslet, Didem Havlioglu, Micah Hughes, Ji-Yeon Jo, Charles Kurzman, Townsend Middleton, Christopher Nelson, Robin Visser, Nadia Yaqub, and Gang Yue. Zeina Halabi was a daily interlocutor on all matters—intellectual, pedagogical and political—who made UNC feel like home. Treasured long walks with Cemil Aydin fine-tuned many ideas. Dispensing invaluable insights, which improved both form and content, came so naturally to Peter Redfield.

During my memorable year at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Joan Scott provided invaluable guidance, made sure I finished the manuscript before the end of my time there, and read it in its entirety. This book is so much better for Joan's generous and detailed insights. I cannot thank her enough. I also benefited greatly from the comments of my companions in the writing group Joan assembled: David Kazanjian, Massimiliano (Max) Tomba, and Linda Zerilli. I also learned a lot from my interlocutors in the informal reading groups we put together throughout the year, particularly from Amy Borovoy, Andrew Dilts, Reuben Miller, and Max, who was also my daily conversation partner. Our yearlong reading seminar on rethinking critique in and for our present, steered by Didier Fassin and Bernard Harcourt, was a collegial and vibrant space of intellectual exchange made so by the contributions of Lori Allen, Nick Cheesman, Andrew Dilts, Karen Engle, Vanja Hamzic, David Kazanjian, Allegra McLeod, Juan Obarrio, Ayse Parla, Peter Redfield, and Linda Zerilli. The Historical Studies–Social Science Library was a formidable workspace, in large part due to its formidable staff; a special thanks to Erica Mosner, Marcia Tucker, and Kirstie Venanzi. I also shared many ideas with Lalaie Ameeriar, Céline Bessière, and Anne-Claire Defossez. Thomas Dodman has been a close intellectual interlocutor since our time together at the Institute. Pascal Marichalar read the entire manuscript and among other things provided crucial insight on the narrative arc of the book. Jaeeun Kim was an exemplary work companion who also made sure to hold me accountable to my self-imposed deadlines. Conversations

with Christian Lentz continued in Durham and became part of the fabric of our lives. Didier Fassin offered encouragement and critical insights throughout the year. His generosity, and Donne Petito's and Laura McCune's hospitality, quickly made the school of social science a convivial environment in which to write, share ideas, and nurture friendships.

The Committee on Globalization and Social Change (CGSC) at the City University of New York's Graduate Center is an exceptionally vibrant space of intellectual exchange. I would like to thank all the participants in the 2017–18 seminar on populism for the conversations; in particular Susan Buck-Morss, Grace Davie, Linsey Ly, and Julie Skurski. Uday Mehta commented on a chapter and provided an insightful comparative perspective. Gary Wilder offered a warm welcome to the committee, incisive comments, and inspiring conversations.

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I would also like to thank my colleagues, the librarians, and staff at the Institut Français du Proche Orient with which I was affiliated during parts of my research: special thanks are due to Miriam Ababsa, Jalal al-Husseini, and Pénélope Larzillière. The Center for Behavioral Research at the American University of Beirut, in particular its administrator, Leila Jbara, welcomed me back as a predoctoral fellow in 2007–8. My thanks to Samir Khalaf, my teacher and the center's director, for his support and generosity over the years and for sustaining a vibrant space of interdisciplinary intellectual exchange for over a decade.

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I had the good luck of being born into a family of unconditional love, boundless generosity, and unwavering trust. I was also fortunate to grow up in a buzzing open-door home, so to speak. My parents, Abdo Bardawil and Gisèle Araman-Bardawil, welcomed people from all walks of life, dissolving in the process the social hierarchies that divide people and ideologies, which pit them against each other, as civil and regional wars tore things down around us. This was not done out of ideological reasons. My parents never spoke about it. And they certainly never thought they were more “progressive” than others. I am infinitely grateful for growing up in a sea of difference suffused with a generous ethos, which always nurtured and never directed. Special thanks are due to Nadia Araman, Ziad Bardawil, Nicolas Araman, Sahab Bardawil, Bechara Bardawil, Tarek Bardawil, and Elie and Nicolas Geahchan. I am grateful for the many family members who sustained me with love and encouragement along the way.

# Notes

## NOTES TO PROLOGUE

1. For recent scholarship that similarly takes note of the overlooked status of the Arab Marxist archive, see Omnia el Shakry, "'History without Documents': The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East," *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 920–34; and Sune Haugbolle, "The New Arab Left and 1967," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 4 (2017): 497–512.

2. For a contemporary concern with mobilization across difference, see Anna Tsing, "Is There a Progressive Politics after Progress?" *Cultural Anthropology* website, accessed June 26, 2018, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1133-is-there-a-progressive-politics-after-progress.

3. Reinhart Kosselleck, *Futures Past*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, [1979] 2004. See also David Scott's rearticulation of Kosselleck's pivotal concepts—"spaces of experience" and "horizon of expectation"—to think the temporalities of texts in *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

4. I borrow the notion of post-postcolonial from Charles Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 16.

5. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

6. I engage the failures of the metropolitan anti-imperialist Left in "Forsaking the Syrian Revolution: An Anti-Imperialist Handbook," *al-Jumhuriya*, December 22, 2016, https://www.aljumhuriya.net/en/content/forsaking-syrian-revolution-anti-imperialist-handbook.

7. Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 41. Hereafter cited in the body of the text.

8. Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 1. See Ghassan Hage, *Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2015) for an intellectually courageous and imaginative theoretical work that seeks to steer the radical critical imagination away from an exclusive investment in oppositional politics (antipolitics) and toward opening up new spaces for thought to reimagine our futures together (alter-politics).

1. Their occupations at the time: Fawwaz Traboulsi (student), Waddah Charara (school teacher), Wadad Chakhtoura (school teacher), Ahmad al-Zein (lawyer), Christian Ghazi (film director), Madonna Ghazi (school teacher), and Mahmoud Soueid (lawyer).

2. Partha Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

3. Nicolas Dot-Pouillard, "De Pékin à Téhéran en regardant vers Jérusalem: La singulière conversion à L'Islamisme des 'Maos du Fatah'" [From Peking to Teheran while looking toward Jerusalem: The Singular Conversion to Islamism of "Fatah's Maoists"], *Cahiers de l'Institut Religioscope*, no. 2 (December 2008): 1–37.

4. I borrow the notion of "transversality of knowledges"—*la transversalité des savoirs*—from the French thinker Christine Buci-Glucksmann. https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/voix-nue/christine-buci-glucksmann-15.

5. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), and Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or How Euro-America Is Evolving towards Africa* (New York: Routledge, [2012] 2016).

6. See Kristin Ross's insightful *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) for a discussion of the Third Worldist parenthesis when theory was generated from the South, and Gavin Walker's *The Sublime Perversion of Capital: Marxist Theory and the Politics of History in Modern Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016) for a similar point regarding the invisibility of Japanese Marxist theorists.

7. See, for instance, Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London: Verso, [2003] 2006). I offer an appreciative and critical engagement of Buck-Morss's work in chapter 2.

8. For a history of early generations of left-wing radicals in the region, which embeds it in global transformations, see Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

9. For a kindred critique of binaries, see Leyla Dakhli, "The Autumn of the Nahda in Light of the Arab Spring: Some Figures in the Carpet," in *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda*, edited by Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 353.

10. For a discussion on the practice of contemporary Arab intellectual history, see Max Weiss and Jens Hanssen, "Introduction: Arabic Intellectual History Between the Postwar and the Postcolonial," in *Arabic Thought against the Authoritarian Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Present*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1–35.

11. Volumes dealing with contemporary thinkers and trends in Arab thought do not include Edward Said among the authors they discuss. See, for example, Ibrahim Abu Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London: Pluto, 2004); Suzanne Elizabeth Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

12. See Walter Benjamin, "Left-Wing Melancholy (On Erich Kästner's New Book of Poems)," *Screen* 15, no. 2 (1974): 28–32; and Wendy Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," *boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (1999): 19–27. Enzo Traverso's *Left-Wing Melancholy: Marxism, Mem-*

*ory, Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), offers a more appreciative reading of the potential of Left melancholy than Brown, who interprets it as "Benjamin's name for a mournful, conservative, backward-looking attachment to a feeling, analysis, or relationship that has been rendered thinglike and frozen in the heart of the putative left," 22. I am deploying Left melancholy in Brown's sense to point to a structure of feeling among leftists in Lebanon of different generations, who mourn the good old days of the 1960s and 1970s. Having lived through these times is of course not necessary to be afflicted by Left melancholy. See Nicolas Dot-Pouillard, "Boire à Hamra: Une jeunesse nostalgique à Beyrouth?" [Drinking in Hamra: A Nostalgic Youth in Beirut?], in *Jeunesses Arabe—Du Maroc au Yémen: Loisirs, Cultures et Politiques* [Arab Youth—From Morocco to Yemen: Entertainments, Cultures and Politics], ed. Laurent Bonnefoy and Miriam Catusse (Paris: La Découverte, 2013), 125–33.

13. Talal Asad's early work is exemplary in this respect, and so are the reflexive writings in the 1980s, such as James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), and James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

14. Middle East anthropology has been exploring research veins that transcend the earlier theoretical metonyms for the study of the region—tribalism, religion, gender—as well as the frontiers of nation-states and the boundaries of religious traditions. These works explore lives, ideas, practices, and institutions in the Arab world through situating them within transnational streams of capital, art, politics, and mass media. See Julia Elyachar, *Markets of Dispossession, NGOs, Economic Development, and the State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Lori Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights: Cynicism and Politics in Occupied Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Amahl Bishara, *Back Stories: US News Production and Palestinian Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

15. For a recent reflexive work that turns its ethnographic gaze inward to investigate the practice of Middle East anthropology in the US academy, see Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, *Anthropology's Politics: Disciplining the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

16. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff call attention to a recent "retreat from theory" in the social sciences at large and in anthropology, in "Theory from the South: A Rejoinder," "Theorizing the Contemporary," *Cultural Anthropology* website, February 25, 2012, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/273-theory-from-the-south-a-rejoinder.

17. Robert A. Fernea and James M. Malakey, "Anthropology of the Middle East: A Critical Assessment," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 4 (1975): 183–206.

18. Lila Abu-Lughod, "Zones of Theory of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (1989): 267–306. For a more recent review of the literature on the region, see Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, "Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 537–58.

19. "What we call our data," as Clifford Geertz put it in his memorable phrase, "are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to." Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 9.

20. See Vincent Crapanzano's *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) for an early methodological reflection on the consequences of the effacement of the anthropologist's mark in both of these two moments.

21. See Talal Asad's "Ethnographic Representation, Statistics and Modern Power," *Social Research* 61, no. 1 (1994): 55–88, for an incisive discussion of the empiricist distinction between "observation" and "theorization" in ethnography and his plea, also briefly discussed in the introduction to *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), not to collapse anthropology as a discipline of intellectual inquiry into its predominant method, fieldwork-based ethnography.

22. Cited, and critically engaged, in Talal Asad, "Anthropology and the Analysis of Ideology," *Man* 14, no. 4 (1979): 622.

23. Michael Jackson, "Ajàlá's Heads: Reflections on Anthropology and Philosophy in a West African Setting," in *The Ground Between: Anthropologists Engage Philosophy*, ed. Veena Das, Michael Jackson, Arthur Kleinman, and Bhrigupati Singh (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 41.

24. Jackson, "Ajàlá's Heads," 42.

25. Jackson, "Ajàlá's Heads," 28.

26. João Biehl and Peter Locke, "Deleuze and the Anthropology of Becoming," *Current Anthropology* 51, no.3 (2010): 348.

27. Giovanni Da Col and David Graeber, "Foreword: The Return of Ethnographic Theory," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 1, no. 1 (2011): vi–xxxv.

28. Da Col and Graeber, "Foreword," xii.

29. Asad, "Anthropology and the Analysis of Ideology," 614.

30. Émile Durkheim opened his magisterial *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, [1912] 1995) by asserting the social origins of the categories of human thought, targeting both philosophical empiricists and a priorists. Pierre Bourdieu makes a homologous move that grounds aesthetic perception and consumption in social space in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1979] 1984). For an early critique of Bourdieu's sociology, see Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, [1983] 2004).

31. David Scott, *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 132.

32. See Bruno Perreau, *Queer Theory: The French Response* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016). "Thus, when the category 'queer' travels from one shore of the Atlantic to the other," Perreau writes, "it retains the same terms, but its meaning is literally distorted. . . . I bring to light the numerous modulations of queer theory, showing how sexuality, nation, and community are conceptually and politically interwoven," 9.

33. For works that share similar concerns on how to approach the archive of Arab contemporary thought, see Samer Frangie, "Theorizing from the Periphery: The Intellectual Project of Mahdi 'Amil," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 3 (2012): 465–82, and Omnia El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

34. For a divergent position that argues for forgoing critical theory for historical narrative in the study of contemporary Arab thought, see Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 20–23.

35. Among the key political events and structural economic, legal, and educational transformations that have destroyed certain ways of being in the world and brought forth new ones are Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798); the Ottoman Tanzimat (1839–76), which included the codification of parts of the Shari'a put forth in the Mecelle since 1869; the integration of Mount Lebanon's silk-centered production into the world economy; dense missionary activity and competition; the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon since 1918; the declaration of the Lebanese Republic by French colonial powers in 1926; and its independence in 1943.

36. The relationship to France is part of a long and complex history, whose multiple episodes include the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon (1920–43), missionary activity, and centuries-old privileged commercial, political, and religious ties with the Christian Maronites. See Iliya Harik, *Politics and Change in a Traditional Society: Lebanon, 1711–1845* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

37. Dense missionary activities and competition resulted in the founding of the Syrian Protestant College (1866) by American Protestants, which later became the American University of Beirut (1920), and the Université Saint-Joseph (1875) by Catholic Jesuits. These two elite private institutions of higher learning founded by missionaries in the nineteenth century are still active today. Currently, their predominant languages of instruction are English and French, respectively.

38. In their teaching career at the Lebanese University, Charara and Beydoun relied a lot on existing translations in Arabic or translated the material they wanted to teach from French into Arabic themselves. This was a labor that Traboulsi, teaching in English in the private elite universities, was spared.

39. For a recent exploration of the dislodging of the image of the public intellectual as a prophetic figure and a national icon from the 1990s onward, see Zeina G. Halabi, *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual: Prophecy, Exile and the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

40. They translated writings by authors from the revolutionary tradition such as Karl Marx, Isaac Deutscher, V. I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Antonio Gramsci, John Berger, Mao Tse-Tung, and Cornelius Castoriadis; anthropological authors such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Evans Pritchard; poets such as René Char, Pierre Tardieu, and Yannis Ritsos. In the past two decades, Fawwaz Traboulsi translated some of Edward Said's later works including his autobiography, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1999). Waddah Charara, who was for a number of years the editor of *Sahafat al-'Alam* (the World Press supplement) of the Saudi-owned Arab daily *al-Hayat*, translated a number of newspaper, magazine, and journal articles that were published every Wednesday.

41. "The migration to the metropolis," Robert Malley wrote, "resulted in contact with Third World exiles," whose solidarity can be viewed as the "diaspora's offspring." Robert Malley, *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 22–23.

42. "Focusing on transfiguration," Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli write, "rather than translation—the refunctioning of a text as such for different demanding-sites—orients our analysis toward the calibration of vectors of power rather than vectors of meaning-value. We will care more about the distribution of power than of meaning, more about institutions of intelligibility, livability, and viability than about translation." Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition," *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003): 396.

43. Talal Asad, "A Comment on Translation, Critique, and Subversion," in *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-cultural Texts*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 330. Take, for instance, the Algerian journalist and writer Kamel Daoud, whose novel *The Meursault Investigation* (Meursault, contre-enquête), written in French, was crowned with three prestigious French literary prizes: the Prix François Mauriac and Prix des Cinq Continents de la Francophonie in 2014 and the Prix Goncourt in 2015. After consecration, the writer's culturalist statements—"Is the refugee a 'savage'?" he asked—about the sexual misery of the Arab world, its sick relationship to women, bodies, and desire that he professed in *Le Monde* (January 29, 2016) in the wake of New Year's Eve's sexual assaults on women in Cologne circulated globally (the article was also published in the *New York Times*), spawning discourses pointing out the author's racist and colonial account, while others came to his defense. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35653496.

44. Rosalind Morris, "Introduction," in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 14.

45. For a critical reading of Marxism in India and a cogent discussion of the different grounds of persuasion in the history of ideas, see Sudipta Kaviraj, "Marxism in Translation: Critical Reflections on Indian Radical Thought," in *Political Judgement: Essays for John Dunn*, ed. Richard Bourke and Raymond Guess (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 172–99.

46. For a series of dialogues on translation and the constitution of universality, see Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Universality, Hegemony: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 91–107.

47. Faleh A. Jabar, "The Arab Communist Parties in Search of an Identity," in *Post-Marxism and the Middle East*, ed. Faleh A. Jabar (London: Saqi Books, 1997).

48. For traditional anthropological work on Lebanon that was later criticized by Talal Asad in passing for its failure to account for structural transformations and political power that was contemporaneous with, and seems "belated" from the perspective of the Marxist theory and practice of Socialist Lebanon, see Emrys L. Peters, "Aspects of Rank and Status amongst Muslims in a Lebanese Village," in *Mediterranean Countrymen*, ed. Julian Pitt-Rivers (The Hague: Mouton, 1963), 159–200, and Emrys L. Peters, "Shifts in Power in a Lebanese Village," in *Rural Politics and Social Change in the Middle East*, ed. Richard Antoun and Iliya Harik (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 165–97. For Asad's critique, see Talal Asad, "Anthropological Texts and Ideological Problems: An Analysis of Cohen on Arab Villages in Israel," *Economy and Society* 4, no. 3 (1975): 276.

49. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1979] 1984).

50. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, [1978] 1994), 325.

51. Said, *Orientalism*, 325.

52. David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

53. See Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, the Taliban, and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency," *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2002): 107–22.

54. See Nadia Abu El-Haj, "Edward Said and the Political Present," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 4 (2005): 538–55, for an insightful reading of the scholarly and political relevance of Said's oeuvre in the aftermaths of the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

55. Said, *Orientalism*, 27.

56. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 162–63.

57. See Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 17, for a reading practice that underscores "the continuing influence of Orientalist and colonial taxonomies on Arab intellectual production." See also Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006): 323–47, and the subsequent exchange between Mahmood and Stathis Gourgouris on the pages of *Public Culture*. Stathis Gourgouris, "Detranscendentalizing the Secular," *Public Culture* 20, no. 3 (2008): 437–45; Saba Mahmood, "Is Critique Secular? A Symposium at UC Berkeley," *Public Culture* 20, no. 3 (2008): 447–52; Stathis Gourgouris, "Antisecularist Failures: A Counterresponse to Saba Mahmood," *Public Culture* 20, no. 3 (2008): 453–59; and Saba Mahmood, "Secular Imperatives?," *Public Culture* 20, no. 3 (2008): 461–65.

58. For an insightful discussion of the authority of discourses in the societies anthropologists study and of anthropological—and theoretical—discourses, see Asad, "Anthropology and the Analysis of Ideology," and David Scott, "Criticism and Culture: Theory and Post-Colonial Claims on Anthropological Disciplinarity," *Critique of Anthropology* 12, no. 4 (1992): 371–94.

59. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's discussion of the two meanings of representation in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 1995), 28–37.

60. Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

61. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1962] 1983). See Rashid Khalidi, "The Legacies of *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*," in *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 375–86.

62. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, v.

63. Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Decolonization and the Future of the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 11.

64. For two different critiques of how difference is configured as a site of resistance against universal homogenizing forces that engages Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), see Zahid R. Chaudhary, "Subjects in Difference: Walter Benjamin, Frantz

Fanon, and Postcolonial Theory," *Differences* 23, no. 1 (2012): 151–83, and Viren Murthy, "Looking for Resistance in All the Wrong Places? Chibber, Chakrabarty, and a Tale of Two Histories," *Critical Historical Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 113–53.

65. See James Tully, *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), for a collection of Skinner's methodological writings, a valuable introduction to his work by Tully and a series of engagements with it.

66. In addition to countering the anachronistic readings of texts, this method also bypasses causal explanation by attempting understanding through a redescription of the linguistic action in terms of its ideological point and not "in terms of an independently specifiable condition." Tully, *Meaning and Context*, 10.

67. Skinner's historical method, centering as it does on the figure of the author and the contrast-effect her intervention creates in a field of arguments, operates at a different level of analysis than Michel Foucault's archaeologies, which dilute the author in a deep episteme, and the Foucauldian-inspired critique of discursive assumptions. See Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* [The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences] (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

68. Quentin Skinner, "An Interview with Quentin Skinner," *Cogito* 11, no. 2 (1997): 71.

69. Skinner, "Interview with Quentin Skinner," 73.

70. David Scott, "David Scott by Stuart Hall," *Bomb* 90 (Winter 2005), https://bombmagazine.org/articles/david-scott/.

71. Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 4.

72. Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 4.

73. Scott, "David Scott by Stuart Hall."

74. Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 54.

75. Part of the differences between Scott and Skinner on the uses of historical inquiry can be understood in light of their different intellectual projects and objects of inquiry. Skinner, the historian of early modern political thought, seeks to unearth traditions of political argument that have faded from view in the past five centuries, and therefore destabilize the current liberal idioms through which political thinking proceeds in the present. While Scott's interest in *Conscripts of Modernity* is in a much more recent mid-twentieth century anticolonial history, and his project is not to rehabilitate lost treasures, as Skinner would put it, but to escape antiessentialist presentism that dismisses the older generation's work, through reconstituting their intervention in their context and to interrogate whether our present demands of us a different kind of intervention and different practices of criticism. While both thinkers engage in a historical reconstruction, their objects, periods of inquiry, and projects are different: Skinner's past has long ago faded from view, while Scott's past is still active in the present, and therefore the uses historical reconstruction are put to are of a different order.

76. Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 55.

77. For an insightful reconstruction of the problem-space of French political anthropology, and its comparison with the US, which ends with a call for a critical French political anthropology, see Didier Fassin, "La politique des anthropologues: Une histoire

Française" [The Politics of Anthropologists: A French History], *L'Homme* 185–86 (2008): 165–86.

78. See Linda M. G. Zerilli, "Feminism, Critique, and the Realistic Spirit," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 50, no. 4 (2017): 589–611.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, vii.
2. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, viii.
3. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, vii–ix.
4. Albert Hourani, "Albert Hourani," in *Approaches to the History of the Middle East: Interviews with Leading Middle East Historians*, ed. Nancy Gallagher (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1994), 33.
5. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, ix.
6. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, ix.
7. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 348.
8. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 348.
9. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 349.
10. 'Partha Chatterjee, "Anderson's Utopia," *Diacritics* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 130.
11. For those of them who are of Shi'i descent, they are lodged between the "religion to modern secular ideologies" generation of Husayn Muruwwa (1910–87), who moved from being a Shi'i cleric to a central committee member of the Lebanese Communist Party, and the militant Islamic revival generation that came in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution—Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of Hizbullah, was born in 1960.
12. See Bruno Latour, "The Recall of Modernity: Anthropological Approaches," trans. Stephen Muecke, *Cultural Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (March 2007): 11–30.
13. Cited in Said, *Orientalism*, 318.
14. See Roschanak Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 24, and Waddah Charara, "al-Rifaq" [The Comrades], in *Isti'naf al-Badi': Muhawalat fi al-'Ilaqa Ma Bayn al-Tarikh wa-l-Falsafa* [The Resumption of Beginnings: Attempts at an Encounter between History and Philosophy] (Beirut: Dar al-Hadatha, 1981), 11–55.
15. Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5.
16. The Maronites, an indigenous Christian sect in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, are Lebanon's largest Christian community.
17. Samir Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban: De la dissension nationale au conflit régional 1975–82* [The Lebanon War: From National Strife to a Regional Conflict 1975–82] (Paris: Karthala, 1994), 33.
18. Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Affairs Harvard University, 1979), 35.
19. Borrowed from the famous 1949 quip of George Naccache, the Lebanese Francophone journalist and editor, "Deux négations ne font pas une nation" [Two negations do not make a nation].

20. See Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

21. In the aftermath of independence, the Lebanese elites agreed on "the distribution of the chief political and administrative responsibilities, among the six largest communities: Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Sunni, Shi'i, and Druze. At the suggestion of General Spears, the British delegate in Beirut, the number of parliamentary seats proportionally assigned according to data from the 1932 census was to be a multiple of eleven: for each six Christian deputies, the chamber would include five Muslim and Druze deputies. In the government and civil service, the ratio accepted was 50:50, but according to a hierarchy in which the Maronites still held the top positions: the presidency and the command of the army. The office of prime minister went to the Sunnis, the presidency of the parliament to the Shi'is, and the vice presidency to the Greek Orthodox. Thus, on the pretext of securing an "equitable" distribution of power and its prerequisites, the criterion of communitarianism took precedence over that of competence at every level of the political hierarchy: the administration, the judicial apparatus, the municipal councils, the army, and even the banking sector." Elizabeth Picard, *Lebanon, a Shattered Country: Myths and Realities of the Wars in Lebanon*, trans. Franklin Philip (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1996), 70. The literature on Lebanon uses communitarianism, confessionalism and sectarianism interchangeably to denote the system of political representation based on quotas for the different religious minorities constitutive of Lebanon, as well as for the form of sectarian loyalty that hinders allegiance to the nation.

22. For instance, a substantial number of Christian Palestinian refugees were granted Lebanese citizenship under the regime of President Camille Chamoun in the 1950s. In the aftermath of the Syrian revolution (2011), Lebanon received more than one million, predominantly Sunni, Syrian refugees. They are living in extremely precarious conditions under constant threat of xenophobic attacks and police and army roundups, as well as the overtly racist discourses circulating in the public sphere by some government officials, politicians, and the media.

23. Some of its ideologues sought to bypass Arab history and identity by anchoring the Lebanese nation in Phoenician times, and calling in its extreme right-wing versions to drop the Arabic script and classical Arabic and adopt a Latinized alphabet to write the Lebanese dialect.

24. Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban*, 55.

25. Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban*, 55. Samir Kassir, a professor of history at the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut, was a distinguished and courageous leftist political editorialist. He was assassinated on June 2, 2005, in Beirut, in the turbulent times that followed the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic al-Hariri on February 14, 2005, and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country under substantial internal and international pressure in April of the same year. Kassir in the last years of his tragically interrupted life wrote fiery articles against the Syrian Ba'th regime and its domineering influence in Lebanon, and was politically involved in the political movement (March 14th) calling for reclaiming Lebanese sovereignty from Syrian tutelage in a very tense regional and international conjuncture, characterized by the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, the worsening of its relations with Syria, and direct UN interference (UNSC 1559), which called

"upon all remaining foreign forces [i.e., Syria] to withdraw from Lebanon" and "for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias," referring mainly to Hizbullah's guerrilla force. It is widely believed that the Syrian regime or its local allies and acolytes are behind Kassir's assassination.

26. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 9, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

27. Mahmoud Soueid, interview by author, July 7, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

28. Waddah Charara, *Transformations d'une manifestation religieuse dans un village du Liban-Sud, Ashura* [Transformations of a Religious Manifestation in a Village of Southern Lebanon ('Ashura)] (Beirut: Publications du Centre de Recherches de L'Institut des Sciences Sociales, 1968), 3.

29. Mahmoud Soueid, interview by author, July 7, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

30. Wajih Kawtharani, interview by author, July 15, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

31. Kawtharani's father owned a grocery store in Beirut while Soueid's father was a Sunni cleric in a poor southern village. Charara's father, a prolific author, worked at the Bibliothèque Nationale Libanaise, and Abbas Beydoun's father was a school teacher and local intellectual. Ahmad Beydoun's case is different. He is the son of Abdel Latif Beydoun, a notable from Bint Jbayl who was twice elected to the Lebanese Parliament.

32. Fawwaz Traboulsi, *Surat al-Fata bi-l-Ahmar: Ayyam fi al-Silm wa-l-Harb* [Portrait of the Young Man in Red: Days of Peace and War] (Beirut: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 1997), 45. Bouhired, the twenty-year-old militant, quickly became an icon in the Arab world of the Algerian anticolonial struggle against the French. Iraqi, Syrian, Egyptian, and Algerian poets, among others, would depict her struggle. The Egyptian director Youssef Chahin directed a movie entitled *Djamila* in 1958 and the Lebanese diva Fairuz sang a "Letter to Djamila" in 1962. Hereafter cited in its English translation.

33. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red,* 45.

34. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red,* 45.

35. November 1, 1954, is the date of the first radio appeal to the Algerian people broadcast by the Front de Libération Nationale and is used to mark the beginning of the war of independence.

36. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June, 9, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

37. See Salma Khadra Jayusi, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), for biographical entries on both poets.

38. Azza Charara Beydoun, interview by author, July 23, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

39. Wajih Kawtharani, interview by author, July 15, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon. See Laura M. James, "Whose Voice? Nasser, the Arabs, and 'Sawt al-Arab' Radio," *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, no. 16 (June–December 2006), accessed July 21, 2010, http://www.tbsjournal.com/James.html.

40. James, "Whose Voice?"

41. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

42. Muhsin Ibrahim, interview by author, August 4, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

43. Charara's second baptism was traveling with his father to Damascus in 1954 on the day the newspapers were discussing Czech arms deals, and being present among family, politician, and poet friends of his father who were discussing the implications of this

important event. He dubs listening to Nasser's entire speech on the day of the nationalization of the canal his third baptism.

44. Azza Charara Beydoun, interview by author, July 23, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

45. "Established in 1929," the school, which was created "because of the discrimination and socioeconomic difficulties confronting rural and poor Shi'ite migrants to Beirut," also doubled in its beginnings as a "socioreligious center for many Shi'ites" where the new migrants commemorated 'Ashura. Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon*, 56.

46. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

47. Mahmoud Soueid, interview by author, July 7, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon. For Olivier Carré, the French political sociologist, Nasserism was characterized more by an attachment to a charismatic leader than it was to a doctrine. Carré mentions the diatribes between Nasser and the Ba'th in the aftermath of the union's rupture. Numerous writings by the Ba'th, from 1961 to 1965, accused Nasser of Arab inauthenticity, while Nasser replied, accusing it of being a fascist and atheist party in 1963. The question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli struggle was at the heart of these quarrels. To Nasser's position in 1964–65, that the battle against Israel was not possible until Arab unity was attained, the Ba'th replied, naming Nasser the Pétain of the Arab Nation, and that the champion of the Battle of Suez (1956) was a traitor to Israel, and would be punished by the Arab people. See Oliver Carré, *Le nationalisme Arabe* (Paris: Payot, [1993] 1996), 105–8.

48. Muhsin Ibrahim, interview by author, August 4, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

49. The documents and arguments for dropping the earlier version of Arab nationalism and espousing Marxism-Leninism were published under the title *Limadha Munazzamat al-Ishtirakiyyn al-Lubnaniyyin (Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-'Arab min al-Fashiyya ila al-Nassiriyya): Tahlil wa Naqd* [The Organization of Lebanese Socialists, What For? (The Arab Nationalist Movement from Fascism to Nasserism): An Analysis and a Critique] (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1970).

50. Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 130.

51. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 9, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

52. Ahmad Beydoun, interview by author, July 11, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon. The Phalanges are a right-wing Christian Lebanese nationalist party founded in 1936. They were one of the major political and military players in the first years of the Lebanese civil and regional war, facing the predominantly Muslim Lebanese National Movement (LNM), a pro-Palestinian coalition of leftist and Arab nationalist parties.

53. The historical background supplied in this section relies on Fawwaz Traboulsi's *History of Modern Lebanon*.

54. Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 131.

55. Charles Malik (1906–89)—the new foreign minister—was a philosopher by training, graduating from Harvard in 1937 after a period of study in Germany in the early 1930s. Malik was one of the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations and succeeded Eleanor Roosevelt in chairing the commission for human rights in 1951, after her retirement. Later on, Malik was also Lebanon's representative at the nonaligned conference in Bandung that took place in April 1955, a few months after the signing of the Baghdad Pact, where he pushed for the acknowledgment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the confer-

ence's final statement. Malik's active political life at the time lends itself to be read retrospectively as encapsulating some of the features that came to define the political conjuncture after World War II, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to Bandung, via the Eisenhower Doctrine. Much later, in the mid-1970s, Malik became one of the ideologues of the anti-Palestinian, Christian right-wing National Front, which fought against the predominantly Muslim, pro-Palestinian Lebanese National Movement.

56. As the CIA's main operative in Beirut at the time, Wilbur Crane Eveland wrote, "Throughout the elections I traveled regularly to the presidential palace with a briefcase of Lebanese pounds, then returned late at night to the embassy with an empty twin case." Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 132.

57. For a historical reassessment of the fighting and tensions in 1958 in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan that argues that they resulted in state-formation surges, particularly in the sphere of socioeconomic planning, see Cyrus Schayegh, "1958 Reconsidered: State Formation and the Cold War in the Early Postcolonial Arab Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 421–43.

58. Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 136

59. Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 136.

60. Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 137.

61. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 9, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

62. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 9, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

63. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party, a radically secular organization advocating for a pan-Syrian union, aligned itself with President Chamoun and the Lebanese nationalists against the Arab nationalists Muslims during the 1958 civil clashes. Fawwaz Traboulsi, interview by author, August 2, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

64. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 9, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

65. Husayn Muruwwa, *Wulidtu Shaykhan wa Amutu Tiflan: Sira Dhatiyya fi Hadithin Ajrahu ma'ahu 'Abbas Baydun* [I Was Born a Sheikh and I Will Die a Child: An Autobiography Undertaken as a Conversation with Abbas Beydoun] (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1990), 9.

66. Muruwwa, *Wulidtu Shaykhan wa Amutu Tiflan*, 10.

67. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

68. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon. Mikhail Naimy (1889–1988), also a staple of the school curriculum, was an "influential Lebanese immigrant writer of the same period [as Khalil Gibran]. Born in Mount Lebanon in 1889, Naimy spent years studying in Palestine and then the Ukraine before moving to Washington State and eventually to New York. His publications, both in English and Arabic, also abound in the deification of the Lebanese terrain and reinforces themes that Gibran would make popular," in Elise Salem, *Constructing Lebanon: A Century of Literary Narratives* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 17. The stories of Maroun 'Abbud (1886–1962) also deal with village life in Mount Lebanon: "The 'Lebanese' 'Abbud writes about are Christian villagers who live deep within the rugged Maronite terrain. The inhabitants are very religious and have total faith in the powers of St. Maroun. The stories revolve around village characters and their beliefs, generational differences, shocking Western innovations, etc." Salem, *Constructing Lebanon*, 54.

69. Abbas Beydoun, *Blood Test*, trans. Max Weiss (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008); Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

70. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

71. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

72. The comparison between the road to Najaf and the road to Damascus and Beirut—previously quoted—is extracted from the introduction to the book of biographical interviews that Abbas Beydoun conducted with Husayn Muruwwa entitled *Wulidtu Shaykhan Wa Amutu Tiflan* (1990). The title is based on a word pun. *Shaykhan* could either mean an old man or shaykh as in cleric, and the title plays on the double meaning, which could be rendered in English as "I was born an old man and I die a child" or "I was born a cleric and I die a child."

73. Abdel Latif Charara, however, unlike Husayn Muruwwa and his brother Muhammad, did not pursue a religious curriculum in Najaf, but graduated around the mid- to late 1930s from the "center for elementary school teachers" in Beirut, a Lebanese public institution for the preparation of primary school teachers.

74. Charara, *Transformations*, 3.

75. Charara, *Transformations*, 3.

76. This text, written in April 1967, three months before the June 1967 defeat, did not contain any index of the author's Marxist political militancy at the time. Socialist Lebanon was an underground organization.

77. Charara, *Transformations*, 94.

78. Waddah Charara, "al-Nisba al-Mutala'thima: Fusul min Sira (ma Qabl) Lubnaniyya" [The Faltering Belonging: Segments from a (Pre-) Lebanese Autobiography], *Abwab*, no. 2 (1994): 202–13. Hereafter cited in its English translation.

79. Charara, "Faltering Belonging," 203.

80. Charara, "Faltering Belonging," 207–8.

81. From the Arabic *Ahl*, which denotes those who are related either by blood ties, by inhabiting the same place, or by belonging to the same clan or tribe. It could also denote those united by a common occupation, such as the practice of a craft. Charara uses Ahli to denote mostly the communal—sectarian, regional, and kin—infranational solidarities at work in Lebanese society.

82. Charara, "Faltering Belonging," 213.

83. Frantz Fanon died in 1961.

84. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 9, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

85. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 9, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

86. Merleau-Ponty's exact sentence is "Nous n'avons pas le choix entre la pureté et la violence, mais entre differentes sortes de violence" [We don't have the choice between purity and violence, but between different kinds of violence], *Humanisme et terreur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 118.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London: Verso, [2003] 2006), vii. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *TPT*.

2. Susan Buck-Morss, "The Second Time as Farce . . . Historical Pragmatics and the Untimely Present," in *The Idea of Communism*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2010), 78. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as STF.

3. Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 138–39.

4. Picard, *Lebanon, a Shattered Country*, 90.

5. "State Administration doubled in size through the employment of 10,000 new functionaries. . . . Under Sham'un, the Maronites constituted 29 per cent of the population but held at least half of the administrative posts; by the end of Shihab's mandate they held no more than a third." Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 140.

6. Picard, *Lebanon, a Shattered Country*, 90.

7. Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 139.

8. Picard, *Lebanon, a Shattered Country*, 90.

9. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 9, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

10. In Lyon, he also met Hassan Hamdan (1936–87), six years his senior, who was studying philosophy. Hamdan later became the main theorist of the Lebanese Communist Party, known under his pseudonym, Mahdi 'Amil, and Charara's colleague at the Lebanese University.

11. The ANM's slogan at the time was "Unity, Liberation, Vengeance," while the Ba'thists' slogan was "Unity, Freedom, Socialism." It is, as would be expected, the term "Vengeance" that provoked accusations of fascism toward the ANM. It would later drop it, for "regaining Palestine." See Walid Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World: Habash and His Comrades from Nationalism to Communism* (New York: St. Martin's, 1975).

12. Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation*, 61.

13. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 36–37.

14. "The tableau of Ba'th was something different from the one you know now. It was a broad alliance that had everything in it, the Arab Spirit [Michel] Aflaq folks, the Algerian model people, and those supporters of armed struggle, as well as a large leftist bloc." Fawwaz Traboulsi, interview by author, August 2, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

15. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 40.

16. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 41.

17. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 41.

18. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 45. In the late 1950s, Yemen was in the last years of the Zaidi imams' rule. The 1962 revolution would give rise to the Yemen Arab Republic. The port of Aden, which fell under British rule in 1839, remained under British control until the establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1967. See Messick, *Calligraphic State*, 8–12, for a synopsis of Yemeni history.

19. Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Arab Left* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1976), 25.

20. Ismael, *Arab Left*, 26.

21. Among those Lebanese cadres who split was Waddah Charara's older cousin, Talal Charara, who was instrumental in Charara's Ba'thist experience and who will later play a role in introducing him to Fawwaz Traboulsi.

22. Mahmoud Soueid, interview by author, July 7, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

23. Ismael, *Arab Left*, 45.

24. Ismael, *Arab Left*, 45.

25. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 46.

26. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 47. After the coup, the new rulers engaged in "a policy of recrimination and physical liquidation against the Iraqi Communists, Qasimites [proponents of the deposed and executed president 'Abd al-Karim Qasim], and opponents to their rule." Ismael, *Arab Left*, 27.

27. Roneos, another name used for mimeographs, the predecessors of photocopiers, are duplicating machines that produce copies from a stencil. Roneos could not be bought without registering the machines; however, the group succeeded in obtaining a machine through a Jewish comrade who managed to buy it from a store that sold stationery, one of the last remaining Jewish stores in Beirut in the mid-1960s.

28. Fawwaz Traboulsi, interview by author, August 2, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon. The first issue was dated September 1966 and the last one in my possession (issue 17) was published in March 1970. Ahmed Beydoun granted me access to his personal archive from that period. Beydoun, who later became a distinguished historiographer, kept an extensive archive of their militant activity. I suspect, through the conversations I had with members of the group, that overall Socialist Lebanon may have published around twenty or twenty-one issues, that is, about three more issues after the one dated March 1970.

29. According to Fawwaz Traboulsi's present estimate, not records. Personal communication with Traboulsi, July 12, 2010.

30. Fawwaz Traboulsi, interview by author, August 2, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon. Hassan Qobeissi (1941–2006) studied philosophy at the Lebanese University, and later at the University Saint Joseph. He taught philosophy in Lebanese public high schools, and later at the Lebanese University, and assumed editorial functions. Qobeissi was also a prolific translator of philosophy and anthropology. He translated Jean-Paul Sartre, Claude Lévi-Strauss, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, and John Locke among other authors.

31. Fawwaz Traboulsi, interview by author, August 2, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

32. Union National des Etudiants de France, France's major university students' syndicate, which was active in support of Algerian independence in the 1950s.

33. Ahmad Beydoun, interview by author, July 11, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

34. Ahmad Beydoun, interview by author, July 28, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Les Héritiers: Les Etudiants et la Culture* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1964).

35. Lubnan Ishtiraki [Socialist Lebanon], "Ma'rakat al-Tullab al-Thanawiyyin al-Muqbila" [The Coming Battle of Secondary School Students], Issue 5, April 1967. Charara mentioned writing a text in support of the secondary students' struggles using Bourdieu at the time. And since "The Coming Battle" is clearly written under the sign of Bourdieu, but not signed, I am inferring that it is the same article he recalled writing—forty years later—in 2007.

36. See Dominic C. Boyer, "Foucault in the Bush: The Social Life of Post-Structuralist Theory in East Berlin's Prenzalauer Berg," *Ethnos* 66, no. 2 (2001): 207–36.

37. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 30, 2009, Beirut, Lebanon.

38. The Dziga Vertov Group, a cinematographic collective that included Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Henri Roger, and Jean-Pierre Gorin, for instance, was founded around the

time of student demonstrations and workers' strikes of May and June 1968 in France, around four years after the establishment of Socialist Lebanon. See Irmgard Emmelhainz, "From Third-Worldism to Empire: Jean-Luc Godard and the Palestine Question," *Third Text* 3, no. 5 (2009): 649–56.

39. Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 81. Hereafter cited in the text as *May '68*.

40. When François Maspero stepped down, he handed the direction of the house to François Gèze on the condition that the name be changed. It became Éditions la Découverte.

41. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, still published on a monthly basis, was founded in 1954 by Hubert Beuve Marie, as Ignacio Ramonet, the monthly editor in chief from 1990 to 2000, noted, in order to give foreign affairs their due place. Until 1973, still according to Ramonet, the monthly followed *Le Monde*'s editorial line on international politics, itself a reflection of Beuve Marie's politics, which were characterized by "a late realization of the necessity of negotiation with the colonies independence movements, a cult of La Francophonie set up as a 'neutral' space facing the American and Soviet blocs as well as constant anti-communism balanced by a severe anti-Atlantism." Ignacio Ramonet, "Cinquante Ans" [Fifty Years], *Le Monde Diplomatique* 74 (April–May 2004). http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/mav/74/RAMONET/10882.

42. Ahmad Beydoun, interview by author, July 28, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

43. Azza Charara Beydoun, who joined Socialist Lebanon in the late 1960s and married Ahmad Beydoun in 1969, was the first math teacher in the English language in the Lebanese public school system in the mid-1960s, revealing the dominance of French until that time in Lebanese public high schools.

44. Anouar Abdel Malek, *Egypte, Société Militaire* [Egypt, Military Society: The Army Regime, the Left and Social Change under Nasser] (Paris: Le Seuil, 1962); Hassan Riad, *L'Egypte Nassérienne* [Nasserite Egypt] (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1964); Mahmoud Hussein, *La Lutte des Classes en Egypte de 1946 à 1968* [Class Conflict in Egypt from 1945 to 1970] (Paris: Maspero, 1969). Adel Rif'at, born Eddy Lévy, grew up in a Jewish Egyptian family. Rif'at, who worked at UNESCO, is a well-known essayist who has been collaborating with Bahgat al-Nadi for the past fifty years, both writing under the nom de plume Mahmoud Hussein. Rif'at is the older brother of Benny Lévy (1945–2003), known also under his pseudonym Pierre Victor, a student of Louis Althusser at the École Normale Supérieure and one of the main leaders and theoreticians of the Gauche Prolétarienne (Proletarian Left), the Maoist party. Charara was in touch with Rif'at and al-Nadi during his stay in Paris in the early 1970s and circulated in militant circles, which included members of the Gauche Prolétarienne. Benny Lévy was also the last personal secretary of the aging Jean-Paul Sartre from 1974 until Sartre's death in 1980. He later steered away from radical politics and began to study Judaism in the late 1970s. He relocated to Israel in 1995 and established the Institute for Levinassian Studies in Jerusalem, alongside two of the most media-present French "Nouveaux Philosophes," Bernard-Henri Lévy and Alain Finkielkraut. See Douglas Johnson, "Benny Lévy," *Guardian,* October 21, 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/oct/21/guardianobituaries.booksobituaries.

45. Lubnan Ishtiraki, "Madkal li–qira'at al-Bayan al-Shuyu'i" [An Introduction to Reading the Communist Manifesto], *Dirasat 'Arabiyya* [Arab Studies], 5, no. 7 (1969): 38–80. Hereafter, this work will be referred to as the "Introduction," and cited parenthetically as IRCM.

46. Faleh A. Jabar, "The Arab Communist Parties in Search of an Identity," in *Post-Marxism and the Middle East*, ed. Faleh A. Jabar (London: Saqi Books, 1997), 93.

47. Jabar, "Arab Communist Parties in Search of an Identity," 93.

48. Jabar, "Arab Communist Parties in Search of an Identity," 94.

49. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.

50. "When the army mobilized itself on July 23rd, it was expressing the people's hopes that for a long time the people had struggled for; its hopes for opening up new horizons over which the banners of 'Sufficiency and Justice' would flap . . . and today brothers, now that this road has been paved for us, and we have declared political democracy for the entire people, not for the people's enemies, and that we have declared social democracy and established socialism in our midst, and that we've declared that we will build a society on the basis of justice and sufficiency." These are excerpts from a speech delivered by President Nasser on December 19, 1961. *Khitab al-Ra'is Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir fi 'Id al-'Alam* [Speech of President Gamal Abdel Nasser on Flag Day], December 19, 1961. http://nasser.bibalex.org/Speeches/browser.aspx?SID=1006&lang=ar.

51. They translated writings by authors from the revolutionary tradition such as Karl Marx, Isaac Deutscher, V. I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Antonio Gramsci, John Berger, Mao Tse-Tung, and Cornelius Castoriadis.

52. Abd al-Ilah Bilqaziz, *al-Islam wa-l-Hadatha wa-l-Ijtima' al-Siyasi* [Islam, Modernity, and Political Sociality] (Beirut: Dar al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya, 2004), 78–79.

53. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

54. See Benjamin, "Left-Wing Melancholy," 28–32, and Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," 19–27.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society* (New York: Regional Bureau for Arab States, cosponsored with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, 2003), 125. Critics situate the trajectory of the Lebanese Rahbani Brothers, Lebanon's most famous postindependence composers and pioneers of musical theater, into two epochs, the pre-1967 one and the post-1967. See Muhammad Abi-Samra, "Zahirat al-Akhawayn Rahbani wa Fairuz" [The Rahbani Brothers and Fairuz Phenomenon] (master's thesis, Lebanese University, 1985).

2. Jastinder Khera, "Mashrou' Leila: The Band Out to Occupy Arabic Pop," *BBC News*, October 16, 2013. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24469243.

3. Cited in Ghassan Salamé, *Le théatre politique au Liban (1968–1973): Approche idéologique et esthétique* [Political Theater in Lebanon (1968–1973): An Ideological and Aesthetic Approach] (Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1974), 102.

4. "In so far as it manifests a rupture with external demands and a desire to exclude artists suspected of obeying them," Bourdieu writes, "the affirmation of the primacy of form over function, of mode of representation over the object of representation, is the most specific expression of the claim to the autonomy of the field and of its pretension to produce and to impose the principles of a specific legitimacy as much in the order of production as in the order of reception of the work of art. . . . The artist challenges any external constraint or demand and affirms his or her mastery over what defines him or her and what belongs to him or her by right, that is, the manner, form, style—*art* in short, thus established as the exclusive purpose of art." Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 299–300. See Fadi A. Bardawil, "Art, War and Inheritance: The Aesthetics and Politics of Ziad Rahbani" (master's thesis, American University of Beirut, 2002) and Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary* Egypt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

5. Ibrahim Abu Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), and Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

6. Hereafter, I will refer to Abu Rabi''s book in the text.

7. Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 2.

8. For a recent revisionist history of the 1967 defeat from the standpoint of the Arab New Left, see Sune Haugbolle, "The New Arab Left and 1967," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 4 (2017): 920–34.

9. See Suzanne Kassab, "Summoning the Spirit of Enlightenment: On the Nahda Revival in Qadaya wa-Shahadat," in *Arabic Thought against the Authoritarian Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Present*, edited by Max Weiss and Jens Hanssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 311–35.

10. See Sadik Jalal al-Azm, *Self-Criticism after the Defeat,* trans. George Stergios (London: Saqi Books, [1968] 2011) and Adonis, "*Bayan 5 Huzayran 1967*" [The June 5th, 1967 Manifesto], *Al-Adab*, Issues 7 and 8, July–August 1967.

11. For an early and prescient, pre-Arab revolutions (2011-) critique, of the crowning of the 1967 defeat as the cardinal event of contemporary Arab thought, see Yassin al-Haj Saleh, "Hazimat Huzayran: min Hadath Tarikhi ila Shart Thaqafi" [The June Defeat: From a Historical Event to a Cultural Condition], *al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, Issue 1936, June 4, 2007. http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=98676&nm=1. For an illuminating discussion of nationalist influences on the historiographies of nationalism in the Middle East, see Rashid Khalidi, "Arab Nationalism: Historical Problems in the Literature," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 (1991): 1363–73.

12. Ahmad Beydoun, interview by author, July 11, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

13. Muhsin Ibrahim, interview by author, August 4, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

14. Lubnan Ishtiraki "Mulahazat Hawl al-Ittifaq al-Akhir Bayn al-Thawra al-Kurdiyya wa-l-Hukuma al-'Iraqiyya" [Notes on the Last Agreement between the Kurdish Revolution and the Iraqi Government], Issue 1 (mid-September 1966), 14–23. Hereafter, Lubnan Ishtiraki will be cited in notes in its English translation, Socialist Lebanon. On their first mention, articles will be transliterated, from the second onwards I will use their English translation.

15. Socialist Lebanon, "Notes on the Last Agreement," 15–16.

16. "Nasser Accuses Arab Reds Again: Says They Plotted to Split U.A.R., Seize Iraq and Form 'Fertile Crescent,'" Reuters, April 16, 1959, http://www.nytimes.com/1959/04/17/archives/nasser-accuses-arab-reds-again-says-they-plotted-to-split-u-a-r.html?_r=0.

17. Socialist Lebanon, "Musahama fi Niqash Ittijahat al-'Amal al-Fida'i al-Filastini (al-Qism al-Awwal)" [A Contribution to the Discussion of the Directions of Palestinian Fida'yi Action (Part One)], Issue 14, December 1968, 35.

18. Socialist Lebanon, "Muhawala li-Fahm al-Ahdath al-Akhira Fi Suria" [An Attempt to Understand the Recent Events in Syria], Issue 3, mid-December 1966, 10.

19. Socialist Lebanon, "An Attempt to Understand," 12. Socialist Lebanon held similar views on the Egyptian regime, whose nationalizations "transformed the ones in power into a core of a state bourgeoisie that controls, through ruling, the surplus production and consumes that surplus to the detriment of development issues and the building of the economic base." Socialist Lebanon, "Mawdu'at Awwaliyya fi Itar al-Ma'raka" [Primary Topics in the Context of the Battle], Issue 8, November 1967, 7. Instrumental to their critiques were the conceptual works of an older generation of Egyptian Marxist thinkers, written and published in France, that were critical of the Nasser regime; see chapter 2.

20. Socialist Lebanon, "al-Yasar al-Lubnani wa A'ba' al-Ma'raka" [The Lebanese Left and the Battle's Burdens], Issue 16, September 1969, 11.

21. Socialist Lebanon, "Lebanese Left and the Battle's Burdens," 11.

22. Socialist Lebanon, "Lebanese Left and the Battle's Burdens," 12.

23. Socialist Lebanon, "Lebanese Left and the Battle's Burdens," 11.

24. Socialist Lebanon, "Lebanese Left and the Battle's Burdens," 12.

25. Socialist Lebanon, "A Contribution to the Discussion," 23.

26. Lisa Wedeen, "Ideology and Humor in Dark Times: Notes from Syria," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 4 (2013): 843.

27. Said, *Out of Place*, 293.

28. Said, *Out of Place*, 279.

29. Edward Said, "My Guru," *London Review of Books* 23, no. 24 (December 13, 2001), http://www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n24/edward-said/my-guru.

30. Said, "My Guru." The American sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod (1928–2013), née Lippman, was married to Ibrahim Abu-Lughod from 1951 to 1991.

31. Timothy Mitchell, "The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science," in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David L. Szanton, University of California International and Area Studies vol. 3, article 3 (2003), 12.

32. Mitchell, "Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science," 12.

33. Mitchell, "Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science," 12.

34. Mitchell, "Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science," 12.

35. al-Azm met Edward Said during the 1970 Association of Arab-American University Graduates conference, which provided an institutional space of encounter between intellectuals at home and those in the diaspora who were supportive of the Palestinian struggle. They became good friends, until the publication of al-Azm's critical review of

*Orientalism* in 1981—that I look into in chapter 6—after which Said severed his relation with al-Azm, refusing to resume contact despite a number of attempts by common friends to reunite them. Sadik Jalal al-Azm, interview by author, August 4, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

36. Ghada Talhami, "An Interview with Sadik al-Azm," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1997): 117.

37. Talhami, "Interview with Sadik al-Azm," 114.

38. The first went through "ten printings between 1968 and 1973 (despite being forbidden and confiscated in many countries) excluding the independent printings that took place in the Occupied Palestinian Territories." Sadik Jalal al-Azm, "Taqdim ba'd Tul Inqita'" [A Preface after a Long Absence], in *Al-Naqd al-Dhathi ba'd al-Hazima* [Self-Criticism after the Defeat] (Damascus: Dar Mamduh 'Idwan li-l Tiba'a wa-l-Nashr, 2007). Both books were published by Dar al-Tali'a in Beirut. The publishing house, owned by the Beiruti "Liberal" Ba'thist Bashir al-Da'uq, also issued the vibrant journal *Dirasat 'Arabiyya*, to which al-Azm and the members of Socialist Lebanon contributed collectively, or individually, with pseudonyms.

39. The philosophy department chair who opposed Sadik al-Azm was Charles Malik (1906–87)—see chapter 1 for a brief synopsis of Malik's political career. On a different register, Malik was married to the first cousin of Edward Said's mother and played an important role in his intellectual and political growth before their subsequent political divergences: "From Uncle Charles, as we called him, I learned the attractions of dogma, of the search for the unquestioning truth, of irrefutable authority. From him I also learned about the clash of civilizations, the war between East and West, communism and freedom. In addition to telling us about this in Dhour, he played a central role in formulating all this for the world stage. Along with Eleanor Roosevelt, he worked on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; names like [Andrei] Gromyko, [John Foster] Dulles, Trygve Lie, [Nelson] Rockefeller, and [Dwight] Eisenhower were the common currency of his conversation, but so too were [Immanuel] Kant, [Johann Gottlieb] Fichte, [Bertrand] Russell, Plotinus and Jesus Christ." Said, *Out of Place*, 265–66.

40. Talal Asad, "Review of *Orientalism* by Edward Said," *English Historical Review* 95, no. 376 (July 1980): 648.

41. See chapter 2 for the different answers provided by Socialist Lebanon and the Arab Nationalist Movement in Lebanon.

42. "To say, therefore, that the Arab is a victim of imperialism is to understand the statement as not only to the past, but also to the present, not only in war and diplomacy but also Western consciousness. There are signs, however, that with much of the Third World, the Arab has now fully recognized this as his predicament: he is demanding the West, and of Israel, the right to reoccupy his place in history and in actuality." Edward Said, "The Arab Portrayed," in *The Arab-Israeli Confrontation of June 1967: An Arab Perspective*, ed. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 9.

43. Sadik Jalal al-Azm, *Al-Naqd al-Dhathi ba'd al-Hazima* [Self-Criticism after the Defeat] (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1968), 69. Hereafter the book is cited in its English translation.

44. al-Azm, "Self-Criticism after the Defeat," 78.

45. al-Azm, "Self-Criticism after the Defeat," 78.

46. al-Azm, "Self-Criticism after the Defeat," 140.

47. Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 54.

48. The Lebanese Communist Party was established in 1924 during mandate Lebanon. It spread its activities toward Syria in the following year, founding the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon in 1925. In the next four decades the party would split and reunite a number of times. In January 1944, a month after Lebanese independence from France, a decision was taken to split the two parties, keeping a common central committee though. In 1950, Khalid Bikdash, the secretary general of the Syrian party, who held control over both parties with an iron fist since he gained the secretariat in the 1930s, feeling his power under threat, decided to reunite the two parties. In 1958, in the wake of the union, Bikdash split the party again and fled to Eastern Europe.

49. Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Communist Movement in the Arab World* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 22.

50. Ismael, *Communist Movement in the Arab World*, 36.

51. Ismael and Ismael, *Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon*, 59.

52. Ismael and Ismael, *Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon*, 78. The relationships with Arab nationalists was not always confrontational. In 1954, Khalid Bikdash won a parliamentary seat in Damascus as part of a progressive front that included the Ba'th, which had won sixteen seats. This rapprochement with the national forces was in alignment with the post-Stalinist doctrine of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. By 1955, the Soviet Union began establishing close links with Nasser, its inaugural iconic moment being the approval of Czech-Egyptian arms deal (1955). In the aftermath of the twentieth Communist Party of the Soviet Union Congress (1956), during which the collaboration with progressive factions in the Third World was confirmed, dropping the Stalinist requirement of the dictatorship of the proletariat, "the USSR often paid little attention to the needs and conditions of Arab Communists." Arab communist parties were stuck between the hammer of the national regimes' repression and the anvil of allegiance to the Soviet Union, which was allied to their oppressors. See Ismael, *Communist Movement in the Arab World*, 22–23.

53. Waddah Charara did not mention this episode in any of our numerous meetings.

54. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 53.

55. The argument for joining the opposition wing of the Lebanese Communist Party, according to Traboulsi, revolved around the idea that Socialist Lebanon was a small group, so why not join the Lebanese Communist Party and try working from the inside to influence it. Fawwaz Traboulsi, interview by author, August 2, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

56. Socialist Lebanon, "al-'Amal al-Yasari al-Lubnani 'ala Bisat al-Bahth min Jadid" [Lebanese Socialist Action under Consideration Once More], Issue 9, February 1968, 6.

57. Socialist Lebanon, "'Lubnan al-'Ishtiraki' wa-l–Yasar" ["Socialist Lebanon" and the Left], Issue 3, December 1966, 2.

58. The early precursor to the Lebanese National Movement of the 1970s was mainly composed of Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party, the Lebanese Communist Party, and the Arab Nationalist Movement.

59. Socialist Lebanon, "al-'Amal al-Yasari al-Lubnani 'ala Bisat al-Bahth min Jadid" [Lebanese Leftist Practice under Discussion Once More], Issue 9, February 1968, 2.

60. Socialist Lebanon, "Nusus Mukhtara min 'Ma al-'Amal?' Linin, 1902" [Selected Texts from "What Is to Be Done?" Lenin, 1902], Issue 4, February 1967, 11.

61. In *The Organization of Lebanese Socialists, What For? (The Arab Nationalist Movement from Fascism to Nasserism): An Analysis and a Critique* (1970), Muhsin Ibrahim in a gesture of auto-critique of the ANM's Nasserite past, writes, "The movement had practiced a pro-unity policy that was romantic and foggy. [This policy] was characterized by severe verbal persistence [in advocating] unity. Such an attitude manifested itself in slogans like 'Unity regardless of the Price,' or 'Unity comes first and last' and/or 'Unity is the path to Liberation and the Key to all Problems Confronting the Arab Society.' This made the movement unable to see the Unity slogan in its proper historical context. It stripped the slogan of all progressive class contents. . . . Again when the movement declared its full support of the establishment of the United Arab Republic, it failed to see its petty-bourgeois contents." Cited in Ismael, *Arab Left*, 70–71.

62. There were 2 *fida'yi* operations launched from southern Lebanon in 1967, 29 in 1968, and 150 in 1969. See Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban*, 63.

63. The guerrillas made their entry into the village of Khiam, the first to welcome them in 1968, accompanied by the inhabitants of the village who occupied the headquarters of the army intelligence in the village, expelling its occupants. Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban*, 64.

64. Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban*, 64.

65. Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban*, 64. Between 1968 and 1974, Israel violated Lebanese territory three thousand times, and eight hundred Palestinian and Lebanese victims fell as a result of Israeli aggression.

66. Wade R. Goria, *Sovereignty and Leadership in Lebanon 1943–1976* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985), 95. Israeli air raids, "which were to become Israel's privileged tool in the coming years, intervening regularly in Southern Lebanon against Palestinian camps and Lebanese villages," were used for the first time on July 30, 1969. Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban*, 65.

67. Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban*, 71.

68. Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press), 153–54.

69. Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 154.

70. The accords recognized the Palestine guerrillas' right to "be present on and move around Lebanese territory, especially to and from the 'Arqub region, and provided a form of extra-territoriality for the Palestinian camps, long under the heavy hand of the Lebanese security services, and recognized a Higher Palestinian Commission, headed by a Palestinian veteran Shafiq al-Hut, as a *de facto* Palestine embassy in Lebanon." Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 154.

71. A few months after the promulgation of the agreement, "Phalangist militants attacked a Palestinian convoy in Kahalé (March 25th, 1970), which was followed by clashes in the suburbs of Beirut." Kassir, *La Guerre du Liban*, 73.

72. Waddah Charara, interview by author, July 4, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

73. Socialist Lebanon, "Al-Muqawamatan: Al-Lubnaniyya w-al-Filastiniyya" [The Two Resistances: The Palestinian and the Lebanese], Issue 16, September 1969, 1. Hereafter cited in the text.

74. Underlined in the original. "The entity," as in the Lebanese entity, is a designation used pejoratively by political commentators and actors wishing not to bestow legitimacy and recognition. Israel, for example, is sometimes referred to as the Zionist entity, while fervent Syrian nationalists refer to Lebanon as the Lebanese entity.

75. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf.

76. Underlining in the original. Socialist Lebanon, "The Lebanese Left and the Battle's Burdens", 16. Hereafter cited in the text.

77. Underlining in the original.

78. There were around 1,000–1,500 Organization of Lebanese Socialists members as opposed to less than 100 for Socialist Lebanon. Estimates of previous adherents note that Socialist Lebanon (1964–70) did not move beyond thirty to forty members in the first few years of work, inflated to less than a hundred members by the time of fusion with the Organization of Lebanese Socialists in 1970.

79. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon. *Al-Hurriyya*, a weekly magazine, was the mouthpiece of the Arab Nationalist Movement, founded in 1960 and edited by Muhsin Ibrahim in the 1960s. After the radicalization of the movement and its splintering post-1967, it was shared by its Lebanese faction, the Organization of Lebanese Socialists (OLS), and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). After the union of SL and OLS in 1970, it would become the common platform of the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon and the DFLP until 1977, when it became associated only with the latter.

80. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

81. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

82. Muhsin Ibrahim, "George Hawi Ibn al-Nahda al-Yasariyya al-Lubnaniyya wa Ahad Abraz Sunna'iha al-Kibar" [George Hawi: The Son of the Lebanese Leftist Renaissance and One of Its Great Producers], *Bayrut al-Masa'*, Issue 572, August 13, 2005. The two points are also cited in Talal Salman, "Muhsin Ibrahim wa Naqd al-Tajruba . . . hayth la Yajru' al-Akharun!" [Muhsin Ibrahim and the Critique of the Experience . . . Where Others Do Not Dare!], *Al-Safir*, August 8, 2005, http://elaph.com/Web/NewsPapers/2005/8/81930.htm?sectionarchive=NewsPapers.

83. Anouar Abdel Malak, "Introduction," *Contemporary Arab Political Thought*, ed. Anouar Abdel Malak (London: Zed Books, 1984), 19–20. I would like to thank Samer Frangie for prompting me to revisit this volume.

84. "A date [1982] that certain authors are not hesitant to propose as the endpoint of the adventure of the Nahda, understood in its wider historical sense. It is true, that until then, the spirit of the Renaissance remained constantly present in the Arab world." Samir Kassir, *Considérations sur le Malheur Arabe* [Being Arab] (Paris: Actes Sud), 67.

85. See Farouk Mardam-Bey and Elias Sanbar, *Etre Arabe: Entretiens avec Christophe Kantcheff* [Being Arab: Interviews with Christophe Kantcheff] (Paris: Actes Sud, 2005),

for 1967 as a second Nakba; and for 1967 as the defeat of the second Nahda, see Elias Khoury, "For a Third Nahda," in *Arabic Thought against the Authoritarian Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Present*, ed. Max Weiss and Jens Hanssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 357–69.

86. Darraj cited in Barbara Harlow, "Introduction to Kanafani's 'Thoughts on Change and the 'Blind Language,'" *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 10 (1990): 132.

87. Darraj cited in Harlow, "Introduction to Kanafani's," 132.

88. Josette Zoueïn and Thierry De Rochegonde, "Rencontre avec un traducteur en Arabe, Georges Tarabishi" [A Meeting with a Translator from Arabic, Georges Tarabishi], *Che vuoi?*, no. 21 (2004): 96.

89. Faysal Darraj, "Rahin al-Hazima/Rahiniyyat al-Kitab al-Naqdi" [The Actuality of Defeat/The Endurance of the Critical Book], in *Al-Naqd al-Dhathi ba'd al-Hazima* (Damascus: Dar Mamduh 'Adwan, 2007), 21.

90. Darraj, "Rahin al-Hazima," 20.

91. Darraj, "Rahin al-Hazima," 21.

92. Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 2–3.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture," in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 46.

2. The merger between the two organizations took place in 1970, and the common body was referred to as the "unified organization." A year later, and in the aftermath of the nascent organization's first conference, the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon was officially declared.

3. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, August 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

4. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 122.

5. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 129.

6. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 115.

7. Among the SL cadres that left were Hassan Qobeissi, Jinan Sha'ban, Rashid Hassan, and Roger Nab'a. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

8. Waddah Charara, interview by author, July 4, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

9. Abbas Beydoun offers a retrospective interpretation of the split and Charara's departure, noting: "No one was aware of this, but he was very disturbed [by the split]. He may have woken up to the fact that what happened was directed against him essentially. The split was against him. If you want to interpret it now away from class analysis and political yammering, it was a battle against him . . . and I think between him and those who were there, there were enmities that are still present." Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

10. Abbas Beydoun, interview by author, July 31, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon. Gauche Prolétarienne, a French Maoist group, was established in the wake of May 1968. It

rejected the Leninist organizational model, and advocated following the masses, namely through the principle of établissement: "the implanting of its (mainly intellectual) members in factories. . . . Its slogans in the workplace were direct and simple: slowdowns, sabotage, and direct action against bosses and supervisors in the form of sequestrations; they even went so far as to call for the lynching of Deputies. They hated the existing unions (particularly the Communist-led CGT) and, as one of their internal bulletins said: 'Demands, unions and lists of demands smell of the reformist litany.'" Mitchell Abidor, *La Gauche Prolétarienne*, http://www.marxists.org/history/france/post-1968/gauche-proletarienne/introduction.htm. Gauche Prolétarienne (Proletarian Left), a hub of militant intellectuals, combined its call to follow the masses with high visibility in Parisian intellectual circles, establishing relations with Sartre, Foucault, de Beauvoir, and Althusser. Benny Lévy, who was briefly mentioned in chapter 2, known as Pierre Victor at the time, was one of its main leaders.

11. *Al-Hurriyya*, Issue 628, July 16, 1973.

12. "Fusion with the Palestinian struggle in this conjuncture is a decisive element between defeat and preparation for future battles. Since the [observation of] forces being prepared by imperialism make every position that does not prepare, starting today, for a certain confrontation, an ostrich's position and one of national abandonment." *al-Majmuʿa al-Mustaqilla ʿan Munazzamat al-ʿAmal al-Shuyuʿi Tudih Wijhatu Nazariha* [The Group Independent from the "Organization of Communist of Action" Clarifies Its Point of View], 94. It was widely known among the comrades as al-Kirras al-Azraq [The Blue Pamphlet]. The text is divided into three major sections of approximately thirty pages each that follow a preface written by Ahmad Beydoun and an introduction. The tripartite structure begins with a history and narrative—an auto-critique—that seeks to answer the question "Where has the OCAL gotten to?" The second section moves out from the internal issues of the OCAL toward providing a theoretical and political examination of the major battles of the "movement of the masses." The third section, building on the auto-critique and the analysis of the second section, draws the appropriate political conclusions, calling for "a national mass line."

13. Ahmad Beydoun, interview by author, July 11, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

14. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 127–28. In addition to these two major splits, in the summer of 1972 the organization also witnessed the exit of one of its student groups, which joined the Maoist tendency within Fatah. It also witnessed the split of Muhammad Kishli, one of the OLS's cadres, at the head of a small group, who joined the DFLP.

15. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 128.

16. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 129.

17. See Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 164–70, for a breakdown of the major protest activities according to the three sectors. Hereafter cited in the text.

18. Organization for Communist Action in Lebanon, Traboulsi is using the shorthand OCA instead of OCAL. Recent accounts cast doubt on the accepted narrative of al-Khawaja's membership in the LCP: see the film *Shuʿur Akbar min al-Hubb* [A Feeling Greater Than Love], directed by Mary Jirmanus Saba, 2017.

19. "A private franchise-holding company since 1935, whose franchise was extended until 1973, the *Régie* also held the exclusive right to export Lebanese-produced tobacco, import cigarettes and produce local cigarettes." Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 165.

20. Waddah Charara, interview by author, July 3, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

21. *The Blue Pamphlet*, 38. Hereafter referred to as TBP and cited in the text.

22. "And it should be clear that this critique is an auto-critique at the same time. For we have participated fully in the revisionisms we are now criticizing, and some of us bear the greatest part of responsibility in them, which in our view consolidates our critique and gives it a practical basis" (TBP, 7).

23. Socialist Lebanon, "Madha Ya'ni Rafi' Shi'ar "al-Kifah al-Musallah" fi al-Marhala al-Rahina" [What Does Branding the Slogan of "Armed Struggle" Entail in the Current Juncture?], Issue 8, November 1967, 15. Underlining in the original.

24. Although the text does not name specific individuals one can infer from the descriptions that one of the main targets of *The Blue Pamphlet* in the leadership is Muhsin Ibrahim, the leader of the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, who later on during the Lebanese war became the secretary general of the OCAL. Initially, the OCAL had a central committee and a politburo but no secretary general.

25. The precursor to the Lebanese National Movement, which included Kamal Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party and the LCP. The rally was launched officially in June 1973 in opposition to a draft law on political parties, under Prime Minister Salam, which "greatly curtailed freedom of thought and association." See Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 174.

26. Waddah Charara, interview by author, July 4, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

27. Charara does not mention Trotsky's book *Our Political Tasks* (1904), in which he criticizes substitutionism. That said, Charara's critique bears a close resemblance to Trotsky's. The latter writes, "In the internal politics of the Party these methods lead, as we shall see below, to the Party organisation 'substituting' itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee." https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1904/tasks/.

28. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 21, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

29. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 134. Hereafter referred to as *PYMR* and cited in the text.

30. Muhsin Ibrahim, interview by author, August 4, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

31. "In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily 'from the masses, to the masses.' This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming

more correct, more vital and richer each time." Mao Tse-Tung, cited in Donald Reid, "Etablissement: Working in the Factory to Make Revolution in France," *Radical History Review* 88 (2004): 89.

32. Jean-Luc Godard during his Maoist phase described himself as a receiver-transmitter. See Julien Bourg, "Principally Contradiction: The Flourishing of French Maoism," in *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*, ed. Alexander C. Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 231.

33. See Ross, *May '68*.

34. Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Batista (London: Continuum Lesson, [1974] 2011), xiv. See Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands*, ed. Bill Schwarz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

35. Mao Tse-Tung, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 1 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_2.htm.

36. Charara translated his dissertation, "Le Discours Arabe sur l'Histoire," into Arabic and published it as *al-Mas'ala al-Tarikhiyya fi al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Hadith* [The Question of History in Modern Arab Thought] (Beirut: Ma'had al-Inma' al-'Arabi, 1977).

37. Socialist Lebanon, "Al-Muqawamatan: Al-Lubnaniyya w-al-Filastiniyya—al-Qism al-Thani" [The Two Resistances: The Palestinian and the Lebanese—Part II], Issue 17, March 1970, 4.

38. Michele Salkind and Fawwaz Trab[o]ulsi, "Organization for Communist Action: An Interview with Fawwaz Trab[o]ulsi," *Middle East Research and Information Project Reports* (*MERIP*), no. 61 (1977): 6.

39. Reid, "Etablissement,"86.

40. Ross, *May '68*, 95.

41. "With the opening up of the Arab domain, the Lebanese bourgeoisie appears it is really is, i.e. as the result of exploiting the whole Arab area. This is what stops it [the bourgeoisie] from restricting its battle with the masses to the isolating Lebanese, sectarian, frame. In this case, its defense of its interests and privileges appears clearly as a political, interest-based defense that cannot veil itself with sectarianism. This transforms a sectarian war into a civil war." Socialist Lebanon, "The Two Resistances: The Palestinian and the Lebanese", 7.

42. See "People's War" in *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 88–99.

43. Waddah Charara, *Fi Usul Lubnan al-Ta'ifi: Khatt al-Yamin al-Jamahiri* [Origins of Sectarian Lebanon: The Right-Wing's Mass Line] (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1975). Hereafter cited in the text.

44. For a much later critique that shares points of contact with Charara's, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Labor History and the Politics of Theory: An Indian Angle on the Middle East," in *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies*, ed. Zachary Lockman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 321–33.

45. Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

1. Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, 52.

2. Michaelle Browers, "The Civil Society Debate and New Trends on the Arab Left," *Theory and Event* 7, no. 2 (2004).

3. See Salim Tamari, "Left in Limbo: Leninist Heritage and Islamist Challenge," *Middle East Report* 179 (1992): 16–21.

4. Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 183.

5. Charara's flatmate at the time, who was also a leftist, was influenced by the Iranian Revolution in 1979. He exited from Marxism and became a Shi'i cleric. The circle is closed. While in the 1940s southern Shi'i clerics were dropping their religious garb and joining pro-Soviet communist parties, their non-Soviet-aligned New Left children under the influence of the Iranian Revolution dropped their "guerrilla" fatigues back for the robes. While the first story can be mapped as a "tradition" to "modernity" story during the high tides of anticolonialism; the second story is more symptomatic of the postcolonial moment of revival of religious traditions, which in the case of the Iranian Revolution was coupled with militant anti-imperialist politics and discourses articulated in an Islamic idiom.

6. Waddah Charara, interview by author, July 3, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

7. Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 192. Old Lebanese identification cards had the citizen's religious affiliation inscribed, facilitating the sectarian sorting out of Christians from Muslims at checkpoints.

8. Waddah Charara, *Hurub al-Istitba' aw Lubnan al-Harb al-Ahliyya al-Da'ima* [Wars of Subjugation: Lebanon the Permanent Civil War] (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1979), 225–26. Hereafter I will refer to the book's title in translation, *Wars of Subjugation*, and cited in the text. The book is a collection of essays published between the autumn of 1974 and the winter of 1976. All citations are from the book, but I will refer in the body of the text to the initial dates of publication of the articles since it is crucial for detecting Charara's shifting theoretical and political positions, from his prewar years to the beginning of the war.

9. "Isolationist" was the term by which the LNM referred to the Christian Phalange Party. In his memoir, *A Portrait of the Young Man in Red* (158), Traboulsi engages in a retrospective auto-critique of the LNM's policy advocating the isolation of the Phalanges, that is, the isolationists: "The biggest mistake committed by the LNM that the communists were drawn to and theorized was the slogan of isolating the Phalange: the call to refuse the participation of representatives of that party in the ministers' cabinet, and to isolate it as a punishment for its role in the massacre of 'Ayn al-Rummana [The Bus Incident], and finally the call for an Arab boycott of the party. We spent a lifetime calling for the isolation of the Phalange. And in reality it was not the Phalange who were isolated in the Arab world, but us. Regardless, instead of convincing the 'isolationist' Phalange to break their isolation and open up to the rest of the Lebanese, and to accept a dialogue with them, and this is the important thing, we called for . . . their isolation." And in *A History of Modern Lebanon* (188), Traboulsi the historian notes, "That slogan [isolation of the Phalange] only led to increasing the influence of the Phalange among the Christian public."

10. Salkind and Trab[o]ulsi, "Organization for Communist Action," 5.

11. Salkind and Trab[o]ulsi, "Organization for Communist Action," 5. The program was mainly formulated by Muhsin Ibrahim, who had become the main leader of the OCAL by the beginning of the war; George Hawi, the assistant to the secretary general of the LCP at the time; and Kamal Jumblatt, the LNM's leader. The veteran Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi in 1979 described the Lebanese Nationalist Movement thus: "All were at least left of Center. Most were undeflectedly confrontational. Their overriding target was a revolution in the status quo. Their battering ram: deconfessionalism. Their enemy: both the Maronite and the Muslim establishments. Their strategic ally: the Palestinian commandos. Their patron saint and mentor: Kamal Jumblatt." Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1979), 75–76.

12. Fawwaz Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 153. The program called for "the abolition of the system of political and administrative sectarian quotas; a voluntary civil code for personal status; a new electoral law based on proportional representation in which Lebanon would become a single electoral district; extensive administrative decentralisation and the convocation of a constituent assembly on a non-sectarian basis." Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 189.

13. Bold in the original text.

14. Charara and al-Azmeh cotranslated Gramsci's *The Modern Prince* in 1970, publishing it under their pseudonyms: Zahi Cherfan (Waddah Charara) and Qays al-Shami (Aziz al-Azmeh), Antuniu Ghramshi, "al-Amir al-Hadith: Qadaya fi 'Ilm al-Marksiyya" [The Modern Prince: Issues in Marxist Science], tarjama [translation] Zahi Shirfan wa Qays al-Shami (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1970).

15. Aziz al-Azmeh, "The Progressive Forces," in *Essays on the Crisis in Lebanon*, ed. Roger Owen (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), 65. Hereafter cited in the text.

16. Rosenthal, the translator of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*, renders *iltiham* as close contact and *istitba'* as subservience; see Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [1967]1989). I am translating *iltiham* as fusion and *istitba'* as subjugation.

17. Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

18. This is what Dipesh Chakrabarty's work does very well. Take for instance Chakrabarty's critical engagement with the elementary categories of political economy: price, labor efficiency, and land. Chakrabarty mentions the contested genealogy of the category of land, particularly in settler colonial societies, such as Australia, where "it is both a tool of disinterested analysis and at the same time a tool of ideological and material domination if not also of epistemic violence." Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Can Political Economy Be Postcolonial? A Note," in *Postcolonial Economies*, ed. Jane Pollard, Cheryl McEwan, and Alex Hughes (London: Zed Books, 2011), 31. See also Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History, Bengal, 1890–1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

19. In this sentence, Charara inserted a footnote referring to his usage of "bourgeoisie." He wrote, "I am using this designation from the angle of a function limited by the

confines of a specific role" (*WS*, 240). It's a convoluted formulation reminding the reader of the "technical" usage of the "bourgeoisie" in this context, one that the author sought to distance from the ideological normative charge this concept carries in Marxist political literature.

20. Charara attached a footnote to the above-cited sentence in parenthesis, noting in a gesture of auto-critique: ". . . in which [i.e., the illusions of the Left] the author of this effort has enthusiastically participated" (*WS*, 246). The three dots (". . .") at the beginning of the footnote are inserted to connote the author's detachment from, and regret about, his past political enthusiasms—an "auto-critique" in a footnote. The author, no longer a militant leader who ought to justify how his past analysis led to a political deadlock that the present political line would deliver him and his comrades from, and no longer writing from within and accountable to a political collectivity, recovered his past after the closure of political activity as a personal enterprise, to which a mention in a footnote sufficed.

21. This is probably why *Wars of Subjugation* neither refers to *Origins*' argument nor cites the book.

22. Ahmad Beydoun, "Waddah Sharara: 'Dimuqratiyyat' al-Dawla aw "Umq' al-Hurriyya" ["Waddah Charara: 'The Democracy' of the State or 'The Depth' of Freedom?"], in *Madakhil wa Makharij: Musharakat Naqdiyya* [Entry Points and Ways Out: Critical Interventions] (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-Jami'iyya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi', 1985), 136–67. The review was written in August 1979 and first published in the November 1979 issue of *Dirasat 'Arabiyya*.

23. Ahmad Beydoun, *Identité confessionnelle et temps social chez les historiens Libanais contemporains* [Confessional Identity and Social Time among Contemporary Lebanese Historians] (Beirut: Publications de L'Université Libanaise, 1984), 463.

24. "'Al-Haraka al-Tullabiyya fi Zawahiruha al-Jadida, min al-Haraka al-Qita'iyya 'ila al-Haraka al-Siyasiyya" [The Student Movement in Its Recent Manifestations: From a Sectorial Movement to a Political One], in *WS*.

25. Beydoun, "Waddah Charara," 150.

26. Beydoun, "Waddah Charara," 151.

27. Beydoun, "Waddah Charara," 152.

28. Waddah Charara, interview by author, June 30, 2009, Beirut, Lebanon.

29. "Man 'Allamani . . . Madha? (Sira Ta'limiyya Jiz'iyya)" [Who Taught Me . . . What? (A Teacher's Partial Autobiography)], in *WS*, 163–224.

30. See Charara's second autobiographical essay regarding his days of militancy, "al-Rifaq" [The Comrades], originally published in *Dirasat 'Arabiyya* in July 1980 and reprinted in *Isti'naf al-Badi': Muhawalat fi al-'Ilaqa ma bayn al-Tarikh wa-l- falsafa* [The Resumption of Beginnings: Essays in the Relationship between History and Philosophy] (Beirut: Dar al-Hadatha, 1981), 11–55.

31. I borrow the notion of distilling political experiences into texts from Russell Jacoby, who wrote that Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and Karl Korsh's *Marxism and Philosophy*, which were both published in 1923, "distilled past political experiences." Russell Jacoby, *Dialectic of Defeat: Contours of Western Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 83.

32. Stefan Collini, "Marxism and Form," *Nation*, December 12, 2005, http://www.thenation.com/archive/marxism-and-form. Perry Anderson, *Spectrum: From Right to Left in the World of Ideas* (London: Verso, 2005).

33. Collini, "Marxism and Form."

34. Collini, "Marxism and Form."

35. Collini, "Marxism and Form."

36. Collini, "Marxism and Form."

37. Ahmad Beydoun, interview by author, July 28, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

38. See Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

39. Ahmad Beydoun, interview by author, July 28, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon.

40. Ahmad Beydoun, "Waddah Charara," 136–37.

41. Ahmad Beydoun, "Waddah Charara," 138.

42. Ahmad Beydoun, *Identité confessionnelle et temps social*, 308–9.

43. See Waddah Charara, *Al-Mas'ala al-Tarikhiyya fi al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Hadith* [The Question of History in Modern Arab Thought] (Beirut: Ma'had al-Inma'al-'Arabi, 1977).

44. Waddah Charara, *Dawlat Hizb Allah: Lubnan Mujtama'an Islamiyyan* [Hizbullah's State: Lebanon, an Islamist Society] (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar li-l-Nashr, 1996).

45. Waddah Charara, interview by author, July 3, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

46. Sudipta Kaviraj, "Marxism in Translation: Critical Reflections on Indian Radical Thought," in *Political Judgement: Essays for John Dunn*, ed. Richard Bourke and Raymond Guess (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 178.

47. Kaviraj, "Marxism in Translation," 178.

48. Traboulsi, *Portrait of the Young Man in Red*, 125.

49. Charara is referring to the massacre of as many as five hundred unarmed men, women, and children committed by US army troops in South Vietnam in March 1968.

50. The *New York Times*'s review of Solzhenitsyn's novel described it as "a non-fictional account from and about the other great holocaust of our century—the imprisonment, brutalization and very often murder of tens of millions of innocent Soviet citizens by their own government, mostly during Stalin's rule from 1929 to 1953." The novel relies on the author's own experiences between 1945 and 1953 in Soviet camps as well as the testimonies of 227 survivors, "supplemented by information from official, samizdat, and even several Western publications. They are assembled in a powerful narrative which combines the prose styles of epic novelist, partisan historian and outraged moralist, interspersed with Russian proverbs, black humor, prison camp language and parodies of Soviet bureaucratese." Solzhenitsyn's argument in the novel rejects the view of the camps as a Stalinist "aberration," relating them instead to "the original nature of the Bolshevik revolution and Soviet political system—that there was a 'straight line' between the Lenin and Stalin eras—and specifically from the Marxist-Leninist ideology." Stephen F. Cohen, "The Gulag Archipelago," *New York Times*, June 16, 1974, http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/01/home/solz-gulag.html?_r=1.

51. Gregory Elliot, "Parisian Impostures," review of *French Intellectuals against the Left: The Anti-Totalitarian Moment of the 1970s*, by Michael Scott Christofferson, *New Left Review* 41 (2006): 140.

52. Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectual against the Left: The Anti-Totalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 103. Christofferson notes that both Lefort and Glucksmann wrote theses under Raymond Aron in the 1960s and were both involved in revolutionary politics and both reacted against communism.

53. André Glucksmann, *La cuisinière et le mangeur d'hommes: Essai sur l'etat, le Marxisme, les camps de concentration* [The Cook and the Man Eater: An Essay on the Relations between the State, Marxism and Concentration Camps] (Paris: Seuil, 1975); and Claude Lefort, *Un homme en trop: Réflexions sur l'Archipel du Goulag* [One Man Too Many: Reflections on *The Gulag Archipelago*] (Paris: Seuil, 1976). Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left*, 100.

54. "The grounds for Clastres's exaggerated, and monomaniacal, hatred of the state are partly biographical. Many ex-communists have felt it. But Clastres took the fanatical suspicion of the state, familiar among some ex-communists, to an altogether new level of theoretical sophistication. And there is the circumstance of the 1970s in which he wrote, the years of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, and the widespread conviction in France that the rejection of totalitarianism counted as the beginning of political wisdom." Samuel Moyn, "Of Savagery and Civil Society: Pierre Clastres and the Transformation of Political Thought," *Modern Intellectual History* 1, no. 1 (2004): 72. Furet argued that the French Revolution "planted the seeds of twentieth-century totalitarianism. "'Today the Gulag forces us to rethink the Terror,'" he wrote, 'precisely because the two undertakings are seen as identical,'" quoted in Andrew Jainchill and Samuel Moyn, "French Democracy between Totalitarianism and Solidarity: Pierre Rosanvallon and Revisionist Historiography," *Journal of Modern History* 76, no. 1 (March 2004): 109.

55. Michael Scott Christofferson, "Quand Foucault appuyait les 'nouveaux philosophes'" [When Foucault Backed the 'Nouveaux Philosophes'], *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 2009, http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2009/10/CHRISTOFFERSON/18219. Foucault erased the term "archipel carcéral" [carceral archipelago] from the later editions of the book, which according to Christofferson was probably related to his fear of it being used to confound all persecutions (i.e., between those taking place in the socialist East and the capitalist West) and to relieve the stress on the French Communist Party (and its relation to Moscow) by comparing institutions in the West to Soviet repression.

56. Peter Dews, "The Nouvelle Philosophie and Foucault," *Economy and Society* 8, no. 2 (1979): 128.

57. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 1.

58. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, [1985] 2001).

59. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xii.

60. "Cold civil-communal peace" is borrowed from the title of Charara's magnum opus, *Al-Silm al-Ahli al-Barid: Lubnan al-Mujtama' wa-l-Dawla 1964–1967* [The Cold Civil/Communal Peace: Lebanon, the Society and the State 1964–1967] (Beirut: Ma'had

al-Inma'al-'Arabi, 1980). Charara resumes in this book the tradition of paradoxical titles he inaugurated in *Origins of Sectarianism: The Right-Wing's Mass Line*.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Foreword: The Names and Repetitions of Postcolonial History," in *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Postcolonial in Thailand*, ed. Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010): vii-xvii.

2. For a similar observation regarding the poverty of Western social and political theory and a conceptualization of the modalities of political practice in India, see Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society*.

3. See Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*: *History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Guha's wonderful collection of essays, *The Small Voice of History*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2013); and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "A Small History of *Subaltern Studies*," in *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): 3-19.

4. Peters, "Aspects of Rank and Status amongst Muslims in a Lebanese Village," and Peters, "Shifts in Power in a Lebanese Village."

5. It also constituted a personal watershed moment for thinkers such as Talal Asad, contributing to steering his critical excavations toward questions of colonialism and power. See Talal Asad, "Introduction," in *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, ed. Talal Asad (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, [1973] 1998), 9–19.

6. Sadik Jalal al-Azm, *Dirasat Naqdiyya li-Fikr al-Muqawama al-Filastiniyya* [A Critical Study of the Thought of the Palestinian Resistance] (Beirut: Dar al-'Awda, 1972).

7. Sadik Jalal al-Azm, interview by author, August 4, 2008, Beirut, Lebanon. See also Husayn Bin Hamza, "Sadiq Jalal al-'Azm: al-Mufakkir alladhi Dafa'a 'an (Hurriyyat) Salman Rushdi" [Sadik Jalal al-Azm: The Thinker Who Defended (the Freedom) of Salman Rushdie], *Al-Akhbar*, January 5, 2009. Fatah also withdrew a large number of copies of the book from the market and prevented the publisher from putting out a second edition.

8. Georges Tarabishi, *Sartr wa-l-Marksiyya* [Sartre and Marxism] (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1963).

9. Josette Zoueïn and Thierry De Rochegonde, "Rencontre avec un traducteur Arabe, Georges Tarabishi," *Che Vuoi?*, no. 21 (2004): 94.

10. Zoueïn and De Rochegonde, "Rencontre avec un traducteur Arabe, Georges Tarabishi," 97.

11. Zoueïn and De Rochegonde, "Rencontre avec un traducteur Arabe, Georges Tarabishi," 96.

12. Hassan Salman, "al-Mufakkir al-Suri Sadiq Jalal al-'Azm: al-'Almaniyya hiya al-Badil 'an al-Harb al-Ahliyya fi al-'Alam al-'Arabi" [The Syrian Thinker Sadik Jalal al-Azm: Secularism Is the Alternative to Civil War in the Arab World], *Asharq Al-Awsat*, August 15, 2007.

13. Salman, "al-Mufakkir al-Suri."

14. Salman, "al-Mufakkir al-Suri."

15. Kassir, *Considérations sur le malheur Arabe*, 39–40. My translation.

16. Al-Afif al-Akhdar, *Madha Qalat li al-Sawarikh al-Mutasaqita ʿala ʿAsimat al-Rashid?* [What Did the Falling Missiles on Baghdad Tell Me?], posted on the Saudi website Elaph, March 23, 2003. Accessed through the website Ahewar.org. http://www.ahewar.org/debat/print.art.asp?aid=6276&ac=1.

17. Abu Jihad (Khalil al-Wazir, 1935–88), one the founders of the Palestinian national liberation organization Fatah and a key political and military figure of the Palestinian resistance, was assassinated by Israeli forces at his home in Tunis in April 1988. In 1962, in the wake of Algeria's independence Abu Jihad opened a bureau for Fatah in Algiers. Al-Afif al-Akhdar, who had close relations with the leaders of the Algerian Left, worked from 1962 to 1965 as a translator in Abu Jihad's Bureau. See Shakir al-Nabulsi, *Muhami al-Shaytan: Dirasa fi Fikr al-Afif al-Akhdar* [The Devil's Advocate: A Study of the Thought of al-Afif al-Akhdar] (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Tibaʿa wa-l-Nashr, 2005), for a synopsis of al-Akhdar's intellectual and political trajectory.

18. Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, [1981] 1997). Hereafter cited in the text.

19. Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," Occasional Papers Series (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986), 1.

20. Ruhollah al-Musawi Khomeini, *A Call to Divine Unity* (Tehran: Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, 1989).

21. See Talal Asad, "Multiculturalism and British Identity in the Wake of the Rushdie Affair" and "Ethnography, Literature, and Politics: Some Readings and Uses of Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses," in *The Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 239–306.

22. See Sadik Jalal al-Azm, *Dhihniyyat al-Tahrim: Salman Rushdi wa Haqiqat al-Adab* [The Tabooing Mentality: Salman Rushdie and Literature's Truth] (Damascus: Dar al-Mada, 1997), 45.

23. Nicolas Dot-Pouillard, "De Pékin à Téhéran en regardant vers Jérusalem: La singulière conversion à L'Islamisme des 'Maos du Fatah'" [From Peking to Teheran while Looking toward Jerusalem: The Singular Conversion to Islamism of "Fatah's Maoists"], *Cahiers de l'Institut Religioscope*, no. 2 (December 2008), 6.

24. Dot-Pouillard, "De Pékin à Téhéran," 10.

25. Dot-Pouillard, "De Pékin à Téhéran," 19.

26. Souheil al-Kache, "Convaincre discours de répression" [To Convince: A Discourse of Repression] (PhD diss., Université de Paris VIII Vincennes, 1979). The dissertation is not numbered. al-Kache defended his dissertation on November 29, 1979, under the supervision of François Chatelet and with a committee that included Jean-François Lyotard, the former member of Socialisme ou Barbarie.

27. al-Kache, "Convaincre discours de répression."

28. al-Kache, "Convaincre discours de répression."

29. Dot-Pouillard, "De Pékin à Téhéran," 10.

30. Sadik Jalal al-Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," in *Orientalism: A Reader*, ed. A. L. Macfie (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 234.

31. Said, *Orientalism*, 328–29.

32. Said, *Orientalism*, 154.

33. See Aijaz Ahmad, "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Cosmopolitan Location in the work of Edward Said," originally published in 1992, and reprinted in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1994), 159–220.

34. For a discussion of these themes, see Edward Said's brilliant critical intervention, *The Text, The World, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

35. Mahdi 'Amil, *Hal al-Qalb li-l-Sharq wa-l-'Aql l-il-Gharb? Marks fi Istishraq Idward Sa'id* [Does the Heart Belong to the Orient and the Mind to the West? Marx in Edward Said's *Orientalism*] (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, [1985] 2006).

36. Samer Frangie, "Theorizing from the Periphery: The Intellectual Project of Mahdi 'Amil," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (2012): 465.

37. Mahdi 'Amil, *Muqaddimat Nazariyya* [Theoretical Prolegomena] (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1980), 8.

38. 'Amil, *Hal al-Qalb li-l-Sharq*, 6.

39. 'Amil, *Hal al-Qalb li-l-Sharq*, 51. Emphasis in original.

40. *Orientalism*'s critique, which is predicated on the coupling of the West's knowledges and its will to dominate, when transposed to the theoretical and political stakes of al-Azm's Levantine problem-space, would lose the power part of the power/knowledge couple.

41. al-Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," 231. Hereafter cited in the text.

42. Said, *Orientalism*, 107.

43. Gramsci, after all, was central to both Edward Said's and Waddah Charara's theories. The first put Gramsci to use, in showing how Orientalism is a hegemonic Western structure that keeps on reproducing itself, while the second concluded around the same time that the multiplicity of modalities of power at work in Lebanese society weakens the establishment of hegemony. Power in this case operates as a formal dominance that does not rework the internal relations of communities and fashions subjectivities, while Said underscored the power of Orientalism in fashioning the "Orient" and the "Oriental."

44. Said, *Orientalism*, 25.

45. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

46. Ahmad Beydoun, "Idward Sa'id wa-l-Bahth fi al-Imbiriyaliyya" [Edward Said and the Examination of Imperialism], in *Kalamun: Min Mufradat al-Lugha ila Murakkabat-il-Thaqafa* [Kalamun: From Language's Words to Culture's Constructions] (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1997), 339.

47. Beydoun, "Idward Sa'id wa-l-Bahth fi al-Imbiryaliyya," 339.

1. Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 227.

2. Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?," 230. For an analysis of how Christian born-again language appropriates feminist language and left-liberal moves, see Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Politics and Language* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); for state discourse's appropriation of claims to the situatedness of scientific claims, which were marshaled by critics to call into question the imperialism of universal norms, see Timothy K. Choy, "Articulated Knowledges: Environmental Forms after Universality's Demise," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 1 (2005): 5–18; for the media's insistence on granting equal time to climate change deniers, see Kim Fortun, "Ethnography in Late Industrialism," *Cultural Anthropology* 27, no. 3 (2012): 446–64.

3. John G. Gunnell, *History, Discourses and Disciplines*, ed. Christopher C. Robinson (New York: Routledge, 2017), 165. These debates, which Gunnell observes, are precipitated by works of the likes of "Thomas Kuhn and Rorty, who disclaims the ability of philosophy to supply the transcendental ground of scientific truth," are a "displacement of the theory/practice problem that haunts all meta-theoretical problems" (165–66). I am thankful to Lisa Wedeen and Linda Zerilli, who introduced me to the work of John Gunnell, which I read with great profit.

4. Gunnell, *History, Discourses, and Disciplines*, 166. In a similar vein, Didier Fassin calls into question his inflated account of the powers of critical theory on political developments in the world. "Is it not too hastily putting the guilt on and simultaneously giving credit to social scientists for the treacherous influence of their knowledge?," Fassin asks, before adding, "is it not complacently granting them too much indignity as well as too much honour?" Didier Fassin, "The Endurance of Critique," *Anthropological Theory* 17, no. 1 (2017): 4.

5. See Linda M. G. Zerilli, "This Universalism Which Is Not One," *Diacritics* 28, no. 2 (1998): 2–20. This scholastic perspective on the world, which fails to dialectically relate the multiple processes and contradictions at the heart of these societies to global capitalist expansion and projects of geopolitical hegemony, misses the simple fact that "universalism," as Ann Tsing pithily put it, "is implicated in both imperial schemes to control the world and liberatory mobilizations for justice and empowerment." Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 9.

6. "One sign of this," Talal Asad had noted a bit less than three decades ago, "is the fact that anthropological textbooks on the Middle East—such as Gulick's or Eickelman's—devote their chapter on 'Religion' entirely to Islam. Although Christianity and Judaism are also indigenous to the region, it is only Muslim belief and practice that Western anthropologists appear to be interested in. In effect, for most Western anthropologists, Sephardic Judaism and Eastern Christianity are conceptually marginalized and represented as minor branches in the Middle East of a history that develops elsewhere—in Europe, and at the roots of Western civilization." Asad, "Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 3.

7. For example, see Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning Secularism: Islam Sovereignty and the Rule of Law in Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shiʿi Lebanon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

8. Lara Deeb gives an illustrative thumbnail sketch of the historical and social-scientific scholarship on sectarianism in Lebanon. She writes: "Max Weiss shows how a Shiʿi sectarian political identity and set of institutional practices were forged during the mandate period, via both top-down and ground-up processes. Scholars, including Joseph, Melani Cammett, Bassel Salloukh et al., Paul Kingston, Joanne Nucho, and Maya Mikdashi, among others, have also shown how sectarianism in contemporary Lebanon is maintained, reinforced, and reproduced at the levels of the state, municipality, civil society, elite networks, citizenship, and personal status law." Lara Deeb, "Til Sect Do You Part? On Sectarianism and Intermarriage in Lebanon," *Jadaliyya*, September 14, 2017, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/27137/-%E2%80%9Ctil-sect-do-you-part%E2%80%9D-on-sectarianism-and-interm.

9. Leila Ahmed poignantly highlights this dimension of colonial power in her encounter with US non-Muslim feminists who claim that they are able to articulate feminist positions from within their religious traditions, while Muslims have to give up their tradition to truly become feminists. Leila Ahmed, *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America—A Woman's Journey* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 292.

10. Talal Asad, "Conscripts of Western Civilization?," in *Dialectical Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Stanley Diamond*, vol. 1, ed. C. Gailey (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 333–51.

11. Deeb, "Til Sect Do You Part?"

12. For an illuminating analysis of psychic disavowal in a colonial context, see Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Colonialism and Psychoanalysis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

13. Lara Deeb, "On Representational Paralysis, or, Why I Don't Want to Write about Temporary Marriage," *Jadaliyya*, December 1, 2010, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/364/on-representational-paralysis-or-why-i-dont-want-t.

14. For a recent critique of metropolitan oppositional scholarship's focus on the critique of imperialism in the discussion of violence against women in the Muslim world as well as its denouncing of Muslim feminists as westernized, see Rachel Terman, "Islamophobia, Feminism and the Politics of Critique," *Theory, Culture and Society* 33, no. 2 (2016): 77–102.

15. Audra Simpson, writing on the contemporary ethnographies of Native North America, noted the disjunction between what was written about her own people and what mattered to them. In doing so, Simpson underlined the poverty of anthropological and postcolonial literatures that could not account for the multiple articulations of consciousness. "There was not a doubleness to their consciousness," Simpson writes, "a still-colonial but striving to be 'post-colonial consciousness' that denied the modern

self that Fanon, Bhabha and Giddens speak of and from." "There seemed rather to be a tripleness, a quadrupleness, to consciousness and an endless play," she adds, "and it went something like this: 'I am me, I am what you think I am and I am who this person to the right of me thinks I am and you are all full of shit and then maybe I will tell you to your face.'" Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures* 9 (2007): 74.

16. For a discussion of the idealist and materialist predication of the subject, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Practical Politics of the Open End," in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interview, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990).

17. Elyachar, *Markets of Dispossession*, 9.

18. The modern project of fashioning peasants into citizens, whether you call it a social reform or a disciplinary project, is also suffering from an additional set of complications. International organizations, since the Bretton Woods Agreement, have the authority "to oversee not only relations between states but the conditions of life of their citizens as well." This aspect of these organizations' work was reinforced when, in addition to their humanitarian effort to alleviate poverty, a concern for human rights was added to their mandate. "With this switch," Elyachar writes, "the person being counted became no longer a citizen of a nation-state but an individual in a universal humanity." Elyachar, *Markets of Dispossession*, 76.

19. Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," and Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

20. See Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), cited in Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), and David Scott, "Appendix: The Trouble of Thinking: An Interview with Talal Asad," in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, ed. David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 243–304.

21. Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1997] 2000).

22. This of course is not exclusive to the Arab world. "South Africans," James Ferguson writes, "responded to the 1990s academic critiques of modernism and enlightenment with the dismayed objection: 'You all are ready to abandon it before we've even gotten to try it!'" James Ferguson, "Theory from the Comaroffs, or How to Know the World Up, Down, Backwards and Forwards," "Theorizing the Contemporary," *Cultural Anthropology* website, February 25, 2012, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/271-theory-from-the-comaroffs-or-how-to-know-the-world-up-down-backwards-and-forwards.

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ization of the Suez Canal Speech"], July 26, 1956. http://nasser.bibalex.org/Speeches/browser.aspx?SID=495&lang=en.

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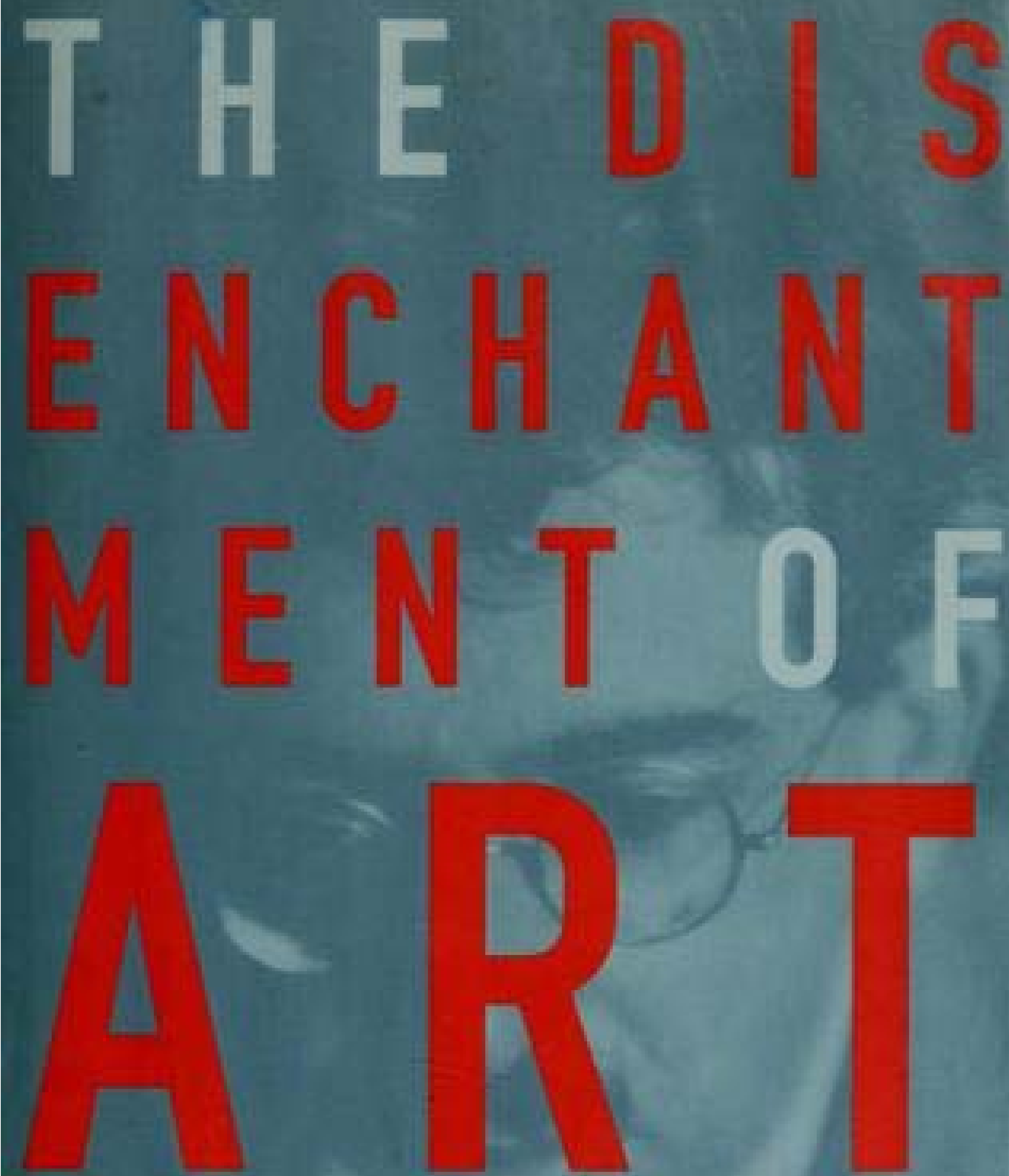

# THE DISENCHANTMENT OF ART

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF WALTER BENJAMIN

RAINER ROCHLITZ

# *THE DISENCHANTMENT OF ART*

## *The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*

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*RAINER ROCHLITZ*

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# *Introduction*

## *I*

The author of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and *Arcades,* of *One-Way Street* and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," is one of the rare thinkers who matter in France, in Germany, in Italy, and, to a certain extent, in the United States as well; he has escaped the petty squabbling and outlived the dominant currents and fashions that have succeeded one another in Western philosophy for the last fifty years. This durability is grounded in the literary qualities of his writings, in his exceptional biography, tragically representative of the destiny of the German–Jewish intelligentsia in the twentieth century, and, finally, in his acute sense of the theoretical issues of the era, whose contemporary character has not yet been belied. Among the authors who did not live long enough to participate significantly in postwar debates, only Ludwig Wittgenstein has had a comparable destiny and remains, like Benjamin, a contemporary through and through.

This book on Walter Benjamin is concerned above all with the conceptual underpinnings of his thought. Its ambition is both to understand the internal logic of his thought and to evaluate his contribution to the disciplines he took on: philosophy of language, aesthetics, historiography. The biographical aspect will move to the background, to the extent that this is possible in the case of a thinker whose life provokes the same passion as his work.[1] Many of Benjamin's texts that deal with different writers or with historical and sociological themes will not be considered in order to focus the analysis more closely on the conceptual structure. In the literature devoted to him thus far, the richness of the Benjaminian universe has been adequately emphasized; in contrast, studies that manage to grasp the logic

that assures the coherence of a philosopher's system of thought across the proliferation of his writings have been rare.

Despite my profound admiration for the thinker and the individual, this book is not at all hagiographical. It rests on the principle that only a critical rereading can both link Benjamin's thinking to contemporary inquiries in philosophy and do justice to the critical imperative inherent in his own work. Until now, too many studies of Benjamin have manifested a fascination—often recognizable in a virtually uncritical imitation, encouraged, as it happens, by the seductive, assured, even authoritarian style of Benjamin's writing—that limits any real productivity of the work.

Whatever judgment they make of his thinking, all those who have taken an interest in his work and life have been conscious of the debt that a peaceful Europe with permeable borders owes to this man whom neither Germany nor—during his exile—France was able to offer decent living conditions and work; his suicide at the Spanish border has come to symbolize the situation of the persecuted intellectual. Such a feeling of debt, nevertheless, does not justify renouncing the task of a critical reading: Benjamin himself had good reasons for being wary of any idea of "celebration" or "homage." Not only does this attitude disregard what is refractory in a work, what is opposed to the constitution of a culture of reference, if only in its use of authors reputed to be subversive, but it also fails to recognize the rigorous imperative Benjamin formulated for a knowledge of the contemporary period; for him, a past determined at every instant reveals the present to itself. Benjamin's experience is not necessarily a key that will open up *our* present; his experience could just as easily conceal the issues of our time and lead to false connections. But, regardless of any application of the principles he formulated to his own work, Benjamin does not deserve the claims made on him by the defeatism of a way of thinking that makes his "failure" a model, as though the historical constellation to which he succumbed remained unchanged today, condemning us to meditate endlessly on the apocalyptic thought that the beginning of World War II and the German–Soviet pact inspired in him. In such cases, faithfulness to the memory of the victims turns to morbid imitation and intellectual laziness.

Benjamin's progeny could not be more diverse. Literary criticism and art criticism continue to refer to his writings. Theodor W. Adorno's work is a ceaseless commentary on him. Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard, even the later Michel Foucault, refer to him as often as do Jürgen Habermas and Paul Ricoeur. Both modernists and postmodernists claim him as one of their own; advocates and detractors of the Enlightenment divide up his inheritance. His most committed exegetes place his thinking on the same level as that of the most discussed living philosophers.[2] The diversity of his heirs itself poses a problem: Are *all* these claims equally legitimate? Some focus on his diagnosis of the age, others on more system-

atic aspects of his thinking, such as his philosophy of language or his conception of history; most merely cling to particular aspects of his research on art, film, literature, and the modern city. Benjamin's work is a gold mine of suggestive quotations, usable for the most contradictory ends. It would be pointless to try to curb these uses on the pretext that they are unwarranted or superficial; it is perhaps more productive to detail the meaning and ramifications of these expressions and formulas that have been emancipated from their author to serve the most diverse causes.

Through the diversity of forms, themes, and conceptions that overlap or succeed one another in Benjamin's corpus, the reading I propose here will trace a guiding thread. Only such a "systematic" approach will allow us to discover, behind this multifaceted critic, the philosopher who remains faithful to a few guiding ideas. Such a search for unity will not be able to avoid resorting to a certain structured *periodization.* Without such a scheme, we would either have to be satisfied with subsuming Benjamin's thought under a few abstract notions that would not elucidate any of his successive positions, or we would end up dissolving his central ideas in a multiplicity of positions drawn from an infinity of contexts.[2]

From the beginning, Benjamin's thought is a philosophy of *language* that, as such, is linked to efforts by numerous other thinkers of the twentieth century—in particular, by Wittgenstein—to escape the aporias of the philosophy of consciousness, in particular those inherent in the privilege accorded to the cognitive and instrumental relation to reality. Benjamin was also among those seeking to put an end to the "myth of interiority."[3] He shared with Wittgenstein the ambition of bringing about "the elimination of the inexpressible in language" (*Correspondence,* 80, letter of July 1916, translation modified).[4] The "spirit" has no reality for him except in the form of symbols. In his view, language cannot be understood in terms of subject and object. But to the extent that Benjamin takes no interest in most everyday functions of language, concentrating instead on the "Adamic" and poetic function of naming, he cannot radically escape the schema of the subject who names and the object that is named. The theoretical consequences of this incomplete rupture with the philosophy of the subject makes itself felt in particular when Benjamin seeks to give a social function to his theory, that is, a function in which the naming subject endeavors to change the course of history.

Beginning with this conception of language as faculty for naming and absolute expression—as communication not with men but with God—Benjamin attempts to elaborate a theory of art: From the time of man's entry into history (or the expulsion from Paradise, according to the biblical myth), art has conserved in a privileged manner the Adamic power of naming. Benjamin's theory encompasses three periods. In the first, during which Benjamin seeks to correct the aesthetic tradition, the "theological" domi-

nates: reestablishing the unrecognized meaning of romantic criticism, namely, its messianism; restoring the meaning of the work of the later Johann Goethe, its rejection of myth; bringing baroque allegory, the forgotten flip side of classical traditions, back from its unjustified exile.

The second period is that of political commitment and the discovery of the European avant-garde: Dadaism, surrealism, photography, and Russian cinema. Benjamin attempts to place the force of his criticism in the service of social revolution, to the point of sacrificing, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," the very autonomy of art: its quality of absolute expression. During this period, drawing on surrealism, he also elaborates a series of models for redeeming the integrity of human forces in the face of historical action: creative intoxication and a total presence of mind that could assure humanity mastery over history and control of a technology that, without such a redemption, is in danger of turning against humanity and destroying it through the aesthetic fascination of war.

The third period tends to restore aesthetic autonomy and the theological foundation it has for Benjamin: Beginning with "The Storyteller," Benjamin no longer accepts the liquidation of the traditional element in works of art. Finally, his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" reveals the ethical and political character of his strategy as an art critic: When he brushes history "against the grain" to reestablish concealed or forgotten meanings, he is attempting to save a threatened past, to make heard the stifled voices of history without which there could be no redeemed humanity.

Language, art and literature, history—beginning with romanticism, these philosophical themes, stemming from the Immanuel Kant of the *Third Critique* and from authors such as Giambattista Vico, Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, belong to the "humanities" and, more especially, to the *hermeneutic* tradition. They define the fields of knowledge that Hans Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Knowledge* in particular will grapple with.[5] Scientific knowledge and morality are characteristically excluded from them; they occupy a place secondary to that of the practice that consists in opening up the horizons of meaning, within which knowledge and norms of action will come to be inscribed. What distinguishes Benjamin from Gadamer is the former's imperative for breaking with a tradition that by privileging continuity overwhelms the decisive moments of history, moments of a liberating interruption in a course of things that, according to Benjamin, has always been in great part catastrophic. If he lays claim to a tradition, it is one that is concealed, oppressed, always threatened, and always to be reconquered. His vision of history is Manichaean. To the mythical continuity of repression that the "victors" have at all times exercised, it opposes the discontinuity of revolts

that were immediately repressed and forgotten, difficult to rediscover subsequently but vital for the future destiny of freedom. It is this excluded part of history that carries the messianic hope of a reversal.

This book is less a monograph on Benjamin's thought than an attempt to render his intuitions operative for the theory of language, for the reflection on historical method, and, especially, for the theory of art, a field in which his intuitions seem to have remained productive. His philosophy of language and his conception of history are the premises and extensions of a theory of art and criticism ordered around his concept of *origin*: the actualization of certain figures from the past, crystallized especially by art and waiting to be saved from oblivion, from denial, and from misreading. Through this dedicated rescue operation applied each time to a threatened past and entering into a significant constellation with an obscure present that it can nevertheless elucidate, Benjamin attempts to revise the official history of Western civilization and its reason.

This study must begin by seeking to grasp the logic of Benjamin's writings across their disconcerting diversity. What is unilateral and nevertheless irreplaceable in this logic has to be underscored within the framework of an approach that, I hope, does not betray Benjamin's intuitions, despite the fact that I have different premises.

## *II*

First, and this is perhaps the most critical point, it proves impossible to identify a traditional symbolic model—Judaism—that Benjamin could be linked to. When he affirms that only theological categories allow us to think about truth or history (*Origin,* 28; "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 253; "Program," 5ff.), he is not speaking in the name of a particular symbolic identity but is, rather, claiming the unconditional truth of his assertions. A thinker, whether linked to Judaism or not, should, according to Benjamin, have recourse to "theology." There is no doubt that, within the framework of a German philosophical tradition dominated by Protestantism and by tendencies he considered mythical or pagan, Benjamin attempted to put forth the critical power of Judaism.[6] But he did so not simply to affirm one identity against others but to approach a more comprehensive philosophical truth.

The Jewish identity of Benjamin's thought remained ambiguous, even for his best friend, Gershom Scholem: On the one hand, Scholem sees in Benjamin an authentic representative of the Jewish tradition[7]; on the other, he maintains that Benjamin knew almost nothing about that tradition[8] and that he was not committed enough to Judaism to adjust to the climate of the Palestine of his time.[9] How the Jewish tradition is transmitted through

Benjamin's thought remains to be clarified.[10] The least adventurous hypothesis seems to be that, even though he knew virtually nothing about the Jewish tradition, he nevertheless represented one of its characteristic attitudes, in an environment that tended to deny and conceal it.

The same is roughly true for most of those German–Jewish philosophers of the time who came from extremely assimilated families, particularly Ernst Bloch and Adorno. Others, such as Franz Rosenzweig and Scholem, made an effort to reappropriate the concealed part of Jewish tradition. Rosenzweig, the author of *The Star of Redemption,*[11] was for Benjamin the model for a new questioning of the dominant tradition of Western philosophy from within a mode of concealed thought. Unlike Scholem and Rosenzweig, however, Benjamin did not want merely to reconquer a lost *identity*—a perfectly legitimate undertaking, by the way—but, rather, through the critical and constructive contribution of the Jewish tradition, to transform Western rationalism and irrationalism in its entirety in order to arrive at a less unilateral concept of universality. We have hardly begun to inquire into the success or failure of this attempt.

The status of theology—Jewish or Christian—remains controversial in philosophical debates, even though in France in the early 1990s a "theological turn" of thought seemed to go without saying.[12] After several centuries of criticism both of metaphysics and of the theological content it conveys, a pure and simple return to metaphysical and theological categories is not automatically justified; however noble its intentions, it bears the stigma of regression. The genesis of such a return in Benjamin's thought—and in that of an entire generation of thinkers in Germany—is quite transparent: In 1914–1915, when the young Benjamin was drafting his first essays within a neo-Kantian context, the representatives of that current, which dominated in the universities, had in large part converted to German nationalism. The reference to "theology"—in fact, to an often very personal reinterpretation of the Bible and of certain mystic writings—can then be considered an attempt to safeguard the universal content of Western reason that seemed to be faltering and compromised in its secularized form.

But this safeguarding had a price: By becoming substantial once more, reason, which had become formal and procedural with Kant, could no longer rely on every subject's faculty to account for its acts and words, a faculty the subject cannot demand for itself without recognizing it in others as well. In no longer having recourse to this faculty, the subject finds itself referred back to a collective that is supposed to guarantee the validity of substantial reason.[13] Whether willingly or not, the philosopher-"theologian" is transformed into a mouthpiece for this implicit collective, which is dogmatic to the extent that it is obliged to exempt certain fundamental categories from all discussion. In seeking to save reason from the hazards of immanence, it is the philosopher-"theologian" who prepares the way for reason's subversion.

## *III*

Walter Benjamin's thinking barely distinguishes between diagnosing the historical present and uncovering its normative bases. Several versions of his theory of knowledge exist, each elaborated ad hoc as a function of a particular research project. In each, the urgency of the historical present dictates the principles of his approach. In an essay on Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" Foucault has distinguished between two great critical traditions stemming from Kant—the "analytic of truth" and the "ontology of contemporary reality"—that, according to Foucault, one must choose between. He himself chooses the second, which G. W. F. Hegel and the Frankfurt School, Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber, also embraced.[14] Benjamin also certainly chose the second, except in certain of his earliest writings, which still betray a systematic ambition. Between "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" or "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" and the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" the move from the "analytic of truth" to the "ontology of contemporary reality" is accomplished, even as the attempt at a rupture between "universal" and "university" philosophy is carried out.

It remains to be seen whether this opposition is pertinent in the long run, whether the reduction of the theory of knowledge to the simple function of an analysis of the present does not lead to a dissolution of philosophy into literary essays and philosophical journalism. Benjamin has contributed to the discrediting and discouraging of any systematic philosophical inquiry; nonetheless, his "ontology of the present" still had a system in the background. The "ontologists of contemporary reality" have reached the point of ignoring advances in the philosophy of language, in historical methodology, and in the philosophy of art. Such a separation between the two aspects of Kantian thought identified by Foucault seems today to have lost its legitimacy. Neither of the two traditions has emerged intact. In this context, it is useful to recall that Benjamin did not *start from* the "ontology of contemporary reality," that he maintained his contact with the university as long as possible and then his contact with the members of the Frankfurt School, who continued to respect its requirements, and that his thinking remains permeated by the systematic intuitions of these beginnings. Finally, the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," his last important work, makes explicit an ethics of universal solidarity with every creature who has suffered human violence, and the whole of his aesthetic criticism bears the signature of this ethics.

## *IV*

We therefore need to take into account Benjamin's initial normative bases (explicit and implicit), the reasons that led him to modify them, and the

risks of dissolution that followed from these modifications. The fragility of these bases lies particularly in the fact that, in Benjamin's early philosophy, the only aspect of language's function that he takes into account is that of revealing the world through the medium of the word. This privilege is in accord with his central interest in literature, but it is also responsible for certain impasses in this theory.

Viewed from the perspective of the revelation of the world through the word and the image, the historical movement of desacralization can only represent an impoverishment, whereas this same evolution appears in a different light if one takes into account the growing importance of the exchange between a proposed image and the interpretations of it that reverberate in the social space. No work of art today can possess the magic and authority of a masterpiece from the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, but a disrespectful collage that twists that masterpiece's meaning can be incomparably valuable as a revelation for *our* age. Benjamin is certainly on the trail of this idea when he situates historical evolution between cult value and exhibition value, but he once more privileges the trajectory of the artistic, or even technical, medium—in this case, film—without placing it in relation to the dynamic proper to social life. Thus, anticipating Marshall McLuhan, he formulates the primacy of the media over political initiative: In encouraging the display of the charisma of dictators, radio, television, and film seem to doom "bourgeois democracy."

By operating his "linguistic" (or "mediatic") turn, Benjamin replaces the spirit with the word, the name, or, in a general way, the medium of communication, according them primacy over the subject. But this substitution leaves intact the dual relation between the medium and the subject. To the extent that Benjamin does not analyze the ways that subjects use meanings, he remains a prisoner of the premises of a philosophy of consciousness. Hence his thinking remains centered on the traditional themes of that philosophy: the awakening from a dream state and the reappropriation of a lost origin.

The move from the spirit to the letter brings together philosophy and literature: The literary work is the quintessential medium where the spirit has no existence independent of the letter. In remaining at this symbolic "materialization" of the spirit, Benjamin has contributed to the effacement of the boundaries that make the philosopher-writer a "creator of concepts."[15]

## V

For many readers, in France perhaps more than elsewhere, Walter Benjamin is seen as a *writer* first and a philosopher only second. He himself had the ambition of being "considered the foremost critic of German

literature" (*Correspondence,* 359). In the eyes of Adorno[16] and Scholem (*Correspondence,* 374),[17] however, he was primarily a *philosopher.* The context of recent (but already dated) debates, the assimilation of any conceptual philosophy to a quasi-totalitarian system of thought, and the vogue for a philosophy that would be indistinguishable from literature have favored the more "literary" approaches to Benjamin's work. The reading proposed here is philosophical. It remains suspicious of the belief in a simple reversal of an instrumental conception of language. Benjamin certainly polished all his texts as if they were literary works, and he published—in part to pay the rent, in part to satisfy his taste for writing—texts that without a doubt are literary forms: sonnets, translations of Baudelaire, childhood memories ("A Berlin Chronicle," *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert* [A Berlin childhood in the nineteenth century]), novellas (such as "Rastelli Narrates"), travel narratives (*Moscow Diary*), dreams and aphorisms (*Einbahnstrasse* [parts of which were translated as "One-Way Street"]). It is nevertheless easy to show that even in texts of this type he never loses sight of the philosophical questions that are his own.

Undoubtedly, there is no philosophical system of Walter Benjamin. He is, in the most elevated sense of a term that is sometimes used to discredit him, an essayist. But he is not an essayist in the manner of Montaigne; the scientific imperative is not lacking in his essays. He conducts concrete research from a philosophical perspective. He has created or rethought numerous concepts that are part of philosophical debates today: notably, truth content and subject matter, symbol and allegory, aura and mechanical reproduction, cult value and exhibition value, dialectical image and remembrance.

If there is no system in Benjamin, we can nevertheless speak of a fundamental schema in his approach and philosophical conception. In the movement of historical "progress," the succession of catastrophes that moves from a fullness of meaning, impure because of its mythical character, to a poverty of meaning incarnated by abstract "meaning" and by the "reification" of the mechanically reproduced commodity, Benjamin seeks to mark the pauses where the liberating "genius" of humanity has manifested itself while pointing toward a decisive liberation. Here, art occupies a privileged place, but only to the extent that the enchantment of its appearance is dominated by the disenchantment proper to knowledge. Greek tragedy, baroque allegory, Charles Baudelaire's modern poetry, and revolutionary film are among these privileged moments where a loss of meaning is heroically converted into a symbolic form free from all pretense. This schema undergoes several versions, from the first conception of a world of Ideas bringing together authentic forms to the transformation of the critical act into political action, and from the privileging of the actualization or destruction of tradition to the remembrance of a past threatened with

definitive occultation. But the idea of rescuing a liberating act of signification, forgotten or disregarded by the official tradition, remains constant.

What can such a schema signify for a reader formed in other schools—that of analytic philosophy, for example—who does not share the historical, philosophical, and aesthetic passions of the European continent? That reader will have a tendency to think that Benjamin is not a philosopher in the strict sense of the term. Nevertheless, a rereading of Benjamin today must respond to these analytic imperatives. By means of criticism and explication, the rereading at work in this book attempts to identify in Benjamin the element that can be integrated into theories of art, language, and history and into ethics and political theory.

# *CHAPTER I*

# *Philosophy of Language*

## *THE MAGIC OF LANGUAGE*

Walter Benjamin considered himself a "philosopher of language" first of all.[1] Any effort to understand his thought must begin with his first works, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (1916) and "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" (1918). It is here that the conceptual choices that will determine the totality of his positions and interests are laid out. During World War I, in fact, he formulated his ideas on the particularity of baroque drama ("*Trauerspiel* und Tragödie" [*Trauerspiel* and tragedy] in 1916) and on Friedrich Hölderlin ("Zwei Gedichte von Friedrich Hölderlin" [Two poems by Friedrich Hölderlin] in 1915); he began to translate Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil*; and, through his contact with Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem, he defined his particular position in relation to Judaism (which would also be his attitude toward Marxism): faithfulness to an idea and a refusal of allegiance to any organization.

To understand Benjamin's interest both in art theory and in the philosophy of history, we need to begin with his philosophy of language. This philosophy has no scientific status. Rather, it is a myth through which the young philosopher attempted to define his task as a thinker. First of all, for Benjamin, language was not particular to man. *Everything* in Creation is language, and man's language is only a particular, albeit a privileged, form, one mode of "language as such." By this Benjamin means not the different forms of producing signals that exist in the animal kingdom but, rather, a linguistic implication in everything, be it organic or inorganic: "There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is in the nature of all to communicate their mental meanings" (*Reflections*, 314). At a time when Ferdinand de

Saussure and others were elaborating a scientific linguistics, Benjamin seems to be returning purely and simply to the premodern—metaphysical and mystical—conception of the Book of the World in which everything speaks to us. But he rapidly reveals the more specific intention that guided him and linked him to a symbolist context (Stéphane Mallarmé, Stefan George); his intention is to rescue language from any instrumentalist conception: "What does language communicate? It communicates the mental being corresponding to it. It is fundamental that this mental being communicates itself *in* language and not *through* language. Languages therefore have no speaker, if this means someone who communicates *through* these languages" (*Reflections,* 315–316). Benjamin insists repeatedly on the fact that "all language communicates itself" (*Reflections,* 316) before it can become—and this is an illusion—an instrument for the communication of a particular content. He speaks of the "immediacy" or the "magical" character of all mental communication, linked to the fact that it is produced *in* and not *through* language. The magic of language lies in the fact that, of itself, it communicates in an absolute way. This magic has to be distinguished from the false magic inherent in the instrumental use of language, from which it must be liberated. Like the language of things and events, human language expresses and communicates before any intentional communication.

There nevertheless exists an important difference between the language of things and that of men:

> The linguistic being of things is their language; this proposition, applied to man, means: the linguistic being of man is his language. Which signifies: man communicates his own mental being *in* his language. However, the language of man speaks in words. Man therefore communicates his own mental being (insofar as it is communicable) by *naming* all other things. . . . *It is therefore the linguistic being of man to name things.* (*Reflections,* 317, emphasis in the original)

The difference between the two types of language lies in the addressee. Things and beings in nature communicate themselves "to man" (*Reflections,* 317). In contrast, "*in naming the mental being of man communicates itself to God*" (*Reflections,* 318). Benjamin needs God to save human language from an instrumental conception that he calls the "bourgeois conception of language":

> Anyone who believes that man communicates his mental being *by* names cannot also assume that it is his mental being that he communicates, for this does not happen through the names of things, that is, through the words by which he denotes a thing. And, equally, the advocate of such a

> view can only assume that man is communicating factual subject matter to other men, for that does happen through the word by which he denotes a thing. This view is the bourgeois conception of language, the invalidity and emptiness of which will become increasingly clear in what follows. It holds that the means of communication is the word, its object factual, its addressee a human being. The other conception of language, in contrast, knows no means, no object, and no addressee of communication. (*Reflections,* 318)

God is the witness of this human faculty for naming through which humanity expresses its mental being. In this way, Benjamin short-circuits any theory of language that links human speech to pragmatic functions, which are here called "bourgeois" in a sense that as yet has nothing to do with Marxist criticism. At the time of his interest in dialectical materialism, in fact, Benjamin felt the need to reformulate his theory of language. But what he called at that time the "mimetic faculty" of man was nothing other than that same noninstrumental relationship, the materialist version of a conception of language that excluded any function of "communication" in the usual sense. "Communication" appeared only in the absolute sense of a revelation without addressee. God is here the name for that absolute nonaddressee who liberates language from all instrumental finality but also from all noninstrumental communication in dialogue.

In "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," the function of naming makes the human being a privileged instance of divine Creation. Creation *is completed* through the linguistic activity of man:

> Man is the namer, by this we recognize that through him pure language speaks. All nature, insofar as it communicates itself, communicates itself in language, and so finally in man. Hence he is the lord of nature and can give names to things. Only through the linguistic being of things can he gain knowledge of them from within himself—in name. God's creation is completed when things receive their names from man. (*Reflections,* 318–319)

From these presuppositions, Benjamin deduces a metaphysics, which he himself links to scholastics; it includes a "graduation of all mental beings . . . in degrees of existence or being" (*Reflections,* 320), as a function of the philosophical–religious concept of *revelation.* Benjamin's idea is that

> the highest mental region of religion is (in the concept of revelation) at the same time the only one that does not know the inexpressible. For it is addressed in name and expresses itself as revelation. In this, however, notice is given that only the highest mental being, as it appears in

> religion, rests solely on man and on the language in him, whereas all art, not excluding poetry, does not rest on the ultimate essence of language-mind, but on language-mind confined to things, even if in consummate beauty. . . . Language itself is not perfectly expressed in things themselves. (*Reflections,* 321)

This hierarchy of being, established on the basis of the relation to language, elucidates the internal economy of Benjamin's oeuvre. What it aspires to, without being able to attain it, is a fusion of philosophical and religious discourse in the perfect *doctrine* (*Lehre*) that knows nothing of the inexpressible. Only such a doctrine could rest exclusively on man and language. In contrast, art, including poetry, is situated at a lower level whose language is "impure" and still acquainted with the inexpressible through the thingness of its language. Even lower on the chain of being, the languages of things are "imperfect" and "mute." Just as man in general *saves* things that are in themselves mute by naming them and thus including them in Creation, the philosopher, as Benjamin conceives it, has the task of *saving* the mental being of art and poetry by stripping away their thingness and bringing them back to the bosom of pure language. That is what the infinite work of the critic and translator consists in.

A letter to Martin Buber written in June 1916, a few months before the essay "On Language as Such," illustrates the meaning Benjamin gave both to the *magical* character of language and to the process of eliminating the inexpressible or muteness of the thing from language. Invited to contribute to the journal *Der Jude* [The Jew], Benjamin refused to make his writing a means of "influencing" the moral world and human behavior, in [placing] the motives behind actions at their disposal" (*Correspondence,* 79). He contrasted this to a different relation between word and act:

> 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.* Every salutary effect, indeed every effect not inherently devastating, that any writing may have resides in its (the word's, language's) mystery. In however many forms language may prove to be effective, it will not be so through the transmission of content but rather through the purest disclosure of its dignity and its nature. And if I disregard other effective forms here—aside from poetry and prophecy—it repeatedly seems to me that the crystal-pure elimination of the inexpressible in language is the most obvious form given to us to be effective within language and, to that extent, through it. This elimination of the inexpressible seems to me to coincide precisely with what is actually the objective and dispassionate manner of writing, and to intimate the relationship between knowledge and action precisely within linguistic magic. My concept of objective and, at the same time, highly political style and writing is this:

> to awaken interest in what was denied to the word; only where this sphere of speechlessness reveals itself in unutterable pure power can the magic spark leap between the word and the motivating deed, where the unity of these two equally real entities resides. (*Correspondence*, 80, translation slightly modified)

In his interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis,[2] Benjamin declares that he is following the Bible in its principle by "presupposing [language] as an ultimate reality, perceptible only in its manifestation, inexplicable and mystical" (*Reflections*, 322). The Benjaminian interpretation nevertheless establishes a hierarchy between the divine word (*verbe*) and the human name (*nom*),[3] a hierarchy that could be Kantian in its inspiration. He then comments on the rhythm of Creation in Genesis—"Let there be—And there was—And he called":

> Therefore, language both creates and is finished creation, it is word and name. In God the name creates because it is the word, and God's word is knowledge because it is a name. . . . The absolute relation of name to knowledge exists only in God, only there is the name inwardly identical to the creating word, the pure medium of knowledge. This means that God made things knowable in their names. Man, however, names them according to knowledge. (*Reflections*, 323, translation modified)

The particularity of man is that he was not created by the word and that he was not named. Drawing mystical conclusions from the biblical narrative, Benjamin continues:

> In man God set language, which had served *Him* as medium of creation, free. . . . Man is the knower in the same language in which God is creator. God created him in his image, he created the knower in the image of the creator. . . . In the word creation took place and God's linguistic being is the word. All human language is only reflection of the word in name. Name is no closer to the word than knowledge to creation. The infinity of all human language always remains limited and analytic in nature in comparison to the absolutely unlimited and creative infinity of the divine word. (*Reflections*, 323)

The "Kantian" character of this distinction between the word and the name, between a knowledge (of intellectual intuition) that creates and a finite knowledge with access only to the "reflection" of the divine Word, is underscored by the introduction of the passive term "receptivity" to characterize human language: "In the name, the word of God no longer creates; it has become in one part receptive, even receptive to language. Through this receptivity [or conception, *Empfängnis*], it 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" (*Reflections,* 325, translation modified). This passive relation of receptivity will later be found in the theory of the mimetic faculty.

As the limiting case between word and name, man's proper name has no knowledge value; instead, it is "the communion of man with the *creating* word of God" (*Reflections,* 324, translation modified). Hence the high value Benjamin always grants to the proper name: In a form that has, of course, been stripped of meaning, man has at his disposal a piece of the divine Word. Conversely, the name that man gives to things has a value of knowledge and, unlike the Kantian concept, is even directed at the "thing in itself":

> The thing in itself has no word, being created from God's word and known in its name by a human word. 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 the thing depends on how language is communicated to him. (*Reflections,* 324–325, translation modified)

Benjamin sidesteps any cognitive *problem,* which, for him, seems to stem from a false conception of knowledge: To name adequately, one need only understand Creation; from that point on, there is no longer any problem of method. Similarly, he rejects—as he will also do within the framework of this materialist theory—any idea of a conventional character of linguistic signs: "The human word is the name of things. 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" (*Reflections,* 324).

Both spontaneous and receptive, human language is for Benjamin essentially *translation*; at this point, he formulates his first theory of translation: "It is the translation of the language of things into that of man. It is necessary to found the concept of translation at the deepest level of linguistic theory. . . . 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" (*Reflections,* 325). The translation of the language of things into human language—the very operation of human knowledge—is possible because there exists a kinship between them:

> The objectivity of this translation is, however, guaranteed by God. For God created things; the creating word in them is the germ of the cognizing name, just as God, too, finally named each thing after it was created. But obviously this naming is only an expression of the identity

> of the creating word and the cognizing name in God, not the prior solution of the task that God expressly assigns to man himself: that of naming things. In receiving the unspoken nameless language of things and converting it into sounds through the name, man performs this task. It would be insoluble were not the name-language of man and the nameless one of things related in God and issued forth from the same creating word, which in things became the communication of matter in magic communion, and in man the language of knowledge and name in blissful mind. (*Reflections*, 325–326, translation slightly modified)

Through this theological description of language, Benjamin does not account for that which needs explanation and which he is presupposing: namely, the relationship between language, knowledge, and things. How could knowledge progress given these foundations, and how could there have been a modern science of nature? In positing a God who guarantees the objectivity of translation, does not Benjamin avoid asking the arduous question of the functioning of language and the possibility of a translation?

An aphorism in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* underscores the aporetic character of Benjamin's approach. By dissociating the human faculty of naming from the everyday practice of language, Benjamin grasps only a "language on holiday." Wittgenstein denounces

> the conception of naming as, so to speak, an occult process. Naming appears as a *queer* connexion of a word with an object.—And you really get such a queer connexion when the philosopher tries to bring out *the* relation between name and thing by staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name or even the word "this" innumerable times. For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday.* And *here* we may indeed fancy naming to be some remarkable act of mind, as it were a baptism of an object.[4]

Such questions will be at the center of the reflections of Willard Van Orman Quine (who will deny the very possibility of an objectivity of translation in the absence of God as guarantor) and Gadamer (who attempts to show the paths by which such an objectivity is nevertheless established in the use of language); such reflections are foreign to Benjamin, whose concern lies elsewhere. In "On Language as Such"—which he never published, merely passing it around to several friends, but which helped him see his own ideas more clearly and to which he was still referring in the 1930s—he seeks to ground the task of the philosopher. In a sense, the biblical text plays a role analogous to tragic texts and pre-Socratic thought in Nietzsche's philosophy: It is a primitive wisdom lost by modernity.

It is also in biblical terms that the origin of the "confusion of tongues" is reformulated, with the biblical text in fact "corrected" by the philosophical concept:

> As the unspoken word in the existence of things falls infinitely short of the naming word in the knowledge of man, and as the latter in turn must fall short of the creating word of God, there is reason for the multiplicity of human languages. The language of things can pass into the language of knowledge and names only through translation—as many translations, so many languages—once man has fallen from the paradisiac state that knew only one language. (According to the Bible, this consequence of the expulsion from paradise admittedly came about only later.) The paradisiac language of man must have been one of perfect knowledge; whereas later all knowledge is again infinitely differentiated in the multiplicity of language, was indeed forced to differentiate itself on a lower level as creation in name. (*Reflections*, 326–327, translation slightly modified)

Benjamin interprets original sin and the tree of knowledge in the same spirit. According to him, they put an end to the magic immanent in language, to the immediacy of knowledge through the name, *and* to the concrete and pertinent character of language:

> 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 to the paradisiac state. Knowledge of good and evil abandons name, it is a knowledge from outside, the uncreated imitation of the creative word. Name steps outside itself in this knowledge; the Fall marks the birth of the *human word*, in which name no longer lives intact, and which has stepped out of language, the language of knowledge, from what we may call its immanent magic, in order to become expressly, as it were externally, magic. The word must communicate *something* (other than itself). That is really the Fall of language-mind. (*Reflections*, 327)

External communication and the knowledge of good and evil are the same thing: "prattling," to use Søren Kierkegaard's term, which Benjamin borrows and which in this case designates in a derogatory way the necessity, to which finite beings are subject, of understanding one another and resolving their conflicts. Such a "prattling," according to Benjamin, *calls for* the judging word, the legal judgment (*Reflections*, 328). Benjamin takes it literally, going so far as to deduce from it "the mythical origin of law" that

will be at issue in "Critique of Violence" and "Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*" [Goethe's *Elective Affinities*]:

> But the 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 communicability of abstractions resides in judgment. This immediacy in the communication of abstraction came into being as judgment, when, in the Fall, man abandoned immediacy in the communication of the concrete, name, and fell into the abyss of the mediateness of all communication, of the word as means, of the empty word, into the abyss of prattle. For . . . the question as to good and evil in the world after creation was empty prattle. The tree of knowledge did not stand in the garden of God in order to dispense information on good and evil, but as an emblem of judgment over the questioner. This immense irony marks the mythical origin of law. (*Reflections,* 328)

The myth of original sin also explains a change in the vision of nature that Benjamin will evoke again in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama:*

> After the Fall, however, when God's word curses the ground, the appearance of nature is deeply changed. Now begins its other muteness, by which we mean the deep sadness of nature. It is a metaphysical fact that all nature would begin to lament if it were endowed with language. . . . She would lament language itself. Speechlessness: that is the great sorrow of nature. . . . Because she is mute, nature mourns. Yet the inversion of this proposition leads even further into the essence of nature; the sadness of nature makes her mute. (*Reflections,* 329, translation slightly modified)

The function of art and philosophy is to *restore* what has been altered in the Fall: the language of names. Just as the language of poetry is "partly, if not solely, founded on the name language of man, it is very conceivable 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" (*Reflections,* 330). Benjamin's entire oeuvre is placed under the sign of this task of reparation. In the late writings, we find it in the definition of the thinker's work as seizing a signifying dimension that presents itself fleetingly and instantaneously: In that case, a "resemblance" signals our mimetic faculty of reading, or, in the words of the early Benjamin, our faculty of knowing through naming.

The Benjaminian conception of language makes the poetic function of revelation absolute, at the expense of any denotative social function. It does

not confine itself to isolating and privileging the poetic function, "the aiming of the message as such, the emphasis placed on the message for its own sake."[5] *That* function of language is radically opposed to any form of "degrading" use—that is, an intersubjective and tendentious use—of the noble gift of human language. Benjamin's exegesis of the Bible reveals an idealism that is *purer* than modern idealism. He calls the misunderstanding of the religious nature of language the original sin both of modern philosophy—in the thesis of the "arbitrary sign"—and of modern society, in which "prattle" reigns and an instrumental degradation is combined with the desacralization and rationalization of the word.

In refusing the instrumental function of language and in designating language as the *medium* of all knowledge, prior to all thought and constitutive of all consciousness, Benjamin partakes in the movement of thought that in the twentieth century establishes the "linguistic turn" of philosophy. But the language that he substitutes for the "spirit" of ancient idealism does not include the language of everyday life. It consists only of the privileged and monological forms of expression known as literature and philosophy. In this sense, Benjamin brings about the linguistic turn from within idealist premises. During the same period, on grounds that were totally different but equally marked by mysticism, Wittgenstein also proposes "the elimination of the inexpressible." He opposes the false depth of an interiority beyond words, but he does so in the name of a logico-mathematical ideal of precision.[6] Later, basing himself on Martin Heidegger and the romantics, Gadamer developes a hermeneutics that is also opposed to the instrumentalist conceptions of language.[7] In his view, language is "the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place"[8]; hence, unlike Benjamin's conception, his is not a mystical conception that confers a messianic role to man in Creation but, rather, a profane theory of the primacy of the tradition inherent in language over reason and knowledge: "Being that can be understood is language."[9] But through their common inspiration in romanticism, Benjamin and Gadamer meet, each granting a primordial importance to the dimension of language *meaning,* in opposition to its forms of validity. Both confer a grandiloquent meaning on the concept of "truth," which goes beyond the refutable or justifiable validity of a statement: "The certainty achieved by using scientific methods does not suffice to guarantee truth."[10] Benjamin, however, attempts to preserve a minimal agreement between his thinking and the Kantian system.

## *THE TASK OF THE COMING PHILOSOPHY*

The Benjaminian conception of language stems in essence from a German tradition that was itself nourished on mystical and kabbalistic texts (Jakob

Böhme, Hamann, Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Humboldt).[11] It is to that tradition—against the neo-Kantian context within which his studies in philosophy were taking place in Berlin and Freiburg—that he refers to valorize the elements of language and knowledge that could not be reduced to scientific rationality and to the concept of experience that is their correlative. Begun in November 1917, one year after "On Language as Such," and written in a rather tortuous style unusual for Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" formulates the paradoxical project of a thinking founded on a religious experience and on a mystical conception of language; nevertheless, this work seeks to establish links with the Kantian critique in a more coherent way than in the earlier essay: "The central task of the coming philosophy will be to turn the deepest intimations it draws from our times and our expectation of a great future into knowledge by relating them to the Kantian system" ("Program," 1).

This entails preserving certain of Kant's central intuitions while detaching them from the context of the Enlightenment: "The question of the certainty of knowledge that is lasting" must be separated from "the question of the integrity of an experience that is ephemeral" ("Program," 1) but whose historical character Kant did not consciously reflect upon. In Benjamin's view, what is dated is a concept of experience borrowed "from the sciences, especially from mathematical physics" ("Program," 2), an experience that "in a significant sense could be called a *world-view* [and that] was the same as that of the Enlightenment. . . . It was an experience or a view of the world of the lowest order" ("Program," 2); according to him, it was even a kind of nadir of experience. Even though it may have been a condition for Kant's undertaking, that experience "whose best aspect, whose quintessence, was Newtonian physics" ("Program," 2) now had to be considered reductive and an obstacle to the development of science.

Entirely in the sense of Gadamer's conservative hermeneutics, and in fact in the spirit of that same romantic tradition, Benjamin contrasts a notion of *authority* to the concept of experience: "For the Enlightenment there were no authorities, not only in the sense of authorities to whom one would have to submit unconditionally, but also of intellectual forces who might have managed to give a higher content to experience" ("Program," 2). At this point, he is alluding to a well-established view concerning that "state of affairs that has often been mentioned as the religious and historical blindness of the Enlightenment" ("Program," 2). Benjamin does not suggest what the "great content" of experience might consist in; he simply indicates that "this experience, then, also includes religion, as the true experience, in which neither god nor man is object or subject of experience but in which this experience is based on pure knowledge. As the quintessence of philosophy alone can and must think of God . . ." ("Program," 5).

In "On Language as Such," God was the guarantor of the noninstru-

mental dimension of language, forbidding any relation to language as means or object. In "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," "the task of future epistemology is to find for knowledge the sphere of total neutrality in regard to the concepts of both subject and object" ("Program," 5). That said, such a knowledge without counterpart can only be mystical if the relation is not made explicit. The linguistic turn of philosophy that Benjamin proposes remains peculiarly indeterminate:

> The great restructuration and correction which must be performed upon the concept of experience, oriented so one-sidedly along mathematical–mechanical lines, can only be attained by relating knowledge to language, such as was attempted by Hamann during Kant's lifetime. For Kant, the consciousness that philosophical knowledge was absolutely certain and *apriori*, the consciousness of that aspect of philosophy in which it is fully the peer of mathematics, caused the fact that all philosophical knowledge has its unique expression in language and not in formulae or numbers to go almost completely untreated. ("Program," 9)

This concept of knowledge, transformed through the reflection on its linguistic being, must include religion, so that

> the demand upon the philosophy of the future can finally be put in these words: to create on the basis of the Kantian system a concept of knowledge to which a concept of experience corresponds, of which the knowledge is the doctrine. Such a philosophy in its universal element would either itself be designated as theology or would be superordinated to theology to the extent that it contains historically philosophical elements. ("Program," 9)

In the addendum to his essay, Benjamin returns to this obscure relation between religion and philosophy. He speaks of a "virtual unity" ("Program," 12) between the two, already anticipated by the term "doctrine." In "On Language as Such," Benjamin did not hesitate to use his philosophical perspective to correct biblical teachings, to make them more coherent. In this addendum, he proposes to integrate knowledge relating to religion into philosophy, following an approach that recalls Hegel. Finally, he wishes to maintain the threefold nature of the Kantian system within a metaphysical "doctrine" reestablished both on the foundation of language and on a conception of experience that would assure it unity and continuity in its diversity. This once more recalls the role of the Hegelian concept of "spirit."

In opposing a concept of experience grounded in language and religion to the Kantian concept of experience grounded in the physical and mathe-

matical sciences, while seeking to maintain the Kantian division into the three fields of logic, ethics, and a third sphere, a kind of hermeneutics destined to include "art, jurisprudence, . . . history . . . and other areas" ("Program," 8–9), Benjamin is aware that he is running into problems of coherence and is far from grasping their solution: He himself fears "that with the discovery of a concept of experience that would provide a logical place for metaphysics the distinction between the realms of nature and freedom would be abolished" ("Program," 7), something he wishes to avoid at all cost. In reality, the synthesis promised in "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" turns out to be unrealizable, and Benjamin will not delay in abandoning the project for a system.

## *THEORY OF TRANSLATION*

"The Task of the Translator," written in 1921 to introduce his translation of Baudelaire's "Tableaux parisiens" and published in 1923, is the first essay in which Benjamin publicly sets out his philosophy of language, since the essays "On Language as Such" and "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" remained unpublished during their author's lifetime. In "The Task of the Translator," the theory of language is indissociable both from the theory of art and from a messianic conception of history, topics that had formed the subject matter both of Benjamin's first book, *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (The concept of art criticism in German romanticism, written in 1918–1919 and published in 1920) and of the essays "Fate and Character" and "Critique of Violence" (both published in 1921).

The essay on translation begins by reiterating the idea of the noncommunicational nature of language that was developed in "On Language and Such," this time applying it to art: "In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. . . . Art . . . posits man's physical and spiritual existence, but in none of its works is it concerned with his response. No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener" (*Illuminations,* 69).

In this, Benjamin is merely borrowing for his own use a fundamental credo of artistic modernity dating from the eighteenth century: "If in drawing a picture, one imagines beholders, all is lost," writes Diderot, "and the painter steps out of his canvas in the same way the actor who addresses the pit leaves the stage."[12] Here, Benjamin is drawing support from the modern metaphysics of *l'art pour l'art,* which tends to snatch art away from any social function of representation. Thus, the role of the work of art is not to establish a relation of communication of the type that prevails in everyday life; it is not subject to the constraints of a kind of speech that anticipates and elicits a response and a position for or against

in practical contexts. Benjamin had already expressed this idea in "On Language as Such" by saying that language "communicates itself to God." In this essay, he asks whether a translation is "meant for readers who do not understand the original" (*Illuminations,* 69). The fact that a work of art expects from its public not an attitude of immediate "communication" calling for a reaction but a reflective attitude prepared to follow the development of the work before forming a judgment and reacting to the whole is here related to the specific function of translation, which for Benjamin is *not* that of making accessible a work that the barrier of language prohibits us from knowing.

Translation as a particular *form,* as an irreducible and irreplaceable mode of expression, thus stems from that "absolute readability" without addressee that characterizes language in general and the work of art in particular. Benjamin refuses to admit that the elements of a work of art other than those on the order of content or information—connotation, the coherence of an underlying vision of what is said or shown, or even, in Humboldt's expression, the "internal form" of language—enter into a relation between the work and the profane public. He thinks that this dimension of language communicates itself only to God; it signifies or expresses absolutely, in the absence of any "reception." He remains convinced that, at bottom, language has no profane and pragmatic function and that there is no truth in the "bourgeois conception" of language that posits the conventional character of the sign and the communicative function, which Benjamin considers purely instrumental. What is new in relation to "On Language as Such" is simply the detail provided regarding the aspect of language that eludes communication.

Translation—which in "On Language as Such" is the fundamental relation between human language and the language of things—is envisioned in this essay only from the point of view of transposing a literary work:

> What does a literary work "say"? What does it communicate? It "tells" very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not statement or the imparting of information. Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information—hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations. But do we not generally regard as the essential substance of a literary work what it contains in addition to information—as even a poor translator will admit—the unfathomable, the mysterious, the "poetic," something that a translator can reproduce only if he is also a poet? This, actually, is the cause of another characteristic of inferior translation, which consequently we may define as the inaccurate transmission of an inessential content. This will be true whenever a translation undertakes to serve the reader. (*Illuminations,* 70)

A *good* translation is as yet defined only negatively: It does not seek to serve the reader; it abandons the task of trying to communicate a meaning; it does not attempt to rival the poet in translating the inexpressible poetic.

In denying any communicative function in the work of art—which must necessarily belittle what is essential in it or what "communicates itself to God"—Benjamin is now aiming at a function of art that stems from the philosophy of history. In language, the German word *Brot* and the French word *pain* (bread) " 'intend' the same object, but the modes of this intention are not the same" (*Illuminations,* 74). In other words, the *connotations* are so different that the two words are not interchangeable:

> While the modes of intention in these two words are in conflict, intention and object of intention complement each of the two languages from which they are derived; there the object is complementary to the intention. In the individual, unsupplemented languages, meaning is never found in relative independence, as in individual words or sentences; rather, it is in a constant state of flux—until it is able to emerge as pure language from the harmony of all the various modes of intention. Until then, it remains hidden in the languages. If, however, these languages continue to grow in this manner until the messianic end of their time, it is translation which catches fire on the eternal life of the works and the perpetual renewal of language. Translation keeps putting the hallowed growth of languages to the test: How far removed is their hidden meaning from revelation, how close can it be brought by the knowledge of this remoteness? (*Illuminations,* 74–75, translation slightly modified)

Translation is thus the measuring rod that in some sense allows us to determine how much time still separates us from the messianic moment when the curse of Babel and original sin will end: "All translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages. . . . The growth of religions ripens the hidden seed into a higher development of language" (*Illuminations,* 75).

If such a mystical conception is to be correctly preserved within a profane context, an attempt must be made to retranslate it. The differences between languages highlight the gulf of incomprehension existing between the members of a single linguistic community, a gulf due to the fact that the same words can designate "internal forms," totally different visions and meanings. But just as every language includes mechanisms allowing us to overcome such pitfalls, each language is open to the connotations and visions articulated in other languages, through an aspiration to infinitely extend

understanding and include new ways of meaning. What leads to this continual pushing back of limits—which Benjamin calls a "growth" of religions and languages—is a process of exchanges and hermeneutic efforts between cultures that leave the differences between languages intact while multiplying the catwalks and seepages that allow each of them to be open to the others.[13] This may be the profane meaning of what Benjamin terms "the harmony of all the various modes of intention," a harmony that does not complete languages to constitute *one* pure language but that adjusts *each* language to another, to an infinitely extensible number of other languages, whose modes of signifying it can welcome and make its own with its own modes.

Benjamin speaks of "growth" because his philosophy of history includes a concept of nature that deals with the "life" of works. It is this life or afterlife that reveals the "translatability" of a work, a quality by which it *demands* translation (*Illuminations*, 72):

> The history of the great works of art tells us about their antecedents, their realization in the age of the artist, their potentially eternal afterlife in succeeding generations. Where this last manifests itself, it is called fame. Translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into being when in the course of its survival a work has reached the age of its fame. . . . The life of the original attains in them to its ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering. (*Illuminations*, 71–72)

Translation allows us to measure the degree of recognition attained by a work whose literary quality and significance radiate beyond one cultural and linguistic sphere. As for the notion of "fame" presupposed by translation, it introduces the criterion of aesthetic value into the religious conception of history, a criterion that Benjamin does not separate from the inherent teleology of languages but that constitutes the nonspeculative kernel of his construction, to which the text constantly refers.

"The Task of the Translator" establishes the link between the life of a work and its messianic finality, based on an idea already set forth in "On Language as Such": The messianic finality of that life is the "expression of its essence," the "presentation of its meaning." "Translation," writes Benjamin, "thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages," a relation that is marked by "a distinctive convergence. Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express" (*Illuminations*, 72). The profound meaning of every translation is thus its anticipation, in the form of an attempt or a "germ," of the convergence between languages, a convergence that has nothing to do with the more or less exact "transmission" of a translated content.

On the one hand, then, Benjamin assigns translation a function that goes beyond the translator's aim: The translator is contributing in spite of himself to the afterlife of the work and the revelation of the relation between languages. On the other hand, by setting forth this transcendental finality, Benjamin is nevertheless dispensing advice to translators, inasmuch as he distinguishes between good and bad translations. Yet, there is an ambiguity: A translation can be good or bad *for* the transcendental finality of the growth of languages and religions, and it can be good or bad *in itself,* from an intrinsic, and especially an aesthetic, point of view. These two qualities are not necessarily congruent. But Benjamin's objective is to suggest that transcendent finality and intrinsic criteria coincide inasmuch as the task of the translator is to translate the "noncommunicable."

In the first place, Benjamin underscores the idea that an "exactitude" of translation is immaterial in any case. Works do not remain the same across time: "For just as the tenor and the significance of the great works of literature undergo a complete transformation over the centuries, the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well. While a poet's words endure in his own language, even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually to be absorbed by its renewal" (*Illuminations,* 73). The function of translation is to observe this growth of languages and to "watch . . . over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own" (*Illuminations,* 73). We can conclude from this that a translation is good to the extent that it is up to the task of this historical process and bad to the extent that it does not take the state of languages into account.

Benjamin then focuses more closely on the noncommunicable, "the primary concern of the genuine translator [which] remains elusive" (*Illuminations,* 75). Instead of determining it positively according to its structure (for example, as connotation or as a component of the particular vision of a work or a language), he defines it negatively as "the element in a translation . . . that does not lend itself to translation" (*Illuminations,* 75). He does not indicate the structural reason for this: the fact that only in exceptional cases can the translated connotation or vision render the rich connotations of the original. Benjamin immediately links this untransmittable element to his philosophy of history: In his view, what cannot be retranslated refers to *another* language, a "higher language" than that incarnated in general by translation. This reference is expressed through the loose relation between "content" (*Gehalt*) and language: "While content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds. For it signifies a more exalted language than its own and thus remains unsuited to its content, overpowering and alien" (*Illuminations,* 75).

The difference between the original and the translation in this relation

is therefore that between a natural and an artificial link, between an organic and an inorganic connection. But instead of concluding that a text is problematic when the artificial and inorganic nature of this relation "smells of" translation, Benjamin sees a merit in such a text, inasmuch as the language of translation (which, because of its fragility, cannot be retranslated) is closer to the messianic end of language. Every translation "ironically, transplants the original into a more definitive linguistic realm since it can no longer be displaced by a secondary rendering" (*Illuminations,* 75). Benjamin explains that he is using the word "ironically" in the sense of the romantics, to whom, in fact, he has just devoted his thesis on the concept of art criticism: "They, more than any others, were gifted with an insight into the life of literary works which has its highest testimony in translation. To be sure, they hardly recognized translation in this sense, but devoted their entire attention to criticism, another, if lesser, factor in the continued life of literary works" (*Illuminations,* 76). Criticism and translation are messianic functions in the process of history; they work to restore the purity of the name.

Taking into account the fact that translation is a form apart, a form of autonomous *expression* defined by this relation to the messianic end of languages, Benjamin then formulates what he considers "the task of the translator," a task that until that time translators had not been conscious of: The task of the translator "consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original" (*Illuminations,* 76). Unlike literary creation, translation must therefore be directed "at language as such, at its totality," in order to bring about the "reverberation" of the original. "Echo" and "reverberation" indicate the "derivative," "ideational" character of the language of translations; as for the matter of finding in the target language (as a general rule, the translator's mother tongue) the intended effect that awakens the echo of the original, that effort amounts to conferring on one language connotations and a particular vision that are theoretically foreign to it. In other words, it is a question of enriching the rhetorical (metaphorical or metonymic) potential of the language into which one is translating.

But that is not the aspect that interests Benjamin. The aesthetic or rhetorical accuracy of translation is a function of truth. The ideational character of the intentional effect of translation is *philosophical:* It aims at "true language," the "language of truth": "For the great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language is at work" (*Illuminations,* 77). Through this work, languages,

> supplemented and reconciled in their mode of signification, harmonize. If there is such a thing as a language of truth, the tensionless and even silent depository of the ultimate truth which all thought strives for, then this language of truth is—the true language. And this very language, whose divination and description is the only perfection a philosopher can hope for, is concealed in concentrated fashion in translations. (*Illuminations,* 77)

Translation is situated "midway between poetry and doctrine [*Lehre*]" (*Illuminations,* 77), exactly where, in the essay on baroque drama, criticism is located. Nor, like translation, can criticism anticipate the true doctrine where philosophy and theology intermingle. From the philosophical point of view, therefore, criticism and translation are practiced with an eye toward doctrine. It remains to be seen whether this connection between philosophy and translation is pertinent and beneficial to either of them, whether that theory accounts for what is involved in translation, which may, after all, have something to do with "readers who do not understand the original" and to whom it is necessary to "communicate" more than a simple discursive content.

The difficulty of translation is defined as an exalted task: "ripening the seed of pure language" (*Illuminations,* 77). The task of the translator is to give up restoring meaning in order to "lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel" (*Illuminations,* 78). Benjamin adds that "it is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work" (*Illuminations,* 80).

Translation would thus consist in aiming not at the singularity of a work but, rather, at the totality of a language, the universality of a way of signifying. Benjamin erects what is a secondary effect of translation into a principal aim: In the interest of pure language, the translator must break through "decayed barriers of his own language. Luther, Voss, Hölderlin, and George have extended the boundaries of the German language" (*Illuminations,* 80). But what Benjamin designates as "pure language" is the always-unique solution to a problem posed by the limits of the target language, and these limits are pushed back using the capacities inherent within that language. As a result, what is at issue is not a "pure" language but a broadening of the possibilities actualized in *each* language treated separately. In a manner characteristic of his entire aesthetic, Benjamin confuses the level of the *imperative* inherent in artistic activity with that of its *function* in the historical process; he confuses "good translation" with what contributes to the "growth of languages" toward their messianic end, the effacement of

Babelian confusion. These two merits can coincide only indirectly, through the growing suppleness of a language that is more and more "welcoming" of foreign ways of signifying.

Through the exercise of translation, every language tends to become more and more universal. We need to distinguish the possibilities of signifying that are thus acquired from "Grecisms," "Germanisms," "Gallicisms," or "Anglicisms," which Benjamin indirectly defends in holding up Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles as a model: "In them the harmony of the languages is so profound that sense is touched by language only the way an aeolian harp is touched by the wind" (*Illuminations,* 81). Benjamin certainly sees the risk of this kind of translation: "The gates of a language thus expanded and modified may slam shut and enclose the translator with silence" (*Illuminations,* 81). But two other passages at the end of the text show that he does not recognize the reasons for this risk. By confusing aesthetic quality and doctrinal truth, which in his view are united by their common refusal of a "meaning" to be communicated, he is no longer able to distinguish the literary value of a highly idiomatic text, which challenges translation as such, from the text's truth value, which hardly poses an obstacle for the translator.

> The lower the quality and distinction of [the original's] language, the larger the extent to which it is information, the less fertile a field is it for translation, until the utter preponderance of content, far from being the lever for a translation of distinctive mode, renders it impossible. The higher the level of a work, the more does it remain translatable even if its meaning is touched upon only fleetingly. (*Illuminations,* 81)

If translation is a fertile field, it is so in view of a "translation of distinctive mode" and hence of a *literary* quality, an *aesthetic* quality in the broad sense. Thus Benjamin's assertion is hardly disputable. In contrast, when he addresses the problem of translating a sacred text, the question of some literary quality able to bring about a figural *intensity* of linguistic creation even in translation no longer arises. Alluding to the disappearance of meaning in Hölderlin's Hellenizing translation, Benjamin writes: "Where a text is identical with truth or dogma, where it is supposed to be 'the true language' in all its literalness and without the mediation of meaning, this text is unconditionally translatable" (*Illuminations,* 82).

According to Benjamin, then, and in conformity with his theory of language as absolute readability independent of any communication of a

meaning, a doctrinal text transmits truth through its pure literalness. Such is the logic of the Benjaminian construction, close to Judaic interpretation in general—and the kabbalistic interpretation in particular—of the *letter:* This logic links the *revelation* that the language of the sacred text bears with the more limited revelation that the language of great poetic works offers. But the word "revelation" is ambiguous here: What a literary work reveals to us is not truth in the sense that a doctrine articulates it; otherwise, all works in their infinite diversity would have to converge toward a single doctrinal truth. Because he links the sacred *word* and the poetic *word,* both stemming from Adamic naming, Benjamin can speak grandiloquently of the "truth content" in works of art, thus confusing aesthetic value and cognitive value. But what confers translatability on the great literary works is not their truth value but their literary quality of intensity in the broad sense and of significant coherence, such that even an impoverished translation retains part of the work's connotations. It is this idiomatic intensity, this constitutive metaphoricity, that is difficult to translate, not the discursive truth of the doctrinal text, which is linked to no specific aesthetic quality. The literalness of the sacred text, the sacralization of its *letter* rather than its spirit, does not coincide with aesthetic or tropic literalness, with its "literariness." Benjamin's essay, however, ends by identifying the two, assimilating literary translatability and the literal translatability of the sacred text: "For to some degree all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines; this is true to the highest degree of sacred writings. The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation" (*Illuminations,* 82). This claim neglects a difference to which the literary text owes its freedom from any doctrine, from anything sacred, a freedom to which *The Divine Comedy* itself owes its blasphemous character, which is precisely at the origin of the idiomatic singularity of poetic texts, that which in them resists translation.

Benjamin seems to be paying tribute here to the linguistic speculation developed by eighteenth-century thinkers, in particular, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Hamann. "Figural language was the first to be born," writes Rousseau in his *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (Essay on the origin of languages); "the literal sense came only later. . . . At first, everyone spoke only in poetry; they thought to reason only much later."[14] Here again, the concern is with profane texts, but in this case with autonomous expression stripped of instrumental meaning. It was Hamann who, by introducing kabbalistic themes into the debate of the German Enlightenment, conferred on that original language the status of a sacred text: In his view, "speaking is translating—from an angelic language to a human idiom," and "poetry," sacralized in this way, "is the mother tongue of the human race."[15] In contrast to profane reason, which breaks with the religious and metaphysical tradition in order to accept only what is justified by the pertinence of

argument, Benjamin's position seeks to preserve the letter of the tradition, the absolute expression of a way of signifying that must be preserved for the messianic time of the original language's recomposition. In 1938 he said that Kafka "sacrificed truth for the sake of clinging to transmissibility" (*Correspondence,* 565, letter of 12 June). Without going so far as to sacrifice truth, Benjamin seeks to save it by transmitting its literalness.

## *THEORY OF IDEAS*

### *Ideas and Names*

The idea of absolute readability in "The Task of the Translator" shows the close link in Benjamin's thought between a philosophy of language and a theory of art. The language of great literary works gives him a base on which to establish a continuity between language in general, the sacred or doctrinal text, the work of art, and philosophy. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is the most explicit, coherent, and comprehensive presentation of this early philosophy of Benjamin's.

In the introduction to this book, he presents his conception of language as a theory of ideas. "Ideas are the object of [philosophical] investigation. If representation is to stake its claim as the real methodology of the philosophical treatise, then it must be the representation of ideas" (*Origin,* 29). Like the name as it was defined in "On Language as Such," the idea is characterized by the fact that it cannot "be taken possession of' (*Origin,* 29). It is not simply an object of knowledge, since "knowledge is possession" (*Origin,* 29). The idea is the correlative of a theory that defines truth as a manifestation or revelation transcending the cognitive dimension of language. This explains the status of truth in "The Task of the Translator": Truth, "bodied forth in the dance of represented ideas, resists being projected, by whatever means, into the realm of knowledge" (*Origin,* 29). As the essay on translation demonstrates, this dance of ideas is constituted by the exemplary works of literature.

Instead of being appropriated by knowledge, truth can only "present itself." Like Heidegger,[16] Benjamin holds that truth originates not in the concept but in being: "As a unity of being rather than a conceptual unity, truth is beyond all question. Whereas the concept is a spontaneous product of the intellect, ideas are simply given to be reflected upon. Ideas are pre-existent. The distinction between truth and coherence provided by knowledge thus defines the idea as being" (*Origin,* 30, translation slightly modified). Benjamin is referring to Plato, but from the beginning of his text, he explains that in his view truth is inconceivable without "theology" (*Origin,* 28). In this case, as in "On Language as Such," "theology" means

nonsubjective and nonformal substantiality, the unavailability of truth for human beings and their communication: Truth is what "communicates itself to God." Benjamin attempts to set out the same conception with the classic distinction between concept and idea.

He dissociates knowledge and truth in this way because he is still indebted to the definition of knowledge as a relation of possession between subject and object and as instrumental rationality—an approach current in a conception of knowledge defined by the natural sciences. When one does not distinguish between perceptible objects and described and asserted facts, truth can be conceived as an object of appropriation. This is not, however, the fundamental relation to truth.[17] Truth is a propositional structure—it is a mode of validity in our linguistic utterances—and it is indissociable from the possibility of proof in cases of dispute. Truth cannot be conceived without a commitment toward an interlocutor, a commitment that one must be able to honor. Yet because the intersubjective dimension of a commitment to speak truthfully, of the claim to validity, and of the possibility of proof can hardly be conceived in terms of a relation between subject and object, Benjamin is led to situate truth, insofar as it is a relation between subject and object, in a *transcendental* dimension; that is what he calls the theological character of truth or its ontological status. In fact, he hesitates between a definition in Platonic terms and an approach that conforms to his philosophy of language. Furthermore, for Benjamin, truth means more than cognitive validity. It is a part of the world's intelligibility and readability, the opening of a horizon of meaning, and it is, as in metaphysical thought, a determination that is indissociable from *the true life*. It refers to the *doctrine* anticipated by every truth content in a work of art. Thus, in Benjamin's work, theological inspiration triumphs over Platonism.

In a letter to Scholem, Benjamin describes his methodological introduction to the book on baroque drama as a kind of ruse, claiming that it is "a kind of second stage of my early work on language . . . with which you are familiar, *dressed up as a theory of ideas*" (*Correspondence,* 261, letter of 19 February 1925, my emphasis; let us note in passing that the importance of Benjamin's *Correspondence* lies in, among other things, such explanations, which were not published at the time). No one has yet asked the question of what this dressing up signifies. In an earlier letter to Scholem, it was already an issue:

> It is difficult [to formulate] my philosophical ideas, especially the epistemological ones, in this study, which has to present a *somewhat polished facade.* It will get easier in the course of my presentation, as the subject matter and the philosophical perspective draw closer together; it will remain difficult to do the introduction. I am currently writing it and must give some evidence of my most intimate hidden motives,

> without being able to *conceal myself* completely within the confines of the theme. (*Correspondence,* 241–242, letter of 13 June 1924, my emphasis)

The obvious reason for dissimulation is the university framework within which Benjamin planned to present his work in order to obtain his *Habilitation*—which, in fact, was refused him. What he is suggesting is that the university would be unlikely to accept his philosophy, and especially his philosophy of language, unless it was *dressed up* as a theory of ideas, that is, as a Platonism like that in force in university philosophy inspired by neo-Kantianism. According to Benjamin, this philosophy of language would be unacceptable inasmuch as it was inspired by the Hebrew tradition. What Benjamin is *dressing up* into a theory of ideas is his theory of Adamic naming. In *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik*—another book on the idea—he was already dissimulating (*Correspondence,* 135–137, 139–140, letters of 8 November 1918 and 7 April 1919) so as not to speak openly of the subject that primarily interested him, namely, messianism. In a word, in his university writings, Benjamin made an effort not to lay himself open to anti-Semitism.

In another letter, addressed to Florens Christian Rang, Benjamin explains more clearly his true conception of the idea: "Philosophy is meant to name the idea, as Adam named nature, in order to prevail over those *that have returned to their natural state*" (*Correspondence,* 224, letter of 9 December 1923, my emphasis). This conception of the idea as stemming from a pagan nature that remains to be dominated by naming distinguishes Benjamin's thought from Platonism. Between the Hebrew tradition and Greek thought, Benjamin—-even as he uses the concept of the idea—institutes a relation that opposes theology and mythic paganism.

In the letter to Rang, which is a first outline of the introduction to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* Benjamin introduces the term "idea" to characterize "the relationship of works of art to historical life" (*Correspondence,* 223), a relation that is revealed only through *interpretation:*

> For in interpretation, relationships among works of art appear that are timeless yet not without historical relevance. That is to say, the same forces that become explosively and extensively temporal in the world of revelation (and this is what history is) appear concentrated in the silent world [*Verschlossenheit*] (and this is the world of nature and of works of art). (*Correspondence,* 224)

These are the "ideas." They constitute an original form of confrontation between human beings and the universe and as such can be renewed throughout history. They appear in works of art as manifestations of the true language, manifestations that are still obscure and endowed with a thingness from which criticism and interpretation must deliver them. That

is the case, in particular, for forms such as allegory or tragic drama, which Benjamin wishes to have accepted among the "ideas" whose totality alone gives us access to truth:

> These ideas are the stars, in contrast to the sun of revelation. They do not shine their light into the day of history, but work within it invisibly. They shine their light only into the night of nature. Works of art are thus defined as models of a nature that does not await the day, and thus does not await judgment day either; they are defined as models of a nature that is neither the staging ground of history nor a human domicile. The night preserved. And in the context of this consideration, *criticism* (where it is identical with *interpretation* and the opposite of all current methods of art appreciation) is the representation of an idea. Ideas' intensive infinitude characterizes them as monads. Allow me to define it: criticism is the mortification of works of art. Not that consciousness is enhanced in them (romantic!), but that knowledge takes up residence in them. Philosophy is meant to name the idea, as Adam named nature. . . . The task of interpreting works of art is to gather creatural life into the idea. (*Correspondence,* 224–225, my emphasis)

More discreetly, the introduction to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* says the same thing, clearly opposing Plato and Adam:

> In philosophical contemplation, the idea is released from the heart of reality as the word, reclaiming its name-giving rights. Ultimately, however, this is not the attitude of Plato, but the attitude of Adam, the father of the human race and the father of philosophy. Adam's action of naming things is so far removed from play or caprice that it actually confirms the state of paradise as a state in which there is as yet no need to struggle with the communicative significance of words. Ideas are displayed, without intention, in the act of naming, and they have to be renewed in philosophical contemplation. In this renewal the primordial mode of perceiving words is restored. (*Origin,* 37)

Like Heidegger, Benjamin claims a particular *attitude* for the philosopher, that of a "primordial perception" (*Urvernehmen*), through which ideas and words rediscover their ancestral value as names:

> The idea is something linguistic, it is that element of the symbolic in the essence of any word. In empirical perception, in which words have become fragmented, they possess, in addition to their more or less hidden symbolic aspect, an obvious, profane meaning. It is the task of the philosopher to restore, by representation, the primacy of the symbolic character of the word, in which the idea is given self-consciousness, and that is the opposite of all outwardly-directed communication. Since

> philosophy may not presume to speak in the tones of revelation, this can only be achieved by recalling in memory the primordial form of perception. (*Origin*, 36)

The most obvious difference from "On Language as Such" lies in the fact that "philosophy may not presume to speak in the tones of revelation" and in the consequences Benjamin draws for his philosophy of language. Yet he never makes explicit just how the philosopher gains access to that "primordial form of perception, in which words possess their own nobility as names, unimpaired by cognitive meaning" (*Origin*, 36). It is hardly satisfying to say that ideas must be renewed in a philosophical contemplation through which the primordial perception of words is restored. How are we to proceed so that, in this contemplation, a primordial perception is restored? How can this restoration be controlled? In employing such expressions, Benjamin is using a magical language that recalls Heidegger's similar pretensions, which were just as ill founded. We would do better to turn toward the exercise of that "philosophical contemplation" in Benjamin's actual work of interpretation. In fact, in the letter of 13 June 1924 already cited, Benjamin himself underscores his difficulty in formulating general philosophical reflections and his greater facility in drawing them out "in the course of my presentation, as the subject matter and the philosophical perspective draw closer together" (*Correspondence*, 241–242).

The change in perspective from "On Language as Such" allows us to understand the status of the work of art and of art theory in Benjamin's thought: It is through the interpretation of works of art and art forms that Benjamin practices the "philosophical contemplation" through which he hopes to rediscover the original force of naming that, in his view, has been lost in abstract meaning, possessive knowledge, and prattling communication.

## *System, Treatise, Doctrine*

In contrast to "On Language as Such," the introduction to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* homes in on the historical perception of the role of philosophy. "In its finished form, it will, it is true, be doctrine, but it does not lie within the power of mere thought to confer such a form. Philosophical doctrine is based on historical codification" (*Origin*, 27). Like translation, philosophy measures the gap that separates us from doctrine and hence from the messianic end of history. That is why philosophy is essentially the "representation" of truth, in the sense that Benjamin gives to this term: not a systematic justification of arguments but an evocation of things as a function of a primordial perception of language. In relation to inaccessible doctrine and philosophical practice as Benjamin conceives it—founded on

the representation of truth through language—the "system" in the nineteenth-century sense seems to him to be an aberration; he sees it as "a syncretism which weaves a spider's web between kinds of knowledge in an attempt to ensnare truth as if it were something which came flying in from outside. But the universalism acquired by such philosophy falls far short of the didactic authority of doctrine" (*Origin,* 28).

In particular, Benjamin's target is the mathematical model of knowledge, characterized by the "total elimination of the problem of representation" (*Origin,* 27). Drawing support from a work by Emile Meyerson, he is thinking generally of a scientific knowledge grafted onto the model of the exact sciences, a knowledge that believes it can bypass any hermeneutic and linguistic consideration:

> Flawless coherence in scientific deduction is not required in order that truth shall be represented in its unity and singularity; and yet this very flawlessness is the only way in which the logic of the system is related to the notion of truth. Such systematic completeness has no more in common with truth than any other form of representation which attempts to ascertain the truth in mere cognition and cognitional patterns. The more scrupulously the theory of scientific knowledge investigates the various disciplines, the more unmistakably their methodological inconsistency is revealed. In each single scientific discipline new assumptions are introduced without any deductive basis, and in each discipline previous problems are declared solved as emphatically as the impossibility of solving them in any other context is asserted. (*Origin,* 33, translation modified)

In contrast to this scientific fluidity, which corresponds to the very principle of modern fallibility, Benjamin's approach is characterized by the wish to solve philosophical problems by abandoning the terrain of controllable knowledge—deductions, proofs, and argumentation—and replacing it with a hermeneutics of "objective interpretation" as a function of a limited number of idea-forms or monads, an interpretation he identifies with a "representation of truth."

This interpretation takes the form of a *treatise,* a medieval term that Benjamin attempts to resurrect. Faced with the impossibility of attaining doctrine, true philosophy in the sense Benjamin intends it is condemned to express itself in "the esoteric essay," "a propaedeutic, which can be designated by the scholastic term treatise" (*Origin,* 28). Unable to possess doctrinal truth, it seeks its only element of authority in *quotation,* through which the author refers to words whose status is more definitive than his own. Quotation, which was Benjamin's theme in many of his discussions of Karl Kraus, or in the context of the "montage" of quotations that was to be

the book *Paris Arcades,* is one of the prototypes for a repetition of the origin in language, an exercise in naming.

For Benjamin, transcendental truth, beyond the grasp of knowledge and inconceivable without "theology," is thus the object not of proofs but of a "representation," that is, an apprehension and an exposition of meaning. As does the phenomenological tradition from Edmund Husserl to Heidegger and beyond[18] (to which Benjamin in fact refers in "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" [8]), Benjamin links truth and meaning. But for him, this meaning has an aesthetic value in the broad sense: The fact that, as Hegel said, truth must appear or must be represented instead of being directly known through the appropriation of an object justifies the privilege of aesthetic criticism as an approach to truth, as long as doctrine, true truth, is not accessible. In the absence of revelation and doctrine, the representation of truth through criticism is a makeshift solution, in an even more grandiloquent sense than is the "critique" in Kant. It is on the near side of metaphysics, but as a makeshift solution it is superior to any system.

Representation as method is a tireless but discontinuous return to "one single object" (*Origin,* 28): "Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object" (*Origin,* 28). Adorno saw in this approach the fulfillment of promises that were not kept by phenomenology: total abandonment to the richness of experience, an unregulated experience of things.[19] Benjamin's thought is fascinating because it lacks sterile preliminary considerations, because it is able to analyze texts and phenomena concretely in order to draw out profound intuitions and a historical diagnosis: "Truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter" (*Origin,* 29). Like Nietzsche, Benjamin sets aside the "systematic" tradition of Western philosophy with a stroke of the pen, to return to a hidden tradition, in this case, that of the "esoteric essay." But this subversive undertaking does not account for the legitimacy either of its own intuitions, which are insufficiently explained in the reference to a "primordial perception," or of parallel undertakings founded on more explicit and more rational foundations.

In 1911, in the introduction to his book *Soul and Form,* Georg Lukács, who had also broken with neo-Kantian thought, presented a conception of the essay that is quite close to Benjamin's.[20] What Benjamin calls "doctrine" Lukács still calls "system," but the connotations are comparable: The essayist is John the Baptist, "who goes out to preach in the desert about another who is still to come, whose shoelace he is not worthy to untie."[21] "System" therefore also has messianic connotations, which become even more obvious in *Theory of the Novel* (1916), in which Lukács develops a philosophy of history that has many similarities to that of Benjamin. For both thinkers, aesthetic criticism occupies a privileged place in philosophy. In this current born on the eve of and during World

War I, Nietzschean subversion is associated with a philosophy of history that is messianic in its inspiration.

## *Art and Truth*

Although Benjamin "dressed up" his philosophy of language into a theory of ideas, the reference to Plato is still not totally fortuitous. In the biblical tradition, there is no direct link between Adamic naming and the aesthetic sphere. In contrast, the theory of ideas had introduced the concept of the beautiful from its Platonic origin. In Benjamin's thought, the importance of the beautiful and of art is justified by the fact that doctrine is beyond reach: In every age, it is art alone that presents a "definitive" image of the world. In this case, philosophy is a practice analogous to art. On the near side of revelation, it also "represents" truth in the medium of ideas. According to its precedents in Nietzsche and the romantics of Jena, this analogy with art distances the philosopher from science and its concern for proofs and forges links to the artist.

In "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," Benjamin had already underscored the fact that, for Kant, any depth was to be linked to the rigor of proofs. He asserts in *Origin* that

> the scientist arranges the world with a view to its dispersal in the realm of ideas, by dividing it from within into concepts. He shares the philosopher's interest in the elimination of the merely empirical; while the artist shares with the philosopher the task of representation. There has been a tendency to place the philosopher too close to the scientist, and frequently the lesser kind of scientist; as if representation had nothing to do with the task of the philosopher. (*Origin,* 32)[22]

Falling "far short of the didactic authority of doctrine" (*Origin,* 28), philosophical prose is characterized by its "sobriety" and recognizable in its "style": "The art of the interruption, in contrast to the chain of deduction; the tenacity of the essay in contrast to the single gesture of the fragment; the repetition of themes in contrast to shallow universalism; the fullness of concentrated positivity in contrast to the negation of polemic" (*Origin,* 32). Deduction and universalism are linked to a "scientific" conception of philosophy. Benjamin's early rejection of polemical negativity and his opposition to the fragmentary gesture contrasts with his later views, often associated both with committed writing, which he practiced during the 1930s, and with romantic fragmentism.

Benjamin refers to Plato because in him he finds the link between the true and the beautiful in the idea, which is constitutive of his theory of art. For Benjamin, as for Kant and as in German idealism, the beautiful is the

*accessible* face of a transcendent truth. Thus, art criticism is a privileged exercise in approaching truth. Benjamin draws two theses from the *Banquet:* "It presents truth—the realm of ideas—as the essential content of beauty. [And] it declares truth to be beautiful" (*Origin,* 30). First, then, beauty is not independent of truth—something Benjamin had already underscored in "Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*"—but, second, truth is not independent of beauty either: "The beautiful remains an appearance, and thus vulnerable, as long as it freely admits to being so" (*Origin,* 31, translation modified). Conversely, "this representational impulse in truth is the refuge of beauty as such" (*Origin,* 31).[23] The first assertion provides aesthetic criticism with the criterion that tends to disappear with the romantics in favor of a religion of art; the second renders the theory of art indispensable to philosophy.

The world of ideas is fundamentally discontinuous. That is what is revealed by the great articulations of "logic, ethics, and aesthetics" (*Origin,* 33), to which Benjamin had already laid claim in "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy." But that is also what characterizes different ideas themselves, which cannot be reduced to one another: "Ideas exist in irreducible multiplicity. As an enumerated—or rather a denominated—multiplicity, ideas are rendered up for contemplation" (*Origin,* 43). This qualitative plurality has consequences for the concept of truth. Instead of stemming from utterances open to criticism and reasoned proofs, truth for Benjamin becomes a "harmony of the spheres," a virtual relation between irreducible signifying structures: "Every idea," he writes, "is a sun and is related to other ideas just as suns are related to each other. The musical [*tönende*] relationship between such beings is what constitutes truth" (*Origin,* 37, translation slightly modified).

A musical relation is difficult to determine; what matters more in Benjamin's view of truth is both that it is absolutely revelational, independent of human knowledge, and that it depends on an irreducible plurality of idea-forms or "monads," which present a complete vision of the world each time. Every "idea"—tragedy, tragic drama, story—presents a "part" of truth that has to be integrated into an enumerable totality. For Benjamin, the world of ideas is a discontinuous set of individual "constellations" or "monads" that escape consciousness in the physico-mathematical sense and are revealed only to contemplation. That is what determines the function of *concepts.*

Concepts have an intermediary status between ideas and empirical phenomena. They divide phenomena into their elements, following an order prescribed to them through the contemplation of ideas:

> Phenomena do not, however, enter into the realm of ideas whole, in their crude empirical state, adulterated by appearances, but only in their basic elements, redeemed. They are divested of their false unity so that, thus

> divided, they might partake of the genuine unity of truth. In this their division, phenomena are subordinate to concepts for it is the latter which effect the resolution of objects into their constituent elements. Conceptual distinctions are above all suspicion of destructive sophistry only when their purpose is the salvation of phenomena in ideas, the Platonic τα φαινμενα σωξειν. Through their mediating role concepts enable phenomena to participate in the existence of ideas. It is this same mediating role which fits them for the other equally basic task of philosophy, the representation of ideas. . . . For ideas are not represented in themselves, but solely and exclusively in an arrangement of concrete elements in the concept: as the configuration of those elements. (*Origin*, 34)

Since concepts have only an auxiliary function, Benjamin confers the status of archetypes on the great symbolic structures—"ideas":

> Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars. . . . They are neither their concepts nor their laws. They do not contribute to the knowledge of phenomena. . . . Ideas are timeless constellations, and by virtue of the elements' being seen as points in such constellations, phenomena are subdivided and at the same time redeemed. (*Origin*, 34)

These original ideas that Benjamin calls timeless constellations—the tripartition of philosophy and artistic forms such as tragedy or *Trauerspiel*—are not independent of history. "Timelessness" and "history" are not contradictory terms for Benjamin. That is why he can ask "whether the tragic is a form which can be realized at all at the present time, or whether it is not a historically limited form" (*Origin*, 39). It is this link between the timelessness of ideas and the historicity of forms that gives meaning to the Benjaminian concept of *origin:*

> Origin [*Ursprung*], although an entirely historical category has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [*Entstehung*]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming. . . . There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history. Origin is not, therefore, discovered by the examination of actual findings, but it is related to their history and their subsequent development. (*Origin*, 45–46)

Through the avatars of the idea, the origin is the sign of history's authenticity. The history of these ideas, even though it is determined by

their "essential being," is nonetheless not "pure history, but natural history. The life of the works and forms which need such protection in order to unfold clearly and unclouded by human life is a natural life" (*Origin,* 47).[24] In this context, as in "The Task of the Translator," "natural life" means the *pure and simple life* of phenomena that have not been delivered by the word; that life, where the "totality" of their history unfolds, must as a result be "consummated" by philosophy, in a sense that once more recalls Hegel. Philosophy brings together phenomena within the perspective of their messianic end. This totality confers the character of "monad" on the idea (*Origin,* 47). This concept of monad guarantees the permanence of Benjamin's speculative idealism up to his last text, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (*Illuminations,* 263). More precisely, Benjamin applies the concept of "monad" only to "ideas": "The idea is a monad," we read in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* "the pre-stabilized representation of phenomena resides within it, as in their objective interpretation" (*Origin,* 47). In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," he will apply it to the object of history in general, inasmuch as it constitutes a decisive "idea," an "origin" for the historian's present.

The application of this method to historical reality itself and not only to works of art is suggested even in the introduction to the *Origin of German Tragic Drama:* "The real world will constitute a task, in the sense that it would be a question of penetrating so deeply into everything real as to reveal thereby an objective interpretation of the world" (*Origin,* 48). To redeem the historical reality of an entire epoch by constructing this archetypal idea and revealing its value of "origin" for the present will be the unbounded task of the *Paris Arcades* project.

## *LANGUAGE AS MIMETIC FACULTY*

For Benjamin in this overtly theological period, language was characterized by its noninstrumentality; communication to God through the human faculty of naming; the messianism inherent in the order of language, oriented toward a move beyond nature even in the human order; the ontological character of truth, inaccessible to physico-mathematical knowledge; and the cognitive character of the beautiful. In his materialist period, Benjamin reformulates his theory of language without resorting to theological terminology, through the concept of *mimesis:*

> Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps

> there is none of his higher functions in which mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role. ("On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections,* 333)

Producing resemblances, mimesis, seems to be a faculty close to that of naming, whereas mimicry is merely another name for the language of natural objects. As he does with the power to name in the 1916 essay, Benjamin envisions the mimetic faculty from the outside, as a manifestation of the species, not from the perspective of those practicing mimesis for one another; that perspective would have seemed to him to instrumentalize language. And, as in his first essay, Benjamin once more refuses to consider language as an "agreed system of signs" (*Reflections,* 334). But instead of resorting to the notion of a kinship between words and things by virtue of their common Creator, Benjamin now introduces a theory of the "onomatopoetic" origin of language. If he escapes the criticisms addressed to that conception of language,[25] it is insofar as he uses the concept of a "nonsensuous similarity" to give onomatopoeia—the sensuous imitation of one sound by another—a peculiar sense (*Reflections,* 334).

It is through this concept, a kind of "intellectual intuition," that he attempts to account for the changes that the mimetic faculty has undergone throughout history: "The direction of this change seems determined by the increasing fragility of the mimetic faculty. For clearly the observable world of modern man contains only minimal residues of the magical correspondences and analogies that were familiar to ancient peoples" (*Reflections,* 334, translation modified). Now, the change is no longer attributed to "original sin"; instead of decay, Benjamin observes a transformation of the mimetic faculty. Astrology, the determination of the newborn by a constellation, provides the first example of a "nonsensuous similarity"; but, following a schema already developed in "On Language as Such," the principal "canon" for it is language: "For if words meaning the same thing in different languages are arranged about that thing as their center, we have to inquire how they all—while often possessing not the slightest similarity to one another—are similar to what they signify at their center" (*Reflections,* 335). What is here wrongly termed a similarity—because Benjamin continues to think that the relation between languages reflects a messianic end of history—is in fact a relation of denotation.[26] Benjamin's theory of language remains unilateral because he needs it to ground his work as a critic and historian.

Even in his materialist period, Benjamin gives a mystical sense of resemblance and *correspondence* to *any* signifying relation. But what interests him in this text on the mimetic faculty is the correspondence between script and the memory of semantic content:

> Graphology has taught us to recognize in handwriting images that the unconscious of the writer conceals in it. It may be supposed that the

> mimetic process that expresses itself in this way in the activity of the writer was, in the very distant times in which script originated, of utmost importance for writing. Script has thus become, like language, an archive of nonsensuous similarities, of nonsensuous correspondences. (*Reflections*, 335)

Benjamin imagines an analogy between the unconscious, which is revealed in graphology, and an archaic mimicry of humanity that has passed into writing. Like the graphologist (he was one, by the way) Benjamin thinks he can detect in writing in general a relation of signification that virtually accompanies the semiotic aspect of language, from which it is not independent: "The mimetic element in language can, like a flame, manifest itself only through a kind of bearer. This bearer is the semiotic element. Thus the coherence of words or sentences is the bearer through which, like a flash, similarity appears" (*Reflections*, 335). In this context, similarity is the relation of an unconscious meaning to an explicit meaning; this unconscious meaning is revealed instantaneously, and, according to Benjamin's theory of knowledge, must be seized in a flash, at the risk of disappearing forever.[27] Benjamin practices this type of indirect reading first of all on works of art and then on history.

In his philosophy of language, Benjamin privileges the aspects of language that reveal indirect meaning, detached from communication. He considers neither expressive intentions, nor the semantic dimension (the representation of states of things), nor the functions of appeal (intersubjective relations), to mention the three aspects identified by Karl Bühler.[28] Despite his touted materialism, he is not interested in any pragmatic function of language even though it may establish social ties; these functions, in his view, are attached to a narrowly instrumental conception of language. Here again, what matters to him is the noninstrumental dimension of language, its faculty of revelation, its burden of memory, its quality of conveying the original powers of the human mind, all of which are related to the transmission of symbols. Hence he concludes his 1935 comment on the theories of language with a quotation from Kurt Goldstein, which he turns to his own account: "As soon as man uses language to establish a living relation with himself or his peers, language is no longer an instrument, it is no longer a means; it is a manifestation, a revelation of our most intimate essence and of the psychological link that connects us to ourselves and to our peers" (Quoted in *G.S.*, 3:480).

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in which he focuses on the addressee, who was set aside in his early writings on art, Benjamin seems to be breaking with his conception of language as an absolute expression of a "communication with God." But has he in fact done anything but reverse the relation between language and its addressee? In

Benjamin's early work, language communicated itself to God, its true receiver; in "The Work of Art," the profane receiver *is* God—he makes of the work, which is no longer sacred and no longer carries any absolute imperative, whatever he likes. This inversion is possible only because Benjamin does not have access to a concept that is solid enough to anchor the work of art "horizontally" in a relationship of recognition.

In language as in art, he gives precedence to functions of expression that are irreducible to any expressive intention whatever, by emphasizing two aspects: the expression of the nature of man inasmuch as he is the being that names; and archaic, unconscious expression, through which desires, utopias, experiences, and the hidden meanings of humanity are revealed. Since the definitive doctrine is inaccessible, it is first the relationship between the critic or the translator and the work of art, then the relationship between the historian and the symptoms of an epoch, that become the prime sites of revelation, where the human faculty of naming is recognized and raised to a higher level.

Benjamin does not account for the fact that the suspension of the pragmatic functions of language in art and in revelation does not suspend every contract with a receiving subject. When he writes, in "The Task of the Translator," that no poem is addressed to a reader, he merely underscores the suspension of pragmatic communication, not the fact that another relation is instituted—one that is reflective and subject to constraints of coherence and pertinence. In this new relationship the work of art nonetheless depends on a receptive pole of communication, a pole whose imperatives are felt within the creation itself. Benjamin has carved out a theory of language to fit the task of critic that he has assigned himself. But in suspending the "instrumental" functions of language, he does not target a pure and simple immanence of the linguistic or artistic form. He attaches that form to a symbolic history in which the destiny of humanity is played out.

In the same way, he refuses to reduce *criticism* to an activity on the purely aesthetic plane; it intervenes in a process that it is art's function to reveal:

> Just as Benedetto Croce opened the way for the concrete and singular work of art by destroying the doctrine of art forms, all my efforts have until now tended to forge a path toward the work of art by destroying the doctrine of art as a specific domain. Their shared programmatic intention is to stimulate the process of the integration of science that more and more makes the rigid cloistering of disciplines—characteristic of the concept of science in the last century—fall away, through an analysis of the work of art that recognizes it as a complete expression of religious, metaphysical, political, and economic tendencies of an age, an analysis that cannot be reduced in any of its aspects to the notion of domain. ("Curriculum vitae" [3], 31)

When he wrote this text, Benjamin had already entered his materialist phase, and theological themes had moved to the background. The religious framework of his philosophy of language, the linking of the creating Word to the poetic word, the symbolist conception of an exclusion of any consideration of the receiver of the work, had all allowed him to preserve aesthetic autonomy to a great extent. Beginning with *Einbahnstrasse,* the sociological context of the literary and ideological "battle" makes the autonomy of the work of art more vulnerable. In all the great philosophical aesthetics, art tends to transcend the definitions that wish to assign it a particular domain. There is a peculiar difficulty in keeping the aesthetic sphere closed upon itself. Through its cognitive, ethical, political, and other stakes, art always refers to *all* dimensions of life. Its imperatives are specific and stem from a logic that solicits a different attention from that claimed by other types of phenomena, but the meaning of an important work of art is never *purely* aesthetic. Our reading of Benjamin's writings on art will show how the undeniable force of his criticism is due to the systematic foundations of his thought and to the way he succeeds in respecting aesthetic logic even while aiming toward a transcendent function for art in the historical process.

## CHAPTER II

# *Theory of Art*

Aesthetic criticism as Benjamin conceived it in his early works is subordinated to the framework defined by his philosophy of language. It intervenes in the "natural" process of the afterlives of works by raising their thing language to a higher, purer, and more definitive language in order to bring it closer to doctrine or to true philosophy. But above all, criticism is the principal raison d'être for a philosophy of language that was never developed as such outside a few elementary theses. For Benjamin, the language of art relates most authentically to *truth,* inasmuch as it preserves the human faculty of naming in the historical stage following the Fall, which led to the splitting of the name into image and abstract meaning. That is why, as an art theorist, he is always dependent on "contemporary" art; he is thus led to adapt his theory to the tendencies that seem the most authentic to him at every stage: His Hölderlin or baroque period is followed by a series of theoretic passions for avant-garde movements or authors (for surrealism; for Marcel Proust, Karl Kraus, Franz Kafka, or Bertolt Brecht), which constitute unstable moments within his second phase. The avant-garde phase finds its definitive formulation in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." During this phase, a political theory and then a philosophy of history progressively replace his philosophy of language as the underpinning of his aesthetics. Benjamin's last text, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," is the epistemological equivalent of his early essay on language for his work during the third phase—that is, for *Paris Arcades* and the writings on Baudelaire.

Despite his reflections on the mimetic faculty, Benjamin's philosophy of language is primarily linked to his theological period, whereas his philosophy of history in essence belongs only to his last period. In contrast, Benjamin's theory of art has three quite clearly differentiated periods. The

aesthetics of the sublime, the first period, is governed by the messianic disenchantment of the beautiful appearance (1914–1924). This is followed by the second period, a political aesthetics of revolutionary intervention in society. It aims both at reconstituting human forces into a lucid intoxication, a total presence of mind, and at compensating for the decline or sacrifice of the aura, or even of art in the traditional sense (1925–1935). The third period evaluates the irremediable loss without compensation of the auratic element, which is linked to language as revelation, and insists on the vital importance of memory in the context of a disenchanted modernity (1936–1940).

Throughout these three orientations, Benjamin continually oscillates on the fundamental question of post-Kantian aesthetics: How do we define the criterion allowing us to state accurately that a work of art is successful, that it is "beautiful," which is not the same thing as simply saying we like it? Beginning with German idealism, "truth" is one of the classic responses to that question. It has the disadvantage of confusing the general question of truth, to which art supposedly offers privileged access, and the question of the validity of art. In Benjamin's first period, aesthetic validity is indistinguishable from the revelation of theological truth communicated "to God" by the artist; in the second, it is subordinated to political truth, which is communicated to receivers concerned with revolution; in the third and last period, it is viewed through the imperatives of the modern work of art, a message in a bottle thrown into the sea that is addressed neither to God nor to receivers.

## 1. *Aesthetics of the Sublime*

The philosophy of language has to seek its proofs in art theory. Although, for Benjamin, art is a manifestation of the human power of naming—or of revealing through language the true nature of things and beings—it does not present the name in its pure form, drawn from the language of things. Criticism and translation have the task of raising the name to a purer and more definitive language.

We will not concern ourselves here with retracing the young philosopher's beginnings in the Free Student Movement, which he broke with when its leaders' nationalistic spirit burst forth with World War I. We need only say that the essays on Hölderlin and on Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot,* as

well as the essay "On Language as Such" and the book *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik,* are part of a process of reflection that, in mourning the Free Student Movement, attempts to reconstitute the universal foundations of thought in the face of a current of thought that was drawing on the same sources, a current that had, however, sunk into pan-Germanic ideology. In 1939–1940, when Benjamin laid claim to theological concepts in response to the party Marxism of the time, it was with exactly the same goal of reclaiming a universal normative foundation that seemed to him to have been betrayed by the "progressivist" thinking of the age.

## *UNDER THE SIGN OF HÖLDERLIN*

Like his philosophy of language, Benjamin's aesthetic approach is part of the tradition of Kant's *Critique of Judgment,* especially as it was read by the romantics of Jena. According to this reading, the work of art is the passageway that allows us to transgress the metaphysical prohibitions imposed by critical thought. The poet was thus endowed with the meaning and the destiny of culture as a whole. This is how Hölderlin saw his task. "Zwei Gedichte von Friedrich Hölderlin" (Two poems by Friedrich Hölderlin; 1914–1915) is the first essay in which Benjamin, even before formulating his theory of language, presents both his philosophy of art—of poetry in particular—and his method of "aesthetic commentary" (*G.S.,* 2:105). This method is neither philological nor biographical; nor is it concerned with an author's "vision of the world." It is a kind of extremely rigorous "immanent reading" following the principles inherited from the aesthetics of early German romanticism. What matters is the "internal form" of the poem, "what Goethe defined as its content [*Gehalt*]" (*G.S.,* 2:105). At first glance, this "content"—which will soon become "truth content"—is difficult to distinguish from a "vision of the world"; Benjamin speaks of "the structure, which can be grasped intuitively by the mind, of the world to which the poem is the witness" (*G.S.,* 2:105). But what separates that structure from a vision proper to one creator or another is an objective imperative that is inherent to it and that Benjamin calls the poet's "task": "This task is inferred from the poem itself. We need to understand it as the presupposition of poetry, as the structure, which can be grasped intuitively by the mind, of the world to which the poem is the witness. That task, that presupposition, is what we understand as the ultimate foundation an analysis can reach" (*G.S.,* 2:105).

Through this "task," Benjamin seeks to define the criterion for an immanent analysis toward which his aesthetic is oriented. In the name of a grandiloquent concept of truth, he isolates the particular "sphere" of every

poem and designates it the "poetized" (*das Gedichtete*), that which has found objective form in a poem: "In it the proper domain that contains truth and poetry is revealed. This 'truth,' which the most serious writers rightly and insistently attributed to their creation, we understand as the objectified form [*Gegenständlichkeit*] of their creative act, the completed realization of any artistic task" (*G.S.*, 2:105). Benjamin places "truth" in quotation marks, suggesting a metaphorical use of the term; for reasons already indicated, however, he sees it as the most authentic form of truth given to us.

Like Novalis, whom Benjamin will again cite in *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik* (" 'Every work of art possesses in itself an a priori ideal, a necessity for its presence' "), he struggles with a difficulty characteristic of post-Kantian aesthetics: that of defining an imperative or a mode of necessity that is proper to the work of art and that is not to be confused with the truth imperative in the narrow sense. How does a work of art impose itself on us, how does it legitimately demand our recognition? Benjamin attempts to wrench art from the arbitrariness of subjective expression by discovering in it a rigorous *law.* To do this, he has to reconstruct the poem's ideal and thus "bracket certain determinations to shed light on the internal relationships, the functional unity of the other elements" (*G.S.,* 2:106).

This consists in giving to a living configuration the necessity of a natural law. Like the German romantics, Benjamin seeks to grasp that necessity through the term "myth," the equivalent of the poetized. For a work of art to exist, life, which is only the poem's "foundation," must be transposed to a level of coherence and greatness that is equal to that of the elements that constitute the criteria for its evaluation. The "myth" invoked by Benjamin could be a styling in the "poetized"—that is, in the philosophically decipherable content of the poem—of a real life, an exemplary life judged in terms of its specific historical and individual conditions. "Myth" is opposed to "mythology" as the coherence of the form itself is opposed to a borrowed coherence that remains at the level of the subject matter. In his analysis of two poems by Hölderlin,[1] Benjamin makes an effort to show precisely how the poet moves from a "mythological" version, marked by references to Greek mythology, to a "mythic" version, in which he elaborates his own myth, his own poetic coherence: "The dependence on mythology is superseded by the cohesion of the myth itself" (*G.S.,* 2:114).

The task of criticism is to show the *intensity* of the realized coherence and through it the *necessity* of the work of art. Following this method, "the judgment we bring to lyric poetry must be, if not proven, at least well-founded" (*G.S.*, 2:108). Abandoning the rigor of scientific proof in aesthetic criticism, Benjamin nevertheless seeks to establish the bases on which an aesthetic judgment can be grounded. In *Einbahnstrasse,* he speaks of "what we rightly call beautiful" (*G.S.*, 4:116). Contrary to what Kantian aesthetics seems to indicate, the act of calling a work of art beautiful, according to

Benjamin, can be jurtified. Inasmuch as Benjamin's critical activity relies on this principle, which he formulated in his very first essay, it would be interesting to follow its development throughout his oeuvre and to see how his work as a critic draws its force from this idea.

"What we rightly call beautiful" cannot owe its validity to anything other than *aesthetics*, for example, it cannot be beholden to a *truth* that could be formulated just as well or better in theoretical terms. That is why Benjamin encloses "truth" in quotation marks. "Only since romanticism," he writes in a 1918 letter to Scholem,

> has the following view become predominant: that a *work* of art in and of itself, and without reference to theory or morality, can be understood in contemplation alone, and that the person contemplating it can do it justice. The relative autonomy of the *work* of art vis-à-vis art, or better, its exclusively transcendental dependence on art, has become the prerequisite of romantic art criticism. I would undertake to prove that, in this regard, Kant's aesthetics constitute the underlying premise of romantic art criticism. (*Correspondence,* 119)

The goal, then, would be to confer the rigor of a transcendental foundation in Kant's sense on an aesthetics centered not on the concept of taste but on that of the work of art.

The choice of Hölderlin in this context is not gratuitous, inasmuch as, in his theoretical writings and his poetry, he conducted one of the most rigorous reflections on the consequences of the Kantian aesthetic. At the same time, this choice is symptomatic of the orientation Benjamin considers most valuable among the post-Kantian thinkers. The figure of Hölderlin will predominate in both "The Task of the Translator" and the essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities.* Hölderlin, like Nietzsche later and to some extent like Benjamin himself, embraced the notion of the beautiful in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*—as the sensible sign of the Idea or as an absolute, inaccessible to rational knowledge—as his personal destiny, which led him to defy death and madness. Through his "genius," the poet is charged with giving form to an ultimate meaning. In the end, God himself must "serve the song" (*G.S.,* 2:121). In that way, the immanence of form and the "truth" of the work of art coincide, precisely because the poet's ambition is philosophical. He is the hero of the world insofar as he guarantees its unity:

> The most intimate identity between the poet and the world, an identity from which all identities between the intuitive and the mental flow into that poetry, such is the foundation where the singularized form is again abolished in the spatio-temporal order, where it is suppressed as if

> formless, omniform, process and presence, temporal plasticity and spatial development. In death, which is its universe, all known relations are united. (*G.S.*, 2:124)

This is a death that the poet—like Empedocles—accepts, as the hero of humanity.

This suppression of form, of the limit, is interpreted—as in the essay on Goethe, which evokes the "caesura" of tragedy[2]—as the irruption of the "inexpressive" or of infinity, concepts belonging to "Eastern" thought, perhaps to Judaism as Benjamin conceives it: "It is the Eastern and mystical principle that transcends borders" and that always "abolishes the Greek principle of structuration" (*G.S.*, 2:124). The essay on Hölderlin already refers to this "caesura." Referring to lines that evoke the poet who "brings" a god, Benjamin writes: "The insistent caesura of these lines shows the distance the poet has to maintain from any form and from the world, inasmuch as he is its unity" (*G.S.*, 2:125). As the unity of the world for which he continually crucifies himself, the poet is separated from it, and this separation is symbolized by his exemplary death. This caesura is the mark of the "holy sobriety" the poet lays claim to in the name of a break with the principle of pagan immanence.

Benjamin thus places his aesthetics under the sign of the *sublime.* Sobriety

> stands in the sublime beyond any elevation. Is this still the Hellenist life? It is so no more than the life of a pure work of art can ever be that of a people, no more than it can be that of an individual or anything else but that element in itself that we find in the poetized. That life is figured in the forms of Greek myth, but—and this is decisive—not only in its forms; in fact, in the last version, the Greek element is abolished and cedes its place to another, the one called . . . the Eastern element. (*G.S.*, 2:125–126)

For Benjamin, Judaism's or monotheism's sublime represents the antidote par excellence to myth or to any particularist or national ideology. The essay on romantic aesthetics attempts to make explicit the philosophical background for an art founded on this principle.

## *THE ROMANTIC MODEL*

The link between the early Benjamin's philosophy of language and his inquiry on *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* is assured by the fact that the philosophy of language is itself inspired by romantic

speculations. And Hölderlin's poetics plays a determining role in both Benjamin's theory of language and translation and his theory of literature.

"Reflection," the central concept of Benjamin's first book, seems at first to move away from the central preoccupations of his philosophy of language, but it very quickly leads back to it. As Benjamin develops the concept, it has a threefold meaning: the *philosophical* concept of reflection as it is developed by Johann Gottlieb Fichte and reinterpreted by the romantics; the *aesthetic* concept of reflection as a principle of romantic criticism; and the *artistic* concept of reflection in the sense of a prosaic sobriety opposed to creative ecstasy, especially in Hölderlin. Finally, in an appendix, Benjamin envisions the limits of romantic criticism founded on the concept of reflection by introducing the Goethean idea of the archetypal content of art, from which he draws his concept of *truth content.*

## *The Philosophical Foundations*

The theme of *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik* was developed through a rather long process. Following his "On the Program for the Coming Philosophy," Benjamin considered writing a study entitled "Kant and History." When he was unable to find enough material in Kant's works, he abandoned that topic. He then envisioned an essay relating the notion of the "eternal task" in Kant to the problematic of "messianism," which was his central preoccupation: what characterized romanticism in Kantian terms was that "it abandoned the idea of a perfect humanity whose ideal would find its realization in the infinite. At present, the preference is given to a 'Kingdom of God' that is called for in earthly time" (*G.S.*, 1:12 n. 3).[3] We already find the rejection of the notion of a continuous "progress" and the imperative for an instantaneous transformation of the world, two ideas that will dominate throughout Benjamin's oeuvre, right through the "Theses on the Philosophy of History." From such a perspective, the work of art occupies a central place as the model for an *immediate* realization of the "eternal task." In the works of Kant himself, the work of art, under the name of the beautiful, is the symbolic anticipation of that perfect humanity that, as the reign of ends, is still to be realized through an infinite process of approximation. Kant had already given the quasi-ontological status of reflection to the sign that nature offers—in the form of the beautiful—to our subjective cognitive faculties. In thus privileging the beautiful, a privilege that is transferred to art, Benjamin rediscovers his own idea that the artist conserves a part of the power of naming inherent in human language. Concerning himself only with "absolute" truth, he brackets the entire Kantian theory of knowledge, which was elaborated to ground science and its concept of objective truth.

The philosophical foundations of romantic aesthetics are thus quite remote from an ontological philosophy of language. They have their source

in the theory of self-consciousness developed by German idealism: "Thought reflects itself in self-consciousness—that is the fundamental fact from which all of Friedrich Schlegel's, and also, for the most part, Novalis's, gnoseological considerations stem. The relation of thought to itself as it is presented in reflection is seen as the closest relation of thinking in general, and all the others are only extensions of it" (*G.S.,* 1:18). For Kant, that proximity of thought to itself in *reflection*—a theme developed in Cartesianism—poses the problem, first, of the concrete sensible, which thought has to integrate, and second, of the thing in itself, which it cannot know totally. Reflective thought faces the pitfall of "intuition": the finitude of human experience excludes "intellectual intuition." The romantics, however, did not accept Kant's resignation:

> In the reflective nature of thought, the romantics saw an even greater guarantee of its intuitive character. As soon as, through Kant . . . the history of philosophy had affirmed the possibility of having an intellectual intuition, and at the same time, its impossibility in the field of experience, we see multiple manifestations of an almost feverish effort to restore this concept to philosophy, as the guarantee of its highest claims. This effort came first from Fichte, Schlegel, Novalis, and Schelling. (*G.S.,* 1:19)

In Fichte's *Doctrine of Science,* reflective thought and immediate, intuitive knowledge are given through each other: In thought, we intuitively and immediately reach the thought content. Benjamin writes that "the immediate consciousness of thought is identical to self-consciousness. Because of its immediacy we call it an intuition. In this self-consciousness where intuition and thought, subject and object, coincide, reflection is fixed, captured, and, though not annihilated, stripped of its boundlessness" (*G.S.,* 1:25). The identity of subject and object in thought would leave the world unthought, were it not the world itself that was thinking itself when we think:

> The romantics begin with the simple act of thinking oneself as a phenomenon; that is proper to everything because everything is Itself [*ein Selbst*]. For Fichte, the Itself falls only to the Self [*das Ich*]. . . . For Fichte, consciousness is the "Self," for the romantics it is Itself; or, in other words: in Fichte reflection relates to the Self, in the romantics only to thinking. (*G.S.,* 1:29)

Benjamin has rediscovered an equivalent to his philosophy of language: Generalized reflection—"everything is Itself"—corresponds to the "language of things" "translated" by human language. Any objective knowledge

is "subordinated" to the object's self-knowledge; it is in this sense that Novalis writes: "perceptibility is a kind of attentiveness," a formula that Benjamin will again recall in 1939, with reference to Baudelairean *correspondances,* as the experience of the aura (*Illuminations,* 188). The same mystical conception is expressed in the romantic form of a "medium of reflection" and in the Benjaminian form of language as a "medium of communication." In both cases, there is an "expression" without addressee, an absolute readability of the world.

As he indicates in "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," Benjamin shares with the romantics the goal of a philosophy that no longer seeks to justify the approach of modern science; he aims at a much wider "experience" than that defined by Kant and Fichte: "What can be drawn from the *Doctrine of Science* is nothing but the image of the world of positive science. Yet the romantics, thanks to their method, entirely dissolve that image of the world into the absolute; and, in the absolute, what they are seeking is a content other than that of science" (*G.S.,* 1:33–34). Through reflection, the absolute reaches a higher "power," inasmuch as it returns to its own origin: "It is only with reflection that the thinking about which there is reflection arises" (*G.S.,* 1:39). In fact, within the context of transcendental idealism, any reality independent of thought is only the reification of an original reflective act. Insofar as it attributes the true power of creating the world to language, Benjamin's philosophy of language remains a variant of this kind of idealism.

For Fichte, the central point of reflection, the absolute, is the Self. As does Kant, Fichte seeks a guarantee, a certainty upon which to base both the positive knowledge of science and the relation to others—moral and juridical recognition. In contrast, according to Benjamin, "in the sense that early romanticism understands it, the center of reflection is art, not the Self" (*G.S.,* 1:39). Whereas Fichte interprets the Kantian theory of knowledge as based on the *Critique of Practical Reason,* in other words, on acts and not on the theoretical relation to the world, the romantics immediately interpret it as based on the *Critique of Judgment,* that is, on a nature reflected in the beautiful, which is sending signals to man. Furthermore, the romantics bracket Kant's "reflective judgment," which prevails over the beautiful. What disappears in the romantic "reflection" on art is the "as if" of Kantian reflection: "Nature is represented by means of this concept as if an understanding contained the ground of the unity of the variety of its empirical laws."[4] Romantic reflection is mystical; on the one hand, it is an ontological process; on the other, through reflection on that reflection, it claims to attain absolute truth. It is therefore no longer necessary to elaborate a theory of knowledge for the natural sciences, since "all knowledge is the self-knowledge of a thinking being, which does not have to be a Self. . . . For the romantics, there exists no

non-Self from the viewpoint of the absolute, no nature in the sense of a being that would not become Itself" (*G.S.,* 1:55). Romantic nature is brother to humanity, and art is the reflection of that nature on itself, with no abyss separating these two universes. Except for its reservations about the limits of human knowledge, that is what the implicit metaphysics of the *Critique of Judgment* virtually suggests. "A Self-less reflection," writes Benjamin of the romantics, "is a reflection in the absolute of art" (*G.S.,* 1:40). This reflection within the medium of art is none other than aesthetic *criticism* as the romantics conceive it.

Reinvested with a magical significance following Kant's critiques, "criticism," according to the philosophy of the romantics as Benjamin explains it, is itself a mystical concept, "an exemplary case of mystical terminology" (*G.S.,* 1:50). According to Benjamin, Friedrich Schlegel's approach to criticism, ignoring the gap that separates human consciousness from the absolute in Kantian criticism, was not a systematic conception of the absolute but, rather, an absolutist conception of system (*G.S.,* 1:45)—through the practice of the fragment and, even more, through terminology. It sought to reduce all thought to a witticism (*Witz*), "an attempt to name the system with a name, that is, to seize it in an individual, mystical concept" (*G.S.,* 1:48–49). Benjamin recognizes this as mystical thinking about *language,* which is nevertheless different from his own, since he respects the Kantian idea of a limit imposed on our faculty of naming. Although romanticism is "the last movement that kept tradition alive one more time" (*Correspondence,* 89), "its efforts [were] premature for that age and sphere," "the insanely orgiastic disclosure of all secret sources of the tradition that was to overflow without deviation into all of humanity" (*Correspondence,* 89).

In this context, "criticism" does not signify an attitude of mere evaluation. Above all, in matters of aesthetics, this approach means that the critic abandons his position as the "judge" of works of art who issues his sentences in the name of preconceived ideas, "whether written or tacit." At the same time, the romantics of Jena rejected the irrational genius of the preromantics of *Sturm und Drang* and sought to establish—between the dogmatism of the one and the skepticism of the other—a "critical" position for aesthetic theory (*G.S.,* 1:52–53). Nonetheless, with a few reservations, "the modern concept of criticism has developed from the romantic concept" (*Correspondence,* 136) of an "immanent" criticism that, through reflection, draws out the internal potentialities of a work. What is missing from this conception is a criterion of "truth" inherent in a work's content. That is why Benjamin complements his analysis of the romantic concept of criticism with an insight into the Goethean conception of criticism, which imposes a limit to the "insanely orgiastic" speculation of the romantics.

## *Theory of Criticism*

Since, in reflection, knowledge is at bottom the object's self-knowledge, criticism for the romantics is the work of art's own *knowledge* of itself. Knowledge is therefore only an intensification, "the potentialization of the reflection" inherent in the object (*G.S.*, 1:57 n.). According to the romantics, however, unlike nature's knowledge, criticism is the work's *judgment* of itself. The work of art judges itself through its own immanent criteria. Nonetheless, Benjamin adds that

> it is clear that that self-judgment in reflection can only improperly be called judgment. For in it the necessary moment of any judgment, the negative moment, is in a state of complete disintegration. Certainly, with every reflection, the mind rises above all the previous degrees of reflection, and in doing so, negates them—that is precisely what gives reflection its critical coloration from the outset—but the positive moment in this intensification of consciousness dominates by far its negative moment. (*G.S.*, 1:66)

This is what distinguishes the romantic concept of criticism from its modern concept, "which views in it a negative judgment" (*G.S.*, 1:67).

When, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* Benjamin defines *his* conception of criticism, he underscores that negative aspect: "Criticism means the mortification of the works. . . . not the—as the romantics have it—awakening of the consciousness in living works, but the settlement of knowledge in dead ones" (*Origins,* 182). In both cases, the reason for the dominant style of criticism, positivity or mortification—the actualization of the work's self-reflection or the contemplation of the work as ruins in the interest of its truth content—seems to be attached to a vision of the determinate world rather than to an imperative inherent in criticism. In both cases, nevertheless, criticism rests on criteria immanent to the work of art—internal "judgment" or "truth content"—whose concept will be made explicit in Benjamin's essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities.* That is what allows us to understand the very possibility of the romantic theory of reflection: A criticism calling for a certain degree of objectivity would hardly be possible if the work itself did not claim a certain type of validity, if, therefore, there existed no rationality in the process leading from creation to the work of art and from the work of art to the critic-receiver.

This rationality that is *inherent* in the work of art, that is created in the name of criteria that are, consciously or not, established by the object, confers on the work of art a privileged status in the theory of reflection: Here is an "object"—a "non-Self," in Fichtean terms—that presents the characteristics of a "Self," in particular that of producing imperatives and justify-

ing itself through its intrinsic rationality. In his *System of Ethics,* Fichte writes that art *"converts the transcendental viewpoint into a common viewpoint. . . .* From the transcendental viewpoint, the world is made, from the common viewpoint, it is given; from the aesthetic viewpoint, it is given, but nonetheless in a way that shows how it is made."[5] Thus, art responds to the aporia of the philosophy of reflection—the fact that a subject "posits" or "makes" an object that is taken to be a subject—without resolving it. But the subject that posits itself and that becomes a subject only in positing itself must *already* be a subject before "positing" itself[6]; hence there is a circularity that only the work of art escapes, in presenting a "nature" entirely fashioned by "freedom." In making the work of art the medium for reflection par excellence, romantic thinkers avoid the problems inherent in the idealist theory of self-consciousness, but they do not solve them; the problems of objective knowledge and intersubjectivity disappear as if with the wave of a magic wand. The only gain is the idea of an imperative for validity inherent in the work of art that must be demonstrated, interpreted, and examined by criticism.

Through criticism, the reflection immanent in a finite work of art is both related to the infinite of art and transposed to its domain. The central operation of the romanticism of Jena is what Novalis calls "romanticizing": "In giving the finite an appearance of the infinite, I romanticize it. The true reader must be an extension of the author. He is the higher court that contemplates the thing already prepared by the lower court" (quoted in *G.S.,* 1:67–68). Benjamin adds that "that amounts to saying that the particular work of art must be dissolved into the medium of art" (*G.S.,* 1:68). This dissolution brought about by criticism amounts to "transcending the work, making it absolute,"

> in the meaning of the work itself, that is, in its reflection. . . . For the romantics, criticism is much less the judgment of a work than the method for completing it. It is in this sense that they required a poetic criticism, that they suspended the difference between criticism and poetry, affirming that "poetry cannot be criticized except by poetry. A judgment on art that is not itself a work of art . . . has no civil rights in the kingdom of art." (*G.S.,* 1:69)

According to this conception, criticism prolongs and amplifies artistic activity itself. As a result, the reflection or "rationality" immanent within works, as translated by the criticism of the romantics, rather than serving as a mediation between the work of art and ordinary language in order to allow readers to share in the meaning proposed in a figural or narrative form, remains beyond the reach of ordinary reason: Criticism accentuates the gap that separates the language of art and ordinary language. Moreover, it claims

to call into question and surpass reason. It is not concerned with communicating a meaning or with recognizing a value, but rather with completing an absolute reflection.

From the point of view of romantic criticism, the work of art is thus "incomplete in terms of its own absolute Idea" (*G.S.,* 1:70). In thus completing the work of art and amplifying its claim to sovereignty, the critic avoids two pitfalls of traditional criticism: first, the rationalist dogmatism that judges in the name of preconceived criteria; and second, "skeptical tolerance, which, in the end, stems from an immoderate worship of the creative faculty reduced to the mere faculty of the creator's expression. . . . [Schlegel] magically captured in the work itself the laws of the mind instead of treating it as a mere by-product of subjectivity" (*G.S.,* 1:71). In that way, Schlegel established "the cardinal principle of any critical activity since romanticism—the judgment of works according to immanent criteria" (*G.S.,* 1:71). In terms of the object—or the artistic configuration—he assures "the autonomy that Kant conferred on the faculty of judgment in his *Critique*" (*G.S.,* 1:72). By autonomy, Benjamin does not mean only the proper legalities that govern both the aesthetic sphere in general and each work of art in particular; he is aiming not only at a purist conception of aesthetic particularity but at the sovereignty of art itself,[7] the fact that the meaning of the work cannot be drawn out except through a form of criticism that poetically finishes it instead of translating it into rational language, whether that of philosophy or that of ordinary consciousness. Through the criticism of the work, an irreducible viewpoint on the world is affirmed, as Schlegel wrote: "To find formulae for individual works that alone allow us to understand them in the most literal sense: that is the substance of art criticism" (quoted in *G.S.,* 1:71).

For the romantics, what has to be grasped in the work is the *form.* For Benjamin, who reveals his reasons in the appendix to *Der Begriff* on Goethe and romanticism, what must ultimately be grasped is, rather, the truth content, but for him, this content is not dissociable from form. The concept of form stems from Fichte's *Doctrine of Science,* which sees "reflection manifesting itself in the simple form of knowledge" (*G.S.,* 1:72); form is both the "transcendental" structure of knowledge, its condition of possibility, and what still limits reflection, which must then become the object of a second-level reflection. Hence, "the pure essence of reflection is revealed for the romantics in the purely formal appearance of the work of art. As a result, form is the objective expression of the reflection proper to the work. . . . It is through its form that the work of art is a center of living reflection" (*G.S.,* 1:73). But because of the particularity of form, it "remains tainted by a moment of contingency" (*G.S.,* 1:73), which is the reason for the work's incompletion: "For criticism to be . . . the removal of all limitations, the work must rest on limitation" (*G.S.,* 1:73); such is the "self-limitation of

reflection." In other words, meaning and validity, which in criticism acquire a virtually universal value, are tied in the work of art to the particularity of the figures or the narrative structure. In recognizing an intrinsic reflection in the work, Schlegel, according to Benjamin, resolves the paradox of immanent criticism:

> In fact, it is difficult to see how a work of art could be criticized in terms of its own tendencies, since those tendencies, inasmuch as they can be established indisputably, are realized, and inasmuch as they are not, are impossible to establish indisputably. . . . The immanent tendency of the work, and as a result, the criterion for immanent criticism, is reflection, which is at its formation, and of which its form is the imprint. In truth, however, this reflection is not so much the criterion for judgment as, first and foremost, the foundation of another kind of criticism which does not have judgment as its vocation and for which the essential does not lie in the evaluation of the particular work of art but in the presentation of its relations to art works as a whole, and in the end, to the Idea of art. (*G.S.*, 1:77–78)

It is because Schlegel seeks not to judge the work of art but, rather, to understand and explain it, to complete and systematize it, and finally, to dissolve it in the absolute of art, that the paradox of immanent criticism is overcome: It excludes "any judgment of the work of art, for which it would be absurd to give an immanent criterion. The criticism of the work of art is rather its reflection, which, of course, can never deploy more than the germ that is immanent to it" (*G.S.,* 1:78).

For early romantic criticism, judgment of the work was limited to establishing its mere "criticizability," the criterion that allowed one to tell whether the work had a reflection worthy of the name. At the same time, in criticizable works, there cannot be a scale of values: All works that bear a reflection within them are equally worthy of consideration, and, in contrast, what is not criticizable is by definition bad. Benjamin underlines the fact that "the validity of the critical judgments of romanticism has been amply confirmed. They have determined until our own time the fundamental evaluation of the historical works of Dante, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Calderón, as well as the phenomenon contemporary to them: Goethe" (*G.S.*, 1:80). But in the word "evaluation" he does not distinguish between interpretation and value judgment. Recognizing these authors' value is hardly the same as discovering something new; at most, it is a matter of appreciating them at their true value, legitimating them in the face of the canonical texts of Antiquity. Moreover, the early romantics did not "discover" Hölderlin any more than did Goethe. And Schlegel admits the retrospective character of romantic criticism: " 'Only the classic and the eternal pure and simple' can be the

subject of criticism" (*G.S.*, 1:81). What remains is the classic status of works criticized or translated by the romantics.

## *Romantic Art: Irony, the Novel, and Prose*

The same concern for objectivity also characterizes the romantic theory of irony, which has frequently been interpreted as the expression of pure subjectivism. Of course, "the poet's arbitrariness, according to Schlegel, suffers no law that dominates him" (*G.S.*, 1:82), but that simply means that the poet obeys no other law than that of his autonomous form. It is only within the framework of that form, relative to the content of the work, that nothing is forbidden him.

Nevertheless, what characterizes the *art* of German romanticism is, in the end, the fact that arbitrariness is also exercised toward form itself, inasmuch as form is only a medium for reflection and the absolute to be attained is the idea of art itself. Properly romantic art rests on the critical idea of "the indestructibility of the work of art" (*G.S.*, 1:86): "Criticism sacrifices the work of art totally to the love of the cohesion of art itself" (*G.S.*, 1:85). The result, according to Benjamin, is fragmented or disordered works like Ludwig Tieck's plays or Jean Paul's novels. Irony tears the work of art to pieces in the name of art, and thus renders it indestructible. A mystical idea underlies the destructive irony of romanticism:

> The ironization of the form of presentation is in some sense the storm that sweeps open the curtain before the transcendental order of art, revealing it even as it reveals the work of art, which remains immediately within it as a mystery. . . . It represents the paradoxical tendency to build up the work by demolishing it: to demonstrate in the work itself its relation to the Idea. (*G.S.*, 1:86)

It is also in the name of this idea that the romantics require a fusion of different forms, a meeting, in the idea of poetry, of "all the separate genres of poetry" (*G.S.*, 1:188). From this conception, the idea of the one Book is born—a mythical reference of modern literature, especially since Mallarmé: "All the books of accomplished literature," writes Schlegel in *Ideen* (fragment 95), "must be only a single book" (quoted in *G.S.*, 1:90). From this same mystical theory, there stems the idea of criticism as "the poetry of poetry," and the task assigned to "universal progressive poetry" to "present the Idea of art in the total work of art" (*G.S.*, 1:91). This total work of art is primarily the novel, the "most resolute working out of self-limitation and of reflective self-broadening" (*G.S.*, 1:98). It is founded entirely on reflection and brings together all forms, from poetry to dramatic dialogue to epic narration, presenting them as a continuum.

Beginning with this romantic idea, Lukács wrote his *Theory of the Novel*

(1914–1915, published in 1916). He, too, addressed the question of novelistic prose. In his view, in the modern period, when meaning can no longer be apprehended in reality, "only prose can then encompass the suffering and the laurels, the struggle and the crown, with equal power; only its unfettered plasticity and its non-rhythmic rigour can, with equal power, embrace the fetters and the freedom, the given heaviness and the conquered lightness of a world henceforth immanently radiant with found meaning."[8] But, for Benjamin, the idea of prose takes on an even stronger meaning: "The Idea of poetry," he writes, "is prose" (*G.S.,* 1:100–101).

Beyond the fusion of poetic genres in the novel, Benjamin is addressing one meaning of the word "reflection," perceived especially, no doubt, through Hölderlin and his idea of sobriety in art. Benjamin adds that "this principle is the fundamental idea of the romantic philosophy of art—an essentially new idea that has yet to reveal itself fully; the greatest age, perhaps, of the Western philosophy of art bears its mark" (*G.S.,* 1:104). For Benjamin, the link between reflection and prose seems to be based on the use of language that associates prose with sobriety.

Literature is conceived as an exercise of lucidity and even calculation, the obverse of feeling and enthusiasm. Here, Benjamin introduces his own nuance concerning the disenchantment of art:

> Under the light of irony, it is only the illusion that falls apart; the kernel of the work of art remains indestructible because it does not rest on ecstasy, which can dissipate, but on an intangible, sober, prosaic figure. . . . The novel is the prototype for this mystical constitution of the work of art beyond the restricted forms that are beautiful in appearance (the poetic in the narrow sense). It is, in the end, in the place it grants to these "beautiful" forms and to beauty in general that this theory marks a break with the traditional conceptions of the essence of art. . . . Form is no longer the expression of beauty but of art conceived as the Idea itself. At the very end, the concept of beauty generally had to disappear from the romantic philosophy of art . . . because beauty, as an object of "enjoyment," of pleasure, of taste, did not seem to be reconcilable with the strict sobriety that, in the new conception, determined the essence of art. (*G.S.,* 1:106)

According to Benjamin, that is the aesthetic theory of Gustave Flaubert and of modern poetry. Above all, it is his own conception of art, founded on his philosophy of language: The task of criticism is to complete the work by presenting its "prosaic kernel" or the "eternally sober consistency of the work" (*G.S.,* 1:109), that is, to transfer the language of art to the level of a higher, more definitive language detached from all sensible beauty, to the level of the inexpressive and creative word that, according to "The Task of the Translator," is the aim of all language.

This destruction of illusion, of appearance, of emotion, and of beauty in the name of prose, sobriety, the Idea, and reflection is the formulation of an aesthetics of the sublime that sacrifices the beautiful appearance in the name of truth. Its form will change often in Benjamin's works, before undergoing a decisive turning point in the theory of the aura. In its first formulations, it leaves intact, even accentuates, the esoteric character of the work of art. Like criticism and translation, the sobriety of artistic prose performs a function of sublimation in the messianic process of history, more through the action stemming from its mere existence than through any supposed persuasion exercised on the mind.

That said, romantic theory speaks only of the form of works and says nothing of their content. The romantics' concern was not the truth of works but their truly aesthetic completion. The romantics' aestheticism was at the origin of their "insanely orgiastic disclosure of all secret sources of the tradition" (*Correspondence,* 89). In addition, "they did not understand the *moral* dimension with which [Goethe's] *life* struggled" (*Correspondence,* 117). In an appendix to *Der Begriff,* Benjamin underscores the necessity of complementing that theory by relying on Goethe's aesthetics.

## *The Criticism to Come: Form and Original Phenomenon*

In the esoteric appendix to *Der Begriff* discussing "the aesthetic theories of the early romantics and of Goethe," Benjamin formulates for the first time the task of the criticism to come. It stems from the fundamental difference between these two aesthetics. The romantics recognized only the "Idea" of art, as an a priori for their method of critical completion; they did not recognize the "Ideal" of art, as an a priori for the work's content, what it was to be about. The romantics' "aestheticism" lay precisely in their refusal to exclude something from the field of art in the name of any ethical or theoretical norm whatsoever. For Goethe, in contrast, there existed a "limited plurality of pure contents" (*G.S.,* 1:111) that compose the Ideal of art. Through this conception, Goethe "is linked to the Greeks. Beginning with his philosophy of art, he interpreted the idea of the Muses under Apollo's dominion as that of the pure contents of art as a whole. The Greeks allowed for nine such contents" (*G.S.,* 1:111). Unlike the forms relativized by the Idea of art, these contents are discontinuous and are not found in any piece of art as such. Goethe speaks of them as invisible archetypes that are accessible only to "intuition" and that works of art can at best "resemble."[9] In Goethe's view, the works that come closest are Greek works, "relative archetypes, models" (*G.S.,* 1:112).

Archetypes are not created by art; they "dwelt, before any production of a work, in that sphere where art is not creation but nature. Goethe's

concern in his inquiry into original phenomena was ultimately to grasp the Idea of nature in order to make it an archetype (a pure content)" (*G.S.*, 1:112). This was not nature as an object of science, but "true" nature: "It is in art alone, and not in the nature of the world, that true nature, accessible to intuition, originally phenomenal, is visible through reproduction, whereas in the nature of the world it is certainly present, but hidden (submerged under the brilliance of the manifestation)" (*G.S.*, 1:113). This concept of nature is the object of a critical reflection on Goethe that Benjamin will undertake in his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities.*

Benjamin shares Goethe's reservations about the romantics' suppression, in art as medium-of-reflection, of any firm distinction between the contingent real and the absolute: "Art was precisely the area where romanticism made every effort to turn to advantage and with the greatest purity the immediate reconciliation of the contingent and the non-contingent" (*G.S.*, 1:114). For Goethe, such a reconciliation has no raison d'être. Benjamin, who also rejects such exaltation but who acknowledges the gains of the romantic aesthetic—its messianic theory of prose and of modern sobriety, its conception of criticism as a reflection of a reflective kernel immanent in the work—raises the problem in the following manner:

> The [romantic] idea of art is the Idea of its form, as the [Goethean] Ideal of art is the Ideal of its content. The fundamental, systematic question of the philosophy of art can thus also be formulated as the question of the relation between the Idea of art and the Ideal of art. The present inquiry must remain on the threshold of that question. (*G.S.*, 1:117)

And since in 1919 he does not yet have an answer, he continues: "Even today, this state of the German philosophy of art as it presented itself around 1800, in the theories of Goethe and the early romantics, is still legitimate. The romantics were no better at solving—or even posing—this problem than was Goethe" (*G.S.*, 1:117).

Just as the romantics neglected to pose the question of content, Goethe did not have a satisfactory theory of form; "He interprets it as style" (*G.S.*, 1:117), in the sense of some particular historical style, that of the Greeks or his own. In contrast to the early romantics' theory, Goethe's theory poses the question of the "criticizability of the work of art" in terms of a general doubt. Benjamin writes that "in the matter of the philosophy of art, all the work of the romantics can be summed up in this: they sought to demonstrate that, on principle, the work is criticizable. The Goethean theory of art, in contrast, is entirely commanded by its intuition of the uncriticizable character of works" (*G.S.*, 1:110). In Goethe's view, criticism was neither possible nor necessary:

> At most, it may be necessary to give an indication of what is good or a warning about what is bad; and, for the artist who has an intuition of the archetype, it is possible to pronounce an apodictic judgment on works. But Goethe challenges "criticizability" as the essential moment of the work of art. From his point of view, a methodical criticism—that is, one necessary for the thing itself—is impossible. On the contrary, in romantic art, criticism is not only possible and necessary, it even contains within its theory the paradox of having more value than the work itself. (*G.S.*, 1:119)

Benjamin wants to maintain, against Goethe, the possibility and necessity of criticism, without forgetting the critic's inferiority in principle to the poet, and, in the critical evaluation of a work, to account for its content by seeking to define an imperative for validity that the romantics associate only with form. What prevents Goethe from grasping the idea of a *criticizable* content is the fact that he identifies it with true nature—the archetypal nature of original phenomena, which the poet intuits—instead of perceiving its historical meaning. What prevents Schlegel and Novalis, in their aesthetic theory, from conceiving of a criticizable *content* is their reduction of the world, of nature, and of history to an artistic process that reduces content to form and, in the end, to the Idea of art. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* Benjamin will replace this single Idea with the plural, irreducible idea-forms, which he himself designates as Goethe's "Ideals" (*Origin,* 35).

The romantic critic casts a "sober light" on the Idea of the as-yet contingent work, which "makes the plurality of works go dark" (*G.S.*, 1:119). Benjamin wants to conserve and name that irreducible plurality by associating it with the normative dimension inherent in the content of works, which can be validated by criticism. That normative dimension rediscovers the problems of truth and justice in the work of art, thus reconsidering the radical differentiation of art accomplished by the romantics: For Benjamin, there is no beauty without truth. The task Benjamin assigns to his work to come is to bring about a synthesis between Goethe's aesthetics and that of the romantics. That is the theoretical program of his essays on Goethe and baroque drama.

## *AN EXEMPLARY PIECE OF CRITICISM*

### *The Authority and Violence of Criticism*

Written between the summer of 1921 and February 1922, two years after *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik,* the essay "Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*" (Goethe's *Elective Affinities*) is, from a philosophical

point of view, one of the most ambitious texts that Benjamin ever completed.[10] In a letter to Scholem dated 8 November 1921, he wrote: "I have to complete writing my critique of the *Elective Affinities.* This is just as important to me as an exemplary piece of criticism as it is a prolegomena to certain purely philosophical treatises––what I have to say about Goethe is located somewhere between the two" (*Correspondence,* 194).

Beginning with his thesis on the concept of criticism, Benjamin wrote a certain number of extremely dense texts: "Fate and Character" (September–November 1921), "The Task of the Translator" (March–November 1921), "Theologico-Political Fragment" (1920–1921), and "Ankündigung der Zeitschrift: *Angelus Novus*" (Notice for the journal *Angelus Novus*; December 1921–January 1922).

In the notice for *Angelus Novus,* Benjamin distinguishes between an annihilating criticism and a positive criticism, both of which have essentially the same role: challenging the public's expectations. But the primary characteristic of criticism is soverign authority. The critic is literally Adam naming and citing the works according to their truth: "We must reconquer the force of critical speech in two ways. We must repeat both the accusation and the verdict" (*G.S.,* 2:242). In the manner of Karl Kraus and André Breton, the secular popes of letters, Benjamin conceives of criticism as a practice of "terrorism" against the "counterfeiters of talent." The critic's role is that of a "guardian at the gate" (*G.S.,* 2:242) who refuses entry to mediocrity. Criticism has both a moral and an aesthetic responsibility to the public of the time:

> The criterion of true actuality is absolutely not found among the public. Any journal like this one must embrace what is truly current, what is forming under the infertile surface of the new, that absolute novelty whose exploitation it must cede to the newspapers. In embracing true actuality, it must be pitiless in its thought, imperturbable in its statements; if necessary it must have total disregard for the public. (*G.S.,* 2:241–242)

The authoritarian violence defended by Benjamin corresponds both to his esoteric idea of "revelation" as the essence of the work of art and to his theory, developed in "The Task of the Translator," that the work of art is not destined for the receiver. How do critics justify their claim to authority? If they were to argue for it, they would be within the public's reach; they can therefore only produce imperatives. Benjamin reclaims for the critic the artist's tyrannical freedom, which is justified only by the work of art, not by argument. This freedom is exercised in two forms. When it destroys, it proceeds collectively, in generalizations: "How would it manage otherwise?" (*G.S.,* 2:242). In contrast, "positive criticism,"

> more than it has done in the past, more than the romantics succeeded in doing, . . . must limit itself to the isolated work of art. In fact, great criticism does not have the task, as is sometimes believed, of instructing through historical representation, or of forming minds through comparisons, but rather of attaining knowledge by sinking into its object. It is incumbent upon criticism to account for that truth of works that art and philosophy require. (*G.S.*, 2:242)

"Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*" was written in that spirit.

Truth is, therefore, the criterion to be sought in the content, the complement of the aesthetic criterion of form. But this is not truth as opposed to artistic value. In this case, truth means validity in an undifferentiated sense, absolute validity. Benjamin nevertheless rejects all obscurantist interpretation of such a claim. Concerning the underlying philosophical attitude of any position the journal *Angelus Novus* might take,[11] he pronounces the following rule:

> For it, the universal validity of the manifestations of the life of the mind must be linked to the question of knowledge if it is to be able to claim a place within the framework of the religious orders being formed. Not that such orders can already be predicted. But we can predict that, without them, the things that these days—the first of a new era—are struggling with to attain life will not be manifested. (*G.S.*, 2:244)

Such a religious exercise is nevertheless incompatible with "the convenient obscurity of esotericism"; Benjamin requires not only Hölderlinian "sobriety" but also "a rationality without concession" (*G.S.*, 2:244), which in this case can only mean a maximum sobriety or clarity in the exposition of the noncontingent and the ungroundable.

It is this same ungroundable character that, on the moral and legal plane, defies the relation between "divine violence" and legal violence. In "Critique of Violence," Benjamin constructs a theory in which divine violence is defined as the pole opposite to the law, which—as the founding violence of power or simply as conservative violence (military service, for example)—he calls "mythic violence":

> Just as in all spheres God opposes myth, mythic violence is opposed to divine violence. And the latter constitutes its antithesis in all respects. If mythic violence is law-making, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythic violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody,

> the latter is lethal without spilling blood. (*Reflections,* 297, translation modified)

Divine violence expiates even as it destroys because of its innate sense of justice: It is located outside the mythic cycle of life, power, and the illusory "equality" of laws.[12] In the religious tradition, the classic example of divine violence is provided by God's judgment, as manifested in the Bible by punishment without warning; but, adds Benjamin, to underscore its actuality, divine violence

> is also found in present-day life in at least one sanctioned manifestation. Educating violence, which in its perfected form stands outside the law, is one of its manifestations. It is defined, therefore, not by miracles directly performed by God, but by the expiating moment in it that strikes without bloodshed and, finally, by the absence of all lawmaking. (*Reflections,* 297, translation slightly modified)

Benjamin sees very well that such an extension of "educating violence" to the scale of society is not without risks:

> The premise of such an extension of pure or divine violence is sure to provoke, particularly today, the most vehement objections, and to be countered by the argument that, taken to its logical conclusion, it leaves men free to exercise even lethal violence against one another. This, however, cannot be conceded. (*Reflections,* 298, translation modified)

Divine violence leaves intact the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." Nevertheless, this commandment's function is not to serve as a criterion of judgment but rather as a "guideline for actions of persons or communities who have to wrestle with it in solitude and, in exceptional cases, to take on themselves the responsibility of ignoring it" (*Reflections,* 298). That responsibility stems from "divine violence" and its sovereign justice. Like educating violence, it is carried out among minorities prey to mythic violence and cannot, according to Benjamin, be grounded in law. In other words, divine violence is authorized by an ethic that has to account for its decisions only to God, not humanity. This is the violence of the general strike, of revolutionary and anarchist violence, according to Georges Sorel (*Reflections,* 291).[13] Such is also the sovereignty of the innovative artist who breaks with an accepted definition of the work of art, and the ethic of the critic who challenges the public's judgment by anticipating aesthetic criteria that have not yet been established. Their violence is a pure manifestation and release of the genius of humanity in its opposition to the forces of myth. For

Benjamin, society has no potential for rationality that the critic could rely on and invoke in addressing the public.

This concept of genius, borrowed from Hölderlin (*G.S.,* 2:116), designates the prophetic, divine faculty of humanity, by virtue of which it escapes destiny and attains freedom. This faculty is intimately linked to poetic creativity. Art and poetry are the privileged locus of a salutary interruption in the fatal course of things:

> It was not in law but in tragedy that the head of genius lifted itself for the first time from the mist of guilt, for in tragedy demonic fate is breached. . . . In tragedy pagan man becomes aware that he is better than his god, but the realization robs him of speech, remains unspoken. . . . The paradox of the birth of genius in moral speechlessness, moral infantility, is the sublimity of tragedy. It is probably the basis of all sublimity, in which genius, rather than God, appears. ("Fate and Character," in *Reflections,* 307)

In a general way, art and philosophy rise up in opposition to myth, and it is in that negation that, for Benjamin, the common ground of the Greek and biblical traditions lies, even though the biblical tradition is then once more related to the Greek as to a pagan and still mythical heritage:

> For truth to be established, we must first know what myth is: we must know it as a reality indifferent to truth and destructive of truth. That is why the Greeks had to eliminate myth so that—after a theurgical phase, which was art and philosophy only in a mistaken sense of these words—true art and true philosophy were born, for both are founded in truth, exactly to the same degree, no more and no less. ("Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften,*" in *G.S.,* 1:162)

"Divine violence" is the transposition of the genius's faculty to the realm of practice. Since law has been defined as purely instrumental—mythic, and as a result, without relation to transcendent justice—the just act can intervene only in a manner as unpredictable and yet as pertinent as the emergence of the poetic or critical genius. "This criticism . . . [which] ascertains the moments in which the artistic sensibility puts a stop to fate draped as progress and encodes the utopian experience,"[14] is wrongly invested, in Benjamin, with the mark of praxis.

Conversely, Benjamin's aesthetic criticism is always conceived as a practical intervention, an effort to interrupt the blind course of history and bring about an awakening, a raising of consciousness. Although he is opposed to an instrumental writing that intervenes in the name of a cause

to convince the public, Benjamin nevertheless aspires to "an objective writing, which for that very reason is highly political." It is in forcing the limits of the inexpressible and of silence, in revealing the unsaid, the forgotten, and the repressed through criticism, that he believes he can have a practical effect.

## *Criticism and Truth*

As an "exemplary piece of criticism," Benjamin's essay on *Elective Affinities* pursues several objectives: It seeks to solve a question left open at the end of the study on the concept of art criticism (the possibility of a criticism of both form and "truth content"); to test a certain number of philosophical ideas (on the Enlightenment and the false emancipation from myth, on redemption, beauty, appearance, truth, and, finally, hope), and to demonstrate the limits of what Goethe was able to say, to submit certain conceptions deeply anchored in the German mentality to a salutary shock. In this sense, it is a theologico-political essay that targets "true actuality" as defined in the notice for *Angelus Novus.* Goethe's novel is interpreted both as the testimony of a culture that remained prey to the obscurity of pagan myth and as a sublime attempt to wrench free of it, and thus as a privileged moment in the break with "destiny." Before the messianic end of history, art alone is capable of making this break, and it is incumbent upon criticism to present the break in order to bring us closer to that end.

The conceptual structure of Benjamin's essay can be outlined as follows: The philosophical problem of the work of art's validity is linked to the idea of truth defined in theological terms. This idea is incarnated in the true work of art, but it is not made conceptually explicit, for it is inaccessible to philosophy; only criticism, in deciphering the work of art, can help philosophy attain it. Within the work of art itself, the subject matter and the truth content have to be distinguished. The artist approaches the subject matter through his technique and receives the truth content in the completed form of the work; the exegete addresses the subject matter in the form of commentary and the truth content in the form of criticism.

The essay is arranged into four schemata. There is, first, a *philosophical* schema grounded in the relation between the idea, intuition, and the concept. It is the task of criticism to relate theological truth both to the inaccessible horizon of philosophical inquiry and to the truth content of the work of art. Art and philosophy relate to each other according to the Kantian complementarity of the concept and intuition, united in the Idea, which is inaccessible to knowledge.

There is, second, a *critical* schema founded in the relation between the components of the work of art and the human subjects—the creator and the receiver—who relate to it. The critic addresses the truth content and the

form of the work of art through a commentary on its subject matter; the artist's technique addresses only the subject matter.

There is, third, an *aesthetic* schema of the relation between appearance and essence in beauty. Appearance and essence are united in the work of art but are dissociated through criticism, which grounds beauty in the truth content, whereas the authentic writer corrects the beauty of mere appearance through the sublime caesura of the inexpressive.

Finally, there is a *historical* schema that anchors relations among men in the religious, since criticism's task is, in the modernity of the Enlightenment—a false emancipation placed under the sign of myth and appearance—to assure the continuity of tradition through the truth content contained within the act that gives form to the authentic work of art.

A wall separates modern consciousness from both truth and tradition: Just as the image and the concept do not immediately have access to theological truth, the artist's technique does not immediately have access to the work's form and truth content. And just as modern beauty is dissociated from its anchorage in truth, modern freedom is cut off from its anchorage in tradition and ritual. *Criticism* plays a determinant role in crossing over that wall. It always holds the key to the enigma. Whether they be truth or freedom, art or beauty, criticism is responsible for the founding values of culture. This privilege is tied to the fact that only criticism can act as a link between the image and the concept, the two aspects of a theological truth that has been split in two. The transgressive power of aesthetic criticism is exercised through the deciphering of the absolute in works of art. In the terms of "On Language as Such," the critic, at a time when life is no longer grounded in ritual, is the "Adam" who makes every effort to name in conceptual terms what the artist named imperfectly through the figuration of his work.

In a methodological introduction, Benjamin approaches the question of the work of art's content, which it is incumbent upon the critic to reveal: "In a work of art, the critic is seeking the truth content, the commentator the subject matter" (*G.S.*, 1:125). The commentator, or literary historian, latches on to artistic phenomena in their immediacy and diversity; the philosophical critic is interested in their force of truth and revelation and in their unity.

Seeking to escape the aestheticism of the romantics, Benjamin thus defines the true work of art in terms of its truth content. And yet, he does not move toward a type of thinking associated with Schelling and Hegel. For those two philosophers, the truth of art was the truth of philosophy

itself, which translates it into conceptual terms, whereas for Benjamin, as for Kant, "doctrine" is beyond reach. For Benjamin, the authentic exercise of philosophy is limited to criticism, and in particular to aesthetic criticism, inasmuch as the figuration of art, in approximating the meaning of the whole by means of its immanent finality, bears a piece of "doctrine."

From Benjamin's first writings, truth is the correlative of such a philosophical doctrine, which is not distinct from theology; ultimately, theological truth is the aim of all thought, all criticism, all art, and all translation. Despite the discontinuity of forms, there exists a solidarity between the poetic work and the Adamic name given to things as a function of their essence. The essay on *Elective Affinities* reveals its hand only in the third and last part: "All authentic works have their sisters in the field of philosophy. They are precisely the figures in which the ideal of their problem is manifested" (*G.S.*, 1:172). Through the concept of an "ideal of the problem," Benjamin attempts to reformulate the Goethean notion of an ideal of art, which is nothing other than its archetypal content; Benjamin speaks of an ideal *of the problem*, to underscore the link between the truth of art and philosophy. Because of philosophy's inability to possess the ontological character of truth

> there exists no question that embraces in its questioning the unity of philosophy. In philosophy, the ideal of the problem designates the concept of that nonexistent question concerning the unity of philosophy. But the system also is in no sense an object of inquiry. Yet there exist productions that, without being a question, have the deepest affinity to the ideal of the problem. These are works of art. (*G.S.*, 1:172)

Schelling's idea of art as an *organon* of philosophy is thus subject to the restrictions formulated by Kant: Unlike Schelling, Benjamin considers philosophy incapable of formulating the idea of its own unity. In art, the ideal of the problem is buried under the plurality of works,

> and the role of criticism is to extract it from them. In the work of art, criticism shows the ideal of the problem through one of its manifestations. For it finally takes note in them of the possibility for a formulation dealing with the truth content proper to the work of art as the supreme problem of philosophy. In every true work of art, one can detect a manifestation of the ideal of the problem. (*G.S.*, 1:173)

In other words, every true work of art allows the critic to address *the* central problem of philosophy and not just *certain* questions that also, from another point of view, interest philosophers. From the legitimate possibility of approaching a philosophical problem from a work of art (following the

principle of the "essay") Benjamin deduces the claim that criticism is able to at least evoke "the supreme problem of philosophy," if not to solve it (the age seems to forbid that).

Or, to set aside Benjamin's systematic claim, criticism is an attempt to approach a philosophical problem that is vital for the age and to situate it in history (including the history of thought) through a work of art chosen because of its universal interest. That is what Benjamin does when he writes on Goethe, on baroque drama, or on Baudelaire. Yet such an undertaking does not itself prove that other more systematic approaches, independent of aesthetic criticism, are not possible in philosophy. Benjamin never sets his theological and metaphysical concept of truth against other conceptions. For him, truth means life considered in the light of messianic salvation. It is not open to polemical justification; rather, it is a quality of the true life.

Whatever we might think of Benjamin's theory, the secularized forms of such a "truth" are no doubt indissociable from aesthetic "validity." We need to be able to determine noncircularly what a "true work of art" is. What makes a work of art "successful" is probably not unrelated to the idea of a "successful" form of existence, even though art may present its failure or impossibility. In that case, the work of art tries to compensate for the absence of a lived realization of that successful existence, or it presents it in an intense way. As a result, the work of art confers upon that absence, that impossibility, an imaginary completion. In this sense, every work of art casts a "messianic" light on the fragment of reality it represents or on the artistic gesture itself. Whatever is subject to the public gaze is wrenched from the triviality of the profane and daily world. But what is thus "transfigured"[15] reaches a nonprofane world only metaphorically; what is lifted from the quotidian and removed from everyday language does not through this act alone acquire the status of an ontological truth: Each case is an individual solution and there is an irreducible plurality of completions that can hardly claim the cognitive universality implied by the concept of truth.

Benjamin's approach poses the following question: What does grounding an aesthetic judgment as such mean if the work of art must ultimately be judged as a function of a metaphysical truth to which philosophy has no direct access[16] but which the work of art represents? In all the great philosophical aesthetics, art has a tendency to exceed the definitions that would reduce it to one particular field. That means, in particular, that it is impossible to account for a work of art by adopting a *purely* aesthetic viewpoint. A work of art that is satisfying from a formal point of view can be empty and of little interest from a more general point of view. It therefore seems that, to judge "beauty"—in other words, the aesthetic quality of a work of art—one must be aware of criteria that are not purely aesthetic but that deal with the extra-aesthetic stakes of what is represented. That said, whatever the interest of the extra-aesthetic stakes of a work of art, they must

be *aesthetically* integrated so that the work can be perceived as a work of art and not as the pretext for a "message" foreign to art.

Benjamin's argument is circular: Having proposed to elucidate works of art by philosophy—"All authentic works have their sisters in the field of philosophy"—he abruptly reverses his inquiry and seeks in works of art a response to the impossible question of philosophy's unity. The problem is no longer one of art, but of philosophy. Kant's critique observes that the human experience imposes limits on our faculty of knowing, whereas there is

> in human reason something that no experience can make us know and yet whose reality and truth are proven by effects that present themselves in experience. . . . That is the concept of *freedom* and the law, which leads to the categorical imperative. . . . Owing to this concept, *Ideas,* which would be totally empty for simply speculative reason . . . become a reality, even though it is only moral-practical; after all, it is a matter of *conducting* ourselves as if their objects (God and immortality), which we can postulate from this (practical) point of view, were given.[17]

According to Kant, the *beautiful* offers an aesthetic Idea for our reflection which, in presenting a subjective finality of nature that is adequate to our faculties of knowing, also exceeds the limits of experience and speculative reason: This is the image of a nature that would be governed by freedom. From his first works, Benjamin sets aside, as a narrow-mindedness characteristic of the Enlightenment, any Kantian effort to establish the foundations of knowledge as a function of a Newtonian vision of nature, and, like the romantics of post-Kantian idealism before him, he seeks to decipher the Ideas in works of art. Leaving aside the function that Kant assigns to Ideas, he indiscriminately rejects the ultimate powerlessness of philosophy and the wise mutism of works of art and instead attributes all the powers of philosophy to aesthetic criticism:

> The totality of philosophy, its system, has more power than the set constituted by all its problems, for unity in the solution of all problems cannot be questioned. In fact, it may even be that, in relation to the question posed, a new question would arise immediately: to know what the unity between the response given to this problem and the response given to all other problems rests on. It follows from this that there exists no question that embraces in its questioning the unity of philosophy. In philosophy, the ideal of the problem designates the concept of that nonexistent question concerning the unity of philosophy. But the system also is in no sense an object of inquiry. Yet there exist productions that, without being a question, have the deepest affinity to the ideal of the problem. These are works of art. (*G.S.,* 1:172)

From the fact that, without infinite regression, there is no *one* single question that is able to inquire about the unity of philosophy or its absolutes, Benjamin concludes the necessity of turning to art to overcome that lack. But art's "affinity" with the problem of philosophy remains to be demonstrated.[18] In a circular argument, Benjamin confines himself to linking philosophy to art, and art to philosophy, through a concept that the essay on Goethe nonetheless criticizes, that of "affinity": "The work of art does not enter into competition with philosophy itself, it simply enters into the most precise relation to it, thanks to its affinity with the ideal of the problem" (*G.S.*, 1:172). The supposed "precision" of this relation is also nothing more than a postulate, pure and simple.

The difficulty is even thornier in that, as Benjamin sees perfectly, it is impossible to speak of *a* truth in *multiple* works of art:

> By virtue of a law that has its foundation in the essence of the ideal in general, that ideal of the problem can be represented only in plurality. But it is not in a plurality of problems that the ideal of the problem appears. It is rather hidden under the plurality of works of art and the role of criticism is to extract it from them. In the work of art, criticism shows the ideal of the problem through one of its manifestations. For it finally takes note in them of the possibility for a formulation dealing with the truth content proper to the work of art as the supreme problem of philosophy. (*G.S.*, 1:173)

What criticism must extract from the work of art is, thus, not simply the particular work's truth content, but, through the plurality of works of art and problems, the *single* ideal of the problem, the *single* truth, the supreme problem of philosophy. By means of the plural relativity of works, the critical essay must aim toward the absolute of philosophical truth:

> In a work, truth, without being an object of inquiry, would nevertheless be recognized as an imperative. If we are allowed to assert, as a result, that everything that is beautiful refers in one way or another to the true and that we can assign it its virtual place within philosophy, that means that, in any true work of art, we can detect a manifestation of the ideal of the problem. (*G.S.*, 1:173)

Benjamin's "in one way or another" betrays his distress in speaking of a "true" work of art. The relation between the beautiful and the true—which will be treated later in the same essay and again in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*—is no more established than is the criterion for a "true" work of art. Furthermore, the plurality of works' reference to the single ideal of the problem, which is supposed to present an affinity with the system of

philosophy, would make criticism a reductive operation. Benjamin's difficulty in addressing aesthetic validity lies in the fact that he is seeking it at a *substantial* level, in a philosophical message underlying all true works, instead of embracing artistic successes whose criteria cannot be established once and for all; in the end, he is seeking an evocation of the true life in the work of art that conforms to philosophical doctrine, not an aesthetically complete representation of *an* experience that does not allow for existential or philosophical extrapolation.

In a quite classic manner, Benjamin thinks that the effort of criticism to attain truth is aided by the passage of time; over time the truth content is revealed:

> United in the first moments of the work of art, as time goes on, we see . . . the subject matter and the truth content become dissociated, since, although the latter remains just as hidden, the former begins to show through. The more time passes, the more the exegesis of what is astonishing and bewildering in the work, that is, its subject matter, becomes for the later critic a precondition. (*G.S.*, 1:125)

As a result, the critic can only begin with commentary (*G.S.*, 1:125). The truth content remains "hidden" because of a "fundamental law of all writing: as the truth content takes on more meaning, its link to the subject matter becomes less apparent and more internal" (*G.S.*, 1:125). In other words, the more important the work, the more its truth is emancipated from its historical elements as they fade into the past. According to Benjamin, that is what defines the fundamental critical question:

> Does the appearance of the truth content lie in the subject matter, or does the life of the subject matter lie in the truth content? For, in becoming dissociated in the work, they decide its immortality. In this sense, the history of works of art prepares for their criticism, whose power is augmented by historical distance. (*G.S.*, 1:125–126)

Does this mean something more or other than the fact that it is difficult to judge a work of art at the time of its creation, to the extent that its burning subject matter dissimulates the source of its force (whether truth or simply surface actuality)? If so, there is an enormous risk of inferring that the judgment of posterity is more certain than that of contemporaries, even though all Benjamin's thinking is opposed to the falseness inherent in transmission: forgeting, repression, deformation, the ideology of progress. Even though he concedes that a true work of art owes its value to its *own* truth content, Benjamin situates the criterion for that value outside the work: in a theological truth that the work of art partakes in. And yet, in

principle, he does not have any means for attaining that theological truth other than the "true" works of art that present an affinity with the ideal of the problem. Only the practice of criticism allows him to leave this circle.

## *The Enlightenment, Myth, and Tradition*

The concept of subject matter continues to be somewhat fluid as long as we do not take into account what, for Benjamin, links this term to the theological foundation of the idea of truth content. When he speaks of the subject matter of a historical epoch, that of the German Enlightenment in particular, we rapidly discover that we are dealing with the historical forms of certain eternal constellations such as love, marriage, or death. The poetic technique, which, Benjamin insists, is situated on the borderline between subject matter and truth content, is in this case revealing: "For the writer, the description of subject matter is the enigma that his technique must allow him to solve. . . . But what it signifies, in the end, has to escape the author no less than the spirit of his time" (*G.S.*, 1:146). The meaning, not only of the subject matter but also of the representation that the writer gives it and that itself rests on the truth content, is inaccessible to the creative consciousness; it can appear only through the dual work of time and criticism.

Benjamin considers marriage the central subject matter of *Elective Affinities,* not primarily as a function of the work but, rather, as a consequence of a theological or archetypal definition of marriage. Criticism consists in setting that definition against the Goethean representation: "In completely discerning the subject matter of permanent things, we also discern their truth content. The truth content is revealed as the truth content of the subject matter" (*G.S.*, 1:128). True to his philosophy of language, Benjamin makes every effort to name the subject matter as a function of its truth content and hence to judge the work of art in terms of its force of revelation. But criticism could not be the final authority, in the absence of an ultimate doctrine, if the work of art did not provide it with something to grasp. Through its *representation* of the subject matter, the work of art extends a branch to the critic that allows him or her to anticipate a part of truth, a parcel of definitive doctrine.

Benjamin attributes his own vision—which is moral and not legal—of marriage to Goethe: "In truth, marriage is never justified in law, that is, as an institution, but only inasmuch as it expresses the permanence of love, which would rather seek its expression in death than in life" (*G.S.*, 1:130). If, in Goethe's novel, the law nevertheless intervenes, through the failure of the main character's marriage, it is because Goethe wanted

> to show the force that, in its decline, proceeds from it. And this is assuredly the mythic violence of the law; in it, marriage is only the

> fulfillment of a destiny that marriage itself does not dictate. For its dissolution is only damaging because it is not at all the effect of supreme powers. . . . It is only in this decline that it becomes the legal relation. . . . But, however true it may be that Goethe never reached a pure discernment of the moral consistency of this link, it never occurred to him to ground marriage in marriage laws. At least he never doubted that at its deepest foundation, at its most secret, marriage was moral. (*G.S.*, 1:130–131)

It is therefore only indirectly, through premonition and denunciation, that Goethe "in fact touches on the subject matter of marriage" (*G.S.*, 1:130). He *shows* that "its dissolution transforms all of humanity in appearance, leaving only the mythic to persist as the only essence" (*G.S.*, 1:131). When the spouses exercise their matrimonial rights toward each other, primitive violence rears its head.

In underscoring the fact that marriage is not founded in law, Benjamin pursues ends other than that of establishing the essence of marriage in its truth. Through the myth of the law—already denounced in "Critique of Violence"—he attacks modernity, its irreligiosity, and its conception of freedom. In defending the authenticity of love and marriage and in making claims for Goethe's premonitions, Benjamin wishes to give the legitimacy of religious law and of tradition precedence over a modernity whose false promises of emancipation seem to lead to the return of mythic violence. In *Elective Affinities* a pastor removes a tombstone in order to plant his clover; Benjamin asks in response:

> Can we conceive, confronted with tradition, a more characteristic liberation than to lay a hand on one's ancestors' tombs, which, under the footsteps of the living, form the ground not only of myth but also of religion? Where does freedom lead those who act in such a manner? Far from opening new perspectives to them, it makes them blind to what is real about their fears. And that is because it is inadequate. For those men to have what they need to defend themselves against the nature within which they live, they need the rigorous attachment to a ritual that we cannot call superstitious except when, detached from its true context, it is only rudimentary survival. Freed from superhuman powers as only mythical nature can be, it comes into play as a threat. (*G.S.*, 1:132)

With Goethe, Benjamin expresses his strongest reservations about a carefree break with tradition; he forgets that, although *Faust* describes the ravages of such a break, it also underscores its heroism and unavoidability. Benjamin is not sensitive to the subterranean links between Goethe and Hegel, between the writer and the dialectician of a revolutionary era. Regarding "Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*," the least one could say is that Benjamin

does not underscore the ambiguity that modernity had for Goethe. He does not understand that the theme of "elective affinities," the transposition of the romantic philosophy of nature to the field of loving relationships, is a warning against the obscurantism that had reemerged from within the heart of the German Enlightenment. Benjamin—who takes the logic of the work as evidence for his theses—reads it as a controlled demonstration not only of incomplete and irresponsible emancipation held prisoner to superstitions but, in a general way, of the illusions of modern freedom, of the secular values issuing from the French Revolution. Emancipation does not take place, but the chains of tradition, despite the "orgiastic" efforts of the romantics to reactualize them, are disastrously broken.

To fully appreciate Benjamin's appeal to tradition and ritual, we must keep in mind the biographical context of his essay, which is in fact inscribed in the text in its dedication to Jula Cohn. The situation of the central couple in Goethe's novel was, at the time, similar to that of Benjamin and his wife, whose marriage was on the point of breaking up because each was in love with another. The modern person's chimerical freedom, which Benjamin denounced, was something he recognized in himself and against which he mobilized the forces of tradition. Beginning in 1920 when he was writing this essay, one of the leitmotifs of his correspondence was his resolution to learn Hebrew in order to return to the sources. The theology of the first texts, then historical materialism, were doctrines that Benjamin hoped would enable him to rediscover indestructible criteria that were lacking both in his own life and in the modern society in which he lived.

Benjamin's aspiration for "doctrine" through the "treatise" form, for which the essay on Goethe was to act as a model, was motivated by his observation of a link between the decline of tradition and the failure of modern freedom. His gamble was to restore tradition by demonstrating both the disastrous effects of the break with religious ritual and the fact that we remain indebted to tradition. Only such a raising of consciousness seemed capable of neutralizing the return of myth and the perpetuation of cyclical destiny: "Destiny is the set of relations that plunges life into guilt" (*G.S.,* 1:138). For Benjamin, there can be no morality without God; he does not acknowledge the idea of a profane morality, particularly as it developed with the Enlightenment: "When supernatural life disappears in man, even if he commits no immoral act, his natural life is filled with guilt. For it is now prisoner to the simple act of living, which is manifested in man as guilt" (*G.S.,* 1:139). Only the work of art, the act of genius wrenching itself from the context of myth and guilt, allows us to break the fatal shackles.

Above all, that is what Goethe's own relation to nature seems to confirm, as it is manifested in his morphological studies and in his theory of colors. His cult of nature, which includes his theory of art founded on the idea of original phenomena, is opposed to the poetic act that wrenches itself

free from mythic forces. Unbeknownst to him, however, the two are closely linked. In *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik,* Benjamin had underscored both the mythic character of natural archetypes supposedly at the origin of art and the indifference toward the aesthetic criticism that resulted from it:

> Just as [Goethe's] notion of nature itself remained ambiguous, he too often slipped from the original phenomenon as archetype to simple nature in the sense of a model. This way of seeing would never have imposed itself if Goethe had moved away from equivocation, had discerned that the field of art is the only one where, as ideals, original phenomena can be intuitively grasped in an adequate way, whereas, in the scientific order, the idea that represents them, though it may elucidate the object of perception, can never transform it into intuition. Far from preexisting art, original phenomena reside in art. On principle, they must never serve as standards. (*G.S.*, 1:148)

Imprisoned by his concept of nature, Goethe falls prey to the "demonic," to astrology, superstition, and the anxiety attached to them: "Anxiety is the price mythic humanity pays for frequenting demonic forces" (*G.S.*, 1:151). This theme continued to grow in force and extension in Benjamin's thinking.[19] Far from being limited to the Germany of the romantics, it applied to history as a whole, placed under the sign of the mythic eternal return and the phantasmagoria of modern consciousness. It applied in particular to the Paris of the nineteenth century as it was described by Baudelaire and Auguste Blanqui: "Blanqui's cosmic speculation," wrote Benjamin in 1929, "includes this lesson: that humanity will be prey to a mythic anxiety to the extent that the phantasmagoria occupy a place" (*G.S.*, 5:1256). There is no deliverance from this anxiety except "redemption in eternal life" (*G.S.*, 1:154). Benjamin's later dialectical materialism did not change very much in this deep conviction, except that it invested all the qualities of religious eternity in the historical present, the "now" of action.

According to Benjamin's impressive analysis, Goethe dedicated his last works to mythic powers, to "the poet's struggle to escape from the circle where mythology claimed to enclose him" (*G.S.*, 1:164). Like Hölderlin, Goethe became the slave of literature. In his last works, beginning with *Elective Affinities,* he reached the summit of his art. The key is provided in a short novella inserted into the novel that, by way of contrast, reveals the true values that the novel's characters know nothing about. Once more, divine violence attests to authenticity and true love; the characters in the novella are unacquainted with the modern ideas that destroy those in the novel. "In fact," writes Benjamin,

> when the young man chooses to dive in to save the young girl, while far from obeying the instructions of destiny, he still does not perform a truly free act. In the novel, the chimerical quest for freedom condemns the heroes to an evil fate; the characters in the novella are situated beyond freedom, beyond destiny; their courageous decision is enough to break the circle of a destiny ready to enclose them, enough to unmask a freedom that would have led them to the nothingness of choice. (*G.S.*, 1:170)

In short, "in the face of the mythic themes of the novel, the corresponding motifs of the novella must be considered redemptive themes" (*G.S.*, 1:171). The life of its characters is real life, in opposition to the confused and degraded life of the novel's characters.

Such a bias against modernity can hardly be justified. Is it truly the "chimerical quest for freedom" that destroys the characters and the "nothingness of choice" that stands in solidarity with the break with ancestors, ritual, and tradition? Is it not, rather, indecision, half-measures, and disavowed and cowardly desire over which modernity has no privilege? In opposing tradition and the divine violence of a "courageous decision" to an ill-conceived freedom applied not to public life but to one's love life—over which the law in fact loses its power—Benjamin seems to be hurling abuse at himself, the modern man who knows nothing of tradition and who has fallen prey to a situation comparable to that of the characters in the novel. Nevertheless, there is nothing to indicate that the return to tradition was within his grasp, nor that it is within ours; there is nothing that allows us to say that the *moral* problem evoked by *Elective Affinities* is elucidated in any decisive manner. The "redemption" that is here the antithesis of myth appears no less irrational than the behavior of those who, believing they are free, fall prey to myth. The "decision" reached in response to catastrophe and miracle, through a gesture of sovereign violence as it is conceived in "Critique of Violence"—the tragic or irremediable outcome that is barely averted on several occasions in the novella—could no more be erected into an example or a rule than can the ambiguity that characterizes the behavior of the novel's characters; both conditions are part of the same unstable universe and offer no answer that is valid for all. In presenting redemption as a miracle, Benjamin deprives it of all moral exemplarity.

## *The Beautiful, Appearance, the Inexpressive*

As he often does when he finds himself confronted with the inextricable forest of a mythical universe,[20] Benjamin invokes *reason*—an incorruptible lucidity, a sobriety that resists all seduction—in raising the question of beauty in relation to *Elective Affinities*: "To confront it, we need a courage

which, from the safety of indestructible reason, can abandon itself to its prodigious, magical beauty" (*G.S.,* 1:180).

According to Benjamin, we must be convinced of the beauty of the character Ottilie—a beauty that moves beyond the framework of the epic form and approaches the field of painting—in order to participate in Goethe's novel (*G.S.,* 1:178–179). "With *Elective Affinities,* the demonic principles of incantatory magic irrupt in the literary work itself. What is evoked is never anything but appearance, that beauty incarnated in Ottilie" (*G.S.,* 1:179). And, according to Benjamin, beauty "in its pure state," appearance evoked by incantation, represents a danger for the work of art, which, in his view, has the role of liberating us from the mythic forces that appearance participates in and of leading us toward truth. There is an opposition between the incantatory "formula" that creates appearances out of chaos and artistic form that, through rational enchantment, momentarily transforms chaos into a universe. No work of art, writes Benjamin, "has the right to elicit a living appearance without conjuring it away; if not, it becomes pure appearance and ceases to be a work of art" (*G.S.,* 1:181).

In reaching that limit where Goethe, fascinated by the powers of myth, almost succumbs and betrays the imperatives of art, Benjamin, as he often does, turns to the philosophy of Hölderlin, the surest guarantor of his philosophy of art. As in *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik,* the *reason* defended by Hölderlin once more bears the name of "Western, Junian sobriety" (*G.S.,* 1:182); here, it is not simply the affirmation of the force of the Idea, but the destruction of the aura that surrounds the beautiful appearance of myth. What Hölderlin—in reference to the "tragic transport" or the movement of the passions that leads to catastrophe for the characters in tragedy—calls "caesura, pure speech, the counter-rhythmic interruption" (*G.S.,* 1:181), Benjamin calls "the inexpressive" (*G.S.,* 1:181), that which in a work of art is without expression and is hence reflective in nature. In other words, it is the moment of mutism in tragedy—or in any work of art—the moment of a virtual raising of consciousness that awaits the critic's explicit explanation. As Benjamin explains: "What suspends appearance, conjures away movement, and interrupts harmony is the inexpressive" (*G.S.,* 1:181). But the *reason* invoked by Benjamin against the beautiful appearance takes on the traits of masculine rigor calling feminine ambiguity back to the moral order. And the role of art, and of criticism, once more evokes a divine violence invested with moral authority:

> By interrupting with an imperative word a woman who is turning to subterfuge, we can wrench the truth from her at the very moment of the interruption; hence, the inexpressive forces the quivering harmony to suspend its movement and, through the protest it emits, confers eternity on this quivering. Thus eternalized, the beautiful is forced to justify

> itself, but precisely in that justification, it now seems interrupted, and it owes the eternity of its content to the grace of that protest. The inexpressive is the critical power that can, if not separate appearance and essence in art, then at least prevent them from becoming confused. It is endowed with this power because it is moral speech. It manifests the sublime power of the true as that power defines the language of the real world according to the laws of the moral world. (*G.S.*, 1:181)

This model for the relation between art and life is, not accidently, designated by the term "sublime." For Benjamin, there is no artistic beauty that is not founded on the sublimity of truth. Truth, the ultimate criterion of aesthetic validity, does not seem to be accessible except in an authoritarian and violent way, through an action of breaking and entering. That is the reason Benjamin defines it not in discursive but in theological terms. This truth cannot convince; like the Kantian sublime, it forces one's hand through its energy, through violent emotion, and through its claim to obviousness. Although this kind of truth is conceivable in the realm of the vital illusions that the psychiatrist dissolves by bringing them to light, in the areas where moral, legal, or moral conflicts between adults are decided, where different claims confront one another, claims whose arguments must be weighed against one another, it can only take the form of authoritarian violence.

Beginning with his philosophy of language, Benjamin is led to admit only *one* truth despite the diversity of works of art, a truth that reveals the nature of mythic existence in relation to which art and criticism have a therapeutic role. This truth has a dual status: that of disillusionment and that of radical authenticity. A work of art is aesthetically valid or successful to the extent that it leads the reader toward that truth by destroying the beautiful appearance. For Benjamin, there is no properly aesthetic criterion for the value of art. Nor, as a result, is there any place for a diversity of interpretations. The central truth that has to be recognized also monopolizes meaning. For Benjamin, admitting that there might be many interpretations of a work would entail conferring the status of mythic ambiguity on art; but such an admission is inevitable only to the extent that there exists no access to truth independent of art, and therefore, to the extent that true art must be stripped of all ambiguity.

Nevertheless, Benjamin does not confine himself to a criticism founded on disillusion; he makes an effort to *redeem* the appearance of the beautiful, by linking the beauty of life to the beauty of art:

> All that is essentially beautiful is linked to appearance, in a constant and essential way, but at infinitely varied degrees. That link reaches its highest point wherever life is most manifest, and in this case precisely, in the dual aspect of an appearance that triumphs or is snuffed out. For

every living thing escapes the domain of essential beauty in relation to how advanced its nature is; in its form, essential beauty is thus manifested more clearly as appearance. (*G.S.*, 1:194)

Hence, according to Benjamin, the living body in its nudity is not beautiful but, rather, sublime, and in this sense it escapes the domain of essential beauty.[21] That said—and this is where Benjamin moves from living beauty to the beauty of art, in the name of an identity based on the order of the creature—even "in the least living reality, as soon as something is essentially beautiful, there is something of pure appearance in it. And that is the case for any work of art—music being the art that is the least affected" (*G.S.*, 1:194).

Benjamin seeks to provide evidence for the kinship between living beauty, founded in the sublimity of Creation, and artistic beauty, founded in the sublimity of truth. In both cases, it is a matter of establishing that the beautiful cannot be reduced to appearance, even though appearance is essential to it. The appearance of art does not encompass its essence, which "refers, much more profoundly, to what in the work of art can be defined as the very opposite of appearance: the inexpressive, that which, outside that contrast, can neither have a place in art nor be named without equivocation" (*G.S.*, 1:194). The fact remains that the inexpressive or the sublime in itself cannot institute artistic beauty, which is thus indissociable from appearance. That is why Benjamin—once more for reasons that are ultimately theological[22] and far removed from the motives that lead Nietzsche to give precedence to appearance—makes an effort to redeem the element of appearance without which there could be no beauty: "The beautiful is essentially beautiful as long as it maintains an appearance" (*G.S.*, 1:194). For appearance is our access to truth. According to Benjamin, without it there is neither the revelation of truth nor—as we shall see—hope. As a result, criticism itself must respect appearances. Appearance is the veil of beauty, "for its very essence forces beauty to appear only veiled" (*G.S.*, 1:194). This essence is its theological kernel, which Benjamin terms the mystery inherent in beauty. Beauty therefore, cannot be unveiled:

Beauty is not an appearance, it is not the veil that would cover another reality. . . . Beauty is neither the veil nor the veiled, but the object itself beneath the veil. Unveiled, that object would remain forever lost to appearance. Hence that very ancient idea that unveiling transforms what is unveiled, that the veiled thing will not remain "adequate to itself" except in its veiling. In the case of the beautiful, we must go further and say that unveiling is itself impossible. That is the guiding idea of any art criticism. The role of criticism is not to lift the veil, but rather, in knowing it as such in the most exact manner, to rise to the true intuition

> of the beautiful. . . . The intuition of the beautiful is mystery. . . . It is in mystery that the divine ontological foundation of beauty lies. (*G.S.*, 1:195)

This metaphysical conception of the beautiful applies the concept of appearance that is borrowed from the theological conception of human beauty to the work of art, inasmuch as the work of art reveals a sublime ground of truth. In this way, Benjamin believes he is accounting for the non-unveilable character of appearance better than did Nietzsche. Nevertheless, he conserves the Platonic judgment of what is *only* appearance, illusion, make-believe. Artistic appearance is legitimate in Benjamin's view inasmuch as it is the only way that the *essence* of beauty, its divine mystery, can manifest itself. Hegel says nearly the same thing when he asserts that the Idea must appear or that it must attain a sensible manifestation.[23]

Conversely, in defiance of the romantic and Nietzschean subversion of the Hegelian scheme of a beauty founded on transcendental truth, Benjamin remains faithful to the theological ground of his thought, but he abandons the idea of giving an autonomous foundation to the aesthetic sphere, as he had promised in the appendix to *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik.* Through the Goethean concept of the ideal, Benjamin returns to a conception of art and of the beautiful that conforms to metaphysical tradition.

*After* Benjamin, the question arises of whether it is possible to ground the aesthetic validity of the work of art in a radically nonmetaphysical and atheological way. In other words, can—or, must not—what is "beautiful" or aesthetically valid in a work of art be made explicit independently from "divine mystery"? That formulation implies that it is necessary to dissociate artistic beauty and human or natural beauty, to which the question of "validity" cannot be applied; at most, we can recognize in it a conformity to a canon that is also culturally established. At the same time, we need to distinguish what, in a work of art, is tied to the artist's religious conceptions and what can or must be conceived independent of a metaphysical idea of the beautiful, despite the fact that traditional art, and even modern art to a great extent, rests largely on religious or metaphysical conceptions. What is derived from art itself may be foreign to these conceptions.

The very concept of representation, detached from its metaphysical use as a substitute for the pronouncements of doctrine, might have led Benjamin to abandon the analogy between human beauty and artistic beauty: In the work of art, everything is an act of showing, emphasizing, and demonstrating, just as in criticism everything is interpretation, reconstruction, and completion. What appears in the work of art is the material configuration of the semiotic structure whose signs are to be deciphered and interpreted; what appears in human beauty is not *made* to be interpreted but resides within itself and can at the very most *indicate* the presence of a trait that

must nevertheless be proven through actions. There is nothing that allows us to ground an artist's vision in a transcendental power, however sublime the work might be; the sublime is a limiting case of the human faculty for representation, the case where human faculties test their limits.

Even in its inevitable loss, Benjamin, with Goethe, proposes to redeem the being of appearance. *Elective Affinities*' "caesura," the "inexpressive" moment of its truth is, according to Benjamin, "the moment when the lovers, embracing each other, seal their ruin: 'Hope passed over their heads like a star falling from the sky.' Obviously, they do not see it fall, and Goethe could not have indicated more clearly that the ultimate hope is only such for beings for whom one hopes, not for those who themselves hope" (*G.S.,* 1:200). This ingenious interpretation, which also recalls Benjamin's commentary on Baudelaire's *Le jeu* (*Illuminations,* 180), cannot hide the fact that the falling star is inscribed within the context of Goethe's superstitious beliefs, his myth of nature and destiny, which Benjamin has here transfigured. It is nonetheless in the name of this disinterested sign of hope that Benjamin redeems aesthetic appearance: "Hence, in the end, hope justifies the appearance of reconciliation, and that is the only case where we cannot say, with Plato, that it is absurd to wish for the appearance of the Good. For the appearance of redemption can be, and even must be, wished for; it alone is the dwelling place of hope at its highest degree" (*G.S.,* 1:200). Benjamin recognizes in this "our hope for the redemption of all the dead," adding: "It is the only right of that faith in immortality whose flame could not arise from contact with our own existence" (*G.S.,* 1:200). And he concludes with this expression, which, in its gnomic form, anticipates the "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "Only for the hopeless was hope given to us" (*G.S.,* 1:201). In the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" as well, hope has no raison d'être except to gather together and redeem the memories of the vanquished and of those who failed. It is only in this late text that Benjamin will make explicit the ethic of solidarity that underlies the essay on Goethe.

To judge by the final sentence of his essay, Benjamin sees the "beauty" of *Elective Affinities* as resting on a narration that pushes generosity to the point of an extremely moral disinterest. The narrator, both ironic and moved, painting a situation he knows is desperate, catches a glimpse, beyond the moving illusion of the characters, of the entire meaning that is his to see in this world. The hope that the falling star symbolizes, perceived only by the narrator, has no object: It is self-sufficient. Rejecting the Christian mysticism made explicit at the end of *Elective Affinities,* Benjamin concedes the force of mystery only to the *representation* given of hope in the falling star. According to him, that is where the truth content of literature resides: in what the writer cannot say discursively. Such a redemption of appearance beyond the imperative for sobriety and the destruction of any false aura is nevertheless not indispensable for Benjamin's aesthetics. It has

little place in the theory of allegory that is set out in his principal work: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama.*

## *THEORY OF TRAGIC DRAMA*

In his two principal critical early texts, Benjamin undertakes to submit the history of modern literature to a profound revision in the name of a philosophical position. The essay on Goethe seeks to wrench a too-well-known work from the false familiarity surrounding it; the work on tragic drama attempts to restore a forgotten and repressed part of history to the German literary consciousness: "The renewal of the literary heritage of Germany, which began with romanticism, has, even today, hardly touched baroque literature" (*Origin,* 48). This is a radical movement in Benjamin's approach, a new stage in his distancing from the romantic aesthetic. As he writes in a letter to his friend Scholem in 1918—speaking both of his own writings on baroque drama, drafted in 1916, and of a text by his friend on "the lament and . . . mourning" in the Hebrew tradition—it is as a Jew that Benjamin feels his solidarity with the accursed share of literature:

> As a Jew, the inherent code, the "completely autonomous order" of the lament and of mourning, became obvious to me. Without reference to Hebrew literature, which, as I now know, is the proper subject of such an analysis, I applied the following question to the *Trauerspiel* in a short essay entitled "Die Bedeutung der Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie" [The meaning of language in *Trauerspiel* and tragedy]: "How can language as such fulfill itself in mourning and how can it be the expression of mourning?" (*Correspondence,* 120, letter of 30 March 1918 [?])

Mourning for a world that, after the loss of names, has fallen into the confusion of abstract meanings; solidarity with the accursed share of German literature, which, in its cult of mourning, is close to Hebrew lamentation—such are the two principal motivations that led Benjamin to choose the *Trauerspiel* as a subject for his *Habilitation* dissertation.

In the name of a vision of the world that seems to him more comprehensive and more universal, Benjamin opposes a new hierarchy to the privileged status awarded philosophical systems, tragedy, and the artistic symbol in German thought. He contrasts *tragedy* and tragic drama, as two "ideas" opposed in their historical and religious anchorage. The modern tension between Western religions since the Reformation, as he perceives it in studies of the German sociology of religion, serves as an introduction to the particular situation of tragic drama vis-à-vis a disenchanted world. Benjamin explores this backdrop through the concepts of *secularization* and

*spatialization,* concepts that he borrowed from Max Weber and Henri Bergson and through which he defines the horizon of modernity within which tragic drama is inscribed. Understood in this way, tragic drama is devoted to the gaze of *melancholia,* as Albrecht Dürer had engraved it a century before the advent of that dramatic form.

## *Treatise, Tragic Drama, Allegory*

The concept of origin that organizes the interpretation requires the restoration of the original force, intensity, and authenticity through which a work or a form imposes an idea, a coherent way of representing the world and setting forth a truth. In every historical constellation that summons it, this idea, always threatened by the inertia of tradition, is waiting to be reactualized in its original force. Aware of the fact that German tragic drama, unlike *Elective Affinities,* does not offer the critic the opportunity to analyze an immortal masterpiece, Benjamin proposes to grasp "the metaphysics of this form" (*Origin,* 48). This entails starting from scratch and constructing what no completed work provides. For, despite an artistic inadequacy, there resides in German tragic drama as *form* a truth that Benjamin seeks to save:

> No sovereign genius imprinted his personality on this form. And yet here is the centre of gravity of every baroque *Trauerspiel.* The individual poet is supremely indebted to it for his achievements within it, and his individual limitation does not detract from its depth. (*Origin,* 49)

Benjamin thus refers only occasionally to a particular baroque tragic drama, embracing instead the notion of constructing its idea, which was never realized yet is still the bearer of a profound "truth content": "The idea of a form . . . is no less alive than any concrete work whatever. Indeed, in comparison with some of the efforts of the baroque, the form of the *Trauerspiel* is much the richer" (*Origin,* 49, translation modified). The mediocre works even reveal the underlying formal structure better than perfect works, which always exceed any determinate genre:

> The life of the form is not identical with that of the works which are determined by it, indeed the clarity with which it is expressed can sometimes be in inverse proportion to the perfection of a literary work; and the form itself becomes evident precisely in the lean body of the inferior work, as its skeleton so to speak. (*Origin,* 58)

Just as Benjamin takes liberties with these historical phenomena, these baroque dramas, in order to draw out an idea or an underlying signifying

structure, it must be possible to distinguish between the theological foundations of the Benjaminian philosophy of language and the descriptive contribution of his structural analyses of baroque drama and allegory.

Throughout the three parts of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin attacks three pillars of nineteenth-century German culture: the idea of a deductive *system*, disparaged in the "epistemo-critical prologue"; the canonical status of *tragedy* (at the top of the poetic hierarchy of German idealism), which is declared unrealizable in the present; and, in romanticism and German idealism, the idea of a reconciliation in the beautiful of the sensible and the suprasensible. Benjamin opposes to these, respectively, the *treatise*, or esoteric essay, as the anticipation of doctrine; tragic drama, or *Trauerspiel*; and *allegory*. These three terms—treatise, *Trauerspiel*, and allegory—as they are opposed to the immanent models of a culture marked by the idealization of Greece, are defined in their relation to transcendence; they are founded in a religious vision, that of medieval Christianity, but Benjamin also recognizes his own Judaism in them. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* develops as a function of this transcendence, a theory of genre (reflexive and literary genres) and of modes of symbolization (symbol and allegory), a theory that is both normative and historical. It is normative inasmuch as it establishes a hierarchy and historical inasmuch as it rests on a philosophy of history. Despite the complex form of the argument, which continually accelerates in composing a mosaic based on the most diverse aspects, the internal structure of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is relatively simple. It relies on schemata elaborated in 1916 in "On Language as Such" and on the conceptions sketched in *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik* and in "Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften*." Here again, artistic "beauty," however tenuous and fragile in this case, rest on a truth content that is theological in nature.

## *Tragedy as Agonal Prophecy*

From the end of the eighteenth century until the middle of the twentieth, every self-respecting German aesthetician was required to have at his disposal a theory of the difference between ancient and modern tragedy in order to demonstrate, despite differences in structure, the legitimacy of modern tragedy. Next to the theory of the novel, that was the principal issue in this new *querelle* between Ancients and Moderns. Through the question of tragedy, German culture posed the problem—insoluble on the political plane until the twentieth century—of how to legitimate the Luciferian revolt of those modern individuals who broke with the traditional laws of the community and whose hubris was punished by the immutable order of ancient society. From this perspective, Benjamin's originality is confined to a more radical differentiation, which denies any specifically tragic character to modern drama as it developed from Shakespeare and Pedro Calderón.

Benjamin's attitude toward tragedy is extraordinarily positive; what he rejects is the claim by an epigonic aesthetics that an authentically tragic creation can resurface in the present. Like Hegel and like the early Lukács—whose *Metaphysics of Tragedy* Benjamin cites at length, while neglecting his *Theory of the Novel,* which is even closer to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*—Benjamin sees artistic forms as part of a "philosophy of history" (*Origin,* 102). To be more precise, for Benjamin—this is also implicit in Lukács—they are part of a "philosophy of religion" (*Origin,* 104). Opposing the vain efforts to "present the tragic as something universally human," he underscores "the simple fact that modern theater has nothing to show which remotely resembles the tragedy of the Greeks" (*Origin,* 101). According to Benjamin, tragedy is linked to a precise moment of history, that of "agonal prophecy."

Against the moralizing interpretation of German idealism, against Nietzsche's aesthetic that, according to Benjamin, does not really engage in criticism but confines itself to sidestepping it, against contemporary epigones, Benjamin erects a theory of tragedy inspired by Lukács, by Rosenzweig, and by the ideas of a friend, Florens Christian Rang (*Correspondence,* 233–234). Benjamin begins by borrowing from Hegel the historical schema claiming that tragedy presents a struggle between the ancient gods and the gods to come, a struggle in which the tragic hero is sacrificed. He introduces his own idea of the prophetic nature of tragedy, as explained in "Fate and Character": Tragedy is the first manifestation of the genius of humanity within a mythical universe. He then draws on Nietzsche, Rosenzweig, and Lukács for evidence of the nature of the tragic hero, his contained mutism, the delimitation of his life by his death. Finally, he develops Rang's ideas on the pragmatic origin of the tragic process, which is linked to the juridical procedure of ancient Greece.

According to Benjamin, tragedy is founded on myth, not on history, which, in contrast, is a determining factor for the *Trauerspiel* (*Origin,* 62). Tragedy is linked to prehistoric heroism. It represents a break in the absence of orientation that still characterizes the epic.[24] In "Fate and Character," Benjamin had already proposed the central idea regarding the nature of the tragic—that of humanity's new consciousness of pagan gods, a consciousness so new that it deprives human beings of speech. It consists in making the tragic hero, through the mere force of his gesture, the mute "*prophet*" of a message that accords with that of the biblical tradition (*Origin,* 118). Such a mutism can be represented only in the register of speech, without which there is no tragedy. This idea is explained by the Hegelian idea of tragic *sacrifice,* which is both beginning and end—the end of the "ancient law of the Olympians," the beginning of the "life of the, as yet unborn, community": "The tragic death . . . offers up the hero to the unknown god as the first fruits

of a new harvest of humanity" (*Origin*, 107, translation slightly modified). This is an *agonal* prophecy inasmuch as, arriving at the *akmè*, it is articulated only through the mute struggle of the protagonists who do not know the language of the new god: "In the presence of the suffering hero the community learns reverence and gratitude for the word with which his death endowed it—a word which shone out in another place as a new gift whenever the poet extracted some new meaning from the legend" (*Origin*, 109).

The epigonic theory claims that the tragic is a universal human content. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* opposes that idea. Benjamin sees the importance of Nietzsche's book in its underscoring of the incompatibility between the tragic spirit and democratic culture. Nietzsche saw the link that attached tragedy to the hero's myths and age, but he could not take advantage of his discoveries because of his "Schopenhauerian and Wagnerian metaphysics": for Nietzsche, tragic myth "is a purely aesthetic creation" (*Origin*, 102).

Nonetheless, Benjamin does not return to a moralizing criticism. He disputes an "apparently unchallengeable prejudice. . . . This is the assumption that the actions and attitudes encountered in fictional characters may be used in the discussion of moral problems in a similar way to an anatomical model" (*Origin*, 104). Moral phenomena are not reproducible in a work of art, quite simply because "fictional characters exist only in literature" (*Origin*, 105). In other words, "the human figure in literature, indeed in art as such, differs from the human figure in reality" (*Origin*, 105); according to Benjamin, that is one of the implications of the biblical prohibition on making graven images: It "obviates any suggestion that the sphere in which the moral essence of man is perceptible can be reproduced" (*Origin*, 105). That is why the moral content of tragedy must not be grasped "as its last word, but as one aspect of its integral truth: that is to say in terms of the philosophy of history" (*Origin*, 105, translation modified). Benjamin's approach consists in criticizing and commenting on the work of art as a function of its truth content, which stems from a "philosophy of history or of religion."

However convincing this critique of a moralizing or purely aesthetic—a radically amoral—approach to tragedy, the philosophy of history is not the *only* way to avoid a reductive reading. Diderot, for example, indicated the peculiar status of morality in the work of art, but he did *not* have to resort to a philosophy of history or to religious considerations. "There is nothing sacred for the poet," he wrote, "not even virtue, which he ridicules if the person and the moment require it. . . . Has he introduced a villain? This villain is odious to you. . . . Let us judge the poems and leave aside the persons."[25] In this case, aesthetic autonomy changes the status of any moral phenomenon. It is not the philosophy of history that will reveal the truth of the work but, rather, the ever-renewed interpretation of a work as a

function of a present horizon, since it is always open to being reactualized in diverse contexts.

In the end, Benjamin owes the elements of an antijuridical interpretation of Greek tragedy in terms of law to his friend Florens Christian Rang.[26] "Here, as always," writes Benjamin, "the most fruitful layer of metaphysical interpretation is to be found on the level of the pragmatic" (*Origin,* 117). The dialogue between the accuser and the accused; the chorus of jurors; the tribunal that prescribes the unity of place, time, and (judicial) action in tragedy—all lie waiting to reveal what escapes the—demonic, according to Benjamin—nature of the law:

> The important and characteristic feature of Athenian law is the Dionysian outburst, the fact that the intoxicated, ecstatic word was able to transcend the regular perimeter of the *agon,* that a higher justice was vouchsafed by the persuasive power of living speech than from the trial of opposed factions, by combat with weapons or prescribed verbal forms. The practice of the trial by ordeal is disrupted by the freedom of the *logos.* This is the ultimate affinity between trial and tragedy in Athens. The hero's word, on those isolated occasions when it breaks through the rigid armour of the self, becomes a cry of protest. . . . But if in the mind of the dramatist the myth constitutes a negotiation, his work is at one and the same time a depiction and a revision of the proceedings. (*Origin,* 116)

There is, in addition, the satyric drama, which, at the end of each cycle of Greek tragedy, is "an expression of the fact that the élan of comedy is the only proper preparation for, or reaction to, the *non liquet* of the represented trial" (*Origin,* 117). Dionysus, the logos, the cry of revolt, poetry, and the comic are so many objections to the autonomy of the law that, as early as "Critique of Violence," Benjamin sees as incapable of dispensing justice.

## *Reformation, Counter Reformation, and Jewish Messianism*

It is on the foundation of this theory of tragedy that Benjamin attempts to bring out the religious structure of baroque tragic drama. In the first place, he rediscovers "the spirit" of the baroque, before specifying the formal peculiarities of theater at that time. In a sense, tragedy is superior to tragic drama, in which no character attains the moral greatness of the tragic hero: whereas the central character of tragedy is a king of the heroic age, that of tragic drama is an absolute tyrant.

Benjamin insistently designates the Counter Reformation as the source for this conception of sovereignty, in which, like Carl Schmitt, he believes he can perceive a particular profundity of political analysis:

> This extreme doctrine of princely power had its origins in the counter-reformation, and was more intelligent and more profound than its modern version. Whereas the modern concept of sovereignty amounts to a supreme executive power on the part of the prince, the baroque concept emerges from a discussion of the state of emergency, and makes it the most important function of the prince to avert this. (*Origin,* 65)[27]

The reason for this preference for the doctrine of the Counter Reformation is easy to understand, if we recall the "Critique of Violence." The tyrant's boundless power is the extreme form of absolute evil, which, in Benjamin's view, incarnates the essence of history defined as mythic destiny. The goal of Benjamin's book is to break the spell of this destiny by remembering the origin, to show that the form of tragic drama ultimately represents the subversion of this earthly destiny. Benjamin's intention is thus the opposite of Schmitt's: Schmitt was an ultraconservative jurist who would later place his expertise in the service of National Socialism. But a peculiar complicity unites these two men; Benjamin needs the most cynical theory of the political, understood as the truth of the political in general, to introduce his messianic idea on this foundation: "Nature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away. To strive after such a passing, even for those stages of man that are nature, is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism" ("Theologico-Political Fragment," in *Reflections,* 313).

It is from this perspective that history is transformed into the "history of nature," the blind process that escapes human actions. Benjamin rediscovers in tragic drama an analogous perspective that explains its immediate affinity with that universe:

> The religious man of the baroque era clings so tightly to the world because of the feeling that he is being driven along to a cataract with it. The baroque knows no eschatology; and for that very reason it possesses no mechanism by which all earthly things are gathered in together and exalted before being consigned to their end. The hereafter is emptied of everything which contains the slightest breath of this world, and from it the baroque extracts a profusion of things which customarily escaped the grasp of artistic formulation and, at its high point, brings them violently into the light of day, in order to clear an ultimate heaven, enabling it, as a vacuum, one day to destroy the world with catastrophic violence. (*Origin,* 66)

In this hypothesis, Benjamin rediscovers his own theological nihilism. As the incarnation of the spirit of the Counter Reformation, Schmitt's thought is also "theological"; not messianic, of course, but Catholic. To avoid the state of emergency, the very task of the political according to the

baroque conception, is to realize "the ideal of a complete stabilization, an ecclesiastical and political restoration [that] unfolds in all its consequences" (*Origin,* 65). Like Schmitt—and, later, Michel Foucault—Benjamin, extremely skeptical toward the democratic aspirations of modern times, perceives the political sphere through a schema close to that of the absolute power of the baroque age:

> The theological juridical mode of thought, which is so characteristic of the century, is an expression of the retarding effect of the over-strained transcendental impulse, which underlies all the provocatively worldly accents of the baroque. For as an antithesis to the historical ideal of restoration it is haunted by the idea of catastrophe. And it is in response to this antithesis that that theory of the state of emergency is devised. (*Origin,* 65–66)

What is "expressed" here is not the intention but, rather, the profound nature of baroque theory. This vision of history will also determine Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," written in 1940; in that text, history is "one single catastrophe" and "it is [the historian's] task to bring about a *real* state of emergency" (*Illuminations,* 257) in order to accelerate the messianic upheaval.

But if, in the last instance, Schmitt and Benjamin find themselves in opposite camps, the messianic Jew knows he is still linked to the counter-reformist Catholic by a shared skepticism, both toward the Protestant ethic and toward the illusion of a progress created by progressive changes in the human condition. Max Weber's studies of Protestantism and its rationality constitute the background for Benjamin's book on baroque drama.[28] Thus, when Benjamin disputes Schmitt's claim by arguing that, "if one wishes to explain how the lively awareness of the significance of the state of emergency, which is dominant in the natural law of the seventeenth century, disappears in the following century, it is not . . . enough simply to refer to the greater political stability of the eighteenth century" (*Origin,* 66), he refers to an argument made by Weber: "If it is true that, 'for Kant . . . emergency law was no longer any law at all,' that is a consequence of his theological rationalism" (*Origin,* 66). That rationalism no longer permits, among the condition for the state of law, the authoritarian break with the law. Weber, however, would not have conceded that Kant's rationalism could be called "theological," whereas when Benjamin makes the claim, it is a term of praise.

For Benjamin, the difference between the baroque drama of Protestant inspiration and that of Catholic inspiration is not fundamental. His view of the religious background of baroque drama is that both Protestant drama and Catholic drama are dealing with the same problem of secularizing the

form of the medieval "mystery," a secularization imposed "in both denominations" (*Origin*, 79, translation modified):

> It was just that this century denied them a religious fulfillment, demanding of them, or imposing upon them, a secular solution instead. . . . Of all the profoundly disturbed and divided periods of European history, the baroque is the only one which occurred at a time when the authority of Christianity was unshaken. Heresy, the mediaeval road to revolt, was barred; in part precisely because of the vigour with which Christianity asserted its authority, but primarily because the ardour of a new secular will could not come anywhere near to expressing itself in the heterodox nuances of doctrine and conduct. Since therefore neither rebellion nor submission was practicable in religious terms, all the energy of the age was concentrated on a complete revolution of the content of life, while orthodox ecclesiastic forms were preserved. (*Origin*, 79)

At the beginning of chapter 3, "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," Benjamin once more turns to Max Weber's inquiry to introduce the theme of melancholy. The Weberian thesis of secularization and the disenchantment of the world underlies the description of the modern world as the baroque age discovered it.

## *Secularization and Spatialization*

Benjamin tries to deduce the formal language of baroque drama from "the contemplative necessities which are implicit in the contemporary theological situation" (*Origin*, 81). Hence, he alludes to the impossibility of acting creatively in an empty world, a world abandoned by God, which results from the process of *secularization*. In the absence of eschatology, playwrights were led to seek, "in a reversion to the bare state of the creature, consolation for the renunciation of a state of grace" (*Origin*, 81, translation modified). By this, Benjamin means that the baroque spirit, to account for the absence of grace in earthly existence, returns to the state of original sin, which has constituted the human creature ever since the expulsion from Paradise. History brings no notable change to that state; it continually reproduces the same constellations of unhappiness proper to the creature. Contrary to what happens in tragedy, where the hero rises above the state of the creature, the baroque accepts the inevitability of that state as belonging to human nature. At most, it allows itself the utopia or idyll of the pastoral, a reconciliation between the creature and bucolic nature.

By abandoning the soteriological perspective of the Middle Ages—the hope that the stations of the earthly cross would finally lead to salvation—and by secularizing the history of salvation, the baroque transposes the

temporal order onto space. On several occasions, Benjamin returns to the Bergsonian theme of a reifying *spatialization* characteristic of modernity: "Here, as in other spheres of baroque life, what is vital is the transposition of the originally temporal data into a figurative spatial simultaneity" (*Origin,* 81). Elsewhere, he underscores the importance of the image of the clock for the baroque:

> The image of the moving hand is, as Bergson has shown, essential to the representation of the non-qualitative, repeatable time of the mathematical sciences. This is the context within which not only the organic life of man is enacted, but also the deeds of the courtier and the action of the sovereign who, in conformity to the occasionalist image of God, is constantly intervening directly in the workings of the state so as to arrange the data of the historical process in a regular and harmonious sequence which is, so to speak, spatially measurable. (*Origin,* 97)

Analogously, "if history is secularized in the setting, this is an expression of the same metaphysical tendency which simultaneously led, in the exact sciences, to the infinitesimal method" (*Origin,* 92). But, unlike Bergson, Benjamin does not object to the process of spatializing time and history; he discovers in it a symptom that confirms his theological vision of humanity at the state of the creature. Nothing could save humanity but a catastrophe of the messianic type that would reverse the course of history.

During the baroque age, time and power were reduced to pure mechanisms, leaving no illusion about the Fall from grace in earthly existence.

> The German *Trauerspiel* is taken up entirely with the hopelessness of the earthly condition. Such redemption as it knows resides in the depth of this destiny itself rather than in the fulfillment of a divine plan of salvation. The rejection of the eschatology of the religious drama is characteristic of the new drama throughout Europe; nevertheless the rash flight into a nature deprived of grace is specifically German. (*Origin,* 81)

In other words, it is specifically Lutheran. It is here that all the ambiguity of Benjamin's relation to German baroque drama appears. German baroque drama pays a high price for its radicality and "moral" superiority, its "less dogmatic" character, and Benjamin continually underscores the *aesthetic* superiority of Calderón's theater: "Nowhere but in Calderón could the perfect form of the baroque *Trauerspiel* be studied" (*Origin,* 81). In

> the drama of Spain, a land of Catholic culture in which the baroque features unfold much more brilliantly, clearly, and successfully, the conflicts of a state of creation without grace are resolved, by a kind of

> playful reduction, within the sphere of the court, whose king proves to be a secularized redemptive power. The *stretta* of the third act, with its indirect inclusion of transcendence—as it were mirrored, crystallized, or in marionette form—guarantees the drama of Calderón a conclusion which is superior to that of the German *Trauerspiel.* (*Origin,* 81)

Through its playful aspects, Spanish theater puts all its weight behind the component of play, the *Spiel* of the *Trauerspiel,* a component underappreciated in the German theater of the age but widely appreciated among German romantics, who, for that reason, were not at all attracted to German baroque drama: "To what else did the romantics ultimately aspire than genius, decked out in the gold chains of authority, reflecting without responsibility?" (*Origin,* 84). Their model was Calderón, for whom the prince possessed in miniature the divine power of redemption, the capacity to transform earthly despair—which Lutheran playwrights accepted without reservation—into fairy tales. Despite his aesthetic admiration for the Spaniard, Benjamin must rank German baroque drama more highly, since, in the radicality of its form, it bore a truth content that was essential in his eyes.

## *Tragic Drama and Melancholy*

The images and figures that tragic drama presents, writes Benjamin, "are dedicated to Dürer's genius of winged Melancholy. The intense life of its crude theatre begins in the presence of this genius" (*Origin,* 158). A melancholic gaze on the world emptied of its religious substance constitutes the correlative human subject of tragic drama. This theory of melancholy is broadly developed in Weber's inquiries into the Protestant mind and the ethic of capitalism. Given the relative mediocrity of German baroque dramas, we need to seek Benjamin's interest in that form in the religious radicalism of German Lutherans, which was revealing for the drama of modernity itself.

Protestantism deprived human action of all its meaning. By rejecting "good works as such, and not just their meritorious and penitential character," "human actions were deprived of all value. Something new arose: an empty world. In Calvinism—for all its gloominess—the impossibility of this was comprehended and in some measure corrected. The Lutheran faith viewed this concession with suspicion and opposed it" (*Origin,* 138–139). In reality, Max Weber's analysis does not draw such a hasty conclusion. It observes the birth of a professional ethic within Protestant doctrines, with career being the site of a religious ordeal on earth. But it is only at the end of a long process that the Protestant ethic, without being the cause of this change, contributes toward transforming the medieval world into an empty world of cold calcu-

lation and the "iron cage,"[29] that is, into the modern world of work and bureaucracy. Weber does not directly attribute this evolution to Luther; he underscores Luther's mystical attitude, which entailed a rejection of capitalism.[30] In contrast, we find in Luther's thought the idea of

> the fulfilment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume. . . . The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfilment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling.[31]

Benjamin is not yet interested in the social meaning of the religious upheavals of the baroque age. Lutheranism, he writes, has an antinomic attitude toward everyday life: Even as it rejects "works" or the immediate manifestation of "love of one's neighbor," it teaches a severe morality for the bourgeois conduct of life. In denying "works"

> any special miraculous spiritual effect, making the soul dependent on grace through faith, and making the secular–political sphere a testing ground for a life which was only indirectly religious, being intended for the demonstration of civic virtues, it did, it is true, instil into the people a strict sense of obedience to duty, but in its great men it produced melancholy. (*Origin*, 138)

Melancholy and the way it transforms the world into a spectacle corresponding to his deepest convictions fascinate Benjamin. In melancholy, he sees a revolt of "life" itself against its devaluation by an ascetic faith. Benjamin complacently abandons himself to an erudite history of the theory of temperaments, and especially of melancholy, beginning with the age of Aristotle. Melancholy, a "theological" concept (*Origin,* 155), is linked to one of the deadly sins: "indolence of the heart, or sloth," *acedia,* which consists in turning away from good works "if they are difficult for me" (*Origin,* 155), a gesture characteristic of the modern cult of the earthly world. Like the tyrant, the courtier—attached to the crown, to royal purple, to the scepter—is characterized by this indolence of the heart. But this deadly sin also has a redemptive dimension. The courtier's "unfaithfulness to man is matched by a loyalty to these things to the point of being absorbed in contemplative devotion to them. Only in this hopeless loyalty to the creaturely, and to the law of its life, does the concept of guilt behind this behaviour attain its adequate fulfillment" (*Origin,* 156, translation modified). As does the collector in the universe of *Paris Arcades,* the melancholic contemplates dead objects to redeem them. He "betrays the world for the sake of knowledge" (*Origin,* 157).

Benjamin thus interprets the artistic form of tragic drama as one of the liberating breaks from the context of guilt that characterizes the world of the creature. As in the Goethean universe, the inextricable fabric of guilt is once more rent only through artistic creation. In the baroque era, the aesthetic principle is founded primarily on this creation, and it is radically opposed to the Greek, Renaissance, and modern models of the symbol. This is the allegorical form, to which Benjamin devotes the last part of his book.

## *THEORY OF ALLEGORY*

Allegory, says Benjamin about *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* is the "entity it was my primary concern to recover" (*Correspondence,* 256). It is thus the aesthetic concept that mattered most to him. From this concept, he undertook to call into question classical aesthetics, in particular that of German idealism. He begins by underscoring the concealed polarity between symbol and allegory. Regarding the relation between language and music in the tragic drama, he develops certain intuitions from his early philosophy of language. Finally, he deploys the theological dialectic of allegory through which the correlative subjectivity of "abstract meaning" is made manifest and hence abolished. Through this reversal, the allegorical form turns out to be a poetic response to the degradation that language undergoes in the instrumental conception that modernity gives to it.

### *A Concealed Polarity*

More than the actualization of the treatise or esoteric essay at the expense of the philosophical "system," more than the reevaluation of the martyr-drama at the expense of tragedy, which is considered unactualizable in the modern era, it is the rehabilitation of the aesthetic concept of allegory that has generally been considered the principal contribution of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* and rightly so, since, except for the later theory of the aura, this is Benjamin's most fruitful discovery in art theory and also the one to which he was most attached. The critique of the beautiful appearance, conducted in the name of the early romantics, and the "theological" interpretation of Goethe now take the form of a clearly established polarity between profane symbol and sacred allegory.

Never before had Benjamin so clearly taken a position against the romantic aesthetic, which he had at first attempted to resuscitate. He criticizes it for not being aware of the "theological" foundations of aesthetic concepts:

> For over a hundred years the philosophy of art has been subject to the tyranny of a usurper who came to power in the chaos which followed in the wake of romanticism. The striving on the part of the romantic aestheticians after a resplendent but ultimately non-committal knowledge of an absolute has secured a place in the most elementary theoretical debates about art for a notion of the symbol which has nothing more than the name in common with the genuine notion. This latter, which is in fact the one used in the field of theology, could never have rid itself of the sentimental twilight over the philosophy of beauty which has become more and more impenetrable since the end of early romanticism. (*Origin,* 160)

Unlike the approach adopted in "The Task of the Translator" and "Goethes *Wahlverwandtschaften,*" the "theology" of "On Language as Such" is here directly turned against romantic aesthetics. Like the nihilism of the Goethean universe, the catastrophic disarray of the baroque universe seems to call for a theological critique. If Goethe had only an aesthetic premonition of it, the baroque was itself dominated by visions of the world that were religious in their inspiration, but in which the laws of the profane world were beginning to occupy a growing and agonizing place. In his pursuit of a literary universe in consonance with his own, Benjamin discovers a world that was, we might say, predestined for him.

Through its theological conception of the symbol, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* intends to tear down the speculations of idealism and of German romanticism on "essence" and "appearance," of which the symbol is said to be the unity and reconciliation. Benjamin intends to reestablish the rigor of an aesthetic criticism that abandons the task of linking itself to romantic theory. He now maintains that romanticism was only a kind of screen hiding the term that is truly opposed to classicism, namely, the baroque. In romanticism,

> the unity of the material and the transcendental object, which constitutes the paradox of the theological symbol, is distorted into a relationship between appearance and essence. The introduction of this distorted conception of the symbol into aesthetics was a romantic and destructive extravagance which preceded the desolation of modern art criticism. As a symbolic construct, the beautiful is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole. The idea of the unlimited immanence of the moral world in the world of beauty is derived from the theosophical aesthetics of the romantics. (*Origin,* 160)

This tendency toward aestheticizing the ethical actually predates romanticism; it dates from the "classical" period of Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. Already, "in classicism the tendency to the apotheosis of existence in the

individual who is perfect, in more than an ethical sense, is clear enough. . . . But once the ethical subject has become absorbed in the individual, then no rigorism—not even Kantian rigorism—can save it or preserve its masculine traits. Its heart is lost in the beautiful soul" (*Origin,* 160).

Benjamin opposes the rigor of the concept of allegory, defined in theological terms, to the inconsistencies of classical and romantic thought in Germany around 1800. Allegory is not simply a trope for him, a figure that replaces one idea with another analogous to it[32] and that stands beside other kinds of tropes in the same text. Like romantic irony, which is not simply "the replacement of an idea by another contrary to it,"[33] allegory is not only the formal principle of a certain kind of art—from this perspective, it is opposed to the "symbol" or to an art defined as "symbolic"—but also, more than a rhetorical or even poetic concept, it is an aesthetic concept that alludes to the coherence of a vision of the world.

In reviewing the classical and romantic theories of allegory, Benjamin discovers only the "dark background" (*Origin,* 161) against which the profane concept of the bright symbol can stand out. This concept is announced in Diderot's *Essais sur la peinture* (Essays on painting): "I turn my back on a painter who proposes an emblem to me, a logogryph to be deciphered. If the scene is unified, clear, simple, and coherent, I will grasp the totality at a glance."[34] The "essence" is not dissimulated in such cases but is immediately revealed through the appearance of the work of art. For modern aestheticians since the Enlightenment, allegory—when it is not obscurity pure and simple—is "a mere mode of designation" (*Origin,* 162). In allegory, we seek a particular image to illustrate a universal idea: old age through the image of an old man. In contrast, the symbol, considered more authentically artistic, presents the universal *in* the particular: "Whoever grasps the particular in all its vitality also grasps the universal" (Goethe, cited in *Origin,* 161, translation modified). That, according to Benjamin, is an example of a shallow conception of symbol, contrasted with an allegory that is supposedly "dead" and "abstract."

In Benjamin's view—and in the view of the baroque whose thinking he rediscovers and onto which he projects his own thought—allegory "is not a playful illustrative technique, but a form of expression, just as speech is expression, and, indeed, just as writing is" (*Origin,* 162). Here again, we are dealing with the absolute expression of a language form: Allegory "expresses" absolutely, just as handwriting has an expressive value for the graphologist. In the case of allegory, however, its expression is universal and possesses an aesthetic meaning.

From a "theological" point of view, Benjamin contrasts the expression of the symbol and that of allegory according to their relation to *time.* Time carves out the distance that separates these forms from a shared third term. "The measure of time for the experience of the symbol is the mystical instant

in which the symbol assumes the meaning into its hidden and, if one might say so, wooded interior." As for allegory, it "is not free from a corresponding dialectic, and the contemplative calm with which it immerses itself into the depths which separate visual being from meaning, has none of the disinterested self-sufficiency which is present in the apparently related intention of the sign" (*Origin,* 166). Contrary to the sign's intention, Benjamin claims, allegorical intention signifies "as natural history, as the earliest history of signifying or intention" (*Origin,* 166).

Before interpreting one of the most famous passages of the book, a passage that, since Adorno, has become the emblem of an "aesthetics of negativity," we need to acknowledge the presuppositions of the philosophy of language that Benjamin sketched out in his early works and on which his theory of allegory rests. The history of nature, the primitive history of meaning or intention, is that process defined by a theology of history whereby the name deteriorates into a sign, into intention and meaning. Compared to the name, the symbol and allegory are imperfect modes of reference, but compared to the sign pure and simple, they are privileged: Positively or negatively, they reveal the absence of that lasting correlation—that of the name—between a "symbolic form" in the broad sense (in Ernst Cassirer's sense) and a "referent" that would be predestined to it by the divine word.

It is fundamentally a *single* absence, a single nature ravaged by sadness, by mourning for the absent God, that produces the complementary forms of symbol and allegory, which are defined as functions of the category of time:

> Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death's head. (*Origin,* 166)

In the central emblem of the death's head, allegory presents the failure of history, which, in Benjamin's eyes, is the end of all human life, inasmuch as it amounts to "producing a corpse" (*Origin,* translation modified). Symbolic art conceals this fact by presenting, in the flash of an instant, the transfigured "face" of nature, a face opposed to the death's head. Nonetheless, this flash is the product of the *same* gap that allegorical art melancholically displays: In the abyss between the beautiful appearance and the desolation of the world, the artistic symbol, which produces a "realist" and, at the same time, an idealized image of shimmering nature, loses all its meaning.

Retranslated into "theological" terms, Benjamin's symbol and allegory

are principles analogous to those that Nietzsche, following the romantics and Arthur Schopenhauer, called the Apollonian and the Dionysian.[35] Nietzsche opposes the "grace of the beautiful appearance" (similar to the Benjaminian "symbol") and the "horror" of an "ocean of sorrows" (which echoes the "*facies hippocratica*" of history). But whereas the Nietzschean principles *come together* in Greek tragedy, Benjaminian allegory is radically foreign to the "symbolic" principle and cannot in any case be linked to it. Allegory represents a "sublimity" that is unfamiliar with the beautiful appearance.

In terms of his philosophy of language, Benjamin is interested in what distinguishes the written word—in the baroque, typography in particular—from any symbolic conception of art. Baroque typography virtually transforms the Western alphabet into Hebrew or Chinese:

> The written word tends towards the visual. It is not possible to conceive of a starker opposite to the artistic symbol, the plastic symbol, the image of organic totality, than this amorphous fragment which is seen in the form of allegorical script. In it the baroque reveals itself to be the sovereign opposite of classicism, as which hitherto, only romanticism has been acknowledged. (*Origin*, 176)

In a certain kind of baroque—and, to be precise, in the gloomy radicality of the German baroque—Benjamin discovers the formal principle and spirit most clearly opposed to the official culture of the West, which is constituted by Greece, the Renaissance, and German classicism. It is to this antithesis of classicism that he now also links his favorite writers, those heretofore associated with the context of romanticism: "Whatever [allegory] picks up," he writes, "its Midas-touch turns into something endowed with significance. Its element was transformation of every sort. . . . But this passion . . . justifies a more recent linguistic practice, whereby baroque features are recognized in the late Goethe or the late Hölderlin" (*Origin*, 229–230).

Through a radicality that anticipates "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin pushes this tension to the limit: In romanticism, but especially in the baroque, writers "are concerned not so much with providing a correction to classicism, as to art itself" (*Origin*, 176). In correcting art, allegory does not leave the framework of art but, rather, within that framework itself and by means of immanent disenchantment, corrects the illusory character of any artistic expression. Although it is itself a "symbolic form" in the most general sense, allegory reveals the fragility of the symbol, its always provisional and momentary victory over "the arbitrariness of the sign." From this perspective, the practice of baroque allegory, in Benjamin's view, is a much more powerful critique of classicism

than is romantic theory: "Whereas romanticism, inspired by its belief in the infinite, intensified the perfected creation of form and idea in critical terms, at one stroke the profound vision of allegory transforms things and works into stirring writing" (*Origin*, 176). Allegory's expressive writing is destructive: "In the field of allegorical intuition the image is a fragment, a rune. Its beauty as a symbol evaporates when the light of divine learning falls upon it. The false appearance of totality is extinguished" (*Origin*, 176). Not only is allegory "beyond beauty" (*Origin*, 178), but it perceives both the limits of beauty and a certain blindness in the eras of art that cultivated beauty exclusively.

> By its very essence classicism was not permitted to behold the lack of freedom, the imperfection, the collapse of the physical, beautiful, nature. But beneath its extravagant pomp, this is precisely what baroque allegory proclaims, with unprecedented emphasis. A deep-rooted intuition of the problematic character of art—it was by no means only the coyness of a particular social class, it was also a religious scruple which assigned artistic activity to the "leisure hours"—emerges as a reaction to its self-confidence at the time of the Renaissance. (*Origin*, 176)

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to set up allegory as the only true art: Its expressive possibilities are just as limited as those of the symbol. In the overall economy of art, it plays the role of the "inexpressive," which, according to Benjamin's essay on Goethe, prevents appearance from becoming confused with truth. But *without* the beautiful appearance, art would remain desperately fixated on the image of the death's head. Benjamin insistently refers to a normative idea of art, to which German baroque drama does not correspond. That is why "Calderón is essentially the subject of the study" (*Correspondence*, 256), the authentic artist:

> In the *true* work of art pleasure can be fleeting, it can live in the moment, it can vanish, and it can be renewed. The baroque work of art wants only to endure, and clings with all its senses to the eternal. This is the only way of explaining how, in the following century, readers were seduced by the liberating sweetness of the first *Tändeleyen*. (*Origin*, 181)

In Benjamin's view, what counts here is the difference between the baroque and romanticism in their shared opposition to classicism and to the Renaissance. The critique of the baroque work of art gives him the opportunity to redefine aesthetic criticism, this time by setting himself apart from the romantic conception. As in the essay on Goethe, criticism stands alongside time, which annihilates the effect of actuality in the subject matter. Baroque works of art, stripped of their sparkle and secrets,

> were [not] intended to spread by growth over a period of time, so much as to fill up their allotted place here and now. And in many respects this was their reward. But for this very reason criticism is implied with rare clarity in the fact of their continued existence. From the very beginning they are set up for that erosion by criticism which befell them in the course of time. (*Origin,* 181)

Contrary to his approach in the essay on Goethe, which applies itself to deciphering the truth content of a secretive work of art, here Benjamin privileges the aspect of knowledge that encounters no obstacle. Appearance, sparkle, no longer has any value by itself: "Beauty, which endures, is an object of knowledge. And if it is questionable whether the beauty which endures does still deserve the name, it is nevertheless certain that there is nothing of beauty which does not contain something that is worthy of knowledge" (*Origin,* 182). Here, Benjamin takes up the methodological idea that opens the essay on Goethe:

> The object of philosophical criticism is to show that the function of artistic form is as follows: to make historical content, such as provides the basis of every important work of art, into a philosophical truth. This transformation of material content into truth content makes the decrease in effectiveness, whereby the attraction of earlier charms diminishes decade by decade, into the basis for a rebirth, in which all ephemeral beauty is completely stripped off, and the work stands as a ruin. In the allegorical construction of the baroque *Trauerspiel* such ruins have always stood out clearly as formal elements of the preserved work of art. (*Origin,* 182)

In the end, the critique of baroque drama is no longer necessary. Time has done the job by reducing the weak attraction of these works to nothing. Criticism now has only to bring together in the Idea of the *Trauerspiel* the different themes and structures that constitute it. In spite of the two sentences that oppose the idea of *true* art to the baroque drama, the work on the *Trauerspiel* grants little importance to beauty as such; beauty now seems to be no more than an ornament to knowledge, which is all that counts in the work of art. The fragile equilibrium of the essay on Goethe is here disrupted in favor of an annihilation of beauty by criticism and by a trenchant rejection of romantic criticism: "Criticism means the mortification of the works: not then—as the romantics have it—awakening the consciousness in living works, but the settlement of knowledge in dead ones" (*Origin,* 182).

It is no accident that this definition of criticism finds an echo in that of allegorical exegesis: "It was designed to establish, from a Christian point

of view, the true, demonic nature of the ancient gods, and it also served the pious mortification of the flesh" (*Origin,* 222). In the spirit of religious mortification, Benjamin no longer allows for any force or life belonging to the concrete aspects of works of art, independent of what in them can become the object of knowledge, of what constitutes the truth content, which can be defined once and for all and excludes a plurality of interpretations.[36] "True art" can possess a secret and a sparkle, but they are annihilated by criticism. If Benjamin, starting from romantic and Nietzschean aestheticism, has now fallen into the opposite excess, it is because he expects the key to truth primarily from art. If philosophy were capable of attaining truth *without* the help of art, then investing art with the privileged task of revealing truth to us would no longer be necessary. Similarly, the structure and function of art could be determined in a way that, though no less rigorous, would not overburden it.

## *Language and Music in the Baroque*

As both the devalorization and the sublimation of everything attached to the world of the creature, allegory engenders a violent polarity between speech and writing. The poetry of the German baroque is unacquainted with the liberating lightness of musical language. The profound allegorical meditation produces a series of obscure images that no song can translate. Benjamin speaks once more from the perspective of "true art": "This poetry was in fact incapable of releasing in inspired song the profound meaning which was here confined to the verbal image. Its language was heavy with material display. Never has poetry been less winged" (*Origin,* 200).

Since sound is linked to the sensuality of the creature, meaning has its sole dwelling in the written word:

> The spoken word is only afflicted by meaning, so to speak, as if by an inescapable disease; it breaks off in the middle of the process of resounding, and the damming up of the feeling, which was ready to pour forth, provokes mourning. Here meaning is encountered, and will continue to be encountered as the reason for mournfulness. (*Origin,* 209)

It is this mournfulness that gives its name to the *Trauerspiel.* But it is precisely the erudite and artificial meaning at the furthest remove from nature—the extreme figure for "sentimental poetry"—that translates the baroque nostalgia for nature, as it was expressed in the pastoral of the same era.

Benjamin once more considers themes linked to his early philosophy of language, which, ten years before, had led to his interest in baroque

drama: In a letter to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, he speaks of the "the actual but very obscure core of this work: with its literal reminder of a youthful three-page effort called 'Über die Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie' [On language in *Trauerspiel* and tragedy, i.e., "Die Bedeutung der Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie"], my explanation of picture, text, and music is the germ of the project" (*Correspondence,* 309). This conceptual kernel of the book rests on an almost Rousseauian dialectic between nature and culture: "There is a pure affective life of the word," we read in "Die Bedeutung der Sprache," "where the word is decanted by passing from its natural state to the pure sound of feelings. For this word, language is only an intermediate stage in the cycle of its transformation, and it is in this word that the *Trauerspiel* speaks. It describes the trajectory that leads from the natural sound to music by way of the lament" (*G.S.,* 2:138). In this dialectic of nature and culture—the naive and the sentimental—the moment of the lament, which Benjamin associates with Judaism (*Correspondence,* 120), is when "nature is betrayed by language, and it is this formidable inhibition of feeling that becomes mourning" (*G.S.,* 2:138). It is a mourning within nature itself, which, as a result of the Fall, has fallen away from the divine name. For, according to an idea already found in "On Language as Such," "the essence of the *Trauerspiel* is already contained in the ancient wisdom according to which all nature would begin to lament if it were granted speech" (*G.S.,* 2:138).

In "Die Bedeutung der Sprache," music had a redemptive function: "For the *Trauerspiel,* the redemptive mystery is music: the rebirth of feelings in a suprasensible nature" (*G.S.,* 2:139). In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* the function of music is more ambiguous. It represents "the opposite of meaning-laden speech" (*Origin,* 211), not as its redemption pure and simple but, rather, as a form of regression and decline toward opera. Undoubtedly, a reflection on Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and on his relation to Richard Wagner led Benjamin to shift his position. For Nietzsche, according to Benjamin, it was a matter of "mak[ing] a proper distinction between Wagner's 'tragic' *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the frivolous opera, which had its preparatory stages in the baroque. He threw down the gauntlet with his condemnation of recitative. And in so doing he proclaimed his adherence to that form which so completely corresponded to the fashionable tendency to re-awaken the primal voice of all creatures" (*Origin,* 212). Nietzsche's target was a Rousseauism "incapable of art" which saw in the recitative the "rediscovered language of . . . primitive man" (Nietzsche, quoted in *Origin,* 212). "Because he does not sense the Dionysian depth of music," continues Nietzsche in reference to the recitative, "he changes his musical taste into an appreciation of the understandable word-and-tone-rhetoric of the passions in the *stilo rappresentativo*" (quoted in *Origin,* 212).[37] Benjamin agrees with Nietzsche only on this one point: On the heels of baroque drama, opera was a form of decadence. As for Nietzsche's

ambition to bring back to life the "Dionysian" inspiration of musical drama, Benjamin still has reservations.

Inspired by a romantic thinker, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, Benjamin sketches a theological dialectic of language, music, and writing. According to this theory, speech and writing are intimately linked: If "we write when we speak" or if "the organ of speech itself writes in order to speak," it is because "the whole of creation is language, and so is literally created by the word" (*Origin*, 214). Phonetic language and written language are identified "dialectically as thesis and synthesis" (*Origin*, 214, translation modified), while music, which according to Benjamin is "the last remaining universal language since the tower of Babel," should be the "antithesis," whose "rightful central position" had to be assured "to investigate how written language grows out of music and not directly from the sounds of the spoken word" (*Origin*, 214). In the spirit of "The Task of the Translator," Benjamin envisions a theory of the written word as the absolutely and universally intelligible image that requires no translation. The *allegorical image*, which, like language, is understood by all, is close to the idea of the absolutely translatable literalness of the sacred text. According to Ritter's speculations, all plastic arts stem from writing, from calligraphy. In terms of allegory, Benjamin concludes that "every image is only a form of writing. . . . In the context of allegory the image is only a sign, only the monogram of essence, not the essence itself under its veil" (*Origin*, 214, translation modified); this noninstrumental image is not at the service of any meaning and retains its autonomous value as a universally readable "figure."

This is an aporetic construction that—in the absence of the idea of a daily hermeneutics inherent in the practice of language and in its continual effort at translation—responds to the necessity of situating the transcendence of the confusion of tongues in a tangible reality, an existing and demonstrable form, as a fact, and not in an activity that includes both the particularity of languages and symbols *and* an ever transcendent and universal aspect. To give shape to his messianic project, Benjamin is obliged to imagine an immediately transcendent language, whether the language of criticism, of translation, or of the allegorical image. He cannot be satisfied with a reconstruction of everyday language, of its sensible, finite structure tied to context, and of its transcendental powers. He needs a more precise, more determined sign of salvation from the historical viewpoint.

## Manifest Subjectivity

*The Origin of German Tragic Drama* ends with a theology of history that is fairly ambiguous, because Benjamin, who had first linked the *Trauerspiel* to Hebrew lament, now discovers and assumes the Christian origins of baroque allegory. It is a syncretic theology, constructed entirely by the philosopher. No direct path links it to the allegorical exegesis of the Kabbala that

Scholem studies. Perhaps the allegory of the German baroque, with its radical rejection of any symbolic "reconciliation" as characterized in the dominant inspiration of the Christian tradition, led Benjamin toward those margins of Christianity where he could sense the legacy of Judaism, closer to an experience of history as suffering, lament, and sadness, oriented toward a messianic redemption to come, than to a symbolism of the reconciliation already brought about by Christ. That would explain the book's double ending: It includes both an apotheosis of Calderón's Christianity and a defense of the German *Trauerspiel*, aesthetically "weaker" but closer to the Benjaminian experience of a world in mourning. This double ending mirrors the double ending of his essay on Goethe, in which the hope for the desperate characters of the novel is opposed to the earthly redemption of the characters in the novella. This double ending also corresponds to the ambiguity of the prologue of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: a theory of Adamic naming discreetly superimposed on a Platonic theory of ideas.[38]

Thus, only a "theological" perspective is able to "resolve" the limiting form of allegory for Benjamin, since "so long as the approach is an aesthetic one, paradox must have the last word" (*Origin,* 216). This paradox presents scenes of horror and of martyrdom, the accumulation of corpses, which are "the pre-eminent emblematic prop," since the tyrant's task is to "provide the *Trauerspiel* with them" (*Origin,* 218, translation modified). "And the characters of the *Trauerspiel* die, because it is only thus, as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory. It is not for the sake of immortality that they meet their end, but for the sake of the corpse" (*Origin,* 217–218). Whether it consists of displaying the death mask of history, opposing the death's head to the transfigured face of symbolic art, or pushing the sadism of tyrants and the vicious intelligence of the intriguers to their limits, everything is, in spite of it all, produced with redemption the final goal.

Linked to the Counter Reformation, the Christianity of allegory is anchored in the tension that, beginning with the Middle Ages, opposed the Christian era to the pantheon of ancient gods resuscitated by Renaissance humanism. "There is a threefold material affinity between baroque and mediaeval Christianity. The struggle against the pagan gods, the triumph of allegory, the torment of the flesh, are equally essential to both" (*Origin,* 220). Each time it reappears, allegory bears witness to the vitality of the pagan gods. According to Benjamin, it is "the word which is intended to exorcise a surviving remnant of antique life" (*Origin,* 223). As will also be the case for Baudelaire, "allegory established itself most permanently where transitoriness and eternity confronted each other most closely" (*Origin,* 224).

In addition to the ephemeral, there is the guilt both of the fleshly creature and of an allegorical contemplation "that betrays the world for the love of knowledge": a guilt of meaning and a guilt of theoretical knowledge, symbolized by the prohibition against touching the fruit of the tree of knowledge; a meaning and a knowledge that were in fact cultivated by the

Renaissance and by German idealism. These are the biblical themes of "Die Bedeutung der Sprache," which Benjamin repeats almost word for word: "Because it is mute, fallen nature mourns. But the converse of this statement leads even deeper into the essence of nature: its mournfulness makes it become mute" (*Origin*, 224).

Hence the twofold attitude already observed in relation to the creature: whether to deprive it of all value or to redeem it. Allegory, which undertakes this rescue operation, is always born of the confrontation of the body burdened by sin in Christianity and the exonerated body of the Ancients. "With the revival of paganism in the Renaissance, and Christianity in the Counter-Reformation, allegory, the form of their conflict, also had to be renewed" (*Origin*, 226). Since the Christian Middle Ages, both the beings of flesh (matter) and of knowledge (intelligence emancipated from God) have been demonic, Satanic. Distanced from God, nature and spirit are prey to the sadness or the sardonic laughter of Satan,[39] as it resonates in the throats of Shakespeare's villains. As in his early essay, Benjamin once more indulges, in the spirit of the *Trauerspiel*, in a denunciation of the *knowledge* of good and evil, identified as absolute knowledge. Distanced from God, absolute knowledge is an evil: "Knowledge, not action, is the most characteristic mode of existence of evil" (*Origin*, 230), knowledge such as that deployed by the tyrants and intriguers of baroque drama, at a time when modern science was beginning to prevail. Benjamin is no doubt thinking of Goethe's Faust, that scientist and seducer who links his intelligence to Satan's powers, and of Kant, who limits knowledge by faith. The last lines of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* return to this conception of the relation between theory and practice.

The weight of theology in Benjamin's works of this era is such that scientific knowledge has no place in his thought. Satan's promises, denounced here as in the essay on Goethe and evoked in a spirit of opposition to the Enlightenment, are "the illusion of freedom—in the exploration of what is forbidden; the illusion of independence—in the secession from the community of the faithful; the illusion of infinity—in the empty abyss of evil" (*Origin*, 130, translation slightly modified).

And yet, according to the schema of the emblem—in which the crown signifies the garland of cypress, the pleasure-chamber the tomb, the throne room the dungeon—evil and the fragility of the creature *signify* something *other* than themselves:

> As those who lose their footing turn somersaults in their fall, so would the allegorical intention fall from emblem to emblem down into the dizziness of the bottomless depths, were it not that, even in the most extreme of them, it had so to turn about that all its darkness, vainglory, and godlessness seems to be nothing but self-delusion. (*Origin*, 232)

Through the theological nature of allegory, death and hell lead to salvation, and the ephemeral character of things is only the allegory of resurrection. "Allegory, of course," admits Benjamin, "thereby loses everything that was most peculiar to it: the secret, privileged knowledge, the arbitrary rule in the realm of dead objects, the supposed infinity of a world without hope. All this vanishes with this *one* about-turn. . . . [Allegory is] left entirely to its own devices" (*Origin*, 232).

The entire movement of allegory, like that of baroque drama, consists in derealizing the pretensions of modern subjectivity. Benjamin establishes his link to the philosophical speculations of mystic traditions, to the romantics of Jena, to Schelling, to the early Lukács of *Theory of the Novel*,[40] and to the Heideggerian critique of modern subjectivity. Irony and allegory are the aesthetic means for subjectivity's relativizing of itself from within the antinomies of the subject–object model. The mystical or "theological" view reveals freedom and evil as the sad or comical illusions of a melancholic subject who has excluded himself from the community of the faithful. In some sense, it is enough to *awaken* from this nightmare—this idea still underlies his analysis of the Paris arcades as a "dream": "By its allegorical form evil as such reveals itself to be a subjective phenomenon. The enormous, anti-artistic subjectivity of the baroque converges here with the theological essence of the subjective" (*Origin*, 233). Benjamin then reiterates the biblical exegesis of his early essay. When God had considered his Creation and found that "it was very good,"

> Knowledge of good, as knowledge, is secondary. It ensues from practice. Knowledge of evil—as knowledge is primary. It ensues from contemplation. Knowledge of good and evil is, then, the opposite of all factual knowledge. Related as it is to the depths of the subjective, it is basically only knowledge of evil. It is "nonsense" [*Geschwätz*] in the profound sense in which Kierkegaard conceived the word. This knowledge, the triumph of subjectivity and the onset of an arbitrary rule over things, is the origin of all allegorical contemplation. . . . For good and evil are unnameable, they are nameless entities, outside the language of names, in which man, in paradise, named things, and which he forsakes in the abyss of that problem. (*Origin*, 234)

According to this religious reading of morality, there is no way to falsify praxis through a knowledge of good and evil.[41] We have always "known" what we must do and what we must not do. In this sense, the categorical imperative, which cannot be disputed or inquired into, is already part of the prohibition on "knowing" good and evil. It may well be that philosophical ethics can only reconstruct our moral intuitions and refute reconstructions that do not take them into account.[42] But Benjamin goes even further.

On the one hand, he does not concede the cognitive character of our normative behaviors and arguments; he denies the possibility of criticizing or justifying them. Like truth, they transcend knowledge. On the other hand, he disputes the idea that modern humanity has emerged from the cocoon of traditions in which one had only to be reminded of the obvious facts shared by all to renew their validity. Through his conception of allegory, he reintegrates modernity—a kind of subjectivist illusion—into the profound continuity of human solidarity founded in God. Through an aesthetico-theological discourse, he has only to demonstrate the illusory character of our subjectivity, which is prey to abstraction, guilt, and a meaning dissociated from the name, to reintegrate the paradisiac universe into art and thought. But is it still a question of allegory? As defined in rhetoric, allegory replaces a thought by another thought that is similar to it.[43] According to that same theory of rhetoric, it is *irony* that is characterized by inversion: It replaces one thought by another that is *opposed* to it; it calls the ugly "beautiful" and the bad "good." Here, Benjamin seems to be interpreting allegory to mean irony. In fact, he calls Jean Paul, one of his favorite authors, "the greatest allegorist in German literature" (*Origin,* 188), and maintains that he demonstrated "that even the fragment, and even irony are variants of the allegorical" (*Origin,* 188).

In this irony, what earthly justice painfully accomplishes through its sanctions is realized fully in heavenly justice, illustrated in works of art, which reveal "the apparent nature of evil."

> Here the manifest subjectivity triumphs over every deceptive objectivity of justice, and is incorporated into divine omnipotence as a "work of supreme wisdom and primial love" [Dante], as hell. It is not appearance, and equally, it is not satiated being, but it is the reflection in reality of empty subjectivity in the good. In evil as such subjectivity grasps what is real in it, and sees it simply as its own reflection in God. In the allegorical image of the world, therefore, the subjective perspective is entirely absorbed in the economy of the whole. (*Origin,* 234, translation slightly modified)

"The display of manifest subjectivity," as it defines the formal principle of baroque art, "proclaims the divine action in itself," in other words, the miracle. That is the sense of the technical tours de force of baroque architecture and the plastic arts, which suggest divine intervention. "Subjectivity," writes Benjamin, "like an angel falling into the depths, is brought back by allegories, and is held fast in heaven, in God, by *ponderación misteriosa*" (*Origin,* 235). That is also the meaning of the apotheosis, the deus ex machina in Calderón: The organization of the stage leads to "that allegorical totality . . . thanks to which one of the images of the sequence

stands out, in the image of the apotheosis, as different in kind, and gives mourning at one and the same time the cue for its entry and its exit" (*Origin,* 325). As in baroque music, any sadness on the part of the subject who isolates himself from the community is submerged in a final allegro.

To what might have been the end of his book Benjamin adds a remark on German baroque drama, whose technical "weakness," the inadequacy of plot, does not produce any "allegorical totality" and does not overcome sadness. A "romantic" approach is necessary to save the *Trauerspiel.* In the case of such incompletion, criticism cannot limit itself to "mortifying" through knowledge what is already dead. In the manner of romantic aesthetics, "the powerful design of this form should be thought through to its conclusion; only under this condition is it possible to discuss the idea of the German *Trauerspiel*" (*Origin,* 235). But this incompletion has its own expressive value: Unlike the dramas of Calderón, which "shine resplendently as on the first day," the German *Trauerspiel,* "in the spirit of allegory. . . . is conceived from the outset as a ruin, a fragment" (*Origin,* 235). It pushes as far as possible the allegorical destruction of the beautiful appearance and anticipates a radically negative aesthetics, without the slightest compromise with the world, calling for a final inversion only at the time of the Last Judgment: "This form preserves the image of beauty to the very last" (*Origin,* 235).

Benjamin's grandiose construction opposes a kabalistic and ironic reinscription into tradition to Nietzsche's nihilism and "death of God." Instead of a redemption solely through aesthetic experience—Nietzsche's Dionysian intoxication—Benjamin believes he can outline an intact tradition that has remained untouched by modernity. The criteria for a theological gaze not only seem available to him, they even seem to impose themselves in the theoretical construction of aesthetics, morality, social theory, and history. Benjamin does not envision modernity as such; in his view, it is only a misunderstood avatar of the theological tradition. That is why he does not see the necessity, in a post-traditional society, of profane morality and law inscribed within the grammar of our everyday practices. In contrast, even though the baroque is not the most appropriate aesthetic model in terms of actuality, it represents a model of aesthetic authenticity, beyond the romantics, Nietzsche, and classic German culture. In an "intense" but "probably vain" manner, baroque drama "hopes for the rehabilitation of what is best in it by current dramatic experiments" (*Origin,* 216).

In *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik,* Benjamin set out a *modern* aesthetics, poetics, and criticism—of reflection, irony, and prose in Schlegel and Hölderlin—that seem to stand in solidarity with a theological

(messianic) perspective. Beginning with the essay on Goethe, he turns away from romantic aesthetics; he severely criticizes it in his book on tragic drama. The baroque analysis of the state of the creature seems to be an unsurpassed description of the human condition. Benjamin will try to find in Brecht's work a worthy heir to this form of drama. Through allegory, he is able to conceive of a form of avant-garde art that would not be reducible to aestheticism. Benjamin's attitude toward modernity nevertheless remains ambiguous. When all is said and done, how seriously should we take the reactualization of the baroque and the concept of criticism as mortification, when we read in the *Correspondence* that in February 1925 Benjamin wished "to go back to romanticism" (*Correspondence,* 261)? In reading the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," we realize the permanence of certain theological ideas. It is nevertheless clear that *all* of Benjamin's thought cannot be reduced to this perspective. Inasmuch as they glimpse an immanent possibility of transforming the world, romanticism and, later, surrealism and Brechtian and Marxist political commitment represent the flip side, that of a realization of the possibilities of earthly existence.

In the manuscript of *Paris Arcades,* we find this aphorism: "My thinking is related to theology as the blotter is related to ink: it is totally soaked in it. But if it were up to the blotter, nothing would remain of what is written" (*G.S.,* 5:588). In Benjamin's early work, theology would leave nothing of the profane. The work on baroque drama pushes that sacralization of a profane and fully allegorized world to the extreme. But this radical inversion would be impossible if both options did not obey the same finality: that of a quest for salvation for which the work of art is not an end in itself, but a means of knowledge and, ultimately, the means for a messianic process that rejects it when it has extracted its substance.

## 2. *Art in the Service of Politics*

### *THE STRATEGIST IN THE BATTLE OF LITERATURE*

In 1924–1925, even before finishing his book on tragic drama, Benjamin changed his orientation under the influence of the literary and political avant-garde. Since, for him, art was the depository of a truth inaccessible to discursive knowledge, he had to adapt his thinking to the art currently being produced, when that art responded to the imperatives that, until then,

Benjamin had found only in the work of Goethe or in baroque literature. He had not found expressionism significant enough to turn him toward contemporary literature or art.[1] In contrast, with the advent of surrealism and Proust, Kraus and Kafka, Brecht and Russian cinema, he was confronted with a type of contemporary art that he could not honestly call decadent. His entire philosophical perspective was overturned. According to the central idea of his early philosophy, true language communicated itself only to God or expressed human essence through the authentic exercise of the faculty of naming. The avant-garde, on the contrary, was seeking to affect the receiver. For Benjamin, traditional art enclosed truth in its *being* or its *substance*; avant-garde art was related to truth through its *action* on the receiver or through its *function.* Its addressee was no longer God but, rather, the profane public, those who were open to contributing to the transformation of the world. The search for salvation, instead of going through the translation of poetic language into a purer language, now proceeded through revolutionary action and the reconciliation of technology with nature. The cult value or the aura of language without addressee gave way to the exhibition value of a language that was seeking to awaken and motivate.

In principle, then, the early Benjamin's philosophy of language was no longer able to serve as the philosophical background for his new aesthetics. For several years, in fact, he faced the artistic and literary phenomena of the era as a critic, without having at his disposal a fixed epistemology; elements of his philosophy of language coexisted with an opposing orientation toward strategic and instrumental efficacy. It is at first difficult to find a precise common denominator in his essays on surrealism and Kraus, his writings on Brecht, and his reflections on mechanical reproduction, except for the rejection of contemporary society that they all share.

Such a common denominator exists, however, through the central problem of Benjamin's thought: *the work of art,* a term that figures in the title of the most elaborated essay of this second period. It is during this period, in the face of a double subversion, that the concept of a work of art is thematized as such. In surrealism, the work of art foregrounds the force of revelation and action proper to the meaningful *document*; in the tradition of Judaism, it aspires beyond art toward *doctrine.* Nevertheless, contrary to what might have been expected, Benjamin does not purely and simply dismiss the concept of the work of art, precisely because, in the absence of doctrine, the work of art remains the primary support for an interpretation capable of anticipating that doctrine. Thus, in "Karl Kraus" and in *Einbahnstrasse,* Benjamin defends the concept of the work of art against the principle of information and even against the document. The document is legitimate only to the extent that it is used by artists who keep in mind the normative concept of the work of art they are deliberately transgressing.

An encounter and a book were the two determining factors in this

change in orientation. In Capri, when he was drafting *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* Benjamin met Asja Lacis, a Lithuanian woman of the theater and an enthusiast of Brecht and of the revolutionary scene in the U.S.S.R.; he called her the "engineer" who "cut . . . through the author" the new street taken by his thought (*Reflections,* epigraph to "One-Way Street," 61). This encounter coincided with his reading of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness,* in which Benjamin perceived a bridge between his mystical ethics and the theory of revolution (*Correspondence,* 246–250). He immediately decided that he would no longer "mask the actual and political elements of my ideas in the Old Franconian way I did before, but . . . develop them by experimenting and taking extreme measures" (*Correspondences,* 257, letter of 22 December 1924).

In the same letter, he announced to Scholem a "Plaquette für Freunde" (Booklet for friends), in which he intended to bring together "aphorisms, witticisms, and dreams" (*Correspondence,* 257): This was *Einbahnstrasse.* Soon after, in February 1925, he wrote, regarding *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: "This project marks an end for me—I would not have it be a beginning for any money in the world" (*Correspondence,* 261). The climate of the book on tragic drama now seemed "too temperate." "The horizon" of his work was no longer the same. In May 1925, he considered joining the Communist Party (*Correspondence,* 268)—a resolve he would never carry out, any more than he would carry out that formulated a few lines later, of learning Hebrew. These two perspectives, that represented by Asja Lacis, Lukács, and Brecht and that incarnated by Scholem, were indissociable in his view and would always remain so, to varying degrees, up to the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," where the "automaton," historical materialism, "enlists the services of theology" (*Illuminations,* 253). "I can attain a view of the totality of my horizon, more or less clearly divined, only in these two experiences," wrote Benjamin in May 1925 (*Correspondence,* 268). In his view, "there are no meaningfully *political* goals" (*Correspondence,* 301); he considered Communist goals "nonsense and nonexistent." But "this does not diminish the value of Communist action one iota, because it is the corrective for its goals" (*Correspondence,* 301). In contrast, the "anarchist methods," stemming from convictions that Benjamin had shared with Scholem in the past, were "useless." Benjamin was thus seeking to reconcile his theological convictions with Communist action and to maintain contact with both Scholem and Brecht.

To understand this turning point in Benjamin's oeuvre and the modification of his aesthetic, we need to take into account the failure of his university career. Despite Benjamin's profound hesitations at the prospect of the constraints imposed by the position of instructor, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* was conceived as a university thesis. The work was rejected—several professors and associate professors (including Max Horkheimer) judged it obscure—and Benjamin was obliged to imagine a life as a man of

letters. In 1925 he accepted proposals for translations (of Balzac and Proust) and a column as a literary critic ("recent French art theory" [*Correspondence,* 267]) in a new review, *Die literarische Welt* (The literary world). Without abandoning the philosophical imperative to justify his approach, Benjamin now felt freed of the academic constraints he had imposed on himself throughout his study of tragic drama. Without ceasing to be a philosopher, he assumed the freedom of the writer. He was not long in realizing the cost of that freedom. Under the pressures of the literary marketplace, the writer made of his subjectivity, his intimate experiences, a commodity in constant search of a buyer. In reference to Baudelaire, Benjamin reflected on that situation, trying to avoid its traps while writing countless book reviews, short pieces, stories, and radio reports to earn his living.

One of the first projects Benjamin proposed after finishing his book on tragic drama was a study, never completed, on the fairy tale form. We find a kind of retrospective summary of it in "The Storyteller," an essay drafted ten years later, in 1936. This passage—concerning a traditional form of art—allows us to understand the change in Benjamin's viewpoint as he was turning from the contemplation of allegory to the universe of the political struggle of the man of letters and the political thinker he had become: "The wisest thing—so the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day—is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and high spirits" (*Illuminations,* 102). In its cunning, Benjamin's new aesthetics included an element of *strategy.* In his view, the critic was "a strategist in the battle of literature" (*Einbahnstrasse,* in *G.S.,* 4:108). Inevitably, his philosophical attitude, which consisted in *not taking the receiver into account* (as formulated in a letter to Buber in 1916), was called into question. Benjamin realized, to a certain extent, that his philosophy of language was untenable. But the new strategic attitude, though the exact opposite of a type of writing that disregarded the receiver, still remained just as authoritarian as the first. In the first case, he subjugated the reader to the law of form; in the second, he led him strategically to act in the manner desired by the author.

## *Literature and Advertising*

The "aura" of a thing is that in it which "communicates itself to God" and not to any receiver targeted by a literary strategy. In *Einbahnstrasse,* completed in 1926, the "decline of the aura," often attributed to Brecht's influence, was clearly foreshadowed in Benjamin's new attitude toward art:

> Criticism is a matter of correct distancing. It was at home in a world where perspectives and prospects counted and where it was still possible

> to take a standpoint. Now things press too closely on human society. The "unclouded," "innocent" eye has become a lie, perhaps the whole naive mode of expression sheer incompetence. Today the most real, the mercantile gaze into the heart of things is the advertisement. . . . For the man in the street, however, it is money that . . . brings him into perceived contact with things. And the paid critic, manipulating paintings in the dealer's exhibition room, knows more important if not better things about them than the art lover viewing them in the showroom window. . . . What, in the end, makes advertisements so superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon sign says—but the fiery pool reflecting it in the asphalt. (*Reflections,* 85–86)

The destruction of distance,[2] the immediate proximity of things, the striking reproduction of the image by *cinema* and *advertising,* such will henceforth be the leitmotifs defining the Benjaminian analysis of actuality; it is in these terms that he will proclaim the decline of the "aura," which, until that time, had determined the entire destiny of art. Even before his encounter with Brecht in 1929, this observation was accompanied by a certain cynicism about the dominant forces of contemporary life: a provocative respect for the power of money; the culture industry; adaptation to the laws of the market; the supposed superiority of the seller's relation to art in comparison to that of aesthetic contemplation—in short, a certain manifest nihilism, even down to the imitation of advertising in the presentation of the text. Only the final "moral" reveals an ulterior motive: What does that fiery pool on the asphalt, which establishes the superiority of advertising in relation to criticism, signify? Even advertising "expresses" more than it says. It betrays the mercantile intention and is transformed into its opposite: The shock is such that the cynical order is in danger of drowning in the fiery pool. The world of advertising is anesthetized; it dreams a sentimental dream. But it produces effects that prepare for the reawakening. Literary writing is now obliged to use the most effective means of the moment: those of advertising. But it is the involuntary effects of advertising—diversion and subversion—that are strategically sought.

Until this point, Benjamin rarely practiced aphoristic writing. The "systematic" or doctrinal ambition is obvious in his first writings. *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik,* however, underscored the fact that aphorism—valorized by Schlegel and Novalis—is in no way incompatible with a systematic intention (*G.S.,* 1:40–41). Certain fragments of *Einbahnstrasse* make clear the functions of aphoristic writing. "Filling Station" (*Tankstelle*), the first text in the book, opposes the power of facts to the "sterility" of "convictions" that, until now, have determined literary life: These facts must be set forth through the writer's practical intervention. *Einbahnstrasse*'s style—pseudo-advertising—seeks to acquire such a factual force.

> Literary effectiveness, to be noteworthy, can only come into being in a strict alternation between action and writing; it must nurture the inconspicuous forms that better fit its influence in active communities than does the pretentious, universal gesture of the book—in leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards. Only this prompt language shows itself actively equal to the moment. Opinions are to the vast apparatus of social existence what oil is to machines: one does not go up to a turbine and pour machine oil over it; one applies a little to hidden spindles and joints that one has to know. (*Reflections*, 61, translation slightly modified)

Effectiveness is thus the criterion in whose name Benjamin sacrifices both the old literary style and his own "theological" conception, close to symbolism, that consisted in denying the existence of the receiver. It is not a matter of "convincing" the reader—"To convince is to conquer without conception" (*Überzeugen ist unfruchtbar*), we read in "One-Way Street"[3]—but of acting on his mind through the eloquence of images. Nevertheless, Benjamin attempts to construct a continuity. In another text, he refers to Mallarmé who, in the early period of Benjamin's oeuvre, was one of the guarantors of his philosophy of language. The author of *Coup de dés* (Throw of the dice) now takes on the role of grounding the turning point in Benjamin's thinking. Benjamin goes so far as to associate Mallarmé's "pure art" with advertising, which he has just justified in a half-cynical, half-metaphorical way. The art of the book, at the origin of the diffusion of the Book of Books in its Lutheran translation, seemed to be reaching its end.

> Mallarmé, who in the crystalline structure of his certainly traditionalist writing saw the image of what was to come, was in the "*Coup de dés*" the first to incorporate the graphic tensions of the advertisement in the printed page. . . . Printing, having found in the book a refuge in which to lead an autonomous existence, is pitilessly dragged out onto the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos. (*Reflections*, 77)

In *Einbahnstrasse*—a work close in style to a revolutionary tract or lampoon—Benjamin seeks to take the lead by practicing this "picture writing" through which writers "will renew their authority in the life of peoples" (*Reflections*, 78). He feels close to the "traditionalist" (as Benjamin sees him) author Mallarmé when he *constructs* the "graphic tensions of the advertisement" in his work. There is nothing to indicate that this interpretation of Mallarmé's text—writing "pitilessly dragged out onto the street by advertisements"—is legitimate. In any case, it is representative of the type of relation Benjamin conceives between the dynamic of social development and the constructive response of art. This relation is not determinist, not

even in the case of Dadaism's "nervous reactions"—Dadaism is weaker than Mallarmé's work, according to Benjamin—but is, rather, a privileged knowledge of the "monadical" artist who, in his "hermetic room" discovers the laws of actuality (*Reflections,* 77).[4]

More than ever in Benjamin's thought, the construction built by art is the high seat of reason. Morality amounts to no more than the writer's professional ethic; science intervenes only in the revolutionary's audacious calculations.[5] In addition to the advice dispensed to writers and the observations on the mutations of the media, we can distinguish a few recurrent themes in *Einbahnstrasse*: an ethnography of cities, reflections on love, childhood memories, transcriptions of dreams, and remarks on the revolutionary crisis of humanity. In each, Benjamin attacks the currently accepted boundaries between spheres of reality. Metaphorically or literally, he effaces the opposition between public life and private life, exterior and interior (furnishings and the soul living among them), the human and the animal, conscious thought and the dream; in his view, these separations are characteristic of "bourgeois" thought, which is responsible for all abstraction. In "Imperial Panorama: A Tour of German Inflation," he observes the decline of all the values that had been taken to be inalienable acquisitions of the West—freedom, dignity, generosity, dialogue, urbanity—in these difficult years surrounding 1923, where only the "marvelous" seemed able to bring salvation (*Reflections,* 70). Nothing in the world revealed its secret, except through the writer's and philosopher's self-assured deciphering; without this redemptive intervention, everything would remain myth. As a whole, *Einbahnstrasse* is both a sort of hygiene of writing that allowed Benjamin to escape the everyday myths of bourgeois society, and the "objective interpretation of the world" (*Origin,* 48) that he had announced in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama.* The philosophy of *Einbahnstrasse* is situated halfway between that of Nietzsche, who is assuredly one of Benjamin's models, and that of Adorno's *Minima moralia.* It is an approach that exploits both the resources of a unique experience and a singular intelligence in order to counter the intellectual conformity of the environment, and that associates a sort of historical mission with this subversive status of subjectivity. The dream and personal experience are instrumentalized in the name of a cause of general interest and are invested with historical significance.

The introduction to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* still justified the essay form for systematic reasons, namely, the impossibility of reaching doctrine and the impotence of the deductive system. *Einbahnstrasse* adds to this a new political urgency: "These days," asserts Benjamin, "when no one should rely unduly on his 'competence,' strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed" (*Reflections,* 65). Scientific and philosophical competence are devalued in relation to strategic agility. The outcast "strikes blows," like Baudelaire, whose talent as a "fencer" Benjamin

will underscore. Having become the model for a generation of intellectuals in revolt, in particular in the 1960s and 1970s, this mode of thinking has revealed its weakness: In believing he could bypass argumentation, Benjamin encouraged the purely strategic attitude of those who believe they are authorized by the corrupt state of the world to use cunning and every possible weapon to realize their intimate conviction of incarnating justice and truth. For Benjamin himself, the antiauthoritarian impulse is already marked by authoritarian aspects. The tone of the short texts in *Einbahnstrasse* is that of the judicial sentence, the imperative that does not suffer contradiction: "Whoever cannot take a position must remain silent" (*G.S.,* 4:108).

Up to this point, Benjamin has disputed philosophical abstraction as it appeared to him in the neo-Kantian context, by means of theological and literary categories (metaphors), without, however, ceasing to claim a "philosophical" style (*Origin,* 29). *Einbahnstrasse* is resolutely situated not only outside any university context but also outside any philosophical argumentation. The constellation in which Benjamin's texts are inscribed—until his integration into the Frankfurt School when he accepts, for good or ill, the relatively traditional philosophical imperatives associated with the new requirements of a materialist dialectic—is that of literature and politics, under the sign both of a more remote but still present theological reference and of a concept of art that remains its most rigorous element from the philosophical point of view.

## *Hesitations on the Status of Art*

Toward the middle of *Einbahnstrasse,* Benjamin brings together a certain number of rules and bits of advice, humorous or serious, for writers, to which he consigns the essential of his new aesthetics. Three of these texts—"Die Technik des Schreibers in dreizehn Thesen" (The writer's technique in thirteen theses), "Dreizehn Thesen wider Snobisten" (Thirteen theses against snobs), and "Die Technik des Kritikers in dreizehn Thesen" (The critic's technique in thirteen theses) are among the most engaged theoretical formulations of *Einbahnstrasse.* Their goal is to maintain the aesthetic imperative in a strategic context: How does one define a work of art worthy of the name when the principal criterion for creation is the effectiveness of its action on the receiver?

Light in tone, the first series focuses on the author's psychology, on what he or she should or should not do to work successfully: external working conditions, rhythms, techniques for productive delay, how to manage inspiration, discipline, scheduling, material. These recommendations have little normative value and stem from the author's personal preferences or idiosyncrasies. The series ends with a sentence that echoes

*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: "The work is the death mask of the conception" (*Reflections,* 81). "Truth," we read in the work on tragic drama, "is the death of intention" (*Origin,* 36). In each case, intention and conception designate subjectivity pure and simple: Its "death" is a gauge of completion; the work of art or truth becomes detached from the person. It is significant—and apparently incoherent from the philosophical point of view—that Benjamin retains the idea of the *work of art,* even though the first text of *Einbahnstrasse* pronounces that treatises, brochures, newspaper articles, and posters are literarily more effective. Perhaps we need to understand that such a subversion is legitimate only to the extent that it is carried out with full consciousness of the traditional requirements of the work of art and in relation to them.

In his "Thirten Theses against Snobs," Benjamin makes a rigorous—and hardly "surrealist"—distinction between the work of art and the document. In fact, we rarely find in his earlier writings a concept of the work of art defined in terms of immanence, independent of any "theological" function. From a profane perspective, Benjamin now conceives the work of art and the document *together.* These theses are heteroclite and establish no hierarchy; they are also not argued. Benjamin limits himself to enumerating the symptoms that permit us to distinguish a work of art from a document. The snob is someone who sets a child's drawing or a primitive fetish against Picasso (and invites Picasso to "pack up all his works of art" [*G.S.,* 4:107]). According to Benjamin, the work of art is opposed to the document in that the former has a legitimate claim to aesthetic appreciation: A document displays these qualities only incidentally. Inversely, "the work of art is a document only incidentally" (*G.S.*, 4:107).

How do we know, when confronted with such an object, that it is only a document? Beginning with the works of Marcel Duchamp, Dadaism, and surrealism, that is precisely one of the questions of modern aesthetics. When Benjamin opposes the artist who "makes a work of art" to the primitive man who "expresses himself in documents" (*G.S.,* 4:107), he seems to be presupposing an a priori distinction that would allow us to distinguish between art and document. But there are documents and there are documents: All fetishes are not equivalent, and prehistoric paintings cannot be reduced to mere historical testimony. "No document," decrees Benjamin, "is as such a work of art" (*G.S.,* 4:107). This is a tautology pure and simple; we would like to know, precisely, how we move from autobiographical writing or the venerated image to the autonomous work of art. Benjamin evokes two types of clues: clues of possible use and analytic clues. When he opposes the "masterpiece" (*Meisterstück*) to "didactic means" (*Lehrstück*), it is more a play on words than a conceptual distinction, since the two terms are heterogeneous: "Masterpiece" designates an aesthetic merit, while "didactic means" is a pedagogical function, whether or not there is an aesthetic

aspect. The category "didactic means" also applies to the work of art, since Benjamin adds: "With the work of art, artists learn their craft," while "through documents, the public is educated" (*G.S.*, 4:107). These definitions are not mutually exclusive: Nothing prevents the public from educating itself before works of art, and nothing prevents artists from learning from documents, by drawing inspiration, for example, from the fetish form.

The most instructive distinctions concern the relations between the form, subject matter, and content of the work of art. The document has neither form nor content. "In documents, subject matter has total dominion" (*G.S.*, 4:107) It is linked to the "dream" and opposed to the "experimental" character of the work of art's content; hence, Benjamin opposes the telling characteristics of the document to the necessity of the public's validation of the work of art. This need for validation is translated into the fact that, in the work of art, there exists no "content" independent of its meaningful relationship to form: "Subject matter and form are a single thing: content"—that is, the "truth content" of the essays on Goethe and tragic drama—and subject matter is "ballast" to be jettisoned in considering the work. For "in the work of art the law of form is central" (*G.S.*, 4:108). Everything in the work is subjugated to a principle of unity that is foreign to the document, and it is this formal *coherence* that isolates a work of art from all others, whereas "all documents communicate in the material element" (*G.S.*, 4:107). Owing again to its coherence, "the work of art is synthetic: central power [*Kraftzentrale*]" (*G.S.*, 4:108); a force emerges from it that is amplified upon repeated contemplation. In other words, its coherence establishes ties between the elements that are revealed only through prolonged contemplation. The document, on the other hand, is not even analytical: To realize its fertility, it "requires analysis." From the viewpoint of reception, it "takes only by surprise" due to a surface analogy—which collapses before an insistent gaze—with the work of art.

Finally, the last two theses oppose the "virile" qualities of the work of art and the artist to the passivity, even the "femininity," of the document: Inasmuch as the work of art both submits all matter to form and imposes itself in a lasting way on the receiver, "the virility of works of art is in the attack" (*G.S.*, 4:108). In contrast, "the document's innocence serves as its cover" (*G.S.*, 4:108). In other words, the document means to escape judgment on the pretext of something like an immaculate, irresponsible gestation. Similarly, "the artist goes in conquest of content," while "primitive man conceals himself behind subject matter," which is supposed to speak for itself. Through its "content," the work of art is the bearer of a truth. As a result of the pure materiality of the document or of testimony, it *claims* nothing, neither artistic beauty nor truth.

There is an obvious tension between, on the one hand, this classical distinction between the work of art and the document and, on the other,

the demand, in the first piece in *Einbahnstrasse,* for unorthodox forms such as the tract or poster. For a full decade, until after writing "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin will sacrifice his concept of the work of art, but not without some recurrent reservations. Hence, a short, very critical essay on Philippe Soupault underscores the risks of "automatic writing." If artists have a better chance than dilettantes of escaping stereotypes, if they are freer, they still cannot "win at every stroke," says Benjamin, citing Paul Valéry. "In its deepest strata, the felicitous constellation, the fantastic illumination only appear intermittently and occasionally" ("Philippe Soupault, *Le coeur d'or,*" *G.S.,* 3:73–74). What gives the productions of dilettantes, children, eccentrics, and the mad "the autonomy in banality and freshness in horror that, in spite of everything, are often missing in surrealist productions" is not a technical necessity but a "vital" one. Failure is inevitable when the conscious memory is transposed after the fact into the unconscious. Benjamin prefers the authentic document to the surrealist work of art that claims to be the document of a dream world, an unconscious world; with Valéry, he defends the work of art in the traditional sense against the stylized document.

In contrast, in his essay "Surrealism," published in 1929, Benjamin writes: "The writings of this circle are not literature but something else—demonstration, documents, bluffs, forgeries if you will, but at any rate not literature" (*Reflections,* 179). He no longer defends "the work of art" against the document; he draws the consequences of what he had written in 1925 on surrealism, which he did not clearly assume in *Einbahnstrasse*: "What we used to call art only begins two meters from the body" (*G.S.* 2:622). Between *Einbahnstrasse* and the essay on surrealism, Benjamin had begun to write on the Paris arcades, a study he would pursue until his death and that *broke* with the notion of the work of art. The phenomena analyzed—the architecture of the arcades, ancient curios, aging photographs, advertising—possess the passive eloquence of documents and symptoms, not the "virile" eloquence of works of art that bear a philosophical "content."

Finally, "The Critic's Technique in Thirteen Theses" moves closer to the position defended in the essay on surrealism. In this section, the concept of the work of art appears only once, but in a manner that relativizes its validity in the name of intellectual struggle. The work of art is only an instrument in this struggle, a weapon: "Artistic exaltation is foreign to the critic. The work of art in his hands is the cold steel in the battle of minds" (*G.S.,* 4:109), and "the critic is a strategist in the battle of literature" (*G.S.,* 4:108). Benjamin does not say what is at stake in this battle. Taking the era into consideration, we might think the stakes are political. But Benjamin never uses the term here. He requires only one thing: that one take sides. "Whoever cannot take a position must remain silent" (*G.S.,* 4:108). Such an imperative is far from either the "positive" criticism of the romanticism

of Jena, which measured the work of art only against its own Idea, or from criticism as the "mortification" of works of art in the name of their truth content. These two types of criticism, romantic and theological, are not engaged in ideological battle. One of the theses—"The critic has nothing to do with the exegesis of past eras of art" (*G.S.*, 4:108)—could be read as a self-criticism, were the essays on Goethe and tragic drama not conceived as interventions in the process of a literary tradition. Until that point, Benjamin had underscored the necessity for the critic of a temporal distance that allowed him or her to distinguish without possible confusion what, in the interest elicited by the work of art, stemmed from the subject matter and what from the truth content. In a text published in January 1927, after Benjamin's long journey to Moscow in December 1926, he wrote that the criticism opposed to all "tendentious art" belonged to the "heavy artillery drawn from the arsenal of bourgeois aesthetics" ("Erwiderung an Oscar A. H. Schmidtz" [Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmidtz], *G.S.*, 2:751). Such formulations were not yet to be found in *Einbahnstrasse.* But the call to take sides, or to be silent if unable to do so, already stemmed from the "arsenal" of a materialist aesthetic.

This is not necessarily the case for the fifth thesis: " 'Objectivity' must always be sacrificed to the party spirit, if the cause for which one is fighting is worth the trouble" (*G.S.*, 4:108). The qualification that the cause must be worthy introduces an "objective" consideration, since it must be possible to argue in favor of the cause. In this way, Benjamin indicates that the "strategy" he is defending is more than a simple partisan attitude; by taking sides, he is aiming at the universal, as the sixth thesis again underscores: "Criticism is an affair of morality. If Goethe was wrong about Hölderlin and Kleist, Beethoven and Jean Paul, it was not because of his understanding of art but rather because of his morality" (*G.S.*, 4:108). The opposition between morality and understanding is significant. It is not clear why Goethe's lack of understanding for the art of the romantic generation could have been relevant only to his morality, and not to his sense of art. The conceptual bases of the essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* would not have allowed such a distinction. By making morality (and implicitly, politics) the ultimate criterion for criticism, Benjamin abandons the *logic proper* to the work of art and its *internal* morality, indissociable from its aesthetic form. Henceforth, the ideas of the work of art are separable from its aesthetic form: "The critic's art *in nuce*: to forge slogans without betraying ideas. The slogans of incompetent criticism sell off the idea to fashion" (*G.S.*, 4:109). The romantic respect for ideas, however, explains why Benjamin's critical essays—whether he is writing on Proust or Kafka—are not as reductive as those of other authors once they embraced Marxism. In spite of his will to conform to the laws of the literary "battle," his attitude toward the work of art remains comprehensive; he continues to seek a "truth content."

The same ambivalence is found again with regard to the public's evaluation. In 1935, Benjamin judges the public competent to evaluate film, which leaves no superiority to the professional critic. In *Einbahnstrasse,* the critic conserves his romantic privilege: "For the critic, his colleagues are the supreme court. Not the public. And a fortiori not posterity" (*G.S.,* 4:108). The public is always wrong: It cannot accept what is innovative in a work of art; it must "nevertheless always feel represented by the critic" (*G.S.,* 4:109). To the extent that the critic's arguments are well-founded, his interpretations judicious, and his judgments convincing, the public can only identify with him. As for posterity, it "forgets or celebrates. Only the critic judges while facing the author" (*G.S.,* 4:108). This face-to-face relation between critic and author contrasts with Benjamin's earlier thoughts on criticism as the "exegesis of past eras of art." Criticism is centered on the present and on contemporary battles. Hence the importance of polemics: "Polemics entails annihilating a book in a few quotations. The less you study it, the better off you are. Once someone can annihilate, he can criticize" (*G.S.,* 4:108). Such is the attitude of Karl Kraus, to whom Benjamin devotes a fairly long text in *Einbahnstrasse* (*G.S.,* 4:121).

Whatever the ambiguity of the relation between the theses on the critic's technique and the theses that distinguish between the work of art and the document, the ambivalence concerning the "law of form" and strategy can be resolved, inasmuch as the strategist's "taking sides" remains faithful to fairly firm criteria such as the "idea," which has to be defended against fashion. And if "objectivity" is sacrificed, the "cause" must be worth the trouble. In contrast, "Space for Rent" articulates theses that are hardly compatible with the aesthetic of the theses against snobs and those on the critic's technique. "Fools lament the decay of criticism. For its day is long past. Criticism is a matter of correct distancing" (*Reflections,* 85). To the "unclouded" and "innocent eye," Benjamin no longer opposes the "side-taking" of the strategist who militates for a cause that is worth the trouble. Rather, he opposes it to "the most real" gaze today, that of advertising. Hence the strategy of an art serving the power of money: It is an *involuntary* strategy, advertising as "absolute expression," as objectively the most advanced medium of the age, turning against its immediate intentions. *Einbahnstrasse* brings together three viewpoints: the aesthetic (the work of art opposed to the document); the political (strategy opposed to a supposed critical objectivity); and the cynical (advertising opposed to all criticism but concealing a subversive ulterior motive). These different viewpoints are also inexplicably intermingled in the *Paris Arcades* project, conceived in 1927, in which "the profane motifs of *One-Way Street* will march past . . . hellishly intensified" (*Correspondence,* 322).

*Einbahnstrasse* is the heteroclite construction site of different "moments" that constitute Benjamin's thinking in the decade 1926–1935.

Before reaching a relatively firm and well-defined position, in the 1935 Exposé of *Paris Arcades* ("Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century") and in "The Work of Art," Benjamin tries out two conceptions represented by contemporary authors, both essential for him and both seeking to actualize a buried past. He does not immediately succeed in synthesizing the two: the first, a Proustian and surrealist conception of a subversive sphere of images; and the second, a conception of Judaism (in Kraus and Kafka) in the process of destroying modern myths, but in the name of a tradition that was itself sick and that made it fall back into the ambiguous sphere of art. If surrealism was in danger of succumbing to the risk of a renewed myth of modernity, modern Judaism did not seem to be reaching a clear awareness of what was at stake in the social sphere. The *Paris Arcades* project must be understood as an attempt to elaborate a theory of modernity that associates the surrealist—nihilist—gaze on the recent past with a moral and political imperative inspired by Judaism.

## *THE POLITICS OF IMAGES*

In *Einbahnstrasse*, a new form of myth begins to forge a path. It is this enchanted mythology of big cities that the *Paris Arcades* project sets forth. Myth as *utopia* is superimposed on myth as *ideology*, that is, as pagan and superstitious belief. The themes of the child and the lover, the dreamer and the animal, the traveler, the collector, and the writer are linked to the utopian myth. These are beings who have an experience of reality situated on the near side of conscious objectification and who thus escape the reality and utility principles. Exposed to the terrors of myth, they are the only ones who still recognize the miraculous: "Stamps are visiting cards that the great States deposit in the bedrooms of children" (*G.S.*, 4:137). Everything in the city possesses the dual characteristic of being a source of anxiety and a promise of happiness. Such is the ambiguity of urban space lived by those who do not have the clouded perception of adults, by those who have conserved the child's keen sensitivity, by those whose gaze reveals the true nature of reality. With reference to educational materials, Benjamin establishes a close relation between the child and the artist, both of whom recognize the miraculous in things diverted from their utilitarian context (*G.S.*, 4:104–105). Other pieces in *Einbahnstrasse* are, in fact, early versions of certain texts in *Berliner Kindheit* ("Vergrösserungen" [Enlargements], *G.S.*, 113–116).

According to a traditional theme of romanticism, the child, in escaping the sole consideration of the useful and the rational, preserves in play the sense of totality. Benjamin seeks to rehabilitate this immediate unity of all human forces in the practical relation between the body and the world. In

"Madame Ariane—Second Courtyard on the Left," he goes so far as to defend telepathy[6] against any *conscious* anticipation of the future, which is suspected of being a source of paralysis. It is through "alert dexterity" that "the man of courage lays hands on the future" (*Reflections,* 89) instead of confining himself to foreseeing it or receiving revelation from it: "For presence of mind is an extract of the future, and precise awareness of the present moment more decisive than foreknowledge of the most distant events. . . . To turn the threatening future into a fulfilled now, the only desirable telepathic miracle, is a work of bodily presence of mind" (*Reflections,* 89).

In abandoning the primacy of the theological reference, Benjamin moves closer to surrealism. He will criticize André Breton's passion for fortune tellers and spiritualism, but he will also say that intoxication—which, according to him, can be "theological"—is an "introductory lesson" of materialist and anthropological inspiration. At a collective level, humanity's relation to technology stems from the same logic: "They alone shall possess the earth who live from the powers of the cosmos" (*Reflections,* 92). Instead of communing with the cosmos in a purely *optical* manner, as modern science does, humanity must commune with it through the intoxication of the entire body, in the fullness of the present instant and with complete presence of mind; otherwise, we risk communing with it through destruction, in spite of ourselves—in the horror of modern wars, for instance. It is here that the philosophical change appears most clearly: Benjamin has moved from a contemplation of origins in the quest for the true name of things to practical intervention in the world as a way of warding off ancient magic with the enlightened magic of technology. Benjamin expects the proletariat to reestablish its tie to the experience of intoxication, which linked the ancients to the cosmos: "The living being conquers the frenzy of destruction only in the intoxication of procreation" (*Reflections,* 94, translation modified). He thus attempts to confer a revolutionary significance on what, in the work of Nietzsche and Ludwig Klages, was conceived as a radical opposition to such a spirit.[7]

*Einbahnstrasse* already owes a great deal to Paris: In Paris Benjamin found "the form appropriate for this book." There he discovered an affinity between his thinking and the most recent intellectual and literary movements: "I feel that, in Germany, I am completely isolated from those of my generation. . . . In France individual phenomena are engaged in something that also engages me—among authors, Giraudoux and especially Aragon; among movements, surrealism" (*Correspondence,* 315, translation slightly modified). It was also in Paris that, in 1927, he began to draft "the highly

remarkable and extremely precarious essay 'Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairy Play' " (*Correspondence,* 322), of which he said that he had "never written while risking failure to that point" (*Correspondence,* 333, translation modified). If he were to succeed, "an old and somewhat rebellious, quasi-apocryphal province of my thoughts will really have been subjugated, colonized, managed" (*Correspondence,* 333). It is difficult to say what "province" Benjamin is speaking of; we might suppose these thoughts are linked to certain pieces in *Einbahnstrasse*: notations of experiences or archetypal observations of the city and childhood, where the baroque vision of history as petrified nature and the surrealist vision of the recent past as a primitive, abruptly archaic history come together.

Benjamin would like to "put to the test the extent to which it is possible to be 'concrete' in the context of the philosophy of history" (*Correspondence,* 333). As he wrote in his notes for *Paris Arcades,* he felt that the concreteness of the philosophy of history left something to be desired, both in Hegel and in Marx or Heidegger ("N" 2, 6 and "N" 3, 1, pp. 48, 50–51). He believed he had found in surrealism elements that would allow him to make thinking about history more concrete:

> An all too ostentatious proximity to the surrealist movement might become fatal to the [*Arcades*] project, as understandable and as well-founded as this proximity might be. In order to extricate it from this situation, I have had to expand the ideas of the project more and more. I have thus had to make it so universal within its most particular and minute framework that it will take possession of the *inheritance* of surrealism in purely temporal terms and, indeed, with all the authority of a philosophical Fortinbras. (*Correspondence.* 342)

Benjamin called the essay on surrealism, published in early 1929, "an opaque screen placed before the *Arcades* work" (*Correspondence,* 347). "The issue here," he explains to Scholem, "is precisely what you once touched on after reading *One-Way Street*: to attain the most extreme concreteness for an era, as it occasionally manifested itself in children's games, a building, or a real-life situation" (*Correspondence,* 348). He also indicated the goal of the book in an expression he used for a text written on his trip to Moscow: "In this picture, 'all factuality is already theory,' and therefore it refrains from any deductive abstraction, any prognostication, and, within certain bounds, even any judgment" (*Correspondence,* 313). This philosophy was close to the theoretical ideal of Goethe, who dreamed of a kind of "higher empiricism" grasping "original phenomena" in the most concrete objects and who proposed to "think of science as art if we expect to derive any kind of wholeness from it" (epigraph to *Origin,* 27.) In Benjamin's works, the boundary between theory and literature tends to become effaced along the

path of such a science, which affects the consistency of his theoretical constructions: From theory, we continually move toward literary evocations.

In spite of their theoretical nature, most of the writings of that period were in fact characterized by a devaluation of theory. Compared to practice or to the image, theory was judged to be "contemplative" and even false. In that sense, Benjamin was indebted to the tendencies of his age; his aspiration toward concreteness was part of the vast movement of the "detranscendentalization" of thought in which existential ontologies and philosophies, philosophical anthropology, historical materialism, and psychoanalysis all participated. The *image,* according to Benjamin, possessed both an immediate concreteness and the capacity to elicit a practice. He was not yet using the concept "dialectical image," which he would employ during the 1930s; but the concept of the image already occupied a central place, more general than that of "symbol" and "allegory." Benjamin considered himself an expert in images who was placing his knowledge in the service of social transformation. His knowledge was still implicitly supported by his theological conception of language following the loss of the Adamic name: The authentic image overcame the abstraction that characterized conceptual meaning.

From the outset, Benjamin designated surrealist productions not as works of art but as documents (*Reflections,* 179). Contrary to what the "theses against snobs" still suggested, there is nothing pejorative or limiting in the term "document." On the contrary, according to the essay "Surrealism," abandoning art may be a duty of the contemporary artist:

> It is far less a matter of making the artist of bourgeois origin into a master of "proletarian art" than of deploying him, even at the expense of his artistic activity, at important points in this sphere of imagery [that needs to be discovered]. Indeed, might not perhaps the interruption of his "artistic career" be an essential part of his new function? The jokes he tells are the better for it. (*Reflections,* 191)

This is one of Benjamin's most radical texts in terms of favoring the subordination of art to politics. Against the optimism of the bourgeois and the social democratic parties, Benjamin proposes "the organization of pessimism," which will "expel moral metaphor from politics and . . . discover in political action a sphere reserved one hundred percent for images" (*Reflections,* 191)—a sphere inaccessible to contemplation. It will be the sphere of a full integration of the body into political action,[8] which will not allow any gap to remain between knowledge and its object; it will be an instantaneous joining of cognitive, practical, and aesthetic aspects in a profane illumination that incites toward lucid action. In this essay, Benjamin clarifies the idea of a synthesis between Nietzsche and Marx that

he had sketched at the end of *Einbahnstrasse.* In profane illumination, "when . . . body and image so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge . . . reality [has] transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*" (*Reflections,* 192).

The surrealists provided the model for such a sphere of images. Their literary and artistic activity performed an immediately revolutionary function. This was already the program of the romantics of Jena when they transposed the political issues of the French Revolution onto a purely artistic terrain. But the move from the work of art to the document was coming about in a modern situation of the "crisis of the intelligentsia" (*Reflections,* 177), which was precisely "that of the humanistic concept of freedom" (*Reflections,* 177). A "poetic politics" in the style of romanticism could no longer be an adequate response (*Reflections,* 190): "Since Bakunin, Europe has lacked a radical concept of freedom. The Surrealists have one. They are the first to liquidate the sclerotic liberal–moral–humanistic ideal of freedom" (*Reflections,* 189). They employed the cult of evil, the sulfurous anti-Catholicism of Arthur Rimbaud, Compt D. Lautréamont, and Guillaume Apollinaire, to "disinfect" politics by separating it from any "moralizing dilettantism" (*Reflections,* 187), for that is how Benjamin perceived the reformist politics of the bourgeois or socialist democrats. Yet he still had reservations about the surrealists: "Have they bound revolt to revolution?" he asked, or more precisely, to "the constructive, dictatorial side of revolution[?]" (*Reflections,* 189). Benjamin was expressing a point of view characteristic of the debates on the German extreme left, which was permeated by the ideas of Lenin.

Like the Leninists and like Carl Schmitt, Benjamin preferred decision to discussion: The document that was replacing literature had as its goal to "go beyond the stage of eternal discussion and, at any price, to reach a decision" (*Reflections,* 177), a decision that, for the surrealists, still oscillated between revolt and revolution. For them,

> image and language take precedence. Not only before meaning. Also before the self. In the world's structure dream loosens individuality like a bad tooth. This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the domain of intoxication. (*Reflection,* 179)

That intoxication, which *Einbahnstrasse* already invited the reader to enjoy in order to overcome the modern gap between humanity and the cosmos, was in this case a "*profane illumination,* a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an intro-

ductory lesson. (But a dangerous one; and the religious lesson is stricter)" (*Reflections*, 179).

This passage indicates how Benjamin intends to integrate the "religious lesson" of his earlier writings into an "anthropological materialism." He seeks "to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution" (*Reflections*, 189). The *document* of intoxication or of automatic writing, of this fruitful crossing of the threshold between waking and sleeping, which suspends both meaning and the self—indexes of the abstract "meaning" of fallen language—is an image that carries within it profane illumination. Such a document was thus no longer opposed, as in *Einbahnstrasse*, to the "central power" of the work of art; it was no longer primitive "entrenchment," passivity calling for analysis in order to become productive. If reading and thought are also forms of illumination and intoxication, if they are also capable of overcoming the gaps in consciousness, the self, and abstract meaning, then surrealist irrationalism is no longer justified. Benjamin wishes to transpose the surrealist experience to a field foreign to it: that of effective action. Rightly no doubt, Georges Bataille rejected such a fusion[9]; the artistic experience cannot be *instrumentalized* for political action. Neither art nor politics would benefit: Art would lose its autonomy and politics its seriousness. Thus Benjamin, without abandoning the principle, would soon seek another way to place his aptitudes in the service of social transformation.

When he writes that the text on surrealism refers discreetly to his *Paris Arcades* project, he is alluding to an aspect of his affinity with surrealist writings that would long remain alive in his thinking. It was the "revolutionary" nihilism of certain individual experiences in the urban space that allowed Benjamin to actualize certain ideas he had until then associated with baroque allegory. Surrealism, writes Benjamin in a passage that perfectly expresses the motivation for his interest in the Paris of the nineteenth century,

> can boast an extraordinary discovery. [It] was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the "outmoded," in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue for them has begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution—no one can have a more exact concept of it than these authors. . . . They bring the immense forces of "atmosphere" concealed in these things to the point of explosion. (*Reflections*, 181–182)

It is the present itself that Benjamin is now able to perceive as a "petrified, primordial landscape." "Revolutionary nihilism" means convert-

ing what is "prehistoric" and unbreathable about the age into a subversive perception. The surrealist approach, according to him, consists in "the substitution of a political for a historical view of the past" (*Reflections,* 182), an expression that could also apply to the *Paris Arcades* project or to the "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Although those works abandoned the project "to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution" (*Reflections,* 189), like the essay on surrealism they undertook to bring about an awakening by casting a political gaze on the past, as it pressed with all its weight on the present, to make it appear as a petrified, primordial landscape. The method for such a reading consists in applying Adamic naming to a reality prey to abstract meaning, myth, and anxiety. Whatever the sociological concepts that Benjamin would subsequently introduce on the advice of Adorno and Horkheimer, he remained guided by this fundamental intuition.

His essays on Kraus and Kafka show that he could not abandon the critical potential of Judaism; he *links* them to his revolutionary interpretation of French writers, as the positive, messianic face to complement surrealist nihilism. Their lucidity, permeated by tradition, serves as a counterweight to the temptation to "intoxication," which Benjamin rapidly abandoned and which would no longer figure in the sociological *Paris Arcades* project.

Benjamin characterized modern art—in surrealism and in the works of Proust and Kafka—as the emancipation of the image or the represented gesture from any constituted meaning; but, instead of accepting the irreducible character of this status of art, he went on to interpret the emancipated image—in a way he had already experimented with in his work on Goethe—as the supreme form in which truth can appear to us during an age deprived of theological doctrine. Ultimately, he does not admit the open plurality of ever-renewable interpretations because of the philosophico-theological status he grants to the *true* reading, which links the image to doctrine.

Surrealism had shown how the image could fulfill a revolutionary function: by presenting the accelerated aging of modern forms as an incessant production of the archaic, which summed up the true sense of contemporary life. Through the ruins of modernization, it revealed the urgency of a revolutionary turn. Benjamin was then led to animate the static model through which he had identified the contemporary world with a mythical world, in order to oppose to it theological truth. That same operation was now placed in the service of the revolution. In his essay "Franz Kafka," Benjamin for the first time uses the image of progress as a storm blowing from the primitive world—a forgotten world that is present in its very oblivion[10]—a storm to which he opposes the cavalcade of memory and study in quest of the forgotten origin. For such study, gestures—whose

significance escapes Kafka himself, but which are most closely linked to truth—are revealing. No longer does the "sphere of images" act immediately on the receiver, as Benjamin still held in the essay on surrealism; rather, a work of memory and interpretation are opposed to the blind action of a historical progress that only reproduces the same catastrophes ad infinitum. The memory work that, in the service of revolution, seizes hold of the forgotten past's liberating force is the *animation* of the projections for which *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* provided the model. Through the *static* interpretation of allegory, modern humanity has been returned to the state of the creature and has seen abstract subjectivity gathered up and abolished in the economy of Creation. Here, the dynamic interpretation of the images of the primitive world, perceived and named in their truth, carries out a revolutionary operation on the oblivion upon which blind progress is founded. But the world of myth is itself animated through the image of the storm. In the same way, the work of projection becomes engaged in history—as active remembrance with a revolutionary function, the reappropriation of the foreign body in which we have been exiled by oblivion.

Stemming from his work translating Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past,* undertaken in 1926 with Franz Hessel, "The Image of Proust" is linked to the conceptions outlined in "Surrealism." Benjamin is totally uninterested in the architectural aims of *Remembrance of Things Past,* the romantic and symbolist metaphysics that make works of art the ultimate aim of human life: "Proust's analysis of snobbery, which is far more important than his apotheosis of art, constitutes the apogee of his criticisms of society" (*Illuminations,* 209–210). Three things interest Benjamin in the Proustian oeuvre: social physiology, the status of the image, and the aspiration for "presence of mind," the authentic form of our relation to time. Benjamin sees in Proust a detective, a spy introduced into the heart of a class "which is everywhere pledged to camouflage its material basis and for this reason must imitate feudalism" (*Illuminations,* 210, translation modified).

The reflection on the status of the image introduces theses that will be developed in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire": "The image in Proust is the highest physiognomic expression which the irresistibly growing discrepancy between literature and life was able to assume" (*Illuminations,* 202, translation slightly modified). According to Benjamin, the resistance of contemporary forms of existence to a poetic formulation is such that, after Proust, there could never again be a "lifework." More than a work of memory, he sees Proust's work as "a Penelope work of forgetting. . . . Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involontaire,* much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory?" (*Illuminations,* 202). Benjamin contrasts the productiveness of such forgetting—a romantic theme to which he had wanted to devote an essay on a novella by Tieck[11]—to the destructive character of everyday rationality: "With our purposeful activity

and, even more, our purposive remembering each day unravels the web and the ornaments of forgetting. That is why Proust finally turned his days into nights" (*Illuminations,* 202). Forgetting is associated with dreams and the resemblance established with the dream world. The object of *Remembrance of Things Past* is "the image, which satisfied his curiosity—indeed, assuaged his homesickness. He lay on his bed racked with homesickness, homesick for the world distorted in the state of resemblance, a world in which the true surrealist face of existence breaks through" (*Illuminations,* 205). Benjamin confers not merely a literary value but an "ontological" status on Proust's metaphors. He speaks of surrealism in relation to Proust to indicate that he has discovered in both a single preoccupation, not merely artistic, but vital: a quest for happiness and presence of mind, such that they reconstitute the fragmented human faculties. This integrity of faculties seems to him to be artists' contribution to social revolution.

The relation Benjamin establishes between the image and time is linked to that interpretation. For Benjamin, what interests Proust is the intermingling of time, where memory and aging confront each other:

> It is the world in a state of resemblances, the domain of the *correspondances*; the Romanticists were the first to comprehend them and Baudelaire embraced them most fervently, but Proust was the only one who managed to reveal them in our lived life. This is the work of the *mémoire involontaire,* the rejuvenating force which is a match for the inexorable process of aging. . . . *A la recherche du temps perdu* is the constant attempt to charge an entire lifetime with the utmost presence of mind. Proust's method is actualization, not reflection. He is filled with the insight that none of us has time to live the true dramas of the life that we are destined for. This is what ages us—this and nothing else. The wrinkles and creases on our faces are the registration of the great passions, vices, insights that called on us; but we, the masters, were not home. (*Illuminations,* 211–212, translation slightly modified)

Voluntary memory, denied access to the best things, and aging due to forgetting are part of the "poverty" that the surrealists set forth in such a subversive manner. Like them, Proust—as Benjamin interprets him—works to create that "sphere reserved one hundred percent for images" (*Reflections,* 191); like them, he empties "the dummy, his self, at one stroke" (*Illuminations,* 205); he sets aside the abstract meaning of a language held prisoner to voluntary memory. This is how Benjamin would like to decipher the images of the nineteenth century, by wrenching them free from their mythifying action on our oblivious mind.

The encounter with Brecht in 1929 and the discussions with Horkheimer and Adorno that same year concerning the *Paris Arcades* project led

Benjamin to modify his conception of the relation between literature and revolution. Without renouncing his reflections on the *correspondances* and on the intellectual imperatives of contemporary Judaism, he sought to respond to the exigencies of the most acute social criticism. For a dozen years, the interlacing objections of Brecht, Adorno, and Scholem would be a determining factor in the development of his thought, though he did not manage to make a real theoretical synthesis of these heterogeneous imperatives. "My writings have certainly always conformed to my convictions," he wrote to Scholem in 1934, "but . . . I have only seldom made the attempt—and then only in conversation—to express the whole contradictory grounds from which those convictions arise in the individual manifestations they have taken" (*Correspondence,* 439). The indisputable richness resulting from that unstable situation, which has delighted the literary interpreters of his work, goes hand in hand with a certain philosophical incoherence.

## *JUDAISM AND SOCIAL CRITICISM: KRAUS AND KAFKA*

During the period between *Einbahnstrasse* (1928) and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), the two most developed texts that Benjamin managed to complete and publish were devoted to Karl Kraus and Franz Kafka. His interest in Kraus dates from about 1916 (*G.S.,* 2:1078),[12] while that in Kafka had manifested itself by 1925 at the latest (*Correspondence,* 279). In 1928–1929, having portrayed Kraus in a fragment in *Einbahnstrasse* ("Kriegerdenkmal" [War memorial], *G.S.,* 4:121), he published four fairly brief texts on Karl Kraus[13] before devoting almost a year's work to him, from March 1930 to February 1931. His first text on Kafka dates from 1927. Until the end of his life, he gathered notes for a book on the author of *The Trial,* even outlining a new interpretation of that work in 1938 (*Correspondence,* 563–566).[14] This speaks to the importance of the two essays, which, in counterpoint to the "nihilist" reflections on surrealism, represented the normative background against which Benjamin assimilated the avant-garde spirit.

We are thus dealing with two texts from the period of radical commitment, which reveal most clearly both the permanence of the theological reference in Benjamin's thinking and the value he accorded Judaism within the framework of that commitment. Benjamin perceived Kraus and Kafka as he perceived himself, as authentic representatives of a great tradition at a time when it was undergoing a deep crisis. All three authors formulated a severe judgment on the age they were living in, which appeared to them to be a return to the most remote stages of civilization, to such a point that myth appeared as a deliverance (*Illuminations,* 117).

In the name of his interpretation of Jewish theology, Benjamin had opposed pagan myth along with its avatars in law, philosophy, and literature. Here he suggests that Kafka's novels "are set in a swamp world. In his works, created things appear at the stage Bachofen has termed the hetaeric. The fact that it is now forgotten does not mean that it does not extend into the present. On the contrary: it is actual by virtue of this very oblivion" (*Illuminations,* 130). Outlined here is Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* which sees modern reason plunging back into prehistoric barbarism. But for Benjamin, it is not a *dialectic* of reason that is responsible for that regression: Law is quite simply not progress away from myth but, rather, a variant of it and a forgetfulness. From the outset, Benjamin relativizes the promise of modern reason; he had never taken it seriously. No progress has yet taken place. Like Kraus and Kafka, he compares the fragility of Western reason to a messianic promise in whose name any progress realized can be reduced to a mere adjustment within a permanent catastrophe. Jewish theology has the task—to use Freud's term—of drying up the swamp of the modern West. "This man," Benjamin writes of Karl Kraus in 1928, "one of a tiny number of those who have a vision of freedom, cannot serve it in any other way than as prosecutor; it is in that way that the power of dialectic peculiar to him appears in its purest form. It is in that way, precisely, that his existence is prayer, the most ardent call for redemption that Jewish lips are uttering today" ("Karl Kraus," *G.S.,* 2:625).

Through the portraits of these two writers and the historical analysis of their literary forms, Benjamin's essays formulate a diagnosis of the age. Their significance for Benjamin's thinking has to do with his philosophy of language and can only be discerned indirectly. At a time when the "empty phrases" of journalism and the loss of tradition had corrupted language, Kraus and Kafka remember the authentic language: that of the Adamic name. But both are fighting an enemy that is assaulting their own minds. Kraus, the editor-in-chief of *Fackel* (Torch)—and Benjamin, a collaborator on *Die literarische Welt*—are nothing but journalists who are more demanding than the others, at a time when "journalism [is] . . . the expression of the changed function of language in the world of high capitalism" (*Reflections,* 242). What is the author of *The Trial* but a writer, whereas—like Benjamin—he would like to illustrate the teaching of doctrine? The introduction to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* had formulated the thesis that in our time, only *exercises* in view of doctrine are within our reach—and they are better than any philosophy that claims to be systematic. But, for different reasons, neither Kraus nor Kafka can resign himself to a philosophy that so relativizes his era. For Benjamin, they are nevertheless the models of a committed Judaism in an ambivalent process of secularization. In the essay "Surrealism," religious experience appeared only as a lesson in "profane illumination." The texts on Kraus and Kafka show that, as long as the

profane models remain as deficient as surrealist projects, the imperatives of Judaism can only change form; they cannot disappear.

## *Karl Kraus, or the Art of Quotation*

The essay on surrealism had substituted the "document" and the political effectiveness of the emancipated image for the work of art: The surrealist artists who had entered politics were capable of crossing both the boundary between art and the document and the threshold between dreaming and waking. As for "The Work of Art," an essay just as radical as "Surrealism," it presents film as a symptom and as the place for a transformation of the concept of the work of art itself, a transformation that—without resorting to intoxication—also effaces the distinction between art and document in the name of a superior, perceptive, and political effectiveness. In contrast, in the domain of the mercantile confusion between art and nonart, the essay "Karl Kraus" maintains the orthodoxy of the "theses against snobs."[15] The essay on Kraus deals both with a form of *art*, namely, satire, which is the form Kraus uses to intervene on the cultural scene, and with the normative concept of art that he defends and that is inscribed within a "theological" poetics with strong moral connotations of the kind defended by the early Benjamin. The term Benjamin opposed to "journalism" could just as easily have been "authentic language," for Kraus's art consists in jealously conserving the sacred character of language even as he sows terror. In this preservation he confuses language, art, and justice, Judaism and the cult of the German language, as does Benjamin.

In his battle, Kraus opposes the "chronic sickness" of inauthenticity. "It is from the unmasking of the inauthentic that [Kraus's] battle against the press arose" (*Reflections,* 241). Like Kraus, Benjamin still has no doubts about this concept of authenticity, which Adorno will find suspect; witness his use of the concepts "origin"[16] and then "aura," which are indissociable from that of authenticity. He is hardly troubled by the authoritarian connotations of that claim to authenticity that is at the foundation of the conservative critique of culture.[17] Benjamin speaks of Kraus's "strange interplay between reactionary theory and revolutionary practice" (*Reflections,* 247), an interplay that is not far from an analogous constellation for the author of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*—but Benjamin is only partly aware of the ambivalence of his own conceptions. This ambivalence stems from his evaluations of public opinion and of technology in relation to the modern development of the press. Kraus's hatred for the press is not reasoned; it is "more vital than moral" (*Reflections,* 239, translation modified). "The very term 'public opinion' outrages him," writes Benjamin. "Opinions are a private matter" (*Reflections,* 239). As an enemy of discussion, Benjamin mistrusts the contradictory expression of evaluations transmitted

by the media. With Kraus, to opinions thus termed "private" he opposes "judgment," an authoritarian evaluation that—he claims—is no longer affected by the private character of "opinion": "It is precisely the purpose of the public opinion generated by the press to make the public incapable of judging, to insinuate into it the attitude of someone irresponsible, uninformed" (*Reflections*, 329). In the name of this critique of public opinion, infantilized by the press, Benjamin defends both Karl Kraus's authoritarian attitude and his refusal to separate private and public life. Just as Kraus "makes his own existence a public issue," he has "opposed the distinction between personal and objective criticism" (*Reflections,* 247). Kraus incarnates "the secret of authority: never to disappoint" (*Reflections,* 248).[18]

Owing to the destructive work of his polemics, Kraus transforms polemics into an instrument of production. Through his technique of quotation, which will inspire Benjamin in his *Paris Arcades,* Kraus's principle is "to dismantle the situation, to discover the true question the situation poses," and then "to present this to his opponent in guise of response" (*Reflections,* 243–244, translation modified). This work of destruction is carried out in the name of Kraus's "tact," which, according to Benjamin, is "moral alertness" (*Reflections,* 244). Such an authoritarian attitude disdains Kantian morality (*Reflections,* 245), the profane and rational morality to which Benjamin opposes "true tact," grounded in a "theological criterion." To present it—and to introduce the figure of Kraus, *the universal man*—Benjamin mobilizes the conceptions of his book on the baroque: "Tact is the capacity to treat social relationships, though not departing from them, as natural, even as paradisiac relationships" (*Reflections,* 244). The conception Kraus has of the creature

> contains the theological inheritance of speculations that last possessed contemporary validity for the whole of Europe in the seventeenth century. At the theological core of this concept, however, a transformation has taken place that has caused it, quite without constraint, to coincide with the cosmopolitan credo of Austrian worldliness. . . . Stifter gave this creed its most authentic stamp, and his echo is heard wherever Kraus concerns himself with animals, plants, children. (*Reflections,* 244)

Kraus—and this is what is at stake in his actions as a dispenser of justice—becomes the protector of the *creature* against the criminal existence of man: "Every day fifty thousand tree trunks are cut down for sixty newspapers" (*Reflections,* 245). Compared to Benjamin's "theology" or that of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Kraus's theology, in *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (The last days of humanity) is apocalyptic, like a baroque vision: "His defeatism is of a supranational, that is, planetary kind, and history for him is merely the wilderness dividing his race from

creation, whose last act is world conflagration. As a deserter to the camp of animal creation—so he measures out his wilderness" (*Reflections,* 246).

Benjamin's deep identification with Kraus, signaled by the reference to the new angel he incarnates, is revealed again through the image of the storm (one of the first formulations of what will become a leitmotif in the Benjaminian oeuvre), in the texts on Kafka and Baudelaire, and also in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Through this *image* that no concept could translate without being reductionist, Benjamin determines the situation of the "just man" engaged in the adventure of history. Sometimes—rarely—he is a dialectician for whom it is important to "have the wind of world-history in one's sails" ("Central Park," 44), and sometimes—most often—he is a powerless spectator of the historical catastrophe. Faced with the disaster of his age, Kraus, by a kind of monumental passivity, professes silence: " 'Those who now have nothing to say because it is the turn of deeds to speak, talk on. Let him who has something to say step forward and be silent.' Everything Kraus wrote is like that: a silence turned inside out, a silence that catches the storm of events in its black folds, billows, its livid lining turned outward" (*Reflections,* 243). The political effectiveness of such a gesture of indignant self-styling is uncertain.

The technique of montaging quotations, the art of silence, stems from the same principle. "Kraus," writes Benjamin, "has written articles in which there is not a single word that is his own" (*G.S.,* 2:1093). That will also be Benjamin's project in *Paris Arcades,* as it was in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* the "craziest mosaic technique" (*Correspondence,* 256), where quotation was "the only element of authority" (*Origin,* 28, translation modified) available in the absence of true doctrine. Like Adam, the critic originally names things and assigns them their place in Creation:

> To quote a word is to call it by its name. So Kraus's achievement exhausts itself at its highest level by making even the newspaper quotable. He transports it to his own sphere, and the empty phrase is suddenly forced to recognize that even in the deepest dregs of the journals it is not safe from the voice that swoops on the wings of the word to drag it from its darkness. (*Reflections,* 268)

Whether it saves or punishes, the quotation brings together language and justice and confuses them. Quotation "summons the word by its names, wrenches it destructively from its context, but precisely thereby calls it back to its origin" (*Reflections,* 261). Even though Kraus converted to Catholicism, it is this approach that, in Benjamin's view, is his irreducibly Jewish aspect. "To worship the image of divine justice in language—even in the German language—that is the genuinely Jewish somersault by which he tries to break the spell of the demon" (*Reflections,* 254).

This is also a self-portrait of Benjamin and of what ties him to the German language, just as his judgment of Kraus's technique also applies to his own approach: "Kraus knows no system. Each thought has its own cell. But each cell can in an instant, and apparently without a cause, become a chamber, a legal chamber over which language presides" (*Reflections,* 254). Then again, in another form, this is a portrait of Kafka, who is also in a struggle with the "demonism" of that prehistoric world that the contemporary world has never ceased to be: "The dark background from which [Kraus's] image detaches itself is not formed by his contemporaries, but is the primeval world or the world of the demon" (*Reflections,* 250)—the world whose sickness nonetheless affects Kraus.

Benjamin criticizes Kraus's "inadequacies": his demonic vanity as actor and mime, as decadent artist, and as heir to *l'art pour l'art* in which his relation to the law is rooted. "He has seen through law as have few others. If he nevertheless invokes it, he does so precisely because his own demon is drawn so powerfully by the abyss it represents" (*Reflections,* 255). When Kraus latches onto the "trial for sexual offenses," obscene encounters between justice and Venus, he speaks as a "dandy who has his forebear in Baudelaire. Only Baudelaire hated as Kraus did the satiety of healthy common sense, and the compromise that intellectuals made with it in order to find shelter in journalism. Journalism is betrayal of the literary life of mind, of the demon" (*Reflections,* 257–258). The demonic Kraus embraces the alliance between mind and sex. Like Kafka, he falls from a theological role into literature: "The life of letters," writes Benjamin, "is existence under the aegis of mere mind, as prostitution is existence under the aegis of mere sexuality. The demon, however, who leads the whore to the street exiles the man of letters to the courtroom" (*Reflections,* 258). In some sense, he appears in court before being summoned, like Baudelaire or Flaubert.

This critique of Kraus must have seemed strange to Benjamin's friends such as Scholem and Max Rychner, who had not followed the mutation of the philosopher of language into a reader of Marx:

> That to him the fit state of man appears not as destiny and fulfillment of nature liberated through revolutionary change, but as an element of nature per se, of an archaic nature without history, in its primeval, primitive state, throws uncertain, disquieting reflections even on his idea of freedom and of humanity. It is not removed from the realm of guilt that he has traversed from pole to pole: from mind to sexuality. (*Reflections,* 259)

The "nature liberated through revolutionary change" was a new expression, close to Ludwig Feuerbach and the early Marx, in an oeuvre where theology

had until then consisted in linking nature to the ephemeral, to death, and to an irremediable nihilism.

In the last part of the essay, Benjamin tries resolutely to place Kraus in the service of political commitment, by making of him a thinker who announces the move from "classical humanism," that of Goethe and Schiller, to "real humanism," that of Marx. Benjamin thus links two critiques of "human rights." The first is that of Karl Kraus, who sees them only as a "toy that grownups like to trample on and so will not give up" (*Reflections,* 261), to which Benjamin adds: "Thus drawing the frontier between the private sphere [that of "man"] and the public sphere [that of the "citizen"], which in 1789 was supposed to inaugurate freedom, became a mockery" (*Reflections,* 261, translation slightly modified). The operetta, which delighted Karl Kraus, presents a jubilant parody of this. The second critique is that of Marx's "The Jewish Question," where we read, in reference to the bourgeois revolution: "The real man is acknowledged only in the form of . . . the abstract *citoyen.* . . . Only when the really individual man takes back into himself the abstract citizen . . . only then is human emancipation complete" (quoted in *Reflections,* 270). By forcing his interpretation and seeking to save Karl Kraus for Marxism, Benjamin makes him the defender of "real humanism" against "classical humanism." The "inhuman" cynic had written a political text in 1920 claiming that communism was a "deranged remedy with a purer ideal purpose—the devil take its practice, but God preserve it as a constant threat over the heads of those who have property and would like to compel all others to preserve it" (quoted in *Reflections,* 272). Kraus, whose Shakespearean model is "Timon, the misanthrope" (*Reflections,* 263), seems to be linked in spite of himself to a theory that, though not philanthropic, is far removed from misanthropy and pessimistic anthropology. Benjamin sees very well the political naiveté that separates Kraus from Marx: "It is his program to reduce the development of bourgeois-capitalist affairs to a condition that was never theirs" (*Reflections,* 269). But he thinks the two are linked through their destructive impulses.

Like Benjamin's thought, Kraus's thinking is centered on language, on the "sanctification of the name" and "Jewish certainty" (*Reflections,* 265). "You have come from the origin—the origin is the goal" (*Reflections,* 265, translation modified): This formula of Karl Kraus's applies both to poetic verse and to history. "Just as blessedness has its origin at the end of time, rhyme has its at the end of the line" (*Reflections,* 266, translation modified). Kraus substitutes, for the demonic relation of mind and sex lying in wait for him, a relation between eros and language: "The more closely you look at a word the more distantly it looks back" (*Reflections,* 267); Benjamin sees in this sentence the very example of a perception of the "aura" of language in what is unapproachable and profoundly traditional about it (*Illuminations,*

200 n. 17). And yet, Kraus is a destroyer because, for Benjamin, the aura is always associated with destruction and decline; it appears to us only in the light of its destruction.

In this second period of his oeuvre, in which writing serves politics, Benjamin continually radicalizes the destructive operation, extending it to the theological traditions that inspired him and that are preserved only in certain artistic or political gestures. It is for this reason that "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" approves the liquidation of the aura and of art in the traditional sense. According to the architect Adolf Loos, "human work consists only of destruction" (*Illuminations,* 272), to which Benjamin adds, speaking of Kraus:

> For far too long the accent was placed on creativity. . . . Work as a supervised task—its model: political and technical—is attended by dirt and detritus, intrudes destructively into matter, is abrasive to what is already achieved, critical toward its conditions, and is in all this opposite to that of the dilettante luxuriating in creation. His work is innocent and pure, consuming and purifying masterliness. And therefore the monster stands among us as the messenger of a more real humanism. He is the conquerer of the empty phrase. . . . The average European has not succeeded in uniting his life with technology because he has clung to the fetish of creative existence. (*Illuminations,* 272)[19]

In addition to destruction, there is also the watchword of privation, voluntary poverty. Kraus resembles "Klee's *New Angel,* who preferred to free men by taking from them, rather than make them happy be giving to them" (*Illuminations,* 273). Before becoming a clearly articulated philosophical position, this observation attempts to synthesize the attitude shared by a certain number of literary and artistic works: those of Paul Scheerbart, Karl Kraus, Bertolt Brecht, Adolf Loos, and Paul Klee. All these authors, with the exception of Karl Kraus, will be cited in a 1933 essay entitled "Erfahrung und Armut" (Experience and poverty) in which Benjamin develops the theme of voluntary poverty, even as he introduces certain themes that will be taken up again *in reverse form* in his essay "The Storyteller." According to him, this poverty is linked to the decline both of experience and of its communication in storytelling. "Experience is decreasing, and in a generation that, in 1914–1918, had one of the most momentous experiences of universal history. . . . People came back from the war mute. They were not richer in communicable experience, but poorer" (*G.S.,* 2:214). Modern war introduced a gap between technology and the social order: "This enormous deployment of technology has plunged men into an entirely new poverty" (*G.S.,* 2:214). At the same time, all of traditional culture has been devalorized: "What

is the value of all cultural heritage if not that experience attaches us to it?" Thus, a new "barbaric" era has begun. But Benjamin defends it as "a positive barbarism," in the very sense he had defended Kraus's "inhumanity" as a form of "real humanism": "Where does the barbarian's poverty of experience lead him? To begin at zero; to be satisfied with little; to build with few elements, looking neither to the right nor the left. Among the great creators, there have always been the merciless ones who began *tabula rasa*" (*G.S.*, 2:215).

Pell-mell, Benjamin cites René Descartes and Albert Einstein, the cubists and Paul Klee. As in the essay on Kraus, the liquidation of bourgeois private life is part of that poverty. It is symbolized by the idea of the glass house, anticipated by the architecture of arcades in iron and glass and realized by Loos and Le Corbusier. In such a house, the inhabitant leaves almost no trace. It is in this spirit that the initial project of *Paris Arcades* was conceived at that time:

> Glass objects have no "aura." In general, glass is the enemy of the secret. It is also the enemy of property. . . . When a person enters a bourgeois salon from the 1880s, the strongest impression he draws, in spite of any "warmth," is perhaps: "There is no place for you here." There is no place for you here because there is not the slightest space where the person who lives here has not already left his trace. (*G.S.*, 2:217)

In his radical phase of commitment, Benjamin wants to be the joyful barbarian: "Humanity is getting ready, if necessary, to outlive culture. And above all, he does so laughing. This laughter can at time appear barbaric. Let's admit it. It may well be that the individual sometimes gives a bit of humanity to the masses who, one day, will give it back to him with interest" (*G.S.*, 2:219). An almost identical passage is found among the notes on Kraus. He also belonged to those new barbarians, a combination of children and cannibals, who were the "angels," the messengers of a new era. He knows, having learned it too late,

> that there is no idealistic but only a materialistic deliverance from myth, and that at the origin of creation stands not purity but purification. . . . Only in despair did he discover in quotation the power not to preserve but to purify, to tear from context, to destroy; the only power in which hope still resides that something might survive this age—because it was wrenched from it. (*Reflections*, 270–271)

Hence, the "aura" must be destroyed inasmuch as authenticity is mingled with myth and pretense. This destructive dimension of his thinking links Karl Kraus to the other avant-garde artists of his era.

## *Franz Kafka: The Gesture and Its Interpretation*

Instead of elaborating a doctrine, Kraus confined himself to destroying falseness and inauthenticity. Kafka's failure to illustrate doctrine is, in Benjamin's view, symptomatic of the *same* historical situation. Through his failure, Kafka reveals the distance separating the lives of his era from a life that conforms to Scripture. Benjamin wrote the essay "Franz Kafka" about four years after the essay on Kraus, and it was published in an abridged version by *Jüdische Rundschau* (Jewish review) in late 1934. The text on Franz Kafka shows little similarity to the essay on Karl Kraus—except that in both cases Benjamin is concerned with the complex forms of a secularization of Judaism. But where the text on Karl Kraus attempts to establish an internal link between theology and materialism, the essay on Kafka abandons this attempt; at almost the same time, Benjamin was writing one of his politically most radical texts, one that was also among the most distant from any theological preoccupation: the article of Brechtian inspiration entitled "The Author as Producer." What mattered for Benjamin at the time was solely the profound compatibility between the convictions of an author and historical materialism; according to Benjamin, this compatibility seemed to exist for Kafka.[20] That said, the profane level is inadequate and does not allow him to ground such a commitment. That is why the theological conception underlies Benjamin's "materialist" texts and remains implicit in them, until that relation is clearly formulated in "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

Benjamin's essay on Kafka is one of his least conceptual and most narrative texts. Of the four parts, three are introduced by a story, the fourth by the description of a photo of Kafka as a child. As a result, the interpretation is not made explicit.[21] From the point of view of method, however, two things are certain: In the name of his conception of the gap between discursive thought and literary creation in any authentic writer, Benjamin rejects both Kafka's self-interpretation, as it can be drawn from his "posthumous reflections," and the theological interpretation, as it was developed by a great number of authors. He grounds his entire reading on the often obscure "gestures" or "motifs" through which the content of what Kafka had to say is expressed. But this reading is ultimately theological. In other words, according to the conception already expressed in the essays on Goethe and tragic drama, Benjamin situates the element of contemporary thought that matters from the theological viewpoint precisely in the images, figures, and gestures that remain obscure to the authors themselves.

The gap between the discursive propositions of a great writer and his literary oeuvre is interpreted as the distance between a limited rationality and a practice guided by truth: "It is easier to draw speculative conclusions from Kafka's posthumous collection of notes than to explore even one of the motifs that appear in his stories and novels" (*Illuminations,* 128). It is when

an uncomprehending Kafka confines himself to showing that Benjamin finds the keys to his vision: "Kafka could understand things only in the form of a *gestus,* and this *gestus* which he did not understand constitutes the cloudy part of the parable. Kafka's writings emanate from it" (*Illuminations,* 129).

This fact was inadmissable for Kafka; in his view, it constituted a failure that would bring on the destruction of his oeuvre:

> He did fail in his grandiose attempt to convert poetry into doctrine, to turn it into a parable and restore to it that stability and unpretentiousness which, in the face of reason, seemed to him to be the only appropriate thing for it. No other writer has obeyed the commandment "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image" so faithfully. (*Illuminations,* 129)

In another passage, Kafka's parables are assimilated to the relation between the Haggadah and Halakah in the talmudic tradition, in other words, the relation between interpretation (or illustration) and the law:

> This does not mean that his prose pieces belong entirely in the tradition of Western prose forms; they have, rather, a similar relationship to doctrine as the Haggadah does to the Halakah. They are not parables, and yet they do not want to be taken at their face value; they lend themselves to quotation and can be told for purposes of clarification. But do we have the doctrine which Kafka's parables interpret and which K.'s postures and the gestures of his animals clarify? It does not exist; all we can say is that here and there we have an allusion to it. (*Illuminations,* 122)

In this regard, Benjamin and Scholem disagree. For Scholem, the loss of doctrine (of "Scripture") and the incapacity to decipher are not at all the same thing; that is "the greatest error"[22] Benjamin could have committed. In contrast, for Benjamin,

> it comes down to the same thing, because, without the key that belongs to it, the Scripture is not Scripture, but life. Life as it is lived in the village at the foot of the hill on which the castle is built. It is in the attempt to metamorphose life into Scripture that I perceive the meaning of "reversal" [*Umkehr*], which so many of Kafka's parables endeavor to bring about. (*Correspondence,* 453)

In reconstituting the tradition of the Kabbala, Scholem is seeking to preserve the possibility of implementing doctrine, in spite of our current incapacity to decipher it. For Benjamin—and according to him, for Kafka—"the work of the Torah has been thwarted" (*Correspondence,* 2:125). The effort

of Kafka's oeuvre consists entirely in metamorphosizing life into Scripture: According to Benjamin, that is "the meaning of 'reversal' [*Umkehr*], which so many of Kafka's parables endeavor to bring about. . . . Sancho Panza's existence is exemplary because it actually consists in rereading one's own existence—however buffoonish and quixotic" (*Correspondence,* 453). Karl Kraus's destructive practice of quotation and Benjamin's efforts to reread the tradition against the grain in order to destroy its false appearances move in the same direction.

By insisting on the *gestures* through which Kafka presents his vision, Benjamin links them to the gestural aspect of Brechtian theater. Brecht, too, was unable to limit himself to literature alone. He, too, wanted to illustrate a "doctrine"—in his case, that of Marx. He also presented gestures whose importance escaped him to a certain extent. That is undoubtedly the reason Benjamin insists on the analogies between Kafka and the eminently gestural Chinese theater that Brecht claimed as one of the precursors of epic theater. At the same time, Benjamin establishes a relation between the messianic hope of seeing the "disfigured" world put back in order and the materialist hope for a revolution, which was proper to Brecht. But what distinguishes messianism from materialism is the scope of their hopes. The theological character of the Benjaminian vision translates into the hope characteristic of fairy tales, which consists in seeing the hunchback lose his hump.[23] Once more, to differentiate himself from Scholem, Benjamin underscores a convergence between the Jewish tradition and the European—and particularly the German—tradition of the fairy tale, reactualized by romanticism: Through the figure of the hunchback, the man with the curved back bearing the weight of the ages of the world, Kafka

> touches the ground . . . the core of folk tradition, the German as well as the Jewish. Even if Kafka did not pray—and this we do not know—he still possessed in the highest degree what Malebranche called "the natural prayer of the soul": attentiveness. And in this attentiveness he included all living creatures, as saints include them in their prayers. (*Illuminations,* 344)

According to Benjamin, Kafka presented the world in a disfigured state, in the expectation of deliverance. This alteration is such that no rational action could correct it; only a messianic miracle could put it back in order. Benjamin cannot do without theology, since the reconciliation he wishes for is not within the reach of human reason; in addition, reason finds no support in this world. In this period between the two world wars, what he perceives in Kafka and Kraus is the return of prehistory: "Kafka did not consider the age in which he lived as an advance over the beginnings of time" (*Illuminations,* 130).

As in Proust's works, forgetting is central in Kafka's oeuvre and determines his narrative technique: The most important things are said in passing, as if the hero "must really have known it all along" (*Illuminations,* 131) or "as though the hero was being subtly invited to recall to mind something that he had forgotten" (*Illuminations,* 131). Memory, a central notion of Judaism, is the opposite pole: "Everything forgotten mingles with what has been forgotten of the prehistoric world" (*Illuminations,* 131). Forgetting always affects the best part. That is why all of contemporary humanity's efforts must consist in rediscovering the lost gesture, must consist in taking it up again. "It is a tempest that blows from the land of oblivion, and study is a cavalry attack against it" (*Illuminations,* 138, translation slightly modified). For Kafka, the wind often blows "from the prehistoric world," " 'from the nethermost regions of death,' " and the study to which "students" turn in Kafka's work is the reversal, the conversion "that transforms existence into writing" (*Illuminations,* 138). As for Kraus, the object of study is the relation between law and justice: "The law which is studied and not practiced any longer is the gate to justice" (*Illuminations,* 139). This is the utopia of a society in which there would be no more conflicts of interest, in which the practice of law would be pointless.

For Benjamin, the urgency of leaving behind the primitive world justifies the break with an autonomous aesthetics that does not seek to transcend the indetermination of meaning. The paradox of Benjaminian aesthetics is that, even as it rules out discursive meaning in order to set forth the particularity of modern art, in Goethe, in surrealism, and in Kafka—that of producing *images without meaning*—it also attributes to *those very images* a precise theological significance, which necessarily escapes the authors. This operation is the exact reverse of the Nietzschean approach, which consists in bringing *any* value—whether of truth or justice—back to the intensity of modern art's "images without signifieds," and thus reducing philosophy and the normative dimensions of social life to the sole value of the artistic "will to power" or to the most intense aesthetic experience. In surrealism, Benjamin does not find the normative background that would assign a redemptive finality to the "nihilist," destructive operation of the work of art; in the works of Kraus and Kafka, he observes the failure of an attempt to transcend art in the direction of a doctrinal authority inspired by the Jewish tradition. Only the interpretation of artistic signs permits him to discover a perspective that transcends the current horizon. Benjamin will apply this method of interpretation to the "art" that seems to him the most innovative, that grounded in mechanical reproduction: cinema and the mechanical "arts" that structure everyday life, from the architecture of glass and iron to advertising and urbanism.

Among the symptoms of the state of "alienation" of contemporary humanity, Benjamin cites, in his essay on Kafka, film and the record player: "Man does not recognize his own walk on the screen or his own voice on the

phonograph" (*Illuminations,* 137). In 1934, the media of mechanical reproduction still appeared to Benjamin to be obstacles for persons seeking to reappropriate themselves; the next year, film would be interpreted as a means of regaining a grip on oneself.

## *DESTRUCTION OF THE AURA: PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM*

"A Small History of Photography," in which Benjamin formulates for the first time his definition of *aura,* one of the central concepts of his aesthetics, dates from the same year as the essay on Kraus. In this text, the discussion is linked to surrealism in particular and to "the liquidation of the aura" that it brings about in photography. Four years later, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," conceived as the vanishing point for the research on *Paris Arcades,* the stakes are higher. Benjamin attacks the religious foundations of art as they dominate the aesthetic experience in the traditional sense; according to him, this experience is contemplative and fetishistic. This theory draws inspiration from the Weberian theses on desacralization. But what will replace the ritual underlying any work of art is now, according to Benjamin, not an autonomous experience but rather politics: not the ideal receiver, God, but the idealized receiver, the public of the struggling class. Temporarily, then, theology seems to lose all its interest for aesthetic theory. In the earlier essays, however, destruction still had a hidden theological sense, which might very well be resonating here as well.

At the beginning of the 1930s, Benjamin granted a theoretical status to the concept of *aura* by announcing its decline in the restricted field of photography. In "The Work of Art," film seems to provoke a *crisis of art* in general. For better or for worse, however, art has survived the crisis precipitated by film, just as it survived Dadaism, which, if we are to believe Benjamin, was only the prelude to cinematic shock effects. Above all, even if we except commercial film, film itself has hardly evolved in the direction of politicization announced by Benjamin; it has not radically escaped the field of art, and that cannot be attributed solely to the fact that the political project supported by Benjamin has failed. That failure and the obsolescence of "The Work of Art" are closely related.

Benjamin traces the awareness of a crisis in the aura back to Hegel. In his speculations on "the end of art"—to which all the philosophers of art in the following decades will refer, from Heidegger to Gadamer and Adorno—Hegel "sensed a problem" (*Illuminations,* 245), according to Benjamin: "We

are beyond the stage of reverence for works of art as divine and objects deserving our worship. The impression they produce is one of a more reflective kind, and the emotions they arouse require a higher test" (Hegel, quoted in *Illuminations,* 245). For Hegel, this test was philosophical science, which had sublimated art, especially since the Reformation.[24]

In spite of Nietzsche's desperate revolt, this analysis has continued to make its way through modern thought. Not only does art seem condemned to a role secondary to that of science, but it also suffers the consequences of the *desacralization* that affects all modern reality: "The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world,' " writes Max Weber in 1919, adding: "Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life. . . . It is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental."[25]

For Hegel, art is not, properly speaking, desacralized; rather, it can no longer make claims to being the *supreme* expression of metaphysical truth defended by philosophy, which preserves the connotations of rational theology. In the works of Weber and Georg Simmel, modern rationalization provokes a general disenchantment of the world, so much so that art, now without effect on public life, survives only in the private sphere. It is to this decline that Benjamin is reacting, but in a different way from Nietzsche. Inasmuch as the "beautiful appearance" of art is now mere lies and artifice, it is no longer appropriate to celebrate pure and simple appearance, the vital lie that brings us intense experiences: Rather, we must sacrifice art in the traditional sense to preserve the public status and the pragmatic role of its productions. Unlike Max Weber, Benjamin is not part of the tradition of a "Protestant" and rationalist critique of the image, nor does he confine himself to observing in a general way the desacralization of art; he undertakes to precisely show the modifications that certain arts have undergone, according to their technical composition, their relation to reality, and the social context of their reception.

In 1931, when Benjamin introduced his concept of aura,[26] it was not just a general reflection on the destiny of art but, rather, one aspect of the history of *photography.* Benjamin's most famous essay, then, represents an audacious, perhaps even a reckless, generalizing and radicalizing of his early theses. A few years later, in his last essay on Baudelaire, Benjamin once more modified his theory. Such are the three stages of his reflection on this phenomenon.

In "A Small History of Photography," the concept of aura appears for the first time—and already in a context of "decline"—in reference to a

photograph of Kafka as a child: "The picture in its infinite sadness forms a pendant to the early photographs in which people did not yet look out at the world in so excluded and god-forsaken a manner as this boy. There was an aura about them, an atmospheric medium, that lent fullness and security to their gaze" ("Photography," 247). The old photograph is exemplified in the portraits of David Octavius Hill. Their "aura" is due both to the technical conditions of the period and to the status of photography: Because of its low sensitivity, film required a long and concentrated exposure, producing "the absolute continuum from brightest light to darkest shadow," so that "the way light struggles out of darkness in the work of Hill is reminiscent of mezzotint" ("Photography," 248). Paradoxically, when we consider what follows, Benjamin speaks here of the "technical considerations" of the aura:

> Many group photos in particular still preserve an air of animated conviviality for a brief space on the plate, before being ruined by the print. It was this atmosphere that was sometimes captured with delicacy and depth by the now old-fashioned oval frame. That is why it would be a misreading of these incunabula of photography to make too much of their *artistic perfection* or their *taste.* The pictures were made in rooms where every client was confronted, in the photographer, with a technician of the latest school; whereas the photographer was confronted, in every client, with a member of a rising class equipped with an aura that had seeped into the very folds of the man's frock coat or floppy cravat. For that aura was by no means the mere product of a primitive camera. ("Photography," 248)

That aura was the result of a rigorous congruence between "subject and technique": it existed in the reality of the young bourgeoisie, just as it existed on the plate. During the epoch of the triumphant bourgeoisie—such is Benjamin's sociological thesis—it disappeared from both dimensions; at that point, artifice took its place:

> After 1880, though, photographers made it their business to simulate with all the arts of retouching, especially the so-called rubber print, the aura which had been banished from the picture with the rout of darkness through faster lenses, exactly as it was banished from reality by the deepening degeneration of the imperialist bourgeoisie. ("Photography," 248)

Benjamin celebrates the decline of this artificial aura, not the primitive aura. The abandoning of artifice is celebrated first by Eugène Atget, the "forerunne[r] of surrealist photography," who took shots of deserted streets, provoking a "salutary estrangement":

> He was the first to disinfect the stifling atmosphere generated by conventional portrait photography in the age of decline. He cleanses this atmosphere, indeed he dispels it altogether: he initiates the emancipation of object from aura which is the most signal achievement of the latest school of photography. ("Photography," 250)

At this point, "A Small History of Photography" formulates a definition of the aura that we find in every version of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction": "What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance of semblance or distance, no matter how close the object may be" ("Photography," 250). Two negative qualities seem to define the aura: the uniqueness of a moment of temporal apparition and its unapproachability, its distancing despite a possible spatial proximity. And yet, modern society has developed needs that are incompatible with such principles:

> To bring things *closer* to us, or rather to the masses, is just as passionate an inclination in our day as the overcoming of whatever is unique in every situation by means of its reproduction. Every day the need to possess the object in close-up in the form of a picture, or rather a copy, becomes more imperative. ("Photography," 250)

Let us note that this need to possess is a completely different criterion than that which led Atget to liberate the photographic image from the aura. If it were solely an empirical tendency that was anti-artistic in nature and that conformed to the spirit of appropriation that had become widespread in the social system, it is difficult to see why Benjamin would take it into account in a theory of photography. He can only have in mind the *legitimate* imperatives of the "masses" to reverse cultural privilege. And yet, Benjamin concludes this development with an ambiguous sentence that refers to still another aspect of the decline of the aura: "The stripping bare of the object, the destruction of the aura, is the mark of a perception whose sense of the sameness of things has grown to the point where even the singular, the unique, is divested of its uniqueness—by means of its reproduction" ("Photography," 250).

It is no longer a *need*—perhaps legitimate—for proximity on a large scale and for appropriation but, rather, a *sense* of identity, an *identity*-based spirit, that reduces any singularity to multipliable unity and that sets aside differences. We find both a critical judgment on a tendency toward leveling and a comment on an anthropological transformation in the field of cognitive perception, now dominated by the spirit of science.

There are, then, at least three reasons for the destruction of the aura: *aesthetic* authenticity, which is opposed to artifice; *ethics* (or politics), the

questioning of privilege and of the exclusive character of the aura; and, finally, *anthropology,* a metamorphosis of perception, moving in the direction of a primacy of the *cognitive* attitude, which Benjamin notes here without making a value judgment. Only the third reason is linked to Hegel's or Weber's theses on the progression of the rational mind in Western culture, in the sense of a progress of cognitive rationality. In this same text, Benjamin will develop yet another theory of knowledge to which photography is supposed to contribute.

Benjamin also reinterprets aesthetic authenticity and the ethical imperative for equal access to art in the light of another form of art: cinema, and in particular, the revolutionary films of Sergey Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin. After the purification of the false aura brought about by Atget, the authenticity of the human face must be restored—this thesis will leave no trace in "The Work of Art":

> To do without people is for photography the most impossible of renunciations. And anyone who did not know it was taught by the best of the Russian films that milieu and landscape, too, reveal themselves most readily to those photographers who succeed in capturing them in anonymous faces. ("Photography," 251, translation modified)

Anonymity is an essential feature here, in that it excludes the pose, which destroys authenticity: "So the Russian feature film was the first opportunity in decades to put people before the camera who had no use for their photographs. And immediately the human face appeared on film with new and immeasurable significance. But it was no longer a portrait" ("Photography," 251).

The photographs of August Sander suggest the new meaning of these anonymous faces; they have a cognitive, even "scientific" finality. Sander's images provide a "training manual" to members of a society in which each person must orient him- or herself in relation to the physiognomies of others. In addition to restored authenticity and equal access to images, this cognitive function defines the status of photography. At the same time, photography transforms the perception of traditional art, both in granting greater equality of access and, especially, in contributing toward a progress in knowledge: "In the final analysis, mechanical reproduction is a technique of diminution that helps men to achieve a control over works of art without whose aid they would no longer be useful" ("Photography," 253, translation slightly modified).

In using the terms "control" and "useful," Benjamin is clearly defining the relation to art in terms of instrumentality. We recognize here the influence of Brecht and of his conception of the "use value" of art. As

for "photography as art," Benjamin believes that a fundamental tension opposes art to photography. The primordial interest of photography is not aesthetic:

> The creative in photography is its capitulation to fashion. *The world is beautiful*—that is its watchword. Therein is unmasked the posture of a photography that can endow any soup can with cosmic significance but cannot grasp a single one of the human connexions in which it exists, even where most far-fetched subjects are more concerned with saleability than with insight. ("Photography," 255)

In this spirit, Benjamin accepts Baudelaire's critique of photography "as a violent reaction to the encroachment of artistic photography" ("Photography," 256). The task of this nonart is purely cognitive according to him: At the "scene of a crime"—the political crime of modern cities—photography's role is to "reveal guilt and point out the guilty" ("Photography," 256). "Will not the caption become the most important part of the photograph?" asks Benjamin ("Photography," 256). In fact, the image as such always remains open to several readings.[27] The caption is necessary because the cognitive function of photography as such is not assured. This is also true for the succession of filmic images, whose effect Benjamin compares to the function of the caption: "The directives which the captions give to those looking at pictures in illustrated magazines soon become even more explicit and more imperative in the film where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all the preceding ones" ("The Work of Art," *Illuminations*, 226). Here again, Benjamin attempts to reduce the function of cinematic images to knowledge. Nevertheless, "A Small History of Photography" is far from the radicality of the theses in "The Work of Art." It makes no general judgment on the destiny of art in the contemporary period and does not break with a humanist spirit, as evidenced by its attachment to the human face.

Four years after the article on the history of photography, right in the middle of his work on *Paris Arcades*, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" approached the theme of the aura from a much wider angle, this time clearly attached to the Weberian thesis of the disenchantment of the world. No longer is Benjamin concerned with the halo characteristic of old photographs, artificially reproduced by industrial photography; at issue is a much less easily observable quality, attributed to *all* art and stemming from its magic and religious origins. The theoretical ambition is incomparably greater; hence the theses in the essay are much riskier.

In "A Small History of Photography," the aura was linked to the technical condition of a weak sensitivity to light and to the human condition

of an absence of ostentatious externalization characteristic of the posed photograph. That "authenticity" takes on a much more generalized sense in the 1935 essay: "The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" (*Illuminations,* 220). It is thus linked in a general way to the "uniqueness" of the presence of the work of art "at the place where it happens to be" (*Illuminations,* 220). This quality is no longer linked to a precise form of art at a determined time—photography in its beginnings—but rather to a general characteristic of *plastic arts before their mechanical reproduction.* It remains to be seen whether, given such generality, the terms "aura" and "authenticity" still have any pertinent meaning: "The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical—and, of course, not only technical—reproducibility. Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority; not so *vis-à-vis* technical reproduction" (*Illuminations,* 220).

On the one hand, technical reproduction is "more independent of the original" (*Illuminations,* 220), from which it can extract certain aspects "with the aid of certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion" (*Illuminations,* 220). On the other hand, it allows us to link the work of art to the viewer or listener, thanks to photography or phonograph records (*Illuminations,* 220–221). In opposing authenticity and reproduction—Adorno was the first to point this out—Benjamin simplifies a more complex relation he had underscored in the essay on photography: In that case, the aura was due to the *technical* conditions of photography. But that simplification is linked to a guiding idea that appears only in the next passage. The concept of authenticity refers to the notion of *tradition*: "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (*Illuminations,* 221).

Through reproduction, what is disturbed

> is the authority of the object. One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. (*Illuminations,* 221)

Hence, Benjamin is convinced that the authority of tradition presupposes the uniqueness of an object that can be neither approached nor appropriated. Why is that? Why would tradition be linked to the here and now? Why would it not be maintained through diffusion? The printing press had long ago desacralized and diffused writing. Did it thereby disturb the traditions conveyed in writing? In a certain way, yes. The Lutheran disclosure of the

Bible deprived the church of its authority by permitting every reader to have access to the text, to interpret it and to feel its truth; it favored critical judgment and thus no doubt the critique of religion as a heteronomous institution. But fundamentally, it only accelerated the process of copying manuscripts. In addition, however, control over that diffusion now escaped the privileged and cloistered readers, the copyists. Before actually creating images, the technical reproduction of images was at first only an extension of that diffusion of the written text, applied this time to the pictorial, sculptural, and architectural tradition. In that case, it was a kind of "democratization of images":

> By making many reproductions, [the technique of reproduction] substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or viewer in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. (*Illuminations,* 221)

What does this danger, this "obverse" of the contemporary crisis, this "tremendous shattering," consist in? What is revolutionary in Benjamin's view is the *exotericism* of mass culture: the fact that tradition escapes *authorized* transmission. Humanity renews itself, but at the cost of abandoning esoteric traditions. The word "tradition"—Benjamin has to have this in mind—also translates the term "Kabbala," that which, in religious tradition, deserves to be preserved.

Film elicits Benjamin's interest because it is "the most powerful agent" in this process, which hands images over to the masses: "Its social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of cultural heritage" (*Illuminations,* 221). Benjamin fears that the generalized actualization of cultural heritage undermines tradition. But technical reproduction is also an interpretation of traditions. It remains to be seen whether any particular interpretation stems from vulgarity, from misunderstanding, or, instead, from an authentic and fruitful rereading. It is thus not technical reproduction as such that represents a danger but the possibility that it opens of exploiting cultural heritage merely for the ends of profit or propaganda, outside the traditional mechanisms of cultural transmission. The dividing line between the preservation or renewal of tradition and its liquidation thus moves *inside* reproduction—between different ways of interpreting transmitted works—and not *between* authenticity and reproduction themselves. In spite of the aura of actors who are present "in person," theater can betray Shakespeare just as surely as can cinema, and film can renew the interpretation of Shakespearean dramas.

Having introduced the theme of the aura through the influence that technical reproduction exerts on it, Benjamin returns to the theory of "A Small History of Photography." He once more takes up the aspect of an ethical imperative and a change in human perception: The masses today tend to master the uniqueness and the distancing of images, to which they demand access; and this taste for reproduction can be compared to "the increasing importance of statistics" (*Illuminations,* 223). But this time, the ambiguity of this process falls clearly on the side of reproduction. In the field of art, Benjamin gives a positive sense to the desacralization and "disenchantment of the world." The artistic tradition appears indissociable from a notion of a *ritual* that has lost its legitimacy:

> Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual [in theology, says the first version of the text], the location of its original use value. (*Illuminations,* 224)

This is not a thesis that appears in the 1931 essay. Beauty, according to Benjamin, is now indissociable from ritual:

> This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty. The secular cult of beauty, developed during the Renaissance and prevailing for three centuries, clearly showed that ritualistic basis in its decline and the first deep crisis which befell it. (*Illuminations,* 224)

Contemporary with the invention of photography, the "negative theology" of *l'art pour l'art* seemed to prove the sacred character of beauty. According to this reasoning, the historical process of desacralization had to lead ineluctably toward decline, both of art in the technical sense and of beauty. "For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual" (*Illuminations,* 224).

All artistic production, from that of the Renaissance to Mallarmé's "pure" art stripped of object and social function—the Brechtian verdict is resonating in the background at this point—is stigmatized by this term "parasitic," which implicitly assimilates all traditional art to the "rubber print" and "artifice" of denatured photography. But whereas Benjamin's severe judgment on the synthetic aura that characterized posed photography

was well founded, this global and hasty verdict on the metamorphoses of the ideal of beauty since the Renaissance is reductive and unfair. Of course, Benjamin seems to be linking his theory of cult value to the critical background of his essays on Goethe and tragic drama. Hence, he establishes a continuity between the aesthetic of the "inexpressive" and of allegory, his critique of the beautiful appearance, and the thesis of the decline of the aura. But at the time of the essay on Goethe, he knew that beauty cannot be reduced to the "beautiful appearance." In 1935, he sacrifices beauty and the aura to the "emancipation" that technical reproduction as such, freed from the original, is supposed to signify: "To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility" (*Illuminations,* 224). There exists no "original" or "authentic" copy of the negative of a film. Benjamin draws a radical conclusion from this fact: "But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics" (*Illuminations,* 224).

Politics—and, more precisely, Marxist politics—takes over for the sacred, "auratic" foundation of traditional art. It must be added that once Benjamin traced artistic autonomy back to a parasitical form of ritual, he had little choice. The distinction he introduces, based on the sacred origin of art, between the historical poles of cult value and exhibition value, would theoretically have allowed him to escape the choice between the religious and the political. But Benjamin does not interpret exhibition value in terms of a public and profane status of the work of art. Rather, he focuses on its *quantitative* aspect, access to the greatest number of works of art, *in opposition to* the exclusive character of access to cult values; in addition, he focuses on the *mechanical* aspect, the apprenticeship of perception and testing that is *analogous* to the practical functions of primitive art. Hence, through the very choice of concepts, he excludes both the specifically aesthetic content, interest, and value of works of art *and* the particular forms of exchange that govern that content, interest, and value. Benjamin does not allow himself to recognize in the aesthetic quality of works—their coherence, their force of revelation, their ability to open eyes and elicit new ways of seeing and evaluating—the desacralized heir to what he had called aura. In a peculiar manner, his sociological theory of art now leads him to be interested not in works of art, but only in the social functions that art as such fills "in the age of its mechanical reproducibility." Yet these functions are no longer linked to the significance of a unique work. In a certain way, for Benjamin—at least in this essay—the medium is already the message; the significance of art is reduced to the medium through which it addresses the public. At the beginning and the end of art history, the artistic is secondary:

> In prehistoric time . . . by the absolute emphasis on its cult value, it was, first and foremost, an instrument of magic. Only later did it come to be recognized as a work of art. In the same way today, by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental. (*Illuminations*, 225)[28]

That is the final consequence of the founding idea of the *Paris Arcades* project in 1935—from which "The Work of Art" stemmed—the idea that, for the structuring forms of urban space, "the emancipation from the yoke of art" signified a dissipation of phantasmagorical illusions.

Independent of the aura, its theological background, and its anchoring in tradition, the question of reproducibility reveals the peculiar status of the work of art's identity in the field of the visual arts. As Nelson Goodman demonstrates in *Languages of Art*, the problem of authenticity is raised only for the arts he calls *autographic*. "There are, indeed, compositions falsely purporting to be by Haydn as there are paintings falsely purporting to be by Rembrandt: but of the *London Symphony*, unlike the *Lucretia*, there can be no forgeries. Haydn's manuscript is no more genuine an instance of the score than is a printed copy off the press this morning, and last night's performance no less genuine than the premier."[29] This is because, in literature and music, there exists an alphabet of characters and signs that assures the orthographic identity of the work:

> In painting, on the contrary, with no such alphabet of characters, none of the pictorial properties—-none of the properties the picture has as such—is distinguished as constitutive; no such feature can be dismissed as contingent, and no deviation as insignificant. The only way of ascertaining that the *Lucretia* before us is genuine is thus to establish the historical fact that it is the actual object made by Rembrandt. Accordingly, physical identification of the product of the artist's hand, and consequently the conception of forgery of a particular work, assume a significance in painting that they do not have in literature.[30]

This is what Benjamin calls "its presence in time and space" (*Illuminations*, 220), except that he does not explain that the problem he raises in relation to the "work of art" in general applies only to "autographic" works. But Goodman, who is concerned with symbolic classifications, is not interested in the fact that the development of technical reproduction

produces *arts of the image for which the problem of authenticity does not arise.* This is a central question for Benjamin. The art of the ready-made (and Benjamin underscores Dadaism's anticipation of the later problems of reproduction) often presents an object fabricated as part of a series, with no original, as an authentic object; if only from the fact of its presentation, the object presented, whose secondary qualities the artist foregrounds, preserves a certain uniqueness. In the case of film, that uniqueness disappears; every exact copy is identical to the "original," without even needing the sort of system of notation that exists for literature and music.

Precisely in relation to the ready-made, Arthur Danto seeks to show, against Goodman, that what constitutes a work of art is not a difference in perception between an ordinary object and its artistic equivalent but the conceptual difference between any ordinary object and an object interpreted in the light of a theory: "To see something as art at all demands nothing less than this, an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art. Art is the kind of thing that depends for its existence upon theories; without theories of art, black paint *is* just black paint and nothing more."[31] What Danto calls "artistic theory"—a historically defined criterion that nevertheless disregards aesthetic value—Benjamin designates either as "tradition" (founded in a "ritual") or "politics." According to Benjamin, the only perceptions of a work of art that remain are either the decadent forms of ritual and contemplation or the lucid forms of a political reading.

It may be true that there is ultimately no politically indifferent reading of a work of art; but the fact that the reading of a work of art is politically *grounded* is not enough to produce a reading that is both *aesthetic*—attentive to the requirements of the work of art as medium of experience and thus as distinct from a cognitive communication—and aesthetically *adequate.* And if the political reading does not take the aesthetic into account, it also runs a grave risk of being inadequate from the political point of view.

Since, for Benjamin, the idea of the autonomy of art is linked to its magical and religious aura, it no longer has any raison d'être; it now appears purely illusory. At the same time, the true history of art, which considers Greek, medieval, Renaissance, and modern works of art, loses its value, as does the history of aesthetics, which, ever since the eighteenth century, has sought to establish the autonomy of its domain: "When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever" (*Illuminations,* 226). As in Nietzsche's work, the history of culture is traced back to the history of an illusion or a false sublimation. This reduction throws overboard both the ideological aspects of theology and idealism and the elements of a theory of specificity proper to aesthetic logic, which was still present in Benjamin's "theological" writings.

From this perspective, Benjamin purely and simply sets aside the debates on the artistic character of photography and cinema. "Much futile

thought had been devoted to the question of whether photography is an art. The primary question—whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art—was not raised" (*Illuminations,* 227). But it is one thing to transform the entire nature of art, and another to set aside any aesthetic criterion in order to turn immediately to pragmatic or political criteria. Benjamin no longer even asks about the aesthetic quality of works of art. Only the general role of cinematic technique in modern society interests him:

> For contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. And that is what one is entitled to ask from a work of art. (*Illuminations,* 234)

But cinematic technique as such has no more significance—artistic or nonartistic—than does the painter's technique: It all depends on what an artist makes of it. Otherwise, the industry of "popular" movies would be progress as such beyond modern painting, which is what Benjamin in fact suggests, despite his reservations about purely commercial cinema. He confuses technical progress with the progress of art, instrumental rationality with aesthetic rationality. "The Work of Art" stems from the ideology of progress denounced in Benjamin's late works: from an idea of the "wind of history" blowing toward technical development.

Because of its vagueness, the Benjaminian concept of aura is no longer even operative. It is obviously possible to change its meaning, but in so doing we would run the risk of returning to the trivial sense of an "atmospheric" value of the work of art. The *successful work of art* has the "aura" of its artistic authenticity; in contrast, a nonauratic work created by means of the most advanced technologies of reproduction may have no more than symptomatic interest. The opposition Benjamin sees between theater and cinema, between the "here and now" of the aura and reproduction, is not tenable:

> The aura which, on the stage, emanates from Macbeth, cannot be separated for the spectators from that of the actor. However, the singularity of the shot in the studio is that the camera is substituted for the public. Consequently, the aura that envelops the actor vanishes, and with it the aura of the figure he portrays. (*Illuminations,* 229)

The aura supposedly disappears because of the mere presence of the camera. But the camera is not independent of the human gaze, which, as

in the theater, directs the actor; moreover, that gaze directs the camera, and thus, *that aura* does not disappear in film. In addition, whether at the theater or at the cinema, that aura is not constitutive of *art.* The "magic of presence" is not enough to confer on the work as a whole an auratic quality. Even the best actor loses his aura when he is badly directed in a badly written work.

It is just as difficult to maintain the analogy that Benjamin establishes between, on the one hand, the Dadaists' desacralization of art through "the studied degradation of their material" (*Illuminations,* 237), which prevents the viewer from adopting a contemplative attitude toward it, and, on the other, the "shock" provoked merely by the technique of cinema:

> No sooner has the eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested. . . . Like all shocks, [that of film] should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind. By means of its technical structure, the film has taken the physical shock effect out of the wrappers in which Dadism had, as it were, kept it inside the moral shock effect. (*Illuminations,* 238)

Once again, this confuses the medium and the message, the mechanical shock and the aesthetic shock. For the same reason, Benjamin will later compare the succession of cinematic images to the mechanical movement of an assembly line, thus reversing his once-positive evaluation of film. It goes without saying that this same cinematic technique can serve—and does serve in most cases—to present the most traditional plots, with no common ground with avant-garde literature or painting. However attractive Charlie Chaplin might be, it is for all the wrong reasons that Benjamin distinguishes between the masses' "progressive" attitude toward his films and the "backward"—because "contemplative"—attitude of that same audience toward Pablo Picasso's paintings and sculptures. Most of these objections were in fact made immediately by Adorno, in the name of the critical rigor of the early Benjamin himself.

Unlike the observations made in the essay on photography, the theory of the aura as it is developed in "The Work of Art" rests on an anthropological hypothesis. According to the first version of the text:

> Film's function is to train man in his apperceptions and the new reactions that the use of mechanical equipment conditions, whose role in his life is increasing almost daily. To make the immense technical apparatus of

> our age the object of human innervation—that is the historical task in which the true sense of film resides. (*G.S.*, 1:444)

Benjamin reduces "the theory of perception that among the Greeks bore the name 'aesthetics' " (*G.S.*, 1:466) to an exercise relating to the forms that allow humanity to adapt to a dangerous environment, whether it consists of primitive beasts or modern wars.

What can "the politicization of art" mean from such a perspective? How is politics to be substituted for ritual? There is nothing in the text to indicate that it might be a question of something besides a pure and simple rejection of the aura, of cult value, and of the contemplative or meditative attitude before the work of art. In Benjamin's view, cinematic technique as such is political, inasmuch as it allows and calls for a "simultaneous collective reception" and incarnates the critique of "traditional conceptions of art" (*Illuminations,* 231), and inasmuch as every individual can now be found on either side of the camera: "Any man today can lay claim to being filmed" (*Illuminations,* 231). In the preface to "The Work of Art," the concepts of creativity (already manhandled in the essay on Kraus), of genius, of the value of eternity, and of mystery were ruled out (*Illuminations,* 218). This radical thesis finds its explanation here, even though Benjamin glimpses neither the dogmatic use that could be made of it nor the spasms of a generalized amateurism that could lay claim to such a disqualification. With the aura, Benjamin eliminates any particular artistic competence, just as he sets aside any specific critical competence. As in sports, everyone is supposedly an "expert" on the film representing everyday reality—whose aesthetic approaches are entirely set aside. "With regard to the screen," writes Benjamin, "the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide" (*Illuminations,* 234). But what does criticism consist in if the aesthetic sphere and its own criteria are "liquidated" along with the aura? It can only be a criticism of what is represented, apart from any aesthetic mediation of images. The pretext for that liquidation is provided by the *star system,* which—like the rubber print in photography—artificially reconstitutes the aura, even *outside* works of art:

> The film responds to the shriveling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the "personality" outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the capital of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony spell of a commodity. (*Illuminations,* 231, translation slightly modified)

From that moment on, Benjamin can no longer grant classical cinema the magic of an aura emanating from the presence of an actor or an actress,

as showcased by a great film director; he ignores the aura of black-and-white photography, camera movements, and colors. In "The Work of Art," the human face has lost the central role it still had in the study on photography: "It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face" (*Illuminations*, 226).[32] By "refuge" he means a last escape in the face of technical progress and politics. Benjamin thus no longer insists on the return of the face in Russian cinema.

"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" may be the extreme form of Benjamin's *nihilism* in the economy of his oeuvre. The "decline" of the aura, the "liquidation" of tradition, and the disappearance of the human are the expression of a fundamentalism that expects redemption to come only out of the ruins of false and illusory reality: "Nature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away," writes Benjamin in 1920. "To strive after such passing, even for those stages of man that are nature, is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism" ("Theologico-Political Fragment," *Reflections*, 313); "if necessary, to outlive culture . . . laughing" (*G.S.*, 2:219), we read in "Erfahrung und Armut" (1933). This nihilistic background combines with the desire to improve on Brecht's radicality.

Having pushed his approval of reductive and regressive tendencies to the limits of cynicism, Benjamin will change his mind in 1936 and, in a third phase of his oeuvre, will once more question the beneficent effects of the "liquidation" of the aura. We read the first indication of this shift in "The Storyteller," but the most explicit text in this respect is "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," which is also a self-portrait.

In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," we find an evaluation of photography that cannot be reconciled with the earlier texts except in its observation of a crisis in perception. Benjamin interprets modernity in both Freudian and Proustian terms, seeing in the decline of the aura a specific deficiency of memory due to the shocks modern humanity has experienced. This decline is thus not simply the emancipation from an illusory appearance but, rather, a pathological phenomenon; disillusion does not compensate for the liquidation of tradition:

> If the distinctive feature of the images that rise from the *mémoire involontaire* is seen in their aura, then photography is decisively impli-

> cated in the phenomenon of the "decline of the aura." What was inevitably felt to be inhuman, one might even say deadly, in daguerreotypy was the (prolonged) looking into the camera, since the camera records our likeness without returning our gaze. (*Illuminations,* 187–188)

"Returning the gaze" is now the expression of auratic experience in relation, more precisely, to nonhuman realities: "To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return" (*Illuminations,* 188). A painting can thus possess an aura, whereas photography, according to Benjamin, excludes the exchange of gazes by placing man in a confrontation with the camera. Estranged from involuntary memory, photography knows nothing of the beautiful (*Illuminations,* 188). "The Work of Art" said nothing less, but was overjoyed to see the disappearance of the phantasmagoria linked to appearance and inherited from ritual.

In "The Work of Art," painting is seen as an art incapable of addressing a mass public and hence obsolete in comparison to the arts of technical reproduction. The last essay on Baudelaire returns to more traditional conceptions. Cinema, which in 1935 was the canonical art of modernity, is now assimilated to alienated labor (*Illuminations,* 175).

Benjamin reaches this conclusion based on the fact that photography is entirely a function of voluntary memory. According to him, this kind of memory is unfamiliar with the distancing of time, the aura, and the memory of prehistory and origins that characterize involuntary memory and the beautiful in general. Yet, just as a photograph can be "spoiled" by an inadvertent movement or a momentary grimace, it can also "succeed" precisely because the camera does not control its object, or at least controls it much less than does the painter, who depends on no mechanical imprint manifesting itself on the canvas. It is thus not for *that* reason that the beautiful is inaccessible to photography. Furthermore, we must admit that there exist aesthetic criteria constitutive of a photographer's *work of art,* whose qualities are not due simply to the chance events of the shot.

To those who, like Scholem and Adorno, disapproved of "The Work of Art," Benjamin responded that he had sacrificed the aura because that was the only way to remain faithful to the theological issues of art, to a mode of thinking to which art offers an essential knowledge. If that theology of catastrophe is not enough to legitimate artistic modernity, then we must also abandon *that* concept of aura and explain in some other way the magical effect of certain works of art.

The essay on Baudelaire tries to show that the aura of his poetic works is due to the fact that the artist has given up the poet's romantic aura. Under the rubric of the "sacrifice of the aura," Benjamin formulates an aesthetics

of negativity, which Adorno will later develop. What Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory* calls "the redemption of appearance" corresponds to what in Benjamin's late works is a "liquidation of the aura" by the culture industry, which "The Work of Art" seemed to applaud. According to Adorno, the aura belongs to objectified, successful works of art—more than successful, because true—which their dynamic as a whole fleetingly reveals. Authentic works of art, even though inhuman through their rigor, make no concessions to preserving the human they seem to deny. The magic of works of art is thus linked to an idea of humanity that is sometimes pushed to the point of a shocking inhumanity so as not to betray the *idea* of humanity: to remain faithful to utopia.

Whether naive, as in the authenticity of the old photograph, or terrible, as in the brushwork that surrounds the mutilated beings of Vincent Van Gogh or Francis Bacon, the aura is always a moving experience. It reminds us that we share a fragile humanity surrounded by a fleeting halo of light; it is a kind of appeal to solidarity. For precisely that reason, it is not certain that the aura is objectifiable in Adorno's sense. Great works of art can be without any apparent aura; minor works sometimes have that magic. The Benjaminian theory does not illuminate this phenomenon; that is not its goal. Bataille's oeuvre, an inquiry into the moral aspect of the aura—into the "sacred horror" that, for example, emerges from the work of Edouard Manet—is perhaps more instructive in this regard.

Everything indicates that the aura is not the most *artistic* aspect of a work of art. It is, rather, an affective charge received from the context or the time; it can be a sense of scandal or catastrophe—like that surrounding the *Olympia* or Duchamp's urinal, which brutally confront us with the reverse side of sublimation—or that which, in historical anticipation, emerges from Kant's writings. Just as there is in the beautiful an aspect of chance that is not at the disposition of the artist, the aura seems to be the sign of unlikely happiness or the threat of death; it is a part of the humanity that is threatened and captivated by a work of art. There is an aura of childhood, of happiness, of limitless possibilities suddenly glimpsed, and there is an aura of translucid old age, of the convict sentenced to death. The distance imposed by the aura may be linked to these inaccessible limits.

## *EMANCIPATION FROM THE YOKE OF ART*

The primacy of the political over the aesthetic reading, clearly asserted in "The Author as Producer" in 1934, is one of the fundamental hypotheses on which *Paris Arcades* was based. Benjamin formulated this project in 1935, a few months before drafting "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which, in fact, develops perspectives introduced in the

outline of the *Arcades* project. The 1935 Exposé of *Paris Arcades* and the essay "The Work of Art" thus illuminate each other.

In writing these texts, Benjamin, as he often did, was responding to contradictory expectations. On the one hand, he was seeking to satisfy Brecht's imperatives, namely, to purge any trace of "theology" or "metaphysics" from his thinking and to develop an immediately applicable theory of cultural politics. On the other hand, the members of the Frankfurt School, in particular Adorno, were expecting from *Paris Arcades* the philosophical and aesthetic dimension that was lacking in Marx's oeuvre. To encourage him to write what would become the 1935 Exposé, Adorno wrote to Benjamin on 6 November 1934: "You know that I consider this work truly the share of original philosophy that it is incumbent upon us to write" (*G.S.* 5:1106). And again, on 20 May 1935: "I consider the *Arcades* not only the center of your philosophy but the last word that philosophy can today pronounce" (*G.S.*, 7:856). As Adorno explained to Horkheimer, "It is an effort to decipher the nineteenth century as 'style,' through the category of commodity understood as a dialectical image" (*G.S.*, 7:860). As an enthusiastic reader of the early writings of Benjamin, Adorno idealized the project and made it his own concern. That is why he continued to respond to the fragments he came to know with his own conception of a "critique of ideology."[33] Benjamin was attempting to do justice to two imperatives, all the while defending himself against Brecht's philosophical simplifications and against a tendency toward elitism that he suspected in Adorno, the student of Alban Berg.

The ambitious project changed at the beginning of the 1930s, when Benjamin abandoned his original idea of a "dialectical fairy play" in the spirit of *Einbahnstrasse* to turn, under the influence of the critiques of Horkheimer and Adorno, toward a more sociological, more "Marxist" project. The experience of the city, half Proustian and half surrealist, that had been at the origin of the project then had to find refuge in another, more literary form: *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert* (A Berlin childhood around 1900).

In the 1935 Exposé for *Paris Arcades*, the problem of the aura appears only marginally and indirectly. But the sacrifice of art in the name of its perceptive, adaptive, and therapeutic functions, as it would be defended in "The Work of Art," was already clearly announced. In the service of the commodity (but fundamentally, by virtue of technical development or "productive forces") the nineteenth century emancipated all forms of figuration and creation—from architecture to painting to literature—from art. Benjamin even went so far as to compare this process to the way that "the sciences freed themselves from philosophy in the sixteenth [century]" (*Reflections,* 161). That comparison makes of *art* and *philosophy obstacles to the autonomous development of technology and science.* In the spirit of positivism, they

are assimilated to the theological legacy that kept guard on thought and creation in an authoritarian manner and to a mystifying appearance that surrounded human productions before their liberation from tradition. We can gauge the difficulty inherent in that theory when we remember the systematic importance that Benjamin gave to art in his early works, that of anticipating doctrine. His abandonment of art can then be explained only by the fact that he is convinced of the imminence of the great historical turning point. At the slightest doubt regarding its imminence, it was inevitable that Benjamin would once more take up art's defense.

Art nouveau, then, "represents art's last attempt to escape from its ivory tower, which is besieged by technology" (*Reflections*, 154--155). Benjamin attempts to explain all modernity's forms of expression through a dual determination, which in fact he does not differentiate. According to Benjamin, architecture has passed into the hands of construction engineers; the reproduction of nature has fallen to photography, advertising, internal architecture, and urbanism; and literature is now controlled by the large presses. In the first place, this dynamic is inherent in technical development: "As architecture begins to outgrow art in the use of iron construction, so does painting in the panoramas" (*Reflections*, 149); second, it is part of the phantasmagorical context of the commodity: "All these products are on the point of going to market as commodities. But they hesitate on the brink. From this epoch stem the arcades and interiors, the exhibitions and panoramas. They are residues of a dream world" (*Reflections*, 162, translation slightly modified).

The relation between the emancipation of technology and the entry into the world of the commodity is not clearly articulated. We do not know whether these "products" are hesitating because they draw back before technology or because they refuse to become commodities. Benjamin confuses in a single historical complex a technical principle that functions only unconsciously (*Reflections*, 148)—whereas an aesthetic *consciousness* constructs factories in the form of houses, railroad stations in the shape of chalets, and metal supports designed on the model of Pompeiian columns—and a commodity principle that engenders its *own* appearances, those of fetishism, which are at the origin of the "phantasmagoria" of modern society. Any aesthetic principle intervening in the use of technology, whether it expresses the sensibility of an age or different ways of seeing—ironic, futurist, nostalgic, naive, aggressive, sophisticated, and so on—is subsumed under the single conception of an archaic aesthetic consciousness. Such a radical negation of the aesthetic mode of validity could only lead to an impasse.

The 1935 and 1939 Exposés of *Paris Arcades* can be distinguished by the relative weight they give each of these two aspects, the technological and the aesthetic. In 1935—as the final summary of the 1935 version,

which was suppressed in the 1939 version, shows—the emphasis is placed on the substitution of technology for art, a substitution that is equivalent to a *suppression* of illusory appearance. But at the same time, the phantasmagoria engendered by commodity society—the arcades, the flaneur, the interior—include an aspect of utopia that shapes an aspiration to transcend the society of class, a utopia that Benjamin seeks to liberate from its ideological cocoon. In 1939, the substitution of technology for art moves to the background. Commodity society is under the influence of the phantasmagoria, associated with mythic anxiety; any utopian aspect has disappeared. In contrast, this version introduces a distinction between Baudelaire's art, his conception of the beautiful and of modernity, and the ideological ennoblement of technological necessities for "artistic pseudo-ends" (*G.S.,* 5:1257) that we find in Georges-Eugène Haussmann's urbanism: The "beauty" of views masks the political intention to control the city by the monied class, while the beauty of the Baudelairean work of art is authentically artistic and virtually critical.

The two diagnoses of the age are quite different. In the two Exposés, the social space is dominated by the phantasmagoria constitutive of nineteenth-century culture: the interpenetration of the most modern and the most ancient, of avant-garde technology and imaginary regressions; the relation of *compensation* between, on the one hand, technology and a market that are more and more anonymous and, on the other, the interiors of houses, more and more often erected as a shell for the personality itself, the receptacle for traces, accents in velvet and fur, collections that save objects from the anonymity of relations of exchange. But, in the place of the utopian aspect of phantasmagoria that the first version of the Exposé maintained, the second substitutes the truth of an authentic art—that of Baudelaire in "Les sept vieillards" (The seven old men)—and the critical force of a supreme phantasmagoria: that of the aged Blanqui, who, in *L'éternité par les astres* (Eternity by the stars), formulates the thesis of the eternal return of the same on an earth without hope, prey to that "mythic anxiety" already evoked in the essay on Goethe. In 1935, the dynamic of productive forces seems irresistibly to undermine the universe of phantasmagoria: "In the convulsions of the commodity economy we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled" (*Reflections,* 162). In 1939, after his 1938 discovery of *L'éternité par les astres,* written by Auguste Blanqui while in prison, Benjamin is not far from adopting the point of view of the old rebel, for whom humanity is "a damned figure":

> All it can hope for that is new will prove to be nothing but a reality that has always been present; and this novelty will be as unable to provide it with a liberating solution as a new fashion is able to renew society. Blanqui's cosmic speculation includes this lesson: that humanity will be

> prey to a mythic anxiety to the extent that the phantasmagoria occupy a place. (*G.S.*, 5:1256)

In 1939—as in 1935—Benjamin is convinced that "the age has not been able to find a new social order to correspond to its own technological horizons" (*G.S.*, 5:1257). If technical development is not enough to bring down the reign of phantasmagoria, the entire problem consists in knowing how to bring about the awakening that will liberate us from them. Technology has a subversive function, which society must learn to seize in order not to be prey to myth. Technology strips the world of its illusory dreams; in contrast, the development of the market—the perpetuation of the "old" social order—favors phantasmagoria.

In 1935, such dreams were not entirely devoid of value. Rather than being reduced to ideology, they bear within them utopia. What is an illusory and deadly appearance in the technological context becomes fruitful appearance in the context of social anticipation. Regarding Charles Fourier, whom he admired, Benjamin develops a theory of the "collective unconscious," to which he links dialectical images and dream images. All his work in *Paris Arcades,* as he conceived it in 1935, undertakes to decipher these images according to their dual status, ideological and utopian. To the observation that the new technology presents itself first in the form of the old—like the metallic support disguised as a Greek column—Benjamin adds two theoretical ideas: first, that of "wishful fantasies" (*Reflections,* 148), which attempt to compensate for the inadequacies of a given society; and second, that of an anchorage of these utopias in the collective unconscious, the depository of archaic promises that reemerge when a society breaks with the recent past, with what has aged. He thinks that through the imaginary, from which emerge the archaic images of the collective unconscious, the projection of a society into the future is always indebted to the origin.

He resorts to the concept of the collective unconscious, the bearer of archaic images—Adorno immediately pointed out the similarity to the ideas of Carl Gustav Jung (*Correspondence,* 497)—for two reasons. First, he attempts to situate in society the operation—both messianic and surrealist—by which he himself extracts an explosive moment from the past: The "collective unconscious" is the Benjaminian critique transformed into a social subject aspiring, unbeknownst to itself, to actualize utopia. Second, he has no concept of social modernity that, given the present constellation, would allow him to explain the utopias through which certain social groups project themselves into the future.

Regarding Baudelaire, he explains the second of these ideas:

> Modernity . . . is always quoting primeval history. This happens here through the ambiguity attending the social relationships and products

> of this epoch. Ambiguity is the pictorial image of dialectics, the law of dialectics seen at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image therefore a dream image. Such an image is presented by the pure commodity: as fetish. Such an image are the arcades, which are both house and streets. Such an image is the prostitute, who is saleswoman and commodity in one. (*Reflections,* 157, translation slightly modified)

This idea attempts to integrate into Marxian theory Benjamin's own intuitions concerning his philosophy of the origin. The "dialectic at a standstill"—which will also be at issue in the Benjaminian theory of history—is an attempt to place in the service of political commitment the very principle of the critical approach, which consists in interpreting images as a function of their truth content. The standstill is that of the Hölderlinian "caesura" or the "inexpressive," which suspends the movement of images in order to quote them before the tribunal of truth. Placed in relation to the "ambiguity" of images, the dialectic refers to the critical and political sense of an interpretation that rests on Marxian concepts such as the dependence of the superstructure and the omnipresence of the fetishism of the commodity. The ambiguity is, in fact, that of an essence contradicted by a function: The satisfaction promised by the commodity is annulled by the systematic character of its economic mode of operation. In that way, Benjamin attempts to integrate his own intuitions into a Marxist-inspired critique of ideology. But the aesthetic experience does not allow itself to be so directly instrumentalized by social criticism.

Within the framework of the work on *Paris Arcades,* Baudelaire's literary oeuvre is difficult to integrate into the functionalist schema applied to other cultural phenomena. Through the phantasmagoria of the flaneur, the new, and the always-the-same, illustrated by such poems as "Le voyage" (The voyage), Benjamin attempts to *deduce* this poetic oeuvre from the fetishism of the commodity. The flaneur, the idle man-about-town, becomes the model for alienated humanity on the threshold of commodity society: still a romantic dreamer, already a client of the future department store, and a salesman of his "lived experiences" (*Erlebnis*) in the literary marketplace. Under his eyes, the city still presents the idyllic aspects of landscape, and his "mode of life still surrounds the approaching desolation of city life with a propitiatory luster. The *flâneur* is still on the threshold, of the city as of the bourgeois class" (*Reflections,* 156).

In conformity with a classical figure of the Marxist thinking of his time—but already inscribed within his own logic of the "disenchantment of art"—Benjamin participates in the masochistic operation of the leftist intellectual who denounces his or her own autonomy. The autonomy of art and thought is considered incompatible with political commitment; as a result, Benjamin no longer argues in terms of relations of force. Thus, he

also seeks to show that the intellectual of the bourgeois era is the complacent victim of false consciousness. This intellectual is convinced of the autonomy of his approach, even though the only way to escape the mechanisms of bourgeois society would be to renounce autonomy and indirectly aim at reconquering it through political consciousness. The flaneur's illusion is that, in his person, "the intelligentsia pays a visit to the marketplace, ostensibly to look around, yet in reality to find a buyer. In this intermediate phase, in which it still has patrons but is already beginning to familiarize itself with the market, it appears as bohemianism" (*Reflections,* 156). "Baudelaire's poetry draws its strength" (*Reflections,* 157) from the pathos of rebellion proper to this social milieu, where "professional conspirators" are also recruited—an ambiguous group to which the future Napoleon III and Blanqui are linked. But it remains fully prisoner to the ambiguity that characterizes the productions and social relations of that time.

The same is true for the notion of novelty. "*Au fond de l'inconnu pour trouver le Nouveau!*" (To the depths of the unknown to find the New!)—Benjamin laconically comments on this last line of "Le voyage":

> The last journey of the *flâneur*: death. Its destination: the new. . . . Novelty is a quality independent of the intrinsic value of the commodity. It is the origin of the illusion inseverable from the images produced by the collective unconscious. It is the quintessence of false consciousness, whose indefatigable agent is fashion. The illusion of novelty is reflected, like one mirror in another, in the illusion of perpetual sameness. . . . The art that begins to doubt its task and ceases to be "inseparable from utility" (Baudelaire) must make novelty its highest value. (*Reflections,* 157–158)

Down to the smallest details in Baudelaire's universe of images, Benjamin seeks to explain the poet's oeuvre by means of the determinism of bourgeois society, inasmuch as this poetry pushes to the extreme what is illusory and ideological in the collective unconscious.

The work on *Paris Arcades* raises the more general problem of a sociology of cultural phenomena. Benjamin embraces an undertaking that goes beyond the framework of literary criticism. His concept of the flaneur dissimulates a Marxist theory that questions the supposed autonomy of the bourgeois intellectual, just as his concept of a commodity indissociable from the advertising slogan of novelty is not revealed as such through an interpretation of poetic texts. They are in reality *applied* or *brought in* from the outside, from a preexisting theory. Benjamin is not seeking to find in Baudelaire an articulated reaction to the phenomena of commodity society; he views his poetry as one of the symptomatic manifestations of the fetishism of commodities. Art for art's sake and its extension, "the total artwork," are reduced to ideological conceptions that, even as they "abstract from the

social existence of man" (*Reflections,* 158), attempt to "isolate art from the development of technology" (*Reflections,* 158).

Hence the problematic character of the idea of a disappearance of art in favor of technology. Benjamin no longer has any concept of what constitutes the value proper to works of art, of what is inherent in their imperative for validity, independent of the ideological or utopian function they perform in a given social context. Even if the architecture of arcades is a function of the commercial ends that turn technical innovations away from their natural tendency, it is nevertheless not reducible to those ends. Furthermore and a fortiori, Baudelaire's oeuvre cannot be viewed as a mere epiphenomenon of the fetishism of commodities. Unlike architecture, advertising, bourgeois interiors, and urbanism, this oeuvre is itself a reflection on its age and does not limit itself to "expressing" the age's illusions and phantasmagorias.

Yet in the folders collected in preparation for drafting *Paris Arcades,* the folder dedicated to Baudelaire represents four times the volume of the largest of the other folders, and the book on Baudelaire—originally merely a chapter of *Paris Arcades*—tends to absorb the whole project. The work on Baudelaire undertaken in 1937–1938 reveals the impossibility of dealing in the same way with the *symptom* of the arcades, an architectural oddity without the slightest reflective content, and Baudelaire's poetic *oeuvre,* which includes critical thinking and a truth content; that is undoubtedly one of the reasons that, in the end, the book on Baudelaire absorbed the *Paris Arcades* project.

In the 1935 Exposé, as in "The Work of Art" (in which the process of rationalization leads to the magic of fetishism and to a wordless technology), aesthetic value is sacrificed to the functions of adaptation and instrumentality.[34] This reduction is due to the too broad use of the concept of *appearance.* The analysis of *reification*—an extension of the concept of the fetishism of the commodity as Lukács, for example, developed it in *History and Class Consciousness*—and the complementary notion of *phantasmagoria* (also Marxist in origin), are superposed in the theory of *aesthetic* appearance, whose critique Benjamin continued to develop beginning with his study of romanticism. This superimposition of the two concepts of appearance leads to an error, inasmuch as aesthetic appearance cannot be reduced to a false appearance: As the essay on Goethe had remarked, it is the normative form in which the work of art presents itself, a fiction that suspends certain pragmatic functions of signs. In this radical phase of his oeuvre, Benjamin extends the concept of phantasmagoria to aesthetic appearance itself. For him, the philosopher's task seems to be to wrench humanity away from the dream state into which the phantasmagoria of commodity society has plunged it.

In seeking to place his thinking in the service of social transformation, Benjamin interprets the confusion of categories constitutive of fetishism as

the dream of a social subject who needs to be reawakened. From antiquity, the relation between dream (sleep) and awakening has been a constant theme of philosophy: Dream is considered the deceptive and illusory state of subjectivity, and awakening the state of rational lucidity and the absence of illusion. In the context of the philosophy of the subject, the emancipation from illusion and dream is a duty and a rigorous asceticism. Benjamin had always interpreted works of art as both bearing a truth content and as masked by a veil that required a destructive task, in which historical time and critical intervention converged. Here he attempts to apply that critical method to society as a whole, which, in its state of dream and phantasmagoria, is in some sense a work of art that has to be submitted to a process of "mortification." The destructive work of historical time has been transformed into a dynamic of productive forces, of technology that, for its side, tends to efface the mystifying aspect of art in architecture, in urbanism, in utilitarian objects, and in interiors. The conception of the "dialectical image" is in this sense the sociological transposition of a method of literary criticism. In bringing out the truth content of images, Benjamin attempts to provoke society's awakening. But he does not realize that such a therapeutic approach toward a society in its entirety presumes too much of the forces of a critical subject.

Benjamin did not maintain the program formulated in 1935. *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle*[35]—that collection of disparate texts grouped by "folder" as it is read today—is in fact the construction site of three successive projects, all of which failed: (1) a "dialectical fairy play" that would have resembled *Einbahnstrasse* and certain surrealist books such as Louis Aragon's *Le paysan de Paris* (The Parisian peasant); (2) a revolutionary theory of the end of autonomous art and the decline of the aura, a theory illustrated by the 1935 Exposé and "The Work of Art"; and (3) beginning in 1936, a philosophical rehabilitation of the aura and the beautiful as conditions for a life and an art worthy of the name, where mass art is not up to the task of compensating for its disappearance. This last conception is illustrated in "The Storyteller" and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." We find elements of these three approaches in almost every one of the folders that make up the *Paris Arcades* project.

There is, therefore, no single perspective in this labyrinth. The work probably could not have been finished except in the literary form of the first project, which would have dealt with the surrealist discoveries related to the shock provoked by obsolete objects, the pathologies of space for the flaneur and of time for the gambler, the nineteenth century as a hell of immanence comparable to the baroque universe. The other two projects are problematic for complementary reasons. The second abstracts away from the intrinsic value of artistic (or philosophical) phenomena by subordinating them to two types of more powerful interests: economic interests linked to

collective phantasmagoria and revolutionary interests emancipated from aesthetic appearance and phantasmagoria. The third project, which reintroduces aesthetic logic, nevertheless attempts to reconcile it with the functionalism of the second project. During this phase, *Paris Arcades* was in fact transformed into a book on Baudelaire. The decline of the aura became the explicit theme of Baudelaire's poetry, which, as an oeuvre, preserves an element of aura, the element of aesthetic value, through the poetic authenticity of negation.

It is primarily in the second project that the emancipation of technology in relation to art is the central theme. At that time, Benjamin was seeking to improve on Brecht by requiring a change of function for the artist. "The Work of Art" assigns to cinema the task of abolishing the gulf between creators and receivers: Both can demand to be filmed and can judge, as experts, the quality of a film. Hence, "The Author as Producer" redefines the task of the writer: It is not to tame but, rather, to transform the "productive apparatus" (*Reflections,* 230). To transform it is to "overthrow another of the barriers, to transcend another of the antitheses that fetter the production of intellectuals" (*Reflections,* 230). Hence, "what we require of the photographer is the ability to give his picture the caption that wrenches it from modish commerce and gives it a revolutionary use value" (*Reflections,* 230, translation slightly modified). Among the barriers that need to be overthrown, the most important is that of exclusive competence: "The conventional distinction between author and public, which is upheld in the bourgeois press, begins in the Soviet press to disappear. For the reader is at all times ready to become a writer, that is, a describer, but also a prescriber. As an expert—even if not on a subject but only on the post he occupies—he gains access to authorship" (*Reflections,* 225).

To transform the apparatus of production is to devote all one's attention to the technology of the media used. According to Benjamin, who here becomes the spokesperson for Brecht, the writer must become an "engineer" (*Reflections,* 237). Not to transform the means of production is to "tame" them and maintain their routine. To transform them is to teach something to the public and to other technicians: "An author who teaches writers nothing teaches no one" (*Reflections,* 233). The contemporary writer, who cannot compete with film or radio, must attempt to use them and to learn from them. "This debate," writes Benjamin, "the epic theater has made its own affair" (*Reflections,* 235). It has done so by adopting the montage procedure characteristic of film. The songs that interrupt the action of the play "constantly counterac[t] an illusion in the audience. For such illusion is a hindrance to a theater that proposes to make use of elements of reality in experimental rearrangements" (*Reflections,* 235). The audience is called upon to adopt vis-à-vis real society the distanced and critical attitude that the actors and playwright adopt vis-à-vis the play.

Benjamin deals with literary techniques as an equivalent of labor within the framework of relations of production:

> Rather than ask, "What is the *attitude* of a work to the relations of production of its time?" I should like to ask, "What is its *position* in them?" This question directly concerns the function the work has within the literary relations of production of its time. It is concerned, in other words, directly with the literary *technique* of works. (*Reflections,* 222)

Although literature is invited to draw inspiration from cinematic techniques, which, however, it can never rival, it is manifestly cinema that, for contemporary production, has the canonical aesthetic value. In Benjamin's view, film is the form of art that best corresponds to the role of technology in modern society. He is convinced that the status of technology has been reversed over the course of history. Another innovative aspect of cinema is that it escapes the traditional criterion of *eternity,* inasmuch as it possesses a quality opposed to the definitive character of sculpture, namely, perfectibility: "A completed film is nothing less than a creation in a single spurt; it is composed of a succession of images which the editor must choose among—images that from the first to the last shot have been retouched at will" (*G.S.,* 1:446).

This choice on the part of the editor establishes the different shots in a hierarchy that makes the selected version that which has best passed the test of the apparatus. Once more, Benjamin thinks he can eliminate any aesthetic criterion in the traditional sense, as if the editor's choice is a purely technical performance: "The camera director . . . occupies a place identical with that of the examiner during aptitude tests" (*Illuminations,* 246). Benjamin forgets that the writer and the composer—and even the painter who chooses among his sketches for some element of the painting, or who paints "pentimenti"—have long worked toward "montage" based on aesthetic criteria, whose importance in the case of film he misunderstands.

In making film the distinguishing art form for the aesthetics of modernity, Benjamin inaugurates a type of reasoning that makes a fetish of the most advanced technology, independent of the significance of works of art. According to that reasoning, we would today have to give priority, a priori as it were, to computer art or electronic images, whatever the importance of the productions realized through these technologies. Such a valorization is not justified, since the "forces of production" are not aesthetically revolutionary except inasmuch as they set in place a potential for experience, criticism, and revelation. It is true that the use of the most advanced technologies has always been a determining factor for artists, but it has never sufficed in itself to guarantee the quality of a work of art.

Finally, just as Brecht's epic theater goes against the audience's illusion,

Benjamin thinks that cinematic technique manhandles the category of aesthetic *appearance,* this time within the artistic performance itself. In the second version of the German text of "The Work of Art," Benjamin defines appearance as the *magical* aspect of mimesis, to which he opposes the *ludic* aspect, which is linked to the second phase of technology.

> What goes hand in hand with the destruction of appearance, with the decline of the aura in works of art, is a formidable gain in the possibilities of play. The broadest possibility of play has been opened in film. In it, the element of appearance has been totally effaced in favor of the element of play. (*G.S.,* 7:369 n. 10)

He does not see that, independent of the genesis of cinematic images—in which artifice, tricks, and manipulation play an important role—the completed film presents a more convincing illusion of reality than does any other art form. That is a conclusion he should have drawn from his own observations:

> Its illusionary nature is that of the second degree, the result of cutting. That is to say, in the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with other similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology. (*Illuminations,* 233)

Benjamin attempts to show that, contrary to what happens at the theater, where, on principle, one "is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusionary" (*Illuminations,* 233), "[t]here is no such place for the movie scene that is being shot" (*Illuminations,* 322). But, unlike what happens in classical theater, where lighting and setting mask the stage as much as possible, film does not need to hide from the absent audience the equipment that surrounds the sound stage as the film is being made; the result of the final editing merely offers a more complete illusion, which in no way breaks with the tradition of the "beautiful appearance." The fact that this result is obtained in a situation in which "the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality" (*Illuminations,* 233) changes nothing. In fact, painting, contrary to what Benjamin thinks, is just as capable as film of setting out the genesis of the illusion by exposing the process of production. In a very traditional manner, Benjamin again asserts that "one is entitled to ask from a work of art" a reality whose aspect is "free of all equipment" (*Illuminations,* 234). Unlike

the cinema of the time, painting had long since begun to break with this dogma and was, in fact, ahead of cinema.

In a minor text of 1936, "Pariser Brief II. Malerei und Photographie," (Parisian letter II: Painting and photography; *G.S.*, 3:495–507), Benjamin rehabilitates painting, for which "The Work of Art" had left little future, by discovering in it a "usefulness," a political function. On the one hand, painting seems to be parasitical on photography, whose value as witness appeared most important to Benjamin at the time. In fact, if painters such as John Heartfield became photographers for political reasons, "the same generation has produced painters such as George Grosz or Otto Dix, whose work moves in the same direction." And Benjamin adds, "Painting has not lost its function" (*G.S.*, 3:506). He is speaking of caricature or of painting used to the same ends of denunciation as Heartfield's photomontage. Among the great caricaturists, such as Hieronymus Bosch, William Hogarth, Francisco Goya, and Honoré Daumier, Benjamin writes, "political knowledge" has profoundly permeated "physiognomic perception" (*G.S.*, 3:506). From this same point of view, he defends not only painting with a political subject but also nonrealist painting, whose effect is "destructive, purifying" in a Europe threatened by fascism, where there are countries that forbid these painters from painting. "What led to this prohibition," explains Benjamin, "was rarely the subject, but most often their manner of painting" (*G.S.*, 3:507). These painters paint at night with their windows covered.

> They rarely experience any temptation to paint "after nature." In fact, the pallid landscapes of their paintings, peopled with shadows or monsters, are not borrowed from nature but from the class State. . . . [These painters] know what is useful in an image today: any sign, public or secret, showing that fascism has encountered in man limits as insurmountable as those it encountered on the earthly globe. (*G.S.*, 3:507)

This text, though less dogmatic than "The Work of Art," does not move away from it in any fundamental way but submits all judgment on art to political criteria. The Manichaean situation, in a context in which Benjamin—true to the Marxist doctrine of the era—judges that liberalism is only an inconsistent fascism (*G.S.*, 3:496, 507), seems to justify a theory of art that places any consideration of aesthetic value to the account of the phantasmagoria of bourgeois society.

In 1936, a few months after he had drafted the first version of "The Work of Art," he thus reached a second turning point, relatively less brutal than the one that had led him from his first aesthetics to that of political commitment but that would nevertheless lead him to defend theses dialectically opposed to those that made up the radicality of "The Work of Art." The sacrifice of the aura—of that traditional substance of works of art in

whose name he had conceived his philosophy of language—was meaningless unless politics, allied with the most innovative technology, saved the essence of the "theological" *intention.* Several factors seem to have convinced Benjamin in 1936 to abandon the radical idea of the "liquidation of the aura." It was not a change in political attitude—he continued to write texts that were just as committed. What changed was his confidence both in the dynamic of technology and in the solidity of the political forces whose cause he had defended. In fact, the reservations and objections formulated both by Scholem and by Adorno regarding the 1935 essays seem this time to have left their mark. We might argue that it was not a real change in his thinking, inasmuch as he wrote, practically at the same time, his essay on Kafka and "The Author as Producer." But the essay on Kafka contains nothing that contradicts the radical theses of "The Work of Art." In contrast, the texts written as of 1936 frequently present ideas that are no longer compatible with the critique of the aura as it was developed in "The Work of Art." We must therefore admit that a change had intervened in Benjamin's thinking at the beginning of 1936.

Among the arguments that could be opposed to this thesis, at first glance the most difficult to refute is the argument that underscores the fact that Benjamin continued until 1938 to elaborate different versions of "The Work of Art." But we can interpret this as simply an effort to have the essay published in *German*; in fact, during Benjamin's lifetime, only a French translation was published, in the review for the Institut de Recherche Sociale (Institute of social research). Moreover, the modifications Benjamin made in the essay, just before he drafted "The Storyteller" in March–April 1936, concern in particular two central concepts of the essay: that of the masses and that of technology. Although the revisions do not entail any critical inquiry into the value of technical reproduction, a differentiation is made that indicates a certain embarrassment. Benjamin had justified the liquidation of the aura through the legitimate imperative of the modern *masses.* Yet a note to the second version of "The Work of Art" relativizes this concept by asserting that the proletariat, whose cohesion is grounded in an explicit solidarity, tends to suppress the existence of the masses (*G.S.*, 7:370). As for *technology,* the second German version, like the French version, differentiates between a first and a second phase of technology:

> [T]he first engages man as much as possible, the second as little as possible. The exploit of the first, if we dare say so, is human sacrifice, that of the second would be announced in the pilotless airplane guided from a distance by Hertzian waves. . . . Art is in solidarity with the first and with the second technology. [The first technology] truly aimed at the subjugation of nature—the second much more at a harmony of nature and humanity. The decisive social function of current art consists in

> initiating humanity into this "*harmonian*" game. That is especially the case for film. (*G.S.*, 1:716–717)

These reflections subvert the first version of the essay; in fact, they virtually invert its values. They tend to change the relation between the aura, which is in solidarity with the "first technology" through its magical character, and technical reproduction, which is in solidarity with the "second." With this hypothesis, it could no longer be a question either of an alienating effect of cinematic technique as such—and thus of a "productive force of alienated man"—or of a destructive effect on a tradition thus placed in peril. In an experimental and speculative manner, Benjamin is led to give to the concepts of the masses and of technology a more differentiated meaning, before retracting them altogether in "The Storyteller" and in the essays on Baudelaire, in which the masses and technical reproduction appear only in a negarive and destructive light.

## 3. The Price of Modernity

In Benjamin's "third aesthetic," art is no longer an immediate instrument of the revolution. But Benjamin also does not return to an aesthetics of the sublime. What appeared only by way of contrast in the first chapters of "The Work of Art," the decline of the aura that traditionally surrounded artistic phenomena, now becomes the object of a reevaluation. Benjamin inquires into the price to be paid for arriving at modernity. In the 1935 essay, the loss of traditional experience could be compensated for by a new collective experience symbolized by cinema. In what was to be the last period of his oeuvre, Benjamin doubts this possibility, seeing no analogous compensation in the fields of storytelling or lyric poetry.

Nothing has fundamentally changed in Benjamin's orientation toward an aesthetic of "truth." Faithful to a philosophy of art in the Kantian tradition developed by the romantics—Friedrich Schelling and Hegel—he remains opposed to the "subjective" tendency issuing from a Kantian aesthetics. Such an aesthetics of taste, appropriate for the analysis of the pleasure experienced in seeing a flower or ornamentation, does not allow for the realization of the significance and importance of a work of art—its historical stakes and its depth, dimensions that are not a matter of indifference for aesthetic judgment. Benjamin embraces the other side of the

Kantian aesthetics, which sees in beauty part of the thing in itself, inaccessible to discursive knowledge.

In a mystical definition, the last essay on Baudelaire defines the beautiful as the representation of the object of experience in the state of "resemblance." Such an objectivism, which neutralizes aesthetic judgment, cannot be said to be any more defensible. Nonetheless, Benjamin's analyses remain instructive in their penetration into what is *at stake* in art. When we discuss works of art, we do not limit ourselves to observations about "purely aesthetic" qualities. The artistic form has existential, cognitive, ethical, and political dimensions, all the more so since they stem from the formal coherence of the work of art itself and not from its explicit "message." Even though he confuses the levels of aesthetics and criticism, Benjamin shows in an exemplary fashion how a work of art can determine the interpretations of our individual lives and our era.

## *CHILDHOOD AND MEMORY*

From just before his departure from Germany and for almost the entire duration of his exile, until 1938—beginning with his first stay on the island of Ibiza in 1932, a period of his life that was marked by personal and economic difficulties that led him to seriously contemplate suicide, then in Berlin and in the different sites of his exile—Benjamin was working on numerous versions of *Berliner Kindheit* (A Berlin childhood). He published fragments of it in different journals and magazines. Written for the most part in the interval between the essays on Kraus and Kafka, *Berliner Kindheit* initiates the preponderance of memory in the last period of his oeuvre, a shift from the political strategy that dominated his second period. This collection of exemplary memories is constructed in the gap between the dream of the nineteenth century—which did not end in 1900—and the awakening represented by the entry into the twentieth. With an irony marked by nostalgia, Benjamin undertakes this work of memory, more Proustian than surrealist, regarding his experience of Berlin.

As he writes in the foreword to the last version, recently rediscovered in Paris, "I hope these images at least make readers feel how much this writer has been deprived of the security that surrounded him in childhood" (*G.S.*, 7:385). In 1932, he began to write his "Berlin Chronicle" to "vaccinate" himself in advance against the homesickness that exiles experience: "Just as the vaccine should not overtake the healthy body, the feeling of homesickness was not about to overtake my mind. I attempted to limit it by becoming conscious of the irremediable loss of the past, due not to biographical contingencies but to social necessities" (*G.S.*, 7:385). Benjamin undertakes to seize "*images* by means of which the experience of the big city is imprinted

in a child of the bourgeoisie" (*G.S.*, 7:385). He thus attempts to found a genre of the big city to correspond to one that had long existed for the experience of nature.

*Berliner Kindheit* has yet to render up its secrets.[1] It is clear, in any case, that we learn little from it—or that we learn only indirectly—about Berlin and much about the experience of the child who lived there during a historic epoch that had already become antiquated for the adult. The irony in the text signals the distance between the mind, a prisoner of the past, and the consciousness that reconstructs that vision of the past. It is a vision of objects and places that are too grand, around which mythologies of childhood and of an age that is itself childish—like a fairy tale—are crystallized.

Under the original title "A Berlin Chronicle," Benjamin assembled what is, first of all, a series of autobiographical texts. The final form, *Berliner Kindheit,* retains only the exemplary topography of a childhood spent in a city such as Berlin: "A kind of tête-à-tête between a child and the city of Berlin around 1900" (*G.S.*, 4:964). Having abandoned the task of composing a "dialectical fairy tale" on the arcades—a project that "permitted no direct figuration—unless it be an inadmissable 'poetic' one" (*Correspondence,* 506–507, letter of 16 August 1935), Benjamin felt free to give to the mythological aspect of the modern city the form of a series of childhood memories.

Two fragments from *Paris Arcades* suggest its philosophical background. Benjamin's desire for a disenchanted and lucid vision is always contradicted by his fear of seeing the world reduced to abstract signs. He cannot do without either myth or disenchantment, the archaic "dream" of a child's awareness or the awakening of the adult's acute memory. *Berliner Kindheit* is a subtle play on illusion, forgetting, faltering awareness, and involuntary memory, the occasion for a lucid deciphering of accumulated images. Benjamin underscores the importance of childhood for the symbolic appropriation of technical innovations: "Every childhood achieves something great, irreplaceable for mankind. Through its interest in technical phenomena, its curiosity about all kinds of discoveries and machinery, every childhood ties technological achievement to the old symbol-worlds" ("N" 2a, 1, p. 49). A complementary fragment indicates, in contrast, that the mythic aspect of the recent past is linked to a particular lack in modern society: "The prehistoric impulse to the past—this, too, at once a consequence and a precondition of technology—is no longer hidden, as it once was, by the tradition of church and family. The old prehistoric dread already envelops the world of our parents, because we are no longer bound to it by tradition" ("N" 2a, 2, p. 49).

Among the texts of *Berliner Kindheit,* "Das Telephon" (The telephone) illustrates this relation to technology. A mythical object as in Proust, the recently introduced telephone sows terror in the apartment by disturbing

not only the parents' nap "but also the era of the history of the world in the middle of which they were taking that nap" (*G.S.*, 4:243). "The voice talking there" has the omnipotence of myth:

> There was nothing to attenuate the strange and troubling violence with which it gripped me. I suffered, powerless, as it wrenched from me the respect for time, duty, and resolutions, negated my own reflection, and, just as the medium obeys the voice of the beyond that seizes her, I gave in to the first proposal that came to me over the telephone. (*G.S.*, 4:243)

"For the first time" is one of the most common expressions in *Berliner Kindheit.* In "Tiergarten," the first of his "prose poems,"[2] Benjamin calls the writer Franz Hessel "one acquainted with the land," the "Berlin peasant" who had initiated him into the secrets of the city: "The little stairways, the vestibules supported by columns, the friezes, the architraves of the villas near the Tiergarten—for the first time, we took them at their word" (*G.S.*, 4:238). This "first time" is that of adults who have gone off to discover the past. It hides a more distant origin: the inaccessible origin of repeated gestures that are buried in our bodies. Hence, most of the "first times" designate primitive experiences: I can "dream as I once learned to walk. But it is of no use to me. Now I know how to walk; I can no longer learn how" (*G.S.*, 4:267). "The first closet that opened when I wanted it to" (*G.S.*, 4:283) was one of the primitive victories over the malice of things, from which we draw all our self-assurance; the "first telephone calls" are archaic memories that go back to the mythical eras of childhood, an unprecedented reality irrupting in the space of humanity's experience. In the face of such a break with tradition, reason falters, and an actual apprenticeship is required to reintegrate that myth into the symbolic space.

"The first time" is also one of Benjamin's constant questions in his writings in *Paris Arcades.* Whether in the life of the individual or that of humanity, Benjamin is always watching for the inaugural moment of a form that will define the age: "The construction of the arcades is the advent of building in iron" (*Reflections,* 147); "in iron, an artificial building material makes its appearance for the first time in the history of architecture [since Rome]" (*Reflections,* 147, bracketed words not in English edition); Edgar Allan Poe is "the first physiognomist of the interior" (*Reflections,* 156). These questions of "origin" are linked to Benjamin's philosophy of language and his philosophy of history.[3] As the "unavoidable encounter between the sign and its referent as attested to even now in poetic language,"[4] the origin represents for him the moment just before the imprint of creation is forever dissociated from its object and the sign becomes arbitrary. It is the crucial moment toward which Benjamin's thought is continually attracted, as by a magnet.

Benjamin's writing is an incessant effort to restore the power of these origins through translation, criticism, and historical memory. Without such efforts, vital resources for humanity are in danger of being lost forever. But the "origin," "although an entirely historical category" (*Origin,* 45), is not to be confused with genesis. The origin, always incomplete and, because of this, always in quest of its completion, is reproduced throughout history: "There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history" (*Origin,* 45–46). This was also true during Benjamin's "materialist" period. Technology and inventions have their precursors: The arcade, heir to the archway and the heated pavilion, anticipates the department store just as, before cinema, there existed "photo booklets with pictures which flitted by the looker upon pressure of the thumb, thus portraying a boxing bout or a tennis match" (*Illuminations,* 249 n. 17; cf. *G.S.*, 4:304). It is always an authentic aspiration that is reproduced as an origin, an aspiration to happiness associated with knowledge but deflected from its finality by particular social interests that transform it into a phantasmagoria. Rediscovered childhood, the inaugural moment when an authentic experience is formed, is a source of happiness: "With the joy of remembering . . . another is fused: that of possession in memory. Today I can no longer distinguish them" (*Reflections,* 57). *Berliner Kindheit* proposes an archetypal image of that renewed origin, the image in which childhood, the fairy tale, and the philosophy of history intersect. Hence the image of the child in the pantry:

> Grateful and wild as a girl taken from her parents' house, the strawberry jam allowed itself to be taken without bread and by starlight as it were. . . . The hand, a youthful Don Juan, had soon penetrated into all the nooks and crannies, behind the collapsing piles and the falling heaps of things; a virginity renewed without complaint. (*G.S.*, 4:250)

The return to the origin, as Proust experienced it, is barred by all kinds of impediments that make of Berlin around 1900 a well-guarded safe. The obsessive force of places, of topographies, lies precisely in the fact that the past is closed off. One night, Benjamin's father came to his son's bedside to tell him of the death of a distant relative.

> My father gave the news with details, took the opportunity to explain, in answer to my question, what a heart attack was, and was communicative. I did not take in much of the explanation. But that evening I must have memorized my room and my bed, as one observes exactly a place where one feels dimly that one will later have to search for something one has forgotten there. (*Reflections,* 60)

Years later, Benjamin would learn what his father had hidden from him: His cousin had died of syphilis. This may be one explanation for the numerous descriptions of places. Benjamin retained their image because he later had to look for something forgotten or deformed there, like the names from childhood that are enriched by misunderstandings: "Mummerehlen," "Mark-Thalle," "Blume-zoof," "Brauhausberg," the "Anhalter" station, etc., whose prosaic sense escaped the child. Like the objects whose use escapes him and the incomprehensible stories told him to conceal the truth, these names stand out for the powerless child and confer a mythological reality on what they designate. But that obscurity due to powerlessness deforms prosaic reality, renders it poetic, and at the same time, reveals a truth. The eyes and ears of the child, in making reality strange for him, also reveal what is truly strange about reality. Benjamin turns the romantic theme of childhood into an instrument of poetic knowledge.

The Benjaminian child adds a subversive, transgressive quality to the romantic myth of childhood, foregrounded by the near nonexistence of the parents. He continually tries to escape the bourgeois apartment or the despised school in order to discover forbidden worlds. In "A Berlin Chronicle," Benjamin writes, "I never slept on the street in Berlin. I saw sunset and dawn, but between the two I found myself a shelter. Only those for whom poverty or vice turns the city into a landscape in which they stray from dark till sunrise know it in a way denied to me" (*Reflections,* 27). In his childhood in Berlin, Benjamin was a "prisoner" to the new and old "West End." "At that time, my clan lived in those two neighborhoods with an attitude where stubbornness and pride were combined and which made of them a ghetto, which they considered a fief. I remained enclosed in that neighborhood of the propertied classes without knowing any other" (*G.S.,* 4:287). Misery and vice, poverty and sexuality, such are the two cursed regions—in Berlin perhaps more than elsewhere, because of their threatening proximity. Sexuality is here associated with savage animality, to such an extent that the young Benjamin—who encounters his own *passante*—refuses to see what he most desires (*Reflections,* 4). Running errands with his mother, he remains obstinately a half-step behind "in the stubborn refusal . . . to form a united front, be it even with my own mother" (*Reflections,* 11). When his mother chastises him for his "dreamy recalcitrance" (*Reflections,* 4), he obscurely glimpses

> [the possibility of one day escaping her custody through the complicity of these streets in which I could not find my way.] There is no doubt, at any rate, that a feeling of crossing the threshold of one's class for the first time had a part in the almost unequaled fascination of publicly accosting a whore in the street. [But things could go on for hours before I reached

> that point.] (*Reflections,* 11; *G.S.,* 4:288; bracketed passages not in English version)

In the same spirit, the young Benjamin fled the constraints of religious ceremonies. A passage (which Scholem, shocked no doubt, advised him to suppress, and which he did suppress in the later versions) evokes the "first stirring of my sexual urge" (*Reflections,* 52) one day of the Jewish New Year, when he went to find a distant relative to accompany him to the synagogue. Benjamin got lost and, on a sudden, transgressive impulse, sensed for the first time the services the street could render to adult desires (*Reflections,* 52–53).

The limit of the bourgeois apartment in Berlin is the loggia that overlooks the courtyard. With the loggia "the home of the Berliner has its border. Berlin—the god of the city itself—begins there" (*G.S.,* 4:295). In the courtyard, the convalescent child listens to

> the ebb of the carpet beating that came in at the window with the moist air on rainy days and engraved itself more indelibly in the child's memory than the voice of the beloved in that of the man, the carpet beating that was the language of the nether world, of servant girls, the real grownups. (*Reflections,* 44)

Benjamin is convinced that the caryatids of the loggia, on which the loggia of the floor above is supported, had sung to him in his cradle. It is in the air of the courtyards, he thinks, in this text he considers a self-portrait, "where bathe the images and allegories that reign in my thoughts like the caryatids of the loggias in the courtyards of Berlin's West End" (*G.S.,* 4:294). Here, he is applying a concept from his mimetic theory of language to his childhood. It is within this framework of the city of Berlin that he begins both to read the signs of the world and to be read by an environment that he has begun to resemble and to which he is obliged to give the greater part of his being and his gifts. Discovering colors, he is "metamorphosed" (*G.S.,* 4:262–263): He becomes a soap bubble, a wet cloud in a watercolor painting, the silvery paper around a piece of chocolate. His "superior sense" of images is nourished on that source.

If he failed in his life, it was, he believed, not only because of the circumstances but also because he had forgotten an essential part of his experience, which is then picked up by the mythic figure of the "little hunchback." In the essay on Kafka, written a few months after the fragment in *Berliner Kindheit* entitled "The Little Hunchback," this invisible being is evoked as a character from a fairy tale, "the core of folk tradition, the German as well as the Jewish" (*Illuminations,* 134), two peoples whom Benjamin, in 1934, refuses to grant a definitive divorce. Scholem sees in this nothing less

than an immense historical error; the years that followed proved him right, at least for their generation, which tragically paid the price for it. "The little man," writes Benjamin regarding the little hunchback, "is at home in distorted life" (*Illuminations*, 134). The burden he bears is that of forgetting; it will be lifted only at the messianic end of history. But this end cannot be reached without human efforts of memory, the rescuing of the stifled virtualities of the past. The work of memory undertaken by Benjamin goes against the automatic movement of history, which, through the force of forgetting and repression, accumulates catastrophes in the lives of individuals and capital cities and in the life of humanity as a whole. Forgetful of its origins, humanity loses its presence of mind and initiative, submitting to the events from that time on. Such was also the case for Benjamin, as he depicts himself in *Berliner Kindheit.* When he sees the little hunchback appear, the harbinger of forgetting, he has "only to consider the damage" (*G.S.*, 4:303).

This metaphor of "bad luck" (*poisse*), of the individual "curse" (*guigne*), refers to the destiny of an entire generation, whose only surviving image "is that of a vanquished generation" ("Theses on the Philosophy of History," *E.F.*, 345; not in English edition). What had to be excluded from the sociological project of *Paris Arcades,* the "inadmissible poetic" aspect (*Correspondence,* 506–507) or the evocation of experience, was thus reserved for *Berliner Kindheit*: "The Ur-history of the nineteenth century reflected in the vision of the child playing on its doorstep has a totally different countenance than that of the signs, that they engrave on the map of history" (*Correspondence,* 507). This literary preserve is one sign that Benjamin was never able to commit himself totally to the radicality of the theoretical project that defined the second period of his thinking: the "emancipation from the yoke of art."

## THE END OF THE ART OF STORYTELLING

A few months after finishing "The Work of Art," Benjamin formulated a clear relation not only of complementarity but of contradictory tension between that essay and "The Storyteller." On 3 May 1936, in a letter to Scholem in which he speaks of "The Work of Art," he suggests that this text has not exhausted his ideas on mechanical reproduction: "I will attempt a companion piece to it as soon as I return to this subject" (*Correspondence,* 528). The term "companion piece" might lead us to think that Benjamin was free from the beginning to adopt one or the other position. And indeed, with the two poles of the conceptual duality remaining constant, the scales tipped now to one side, now to the other, according to the state of his reflection. In June 1936, when he sent Scholem the French text of "The

Work of Art," Benjamin announced that he had just finished "another, not quite so voluminous manuscript . . . which you would probably find far more agreeable."[5] This was "The Storyteller." The fact that Scholem would find it "more agreeable" indicates a shift in Benjamin's thinking. In a letter to Adorno of 4 June 1936, Benjamin explains: "I recently wrote a piece on Nicolas Leskov which, without in any way claiming to have the scope of the piece on art theory, presents a few parallels with the 'decline of the aura,' through the fact that the art of storytelling is reaching its end" (*G.S.*, 2:1277).

The parallels in question involve the conceptual couple aura/mechanical reproduction. But this time, Benjamin finds no advantage in the decline of the aura. Of course, he had written notes for the drafting of "The Storyteller" that leaned in the direction of "The Work of Art"; these notes rejected any nostalgic lament regarding the loss of the art of storytelling and asserted the legitimacy of the most modern forms of narrative literature—the "new inexactitude" and the slang that had appeared in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (*G.S.*, 2:1282–1286).[6] But these notes found no place in the essay itself; Benjamin thus deliberately excluded them from the published text.

"The Storyteller" opens a new period in Benjamin's thinking: With the acquisition of a sociological interpretation of art, it both links itself to the apocalyptic vision of history proper to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and revises the verdict on the aura and beauty. We find elements of this new mode of thinking in the essays on Kraus and Kafka, but in those essays the perspective of carefree destruction remains dominant. In its completed form, the new version of Benjaminian thought appears in the 1939 Exposé of *Paris Arcades,* in the essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" of the same year, and in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1939–1940). Several of the theses already figure in the 1937 essay "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian." But even the apparently more "committed" texts, such as the Fuchs essay or "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," are distinguished from "The Work of Art" inasmuch as they abandon the task of finding any compensation in the decline of art, the aura, and tradition. Benjamin insists on the price of modernity and the absence of compensation for the losses it brings. The masses and technology no longer have any promising potential; hence the considerable importance that Benjamin's thought now grants to the *memory* of irremediably destroyed traditions. Such a cult of memory is missing from "The Work of Art" and from the sociological *Paris Arcades* project.

On the basis of the distinction between aura and mechanical reproduction, between cult value and exhibition value, between a traditional experience and an impoverished experience, and fundamentally, according to the old sociological duality established by Ferdinand Tönnies, between "com-

munity" and "society," Benjamin tries in 1935 to confer an emancipatory value on both the innovative and the destructive elements of the technology of reproduction, public exhibition, and the reduction of experience. He sees in them a promise of social transformation; aesthetic desacralization seems to open the way both to profane illumination and to a presence of mind favorable to political action. The public status of the new forms of communication, the fact that they place themselves within the reach of the masses and satisfy their legitimate imperatives, seems to counterbalance the loss of traditional substance. In "The Work of Art," the mourning for the riches of the lost past seemed to be at an end. "The Storyteller" reveals that this mourning is continuing because the compensation does not meet expectations. The technically reproducible work of art, as Benjamin had described it, no longer has any properly artistic value; desacralization has left in its wake only instrumental and therapeutic functions. Until "The Work of Art," Benjamin had not succeeded in conceiving of aesthetic value independent of theological categories. In general, he had not accepted the order of *society* in its opposition to the traditional *community*. In pursuing avant-garde art and political revolution, Benjamin masked his desire to preserve the traditional character of community life; in fact, he was explicitly running toward "redemption."

In his assertion that "the art of storytelling is coming to an end" (*Illuminations,* 83), Benjamin found support in a mundane experience: the loss of our ability to tell stories, to exchange our experiences (*Illuminations,* 83).[7] According to him, two complementary phenomena account for this incapacity: the boundless development of technology and the privatization of life that it brings. The mutism of soldiers who returned from the 1914–1918 war, overwhelmed by the hardware used for massive destruction, was coupled with an overextension of the private sphere of existence, revealed especially in the growing place of bawdy stories, by means of which private life invades the public communication of experience.

Traditional storytelling is linked to the conditions of an artisanal, preindustrial society: first, the oral transmission of experience, the bearer of ancestral wisdom; second, a spatial or temporal distance that confers on the story the aura of faraway places; and third, the authority of death, of a "natural history" where the destiny of creatures is written. These conditions are under attack in modern life, which is dominated by the need for proximity and immediate interest, communication through technical or literary media, and the hygienic dissimulation of death.

The artisan class represents the fusion of the two great traditional schools of oral storytelling, the trading seaman and the resident tiller of the soil. One transmits the experience of distant voyages, the other that of distant times. The storyteller remains faithful to the age of "naive poetry" (*Illuminations,* 97), "in which man could believe himself to be in harmony

with nature" (*Illuminations,* 97). In the artisan class, the two ancient types interpenetrated. In several ways, the time of the artisan class created conditions favorable for the transmission of stories. In the first place, it was still acquainted with boredom, which was dissipated in the telling of tales. It allowed the audience to devote itself to manual activities as it listened: "The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself" (*Illuminations,* 91). In addition, the artisanal context favored individual and collective memory. And finally, storytelling is itself an artisanal form. "It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (*Illuminations,* 91–92). Paul Valéry linked the soul, the eye, and the hand in every artisanal activity, including oral storytelling, where the gesture accompanies speech. "The role of the hand in production," adds Benjamin, "has become more modest, and the place it filled in storytelling lies waste" (*Illuminations,* 108).

Benjamin is not alone in according a high value to the artisan in the art of storytelling. We find similar ideas in the work of Ernst Bloch and Heidegger, regarding Johann Peter Hebel, a storyteller held in esteem—for different reasons—by all three philosophers. In any case, they are all convinced that they are witnessing the decline in modern society of a precious and irreplaceable art. This attachment to the artisanal era is accompanied by a reserved and hostile attitude toward industrial modernity. As soon as experience is no longer transmitted orally but, rather, through writing, storytelling, according to Benjamin, is "confined within literature" (*G.S.,* 2:1293; not in English version); the storyteller and his public are then separated, each plunged into a solitude unfavorable to the transmission of experience. At its origin, storytelling was oriented toward practical life. It

> contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, of some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his audience. But if today "having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. (*Illuminations,* 86)

The form that confirms the decline of storytelling is the novel. "The dissemination of the novel became possible only with the invention of printing" (*Illuminations,* 87). Therefore, it is a technology of reproduction

that contributes essentially to the decline of storytelling and its traditional character by depriving it of its "aura" or original authenticity. In that sense, the novel presents a few analogies with film, except that film is addressed to a collective audience while the novel is transmitted in solitude. Unlike Lukács, the author of *Theory of the Novel,* Benjamin is not sensitive to the richness of the novel as literature. A central element of traditional storytelling is lacking, wisdom and good counsel. "To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life" (*Illuminations,* 87). The incommensurable is the irreducibly individual aspect of an experience torn from the framework within which it could be exchanged. The loss of wisdom is also, according to Benjamin's last interpretation of Kafka, what constituted his failure. He had sought to teach the true doctrine through parables and, in the end, he wrote novels; he had succumbed to the demon of literature:

> Kafka's work represents tradition falling ill. Wisdom has sometimes been defined as the epic side of truth. Such a definition marks wisdom off as a property of tradition; it is truth in its haggadic consistency. It is this consistency of truth that has been lost. . . . Kafka's real genius was that he tried something entirely new: he sacrificed truth for the sake of clinging to transmissibility, to its haggadic element. Kafka's writings are by their nature parables. But that is their misery and their beauty, that they had to become more than parables. They do not modestly lie at the feet of doctrine, as Haggadah lies at the feet of Halakah. (*Correspondence,* 565, letter of 12 June 1938)

According to Benjamin, the loss of wisdom made Kafka move from ancient storytelling, to which he had aspired, to the modern world of "rumor" and of slight "madness," characteristic of "literature" in the pejorative sense.

Next to the novel, the second form of modern communication to put an end to storytelling was the press, or *information.* This was already Karl Kraus's target. In showcasing the news story, in mixing in the private lives of individuals, and in clinging to the idea of satisfying the most immediate interests of readers, the press attacks both the public status of experience and the authority of tradition. Information strips traditional storytelling of its sobriety by introducing psychological explanations. At the same time, the story can no longer be repeated and reinterpreted forever. It loses its properly narrative character, constitutive of its life across the ages. From "aesthetic truth," it falls to the level of discursive truth.

Paul Valéry also observed that the idea of eternity, too, was tending to disappear. Benjamin deduces from this that the correlative experience of *death* was being transformed, particularly because of efforts to dissimulate the spectacle of death from us:

> Not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life—and this is the stuff that stories are made of—first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end—unfolding the views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it—suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everyone that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. (*Illuminations,* 94)

With the dissimulation of the act of dying, therefore, a part of humanity disappears, the part, precisely, that distinguishes storytelling from information void of all experience.

The transformation of death and the development of the press are two commonplaces frequently found in the criticism of modern culture. But how many dying men actually transmitted tellable stories on their deathbeds? Must we abandon the services of modern medicine to preserve the art of storytelling? Is not the differentiation between storytelling and information also a good thing? Whatever the faults of the press, does it not perform functions that the storyteller by the fireside cannot satisfy in a modern civilization? Benjamin refrains from asking such questions. What matters to him is the price of modernity, the fact that it forgets the part of natural history that human life entails, the part that associates tradition with death and elicits a need that is more than aesthetic: a religious need, satisfied by storytelling.

Death is "the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death. In other words, it is natural history to which his stories refer back" (*Illuminations,* 94). This notion of natural history, which had disappeared in "The Work of Art," recalls *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and "The Task of the Translator"; it refers to the theological horizon of Benjaminian thought that reappears here with the "creature." In the same spirit, Benjamin opposes the chronicler, the "history-teller," to the historian (*Illuminations,* 95). He insists that the question of whether the "inscrutable course of the world" is "eschatologically determined or is a natural one makes no difference" (*Illuminations,* 6). From the implicitly theological point of view peculiar to him, he approaches a problematic that had occupied several generations of thinkers—from Wilhelm Dilthey and the neo-Kantians around Heinrich Rickert and Max Weber, through Heidegger, Gadamer and his school, and, finally, Paul Ricoeur—who were anxious to distinguish historical, narrative, or hermeneutic knowledge from that of nature. The distinction between explanation and interpretation refers directly to that debate. The same is true for the valorization of the concepts of authority and tradition, which Benjamin

associates with storytelling: "There is one form of authority," Gadamer would write twenty-five years later in *Truth and Method,*

> particularly defended by romanticism, namely tradition. That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us—and not just what is clearly grounded—always has power over our attitudes and behavior. All education depends on this.[8]

As in the hermeneutic tradition, Benjamin rightly refuses to dissociate historiography and narration. He makes explicit the hermeneutic theme of the irreducible horizon within which any questioning on the part of a historian is contained. But he sets aside any discussion of the conditions of communicable objectivity to which his work is subject. In the face of the hold exercised by actuality, through which Benjaminian historiography evokes a past capable of overturning the perception of the present, the question of historical truth pales to the point of insignificance.

The concept of tradition, as it is associated with that of storytelling, leads Benjamin to modify the theory of memory that he had sketched in relation to Proust and that he would later develop, also in relation to Proust, in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." In "The Image of Proust," memory appeared as the *organon* of an integral presence of mind, indispensable to political action. Benjamin now links it to preserving ancestral traditions: "*Memory* creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation" (*Illuminations,* 98). Here again, the epic genre is the matrix from which the forms of memory were differentiated at the time of the decline of the epic. Benjamin opposes "the perpetuating remembrance of the novelist" to "the short-lived reminiscences of the storyteller" (*Illuminations,* 98). One results from a breathless struggle against time, illustrated by the solitary reader devouring the novel like "fire devours logs in the fireplace" (*Illuminations,* 100); the other is the instructive and entertaining memory of a storyteller "who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story" (*Illuminations,* 109). In giving preference to storytelling, Benjamin does not do justice to the richness of the novel as literature; he depreciates the novel as a modern form—and more precisely, as a form that, in a certain way, *accepts* the conditions of modernity. His thinking finds profound affinity only with premodern forms or with expressions of a radical rejection of modernity. Nevertheless, he is not simply a romantic turned toward the past, who would seek to oppose myth to the Enlightenment. He defends the authority of the religious tradition, but still for rational ends. In that, he is also distinguished from the conservative tendencies of German romanticism and from postmodern antirationalism.

He has some affinities with Heinrich Heine, who also sought to reconcile the critical spirit of the Enlightenment with a romantic imperative for happiness. That is what Benjamin's interpretation of the fairy tale reveals (*Illuminations,* 102ff.). When Benjamin opposes storytelling to scientific history or the novel, it is in the name of an *imperative for happiness* apparently unknown to modern society and ascetic rationality. Only the resources of a "theological" mode of thought, the story, and poetry still seem to offer the possibility of acceding to it. At least in memory, modern man must keep alive the old storytelling, so as not to lose an irreplaceable part of his experience.

## *LYRIC POETRY AT THE APOGEE OF CAPITALISM*

Despite their different tones, the essays written in 1937–1938, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian" and "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," do not seem to contradict the change observed in his 1936 essay "The Storyteller." The *revision* of the thesis that had asserted, in the name of the revolutionary character of the technologies of reproduction, the need to liquidate the aura and the end of aesthetic autonomy—a revision that would be more explicitly confirmed by "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire"—is not called into question. It is true, however, that the discussion of this central theme is discussed only parenthetically in these essays. Despite his doubts regarding the emancipatory character of the technologies of reproduction, despite his growing skepticism regarding the "masses," Benjamin wants to maintain the essentials of the *political* positions he defended in "The Work of Art," in which the imperatives of the "masses" still justified abandoning the esoteric aura. That was undoubtedly one of the aspects of "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" that disturbed Adorno and Scholem. A coherent position would be found only in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" and in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

"The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" was the fruit of an enormous effort, yet Adorno suggested that Benjamin give up the idea of publishing it (*Correspondence,* 583–584, Adorno's letter of 10 November 1938). It became the grounds of a quarrel between two Benjaminian "schools": the school that took Adorno's side and the school that, on the contrary, leaned toward a defense of Benjamin's view. Although this quarrel continues to divide Benjamin's readers, it has little contemporary interest. On the one hand, Benjamin agreed to modify his text when he drafted a more explicitly theoretical essay; on the other, neither of the respective views—Benjamin's rather elementary sociological approach or Adorno's theory of the commodity, which claimed to be more rigorous and more critical—is current any more. Today, both these positions are

historical, and they no longer carry authority as verdicts on contemporary culture.

Baudelaire—this is what constitutes his "unique importance" for Benjamin (*Correspondence,* 557)—"apprehended, in both senses of the word, the productive energy of the individual alienated from himself" (*Correspondence,* 557). This sentence recalls certain formulations of the first two versions of "The Work of Art": "In the representation of the image of man by the apparatus, the alienation of man by his own hand finds a highly productive use" (*G.S.,* 1:451). Such is the experience of a film actor confronted not with the public but with the apparatus, an experience that Baudelaire seems to anticipate in his poetry. But in applying that formula to Baudelaire's poetry, Benjamin revises the theses of "The Work of Art," in which such an approach was reserved for cinema and its *technical* liquidation of the aura. Introduced into the heart of poetry, the productive force of alienated man is no longer foregrounded by the technology of reproduction but is inscribed in the poet's approach—a conclusion Benjamin will not draw explicitly until "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire."

In reference to "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," Benjamin predicts, in a letter accompanying his manuscript, that it will not be possible to grasp from this single part (the only one to be written) "the philosophical bases of the *whole* book" (*Correspondence,* 573). This part (which was intended to be the second part) "undertakes the sociocritical interpretation of the poet" but gives neither "the Marxist interpretation" foreseen for the third part (which was to deal with the central theme of "novelty") nor Baudelaire's "aesthetic theory," which was to figure in the first part (*Correspondence,* 574).

When Adorno criticized Benjamin for having avoided "theory" by limiting himself to "the wide-eyed presentation of the bare facts" (*Correspondence,* 582), he was familiar with Benjamin's letter. Nevertheless, he disputed the approach adopted. In his response, Benjamin called his own approach "philological": "Philology is the examination of a text, which, proceeding on the basis of details, magically fixates the reader on the text" (*Correspondence,* 587); according to Benjamin, there was inevitably a "magical" element "which is reserved for philosophy to exorcise, reserved here for the concluding part" (*Correspondence,* 588). It is nonetheless true that the second part was published alone, without the philosophical complement that was to exorcise it, and that, therefore, there was at the very least a risk of misunderstanding. In the absence of theory, the facts and quotations presented by Benjamin seem "deceptively epic" (*Correspondence,* 582, Adorno's letter of 10 November 1938).

"The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" is tied together in a purely narrative way. Benjamin deals with a great number of concepts and notions that had appeared in the Exposé for *Paris Arcades,* but without

making explicit their theoretical status, as if he were seeking to familiarize the reader with a historical universe—the Paris of the Second Empire in fact—rather than to present a theoretical analysis. It is a presentation of the "subject matter" of Baudelaire's oeuvre, linked to the lessons provided by documents from the era. This text is a "commentary" in the sense given this term in the essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities,* "the exegesis of what is astonishing and bewildering in the work" (*G.S.,* 1:125), and not a critique, an examination of the work's truth content. Isolated from the critical part, the completed fragment retains a certain ambiguity: The writings of Baudelaire appear as *documents* of the era, not in the sense of a surrealist subversion of art but in a purely sociological sense, analogous to the quotations from numerous other authors, and not as *works of art* whose life lies in their "truth."

This essay represented a partial realization of the original *Paris Arcades* project, in which Baudelaire figured as a symptom, among the architectural witnesses and phantasmagoria of the nineteenth century. A number of themes were already included in the program of the 1935 Exposé: the bohemian and the flaneur; Baudelaire's ambiguous fascination for Blanqui and Napoleon III; and his pursuit of literary strategies in a market handed over to the popular press. The poet seems to be a prisoner of the myths of his age. "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" is one of Benjamin's texts that is closest to a "critique of ideology" and furthest from the "rescue operation" characteristic of his approach. And yet, even though Baudelaire shares the ambivalent feelings of the rebels—the bohemian and the flaneur—especially "the social illusion that crystallizes in the crowd" (*G.S.,* 1:569), he cannot be reduced to a symptom of his age. Unlike Victor Hugo, who saw in the crowd "the masses of his readers and his voters" (*G.S.,* 1:568), he was the guardian of the gate "that separates the individual from the crowd" (*G.S.,* 1:569). That individual is the "hero" through whom modernity is linked to antiquity: "Baudelaire," writes Benjamin at the beginning of his chapter "Modernity," "modeled his image of the artist on an image of the hero" (*G.S.,* 1:570). Here, the poet forges an image to impose his own aesthetic logic: "The hero," writes Benjamin, "is the true subject of *modernity.* This means that, to live modernity, one must be heroic in nature" (*G.S.,* 1:577). This sentence reiterates and makes explicit what Benjamin had written about Kafka, namely, that "to make a decent table nowadays, a man must have the architectural genius of a Michelangelo" (*Illuminations,* 113). In the same way, Baudelaire "rediscovers [in "L'âme du vin (The soul of wine)] the gladiator in the proletarian. . . . What the salaried worker brings about each day in his work is nothing less than the exploit that brought glory and applause to the gladiator in Antiquity. This image is the stuff of Baudelaire's best intuitions; it is born of the reflection on his own condition" (*G.S.,* 1:577).

This passage is revealing for the text as a whole: Written in Brecht's house in Denmark, it is characterized both by a manifest desire to submit Baudelaire to Marxist analysis and by an identification coupled with self-criticism. This identification is even more obvious in another aspect of modern heroism that Benjamin takes up immediately after these remarks. The difficulties that modernity opposes to "man's natural productive élan" (*G.S.*, 1:578) lead him to find refuge in death: "Modernity must remain under the sign of suicide. Suicide places its seal below the heroic will, which cedes nothing to the spirit that is hostile to it. This suicide is not renunciation but a heroic passion. It is *the* conquest of modernity in the field of passions" (*G.S.*, 1:578). Benjamin had been tempted by suicide on several occasions, and he turned to it a few years later rather than be handed over to his persecutors. This was, then, a form of "heroism" familiar to him. Through Baudelaire, he continually spoke of himself.

He reviewed a whole series of incarnations of the modern hero: the *apache* (thug), the ragpicker, the lesbian, the dandy—all physiognomies to which were attached, of course (in the view of the "critique of ideology") the "illusions" of the age[9] but through which an identification and thus a form of "rescue" were made manifest. Such was the case in particular for the ragpicker. The *Paris Arcades* project constantly sets out to decipher an epoch through its castoffs, just as the psychoanalyst interprets a subject's desire based on the detritus of his language—dreams, slips of the tongue, unconscious acts. "Method of this project: literary montage," we read in one of the epistemological reflections of *Paris Arcades*:

> I need say nothing. Only exhibit [*zeigen*]. I won't filch anything of value or appropriate any ingenious turns of phrase. Only the trivia, the trash—which I don't want to inventory, but simply allow it to come into its own in the only way possible: by putting it to use. ("N" 1a, 8, p. 47)

This method accounts for the absence of interpretation for which Adorno criticizes "The Paris of the Second Empire." It is modeled on the method of the modern poet:

> The poet finds society's castoffs in the street, and in them his heroic subject. In that way, the poet's distinguished image seems to replicate a more vulgar image where the features of the ragpicker—who so often occupied Baudelaire—show through. . . . Ragpicker or poet—castoffs matter to both of them. (*G.S.*, 1:582)

In linking his own approach to the poet's, Benjamin casts an ambiguous light on his work as a philosopher and a theorist. The method that—as the

last avatar of Benjamin's "theology" of language—consists in calling things by their names, citing them by convoking them before the supreme tribunal, runs the risk of falling into a pretentious impressionism or, in Adorno's expression, a "magical positivism." The facts selected do not speak for themselves but only refer to the interests that the essayist attaches to them and that the reader familiar with his oeuvre guesses. At the limit, any *concept* disappears in this evocative approach; through this approach, Benjamin became, in spite of himself, one of the precursors of a defeatist philosophy that is afraid of conceptual rigor.

Later on, however, he proposes a more explicit interpretation. Beginning with the relation in Baudelaire between modernity and antiquity, Benjamin introduces again, in narrative and almost anecdotal fashion, the allegorical form that he considers central for the comprehension of the work. It is here, as well, that the poet fleetingly appears within the perspective of his aesthetic value and not simply as a historical and social symptom, only to be immediately brought back to the limits of his illusions. It had seemed at first that the hero of the big city might be the *apache* as well as the poet who made him his subject. But "the aging Baudelaire," to whom Benjamin accords the greatest value, no longer recognizes himself in "that race of men where, in his youth, he sought heroes" (*G.S.,* 1:583–584). From then on, heroism consists in arranging things so that, through poetry, modernity can one day become antiquity. In the way he presents this imperative of Baudelaire's, Benjamin suggests a link with Nietzsche's thought: "Modernity characterizes an epoch; it characterizes at the same time the energy that is at work in that epoch and links it to Antiquity. . . . Wagner appeared to him as an unlimited and authentic expression of that energy" (*G.S.,* 1:584). From an analogous point of view, *The Birth of Tragedy* links Wagner to the most authentic aspirations of antiquity. But we shall see that Benjamin does not take the notion of antiquity literally.

As always, he does not find the authentic link between modernity and antiquity in Baudelaire's *theory.* He considers it weak even in its famous formulations, where the beautiful is designated as an amalgam of the absolute and the relative, of the eternal and the fleeting, of the age, fashion, morality, and passion (*G.S.,* 1:585). "The aesthetic reflections of Baudelaire," he writes, "never succeeded in presenting modernity in its interpenetration with the ancient as clearly as certain poems from *The Flowers of Evil*" (*G.S.,* 1:585). That is particularly the case for the "Tableaux parisiens," in which Paris appears in its fragility: "It is precisely through that precariousness that modernity, finally and at the deepest level, is espoused and wed to the ancient" (*G.S.,* 1:586). For, in its precariousness, the modern city already appears as an ancient *ruin.* Through the faculty of perceiving or anticipating such ruins, Baudelaire becomes part of a tradition that, for Benjamin, stretches from the decline of antiquity through the beginning of the Middle

Ages and on to surrealism, including in its sweep the baroque and Baudelaire, the tradition of ruin and of allegory. Unlike antiquity as it appears in Victor Hugo's work—"chthonian" (*G.S.*, 1:586), a perception of immutable, eternally human realities from High Antiquity—in Baudelaire's work it is a "mimesis of death" (*G.S.*, 1:587), which, through the detour of allegory, transforms modernity into antiquity. Pursuing his approach through sociological associations, Benjamin recalls the work of Haussmann, whose "great urban cleanup" (*G.S.*, 1:589), in the view of contemporaries, illustrated the fragility of the big city: "When we know something will soon have to disappear from our view, it becomes an image. That is probably what had to happen to the streets of Paris at that time" (*G.S.*, 1:590).

One of the rare interpretive passages links the modern aspiration for antiquity to a process of rapid aging, according to that sense for the antiquated and the obsolete that the surrealists saw with such acuity:

> Baudelaire wanted to be read as a writer of Antiquity. This requirement was satisfied extraordinarily quickly. For the distant ages the sonnet ["Je te donne ces vers" (I give you these lines)] speaks of arrived in as many decades after his death as Baudelaire would have imagined centuries. Of course, Paris is still standing; and the great tendencies of social development are still the same. But it is the very fact that they have remained that makes any contact with what was born under the sign of the "truly new" even more fragile. Modernity has remained largely the same, and Antiquity, which was to find itself in its bosom, in reality presents the image of the obsolete. (*G.S.*, 1:593)

Benjamin brings out a surrealist aspect in Baudelaire. From a sociological point of view, he underscores the limits of the poet's lucidity. Next to the *apache* and the ragpicker, two other figures with "ancient" resonances characterize modern heroism in Baudelaire's view: the *lesbian* and the *dandy.* In describing them, Benjamin—in a Brechtian style—attempts to show that Baudelaire creates a phenomenological abstraction of these figures, whose economic genesis he refuses to see: "A heroine of modernity" (*G.S.*, 1:594), the lesbian emerges from the context of Saint-Simonism and its cult of the androgyne, linked, according to Benjamin, to the masculinization of woman, who had been integrated into factory work. Yet Baudelaire moves away from that aspect: "It was important for him to detach it from economic dependence. He succeeded therefore in giving to that developmental trend a strictly sexual emphasis" (*G.S.*, 1:597). That allowed him to write both a hymn to Sapphic love ("Lesbos") and a condemnation of lesbian passion ("Delphine et Hippolyte"), since damnation was indissociable from "the heroic nature of that passion" (*G.S.*, 1:597).[10] Similarly, when Benjamin evokes the dandy, "the hero in [his] last incarnation" (*G.S.*, 1:599), he

confronts Baudelairean stylization at its historical origins (*G.S.*, 1:599–600). In once more disregarding the social and economic backdrop, Baudelaire reduces the dandy's social "tic" to a Satanic grimace, thus losing the dandy's charm, his "gift for pleasing" (*G.S.*, 1:600). The dandy adopts an attitude of idleness and contained energy without having the means to support it. According to Benjamin, all these incarnations of the hero are only "roles": "Heroic modernity proves to be a tragic drama [*Trauerspiel*] where the role of the hero is still to be cast" (*G.S.*, 1:600). Fundamentally, to use Jules Vallès's malicious expression (*G.S.*, 1:601), Baudelairean heroism is only that of a mime, a "ham."

To these illusory aspects Benjamin opposes Baudelaire's poetic achievements, of which allegory is the linchpin: "Under the masks he used, the poet in Baudelaire preserved his incognito. . . . Incognito was the law of his poetry" (*G.S.*, 1:601). He knowingly calculated its effects, introducing into his lines "vulgar" comparisons ("*la nuit s'épaississait ainsi qu'une cloison*" [the night was growing thick, like a membrane]) or using words borrowed from the language of the city: *quinquet, wagon, bilan, voirie* (oil lamp, train car, balance sheet, dump). "Thus," writes Benjamin, "the lyric vocabulary was created in which, abruptly, an allegory emerged that nothing had prepared for. If we can somehow grasp Baudelaire's linguistic spirit, in it we find that abrupt coincidence, according to Claudel, of the Racinian style and the journalistic style of the Second Empire" (*G.S.*, 1:603).

These outlines of formal analyses are immediately linked to the sociological thesis that is the essay's starting point. Allegory appears as the characteristic gesture of the bohemian conspirator:

> He places his trust in allegories for this surprise attack that poetry is for him. They are the only ones in on the secret. Where Death, or Memory, or Repentance, or Evil appear, they are the centers of the poetic strategy. The sudden appearance of these soldiers, recognizable by the capital letters that irrupt right in the middle of a text, which does not reject the most banal of vocabularies, betrays Baudelaire's hand. His technique is putschist. (*G.S.*, 1:603)

In this way, Baudelaire's poetry, his "dream," joins hands with Blanqui's "action," which Marx, using an implicitly critical term, called "putschist." In adopting this term for his own use, Benjamin introduces into it a pathos of desperate solidarity with the vanquished: Blanqui's acts and Baudelaire's dream "are the hands joined on a stone under which Napoleon III had buried the hopes of the June fighters" (*G.S.*, 1:604). This ambiguity characterizes the text as a whole: It is a critique of ideology linking poetry to a socially situated gesture, but a critique that reveals the identification of an author full of pathos, who sees no alternative to these desperate gestures that are

endowed with a certain dignity. On the pretext of denouncing putschist behavior from a Marxist perspective, Benjamin implicitly rehabilitates its hopeless grandeur. Because these gestures do not reveal a "just politics" in the Marxist sense, they interest Benjamin as experiments. However problematic these gestures might be, they save the "victims" that history would have liked to condemn, if not to oblivion, then at least to misunderstanding. Restoring the political meaning of the Baudelairean gesture amounts to rescuing an aspiration for revolt, condemned to failure but containing a germ of that "weak Messianic power" discussed in Thesis 2 of the "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

Under the contrary pressures of Brechtian objections and the imperatives of his own philosophy of history, Benjamin accords little space to an analysis that would have underscored the aesthetic interest of Baudelaire's poems. But the analytic perspective of symptoms and documents cannot be applied to the *Paris Arcades* project as a whole. In his last essay on Baudelaire, responding this time to Adorno's imperatives, Benjamin proceeds to a comprehensive interpretation that reveals the aesthetic value of the work. Sociological categories, such as that of commodity, have no direct influence on the position taken by the artist; they directly influence only the themes he encounters in the historical context. The early texts on Baudelaire explain the poet's attitude in terms of the place he occupies within the ambiguous bohemian milieu and in terms of the social role of the flaneur, in which the relation between client and commodity is anticipated in the desperate heroism of those excluded from modernity: rebels, lesbians, and dandies. The last essay tries above all to show the aesthetic appropriateness of Baudelaire's choices.

"The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" represents the sociological viewpoint of *Paris Arcades*, which moves away from the value of the poetic work itself and sees in it only one symptom among others of the submission of art to the market. The essay written the following year, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," addresses, at least in part, the point of view of the writer who, to save the authenticity of his work, sacrifices the poet's traditional aura. What moves to the foreground is no longer the "relation of expression" between a technological and sociological infrastructure and a cultural phenomenon but the coherence of the work of art. Nevertheless, the force of this essay cannot be dissociated from historical and sociological inquiries. It is only by reconstituting the context that Benjamin succeeds in comprehending the internal coherence of the work and articulates possible meanings. The text's weakness rests on its failure to devote much attention to the form of poetry and to the quality of the texts as such. Benjamin was no doubt convinced that a more precise reading would not have revealed anything fundamentally new to him, nothing that could call into question the results of his analogical reading of expressive values.

The *Correspondence*, a few posthumous notes, and a series of fragments brought together under the title "Central Park" suggest what the other parts of the planned book on Baudelaire might have looked like. Outside the sociological section, which was the only part drafted, there was to have been an introduction dedicated to the opposition between a critical "rescue operation" and the traditional "homage" given an author, a first part dealing with allegory from the perspective of art theory, and a final section whose object would have been the commodity as "fulfillment" of the allegorical vision in Baudelaire (*Correspondence*, 557). Benjamin would have once more attempted to reconcile a philological presentation of the thinking of the age and an underlying theoretical hypothesis that was explanatory in nature. Poetry seems to be confined to reproducing the different aspects of the commodity as it was analyzed in Marx's *Capital*. All these reflections suffer from the fact that Benjamin does not define the status of the work of art independent of phantasmagoria, a status it shares with speeches, everyday phenomena, and ideologies pure and simple.

Unlike apologetic approaches, the issue is to not neglect "those points at which tradition breaks down and thus misses those jags and crags that offer a handhold to someone who wishes to move beyond them" ("N" 9a, 5, p. 65, translation slightly modified). Such an approach leads Benjamin to distinguish between the themes explicitly targeted by Baudelaire—"Satanism, *spleen*, and deviant eroticism" ("Central Park," 39)—and the poet's "true subjects," those "decisive new subjects"—"the big city, the masses—[that] were not visualized by him as such" ("Central Park," 39). Whether looking at the works of Kafka or Knut Hamsun, Benjamin always distinguishes between the theoretical intention of an authentic writer and his poetic work, which obeys a different logic, inaccessible to his theoretical consciousness. This distinction is justified by the fact that theoretical modes of thought and artistic practice obey different logics and do not necessarily communicate within the author's mind. Art is a technique whose workings the artist can understand no better than can the receiver. For Benjamin, precisely from the point of view of "reception," it is a matter of breaking with the conformism of transmitted visions, with the false continuity of traditions. That is what he sees as the true task of philosophy, which he develops in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History." For Benjamin, the destructive, critical element is constitutive of any study of a historical object, not—as for Heidegger—in order to be rid of a "metaphysics" that would dissimulate the authentic but, rather, to avoid the hold of established "culture," always suspect of complicity with the socially dominant forces.

Allegory is the aspect of Baudelaire's oeuvre that had in fact escaped

critical attention before Benjamin. He had translated "Tableaux parisiens" in his youth and had become interested in Baudelaire when he began to reflect on German baroque drama. The first part of the book on Baudelaire would have thus dealt with the "prehistory" of Baudelairean poetry: from baroque allegory and the new function of the allegorical vision, to the nineteenth century (*G.S.*, 1:1084, letter of 3 August 1938). A few elements of such a comparison are found among the fragments of "Central Park." Through allegory, Baudelaire was setting modernity at a distance. *Spleen* transforms any present moment into Antiquity ("Central Park," 35), into a fragile reality of which, the next instant, only ruins remain.

From the point of view of literary history, Baudelairean allegory emerges in a precise context: "The introduction of allegory answers in a far more meaningful way the same crisis of art which, around 1852, the theory of *l'art pour l'art* was intended to counter" ("Central Park," 34). As in the seventeenth century, allegory is an inquiry into art in general. Baudelaire "could hardly have written his essay on Dupont if Dupont's radical critique of the concept of art did not correspond to an equally radical one of his own" ("Central Park," 52). This fragment is indicative of the modification that the essays on Baudelaire bring to the perspective on the "end of art" as it had appeared in "The Work of Art." The questioning of aesthetic appearance is now situated *within* art and not in an externality, as in the case of film.

The first part of the book was to respond to a difficulty that Benjamin experienced before the "fundamental paradox" of Baudelairean aesthetics: "the contradiction between the theory of natural correspondences and the rejection of nature" (*Correspondence*, 556, letter of 16 April 1938). In "Central Park," this paradox remains an insoluble problem (33), but, among the notes for *Paris Arcades*, we find an attempt to solve it:

> There is between the theory of natural correspondences and the rejection of nature a contradiction that is resolved when impressions become detached in the recollection of lived experience [*Erlebnis*]. Thus, the experience contained in these impressions is freed and can be joined to the allegorical heritage. (*G.S.*, 5:436)

Correspondences do not contradict the rejection of nature, inasmuch as they keep only its sublimation in memory, the place for authentic experience. In a more narrow sense, the "*souvenir*"—in the sense that Baudelaire writes, "*J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans*"—is the means by which Benjamin differentiates between baroque allegory and modern allegory. The "*souvenir*" is the opposite of authentic experience; it is its alienated form through the "lived experience," which one collects like a souvenir photo:

> The *souvenir* is the complement of lived experience [*des Erlebnisses*]. In it the increasing self-alienation of the person who inventories his past as dead possessions is instilled. In the 19th century allegory left the surrounding world, in order to settle in the inner world. The relic derives from the corpse, the souvenir from deceased experience [*Erfahrung*] which calls itself euphemistically "*Erlebnis.*" ("Central Park," 49, translation slightly modified)

Here the move from the first part of the book to the third is announced; this last part was to be devoted to the commodity as poetic object. According to another fragment:

> Melancholy bears in the 19th century a different character, however, to that which it bore in the 17th. The key figure of the early allegory is the corpse. The key figure of the later allegory is the "*souvenir.*" The "*souvenir*" is the schema of the transformation of the commodity into a collector's object. The *correspondances* are the endlessly multiple resonances of each *souvenir* with all the others. ("Central Park," 54–55)

At issue, then, is a sort of internalization or sublimation of death. Internalized death is more difficult to grasp than that represented by the corpse displayed on the baroque stage; hence the status of violence and destruction in Baudelaire, which has to display itself with particular relentlessness: "Baudelaire's allegory bears, in contradistinction to that of the Baroque, traces of a wrath which was at such a pitch as to break into this world and to leave its harmonious structures in ruins" ("Central Park," 42).

But that violence does not seek to annihilate what it breaks; it clings to it:

> That which is touched by the allegorical intention is torn from the context of life's interconnections: it is simultaneously shattered and conserved. Allegory attaches itself to the rubble. It offers the image of transfixed unrest. The destructive impulse of Baudelaire is nowhere interested in the abolition of that which falls to it. ("Central Park," 38)

Allegorical destruction is an ostentatious destruction; it wants to reveal to the reader the significance of the annihilation unfolding before his or her eyes, and of which the poet makes an experience staged on *his own* initiative.

Several fragments underscore the link between allegory and the commodity, which was to be explained in the concluding part.

> Ever more callously the object world of man assumes the expression of the commodity. At the same time advertising seeks to veil the commod-

> ity character of things. In the allegorical the deceptive transfiguration of the world of the commodity resists its distortion. The commodity attempts to look itself in the face. It celebrates its becoming human in the whole. ("Central Park," 42)

Benjamin would have wished to give Baudelairean allegory a sociological explanation of the Marxist type; he thought he had found in modern allegory a response to commodity *reification*[11]:

> The refunctioning of allegory in the commodity economy must be presented. It was Baudelaire's endeavour to make the aura which is peculiar to the commodity appear. In a heroic way he sought to humanize the commodity. His attempt had its equivalent in the simultaneous attempt of the bourgeoisie to personify the commodity: to give the commodity, like a person, housing. This then was the promise of the *etui* [small box], the covers, the sheaths with which the bourgeois household effects of the time were being covered. ("Central Park," 42)

The central idea is thus that classical allegory devalorizes the phenomenal world by reducing it to meaning. Yet, "the devaluation of the world of objects in allegory is outdone within the world of objects itself by the commodity" ("Central Park," 34). But this devaluation is not immediately visible. Baudelaire seizes hold of this world to destroy its appearances. He undertakes to set forth commodity devaluation through allegorical destruction. For him, allegory represents the poet as someone who heroically prostitutes himself by making of poetry a commodity. That is what Benjamin calls revealing "the productive force of alienated man." Appearance or illusion cannot be destroyed by such cynicism: "The lack of appearances and the decline of the aura are identical phenomena. Baudelaire puts the artistic means of allegory at their disposal" ("Central Park," 41).

These ideas are not always coherent. Visibly, and at the expense of any other explanation, Benjamin undertakes to reintegrate the critical aspects of the Baudelairean oeuvre into the schema of the fetishism of the commodity. But if commodity devaluation surpasses that effected by allegory, the poetic technique chosen by Baudelaire is of little interest. In a comment on the poem "Une martyre," written no doubt toward the beginning of 1938, we find an insight into the whole book on Baudelaire:

> The allegorical vision is always founded on a devalued phenomenal world. The specific devaluation of the world of things that one encounters in the commodity is the foundation for the allegorical intention in Baudelaire. As an incarnation of the commodity, the prostitute occupies

> a central place in Baudelaire's poetry. On the other hand, the prostitute is allegory made flesh. The accessories with which fashion bedecks her are the emblems with which she bedecks herself. The fetish is the sign guaranteeing the authenticity of the commodity, just as the emblem is the sign guaranteeing the authenticity of allegory. The inanimate body, still offered up to pleasure, unites allegory and the commodity. (*G.S.*, 1:1151)

"On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" abandons any attempt to link Baudelaire's poetry to an illustration of fetishism and the commodity, in favor of a conceptuality of experience that takes up some of Benjamin's old ideas. Therefore, the collection "Central Park" does not allow us to complete "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" by making of the whole a homogeneous conception.

As foreseen in the 1935 Exposé of *Paris Arcades*, the last part of the book on Baudelaire was to deal with the new and the always-the-same as two complementary aspects of the commodity, aspects that Baudelaire fallaciously opposed to each other:

> The third part treats the commodity as the fulfillment of Baudelaire's allegorical vision. It turns out that what is new, which explodes the experience of the immutable under whose spell the poet was placed by spleen, is nothing other than the halo of the commodity. (*Correspondence*, 557, letter of 16 April 1938)

That duality, which leads Baudelaire—in his ignorance of the nature of the commodity—to oppose the new to the eternal return of the same, was to bring about two digressions, dedicated to the two aspects of the commodity: its illusory aspect, represented by what in Baudelaire anticipates *Jugendstil*, and its true aspect, incarnated in a demystifying manner by the prostitute (*Correspondence*, 557). The fragments brought together under the title "Central Park" further explain these points. Within the framework of his reflection on the impact of the technologies of reproduction, Benjamin considers *Jugendstil* an attempt to repress the rivalry between art and mechanical reproduction; it is, according to him, "the second attempt of art to come to terms with technology. The first was Realism. There the problem was more or less conscious for the artists who were unsettled by the new processes of technological reproduction. . . . For *Jugendstil* the problem as such had already succumbed to repression" ("Central Park," 34). *Jugendstil* worships the virgin body and, in that spirit, develops a "regressive interpretation of technology" ("Central Park," 43). *The Flowers of Evil* anticipates *Jugendstil* in its floral motif and in the theme of the "new." It was through his illusions that Baudelaire was the precursor of *Jugendstil*, whereas he was

its antagonist in his allegorical technique and the destruction of the "halo," whether that of the prostitute or of the poet.[12]

But the cult of the new was not just an illusion. In it, Benjamin discovers an undertaking whose historical significance was close to the ideas of Nietzsche and Blanqui; he reads it as a response to the mythical phenomenon of the always-the-same, the frightening repetition of the same that the poem "Les sept vieillards" illustrates:

> The idea of the eternal return is here the "new" that breaks through the circle of eternal return even as it confirms it. Through the conjunction with Nietzsche—and especially with Blanqui, who developed, ten years before him, the doctrine of the eternal return—Baudelaire's work appears in a new light. . . . Blanqui thought that the eternity of the world and of man—the always-the-same—was guaranteed by the order of the stars. Yet Baudelaire's abyss is deprived of stars. In fact, Baudelaire's poetry is the first in which stars are absent. The line "dont la lumière parle un langage connu" [whose light speaks a familiar language] is the key to this poetry. In its destructive energy—through the allegorical conception—it breaks not only with the pastoral nature of the idyll, but, through the heroic resolution with which it introduces lyric poetry into the heart of reification, it also breaks with the nature of things. It is situated at the point where the nature of things is dominated and re-created by the nature of man. History has since shown he was right not to expect that re-creation from technological progress. (*G.S.*, 1:1152)

Benjamin attempts to draw from the Baudelairean oeuvre a theoretical position comparable to Nietzsche's and Blanqui's ideas, which he had just discovered in Blanqui's *L'Éternité par les astres* (Eternity by the stars). Here again, he hesitates between an explanatory position that reduces thought to an expression of the antinomies of the commodity and a process that makes a hero of the poet who has grasped the reification of nature.

## *MODERN ART AND THE SACRIFICE OF THE AURA*

Catchphrases such as "the decline of the aura" or the "end of the art of storytelling" are linked to the Hegelian idea of the "end of art." Before Heidegger, Adorno, or Danto, Benjamin evoked such a perspective, in a tone that alternated between manifest satisfaction, despair, and nostalgia. In the 1935 Exposé and in "The Work of Art," he is convinced that art will be replaced by technology and that other functions will replace those of the magical domination of nature and sacred ritual, functions that will help us adapt to a perilous environment, that will offer us a form of therapy to heal

collective psychoses through laughter and a knowledge that allows us to get our bearings in the social space. Whatever the case, the imperatives either to liquidate the aura or to preserve its memory are dictated by a concern for a form of *public* communication: In "The Work of Art," that seems to be the function of cinema, compared to the privatization of the aura in other arts and in bourgeois culture generally.

According to the essays of the last period, in which the distance imposed by the work of art of the past goes hand in hand with a public communication that keeps tradition alive, the arts of storytelling and of painting seem to have had that function. The arts of mechanical reproduction are now interpreted as degraded forms of confrontation between an isolated *individual* and a *mechanism.* In the first theory of cinema, this new art was celebrated in the name of an interpretation of the technology of reproduction guaranteeing a public status to the forms of representation; in the second, that art, which is no longer an art, seems to disappoint such an expectation: Technology appears as a privatizing force, as it will in fact be in the automobile and television.

"On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," which formulates the second theory, is one of Benjamin's most complex texts. He once more takes up the themes of experience and memory as they were introduced in "The Storyteller." He underscores the changes they have undergone in the modern big city, the fact of the crowd, and the experiences of shock. He returns to the status of mechanical reproduction and, above all, delves deeper into the theory of the beautiful and of modern art in a way that both explains and modifies the sacrifice of the aura in "The Work of Art." This essay by Benjamin, the final formulation of his aesthetic thought, is linked to the formulation in the essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities.* But he is no longer concerned either with the symptoms of urban life under the hold of the fetishism of the commodity or with the false consciousness of bohemia; he is now concerned with the truth of a work of art, whose gesture contains a historical knowledge offered for philosophical interpretation.

The themes of experience and memory are developed through their formulation in late-nineteenth-century philosophies, from Baudelaire's to Bergson's to Proust's. According to Benjamin, the introductory poem of *Flowers of Evil* is addressed to a reader who does not favor lyric poetry. Poetry has lost contact with the reader's experience. Benjamin explains that break through his early theory of a change affecting the very structure of experience (*Illuminations,* 156). As if to supply the proof, the "philosophy of life"—Dilthey, Klages, and Bergson—attempted, beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, to define "true" experience in opposition to the experience encountered "in the standardized, denatured life of the civilized masses" (*Illuminations,* 156). These are the masses of modern readers who take no interest in poetry, to the point that Apollinaire could imagine a

pogrom directed against poets. Among the vitalist thinkers, Benjamin gives preference to Bergson, who "preserves links with empirical research" (*Illuminations,* 157). But, in the style of Critical Theory, he criticizes philosophers as a whole for not beginning with "man's life in society" (*Illuminations,* 156). He wishes to deal with the themes of that philosophy from a point of view that integrates the results obtained by the social sciences, and especially by Marxism and psychoanalysis.

Bergson's *Matière et mémoire* (Matter and memory) links experience to memory, in other words, to the transmission of tradition. "Experience is indeed a matter of existence," writes Benjamin, "in collective existence as well as private life" (*Illuminations,* 157). Experience "is less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than of a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently unconscious data" (*Illuminations,* 157). This unconscious part of experience escapes Bergson, as does the historical character of experience, the "inhospitable, blinding" experience that belongs to the age of "big-scale industrialization" (*Illuminations,* 157). Bergson fixes his attention only on the reverse of that experience, that of duration, which he describes in such a way, according to Benjamin, that "the reader is bound to conclude that only a poet can be the adequate subject of such an experience" (*Illuminations,* 157).

In fact, it was a writer who tested the Bergsonian theory of experience. Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* is for Benjamin an attempt to reconstitute the experience of duration under current social conditions. Proust is led to distance himself from the Bergsonian conception of pure memory, which "leads us to believe that turning to a contemplative actualization of the stream of life is a matter of free choice" (*Illuminations,* 157–158). In insisting on the powerlessness of "voluntary memory" and on the fortuitous character of the advent of "involuntary memory," Proust underscores the difficulty in the modern age of having an experience in the full sense of the term. Experience—as the essay "The Storyteller" had already underscored—has become "issueless [and] private" and, in that way, is both inaccessible and incommunicable. This evolution, according to Benjamin, is due to the fact that modern man is "increasingly unable to assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience" (*Illuminations,* 158). Benjamin is summarizing the argument of his earlier essays by making of the modern press both a cause and a symptom of the growing cleavage between information and experience. Information no longer provides readers with stories to "pass . . . on as experience to those listening" (*Illuminations,* 159), and thus it contributes to the privatization of experience. Condemned to the Herculean and heroic task of modernity, literature is obliged to *compensate* for that gap: "Proust's eight-volume work conveys an idea of the efforts it took to restore the figure of the storyteller to the present generation" (*Illuminations,* 159).

The tendency toward the privatization of existence seems to be linked to the development of technologies of reproduction that bring the individual face to face with the mechanism while cutting him off from the community. This vision of the modern world allows Benjamin to give a definition—one incompatible with the theses in "The Work of Art"—of experience and ritual in their nonpathological form:

> Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past. The rituals with their ceremonies, their festivals (quite probably nowhere recalled in Proust's work) kept producing the amalgamation of these two elements of memory over and over again. They triggered recollection at certain times and remained handles of memory for a lifetime. In this way, voluntary and involuntary recollection lose their mutual exclusiveness. (*Illuminations,* 160)

Between the first and the second sentence of this passage, Benjamin moves from the present tense to the imperfect: He is not unaware that his model of intact experience belongs to an age that has passed. Between this model and the contemporary era, no mediation is possible. Only a messianic perspective—a confirmation of the gap existing between the present and a reconciled future—allows us to imagine a restoration of integral experience. Without ritual and its ceremonies, experience can present itself only in the degraded form of "lived experience" (*Erlebnis*) which art alone, through a heroic effort, can transform into a true experience (*Erfahrung*), now confined to literature. Contrary to the theses in "The Work of Art," it is in ritual form that art is placed in the service of social life. "The Work of Art" showed the powerlessness of any attempt aimed at restoring ritual within the framework of modern society, but, at the same time, it opened the perspective of a society reconciled with technology. As soon as such a reconciliation has been ruled out by virtue of the profound nature of technology—the source of a relation between the isolated individual and the mechanism—Benjamin can no longer abandon the idea of a reactualization of ritual. He does not imagine a type of social relation, resolutely profane, in which individuals would invent nonreligious forms of exchange and transmission of experiences, forms with which literature and modern art have long since begun to experiment.

Benjamin draws on certain hypotheses from psychoanalysis to determine the relation between voluntary memory (identified with consciousness) and involuntary memory (identified with the unconscious). According to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* consciousness and the memory trace are mutually exclusive, since the function of consciousness is to protect the psychic system against excessive excitation:

> "Becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system." Rather, memory fragments are "often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness." Put in Proustian terms, this means that only what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject of an experience, can become a component of the *mémoire involontaire.* (*Illuminations,* 159–160)

The function of consciousness would thus be to parry the *shocks* provoked not by "experience" in the full sense of the term but by traumatic "lived experiences," which are more and more frequent in modern life. That is what leads the reflection back to its starting point, the relation between experience and poetry: "That the shock is thus cushioned, parried by consciousness, would lend the incident that occasions it the character of having been lived in the strict sense. If it were incorporated directly in the registry of conscious memory, it would sterilize this incident for poetic experience" (*Illuminations,* 162). Under these conditions, "the question suggests itself how lyric poetry can have as its basis an experience for which the shock experience has become the norm" (*Illuminations,* 162). In all likelihood, this would resemble the literature, from Poe's through Baudelaire's to Valéry's, that is distinguished by its high degree of consciousness and calculation.

Benjamin first proposes to illuminate the ways that this modern poetry, exposed to the sterilizing shock of poetic experience, nevertheless succeeds in restoring experience. A first explanation is suggested in the way that Baudelaire portrays himself, presenting the poetic labor as a kind of "fencing." A second seems to be provided by "Spleen de Paris," which associates the ideal of poetic prose with "the frequenting of enormous cities." The shock to be parried now seems to emanate from the amorphous crowd of passersby, which is only implicitly present in Baudelaire's poetry but whose obsessive omnipresence Benjamin thinks he can demonstrate. The example of a shock experience is provided in the sonnet "A une passante," a fleeting encounter in the crowd of the big city; very unlike the love poem, this sonnet evokes only the "lived experience" of "the kind of sexual shock that can beset a lonely man" (*Illuminations,* 169). These verses "reveal the stigmata which life in a metropolis inflicts upon love" (*Illuminations,* 169). Nevertheless, the crowd is not only "an opposed, antagonistic element, this very crowd [also] brings to the city dweller the figure that fascinates. The delight of the urban poet is love—not at first sight, but at last sight" (*Illuminations,* 169). This sonnet is the very model for the transformation of a "lived experience" into an experience in the full sense of the term. From the pathology of experience in modernity, Baudelaire fashions a literary experience of great intensity. That was only possible, according to Benjamin,

because Baudelaire, through the idea of *correspondances*, had a notion of true experience that was linked to ritual.

The essay then examines the perception of the crowd in the nineteenth century, the crowd of the popular classes and the vast public for Victor Hugo, the frightening crowd in the work of the young Friedrich Engels in London, the disturbing crowd in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," which Baudelaire translated. Benjamin shows that civilized people in large cities have returned to a savage state; in other words, they have lost the sense of what links individuals within the community. Benjamin attributes the return to barbarism to modern technology and, among other things, to those techniques of reproduction such as photography and film that he had earlier celebrated as factors favoring the secularization of the aura and as the means allowing for the satisfaction of the legitimate aspirations of the masses:

> Comfort isolates; on the other hand, it brings those enjoying it closer to mechanization. The invention of the match around the middle of the nineteenth century brought forth a number of innovations which have one thing in common: one abrupt movement of the hand triggers a process of many steps. . . . Of the countless movements of switching, inserting, pressing, and the like, the "snapping" of the photographer has had the greatest consequences. A touch of the finger now sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were. (*Illuminations*, 174–175)

In the first chapter of "The Work of Art," this same process of accelerating reproduction was presented under more promising auspices. The following passage, dealing with cinema, from "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," completes the reversal of the 1935 text:

> Thus technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training. There came a day when a new and urgent need for stimuli was met by the film. In a film, perception in the form of shocks was established as a formal principle. That which determines the rhythm of production of a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in the film. (*Illuminations*, 175)

In "The Work of Art," this same acceleration due to the development of reproduction techniques appears as a salutary exercise allowing modern humanity to adapt to a dangerous environment (*G.S.*, 1:717). Benjamin's new evaluation of technology leads him to underscore only the aspect that is destructive, deadly, to experience in general. The model is provided in the relation between the worker and the machine. Supported by a series of quotations from Marx, Benjamin contrasts this relation, defined as a

succession of shocks, to the fluidity that characterizes artisanal work (*Illuminations,* 176). In spite of the difference of the spheres of activity, he then establishes an analogy between the worker at his machine and the gambler, between the "jolt" in the movement of the machine and the "throw" (*coup*) in the game of chance (*Illuminations,* 177).

But what matters most in this analogy is once more the idea of the loss of experience. If, in "Le jeu" (The game), Baudelaire—without being himself a gambler—identifies with gamblers' empty passion, it is because "he too has been cheated out of his experience—a modern man" (*Illuminations,* 180). The concept of experience once more reveals its theological backdrop. The allusions to Goethe, then the comparison between the ivory marble on the roulette wheel and the falling star, refer to the essay on Goethes's *Elective Affinities.* According to Benjamin, the gambler's greed is opposed to "a wish in the strict sense of the word" which "is a kind of experience" (*Illuminations,* 178–179):

> "What one wishes for in one's youth, one has in abundance in old age," said Goethe. The earlier in life one makes a wish, the greater one's chances that it will be fulfilled. The further a wish reaches out in time, the greater the hopes for its fulfillment. But it is experience that accompanies one to the far reaches of time, that fills and divides time. Thus a wish fulfilled is the crowning of experience. In folk symbolism, distance in space can take the place of distance in time; that is why the shooting star, which plunges into the infinite distance of space, has become the symbol of a fulfilled wish. The ivory ball which rolls into the *next* compartment, the *next* card which lies on top are the very antithesis of a falling star. (*Illuminations,* 179)

Gambling time is an *infernal* time, in the theological sense of the term, because it represents a loss of patience in waiting for the wish and because it knows nothing of the fulfillment of experience, the salvation that is granted only to the one who earns it, not to the one who forces it: The gambler himself "has a hand in it" (*Illuminations,* 179). Yet the necessary distance of experience is that which, according to the essay on photography and film, is inherent in the aura. There is thus no authentic experience without the aura, without ritual and tradition, without at least a memory of these realities.

The essay then returns to the initial reflection on duration and memory, in order to comprehend, beginning from what has just been said, the sense of *The Flowers of Evil.* Proust had observed that "time is peculiarly chopped up in Baudelaire; only a very few days open up, they are significant ones" (quoted in *Illuminations,* 181). According to Benjamin, these are the days of authentic experience. It is these days of remembrance

that Baudelaire associates with *correspondances.* These *correspondances,* writes Benjamin,

> record a concept of experience which includes ritual elements. Only by appropriating these elements was Baudelaire able to fathom the full meaning of the breakdown which he, a modern man, was witnessing. Only in this way was he able to recognize in it the challenge meant for him alone, the challenge which he incorporated in the *Fleurs du mal.* (*Illuminations,* 181)

This passage announces the final reversal of the essay, the reversal that distinguishes it from "The Storyteller." What Benjamin could not admit regarding epic literature—the profound modification that would make it accede to modernity—he conceives in lyric poetry. This evolution is differentiated both from the evolution that substituted photography and film for painting, and from the irremediable loss without compensation that characterized the end of storytelling. To be a modern within a traditional form that no longer has any hold on contemporary reality, one must have a notion, a memory of that aura and that experience that are broken down by modern reality. According to Benjamin the experience of Baudelairean *correspondances* "attempts to establish itself in crisis-proof form. This is possible only within the realm of the ritual. If it transcends this realm, it presents itself as the beautiful. In the beautiful the ritual value of art appears" (*Illuminations,* 182).

This ambiguous definition continues to give precedence to the type of community in which ritual has remained intact, one that knows nothing of the artistic beautiful in the grandiloquent sense. The beautiful, and in particular the artistic beautiful, appears only when experience can no longer represent itself within ritual. The ambiguity of the beautiful resides in the fact that it is the only receptacle of experience when ritual is under attack from social secularization, but it is still only an experience of substitution and is thus susceptible to crises. In a long note, Benjamin insists on the "aporetic" character of the beautiful, which is manifested through the "appearance" linked to it.

This appearance is manifested from the *historical* perspective, through the fact, observed by Goethe, that "everything that has had a great effect can really no longer be evaluated" (*Illuminations,* 199); in other words, the identity of the object escapes us by virtue of the fact that admiring gazes, in the end, veil the work of art. "Beauty," writes Benjamin, "is an appeal to join those who admired it at an earlier time" (*Illuminations,* 198). Admiration harvests only "what earlier generations have admired in it" (*Illuminations,* 198–199). It is nonetheless true that the criticism of every age discovers a beauty that is proper to it, and, in doing so, destroys a part of

the beauty transmitted. In illustrating his thesis of the aporetic character of the beautiful and of art, Benjamin seems to identify the beautiful with what persists and is fixed in the historical chain of admiration.

In a more essential way, appearance comes into being in the relation between the beautiful and *nature.* According to a formulation in the essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities,* the beautiful is what "remains true to its essential nature only when veiled" (*Illuminations,* 199). For aesthetic criticism, then, the goal is to respect this veil and not strip the work of art of what conferred consistency on it. But in attempting to explain his idea at this point, Benjamin may merely have complicated it:

> The *correspondances* tell us what is meant by such a veil. We may call it, in a somewhat daring abbreviation, the "reproducing aspect" of the work of art. The *correspondances* constitute the court of judgment before which the object of art is found to be a faithful reproduction—which, to be sure, makes it entirely problematic. If one attempted to reproduce this *aporia* through language, one would define beauty as the object of experience in the state of resemblance. This definition would probably coincide with Valéry's formulation: "Beauty may require the servile imitation of what is indefinable in objects." (*Illuminations,* 199)

What is aporetic in the case of appearance would thus be tied to the notion of a faithful reproduction of the "object of experience" or a resemblance to that object. Reproduction and resemblance are concepts that refer to the type of symbolic relation between the work of art and what it refers to. In "On the Mimetic Faculty," Benjamin speaks of a "nonsensuous similarity" that is a determining factor in the origin of human language. This paradoxical expression might rest on a mystical interpretation of the symbolic relation to the object of experience. As he has always done, Benjamin rejects the idea of the arbitrary or conventional character of symbols. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* he undertook to show that even allegory, far from being an abstract and purely conventional meaning, is a form of original *expression.* The process of naming or of symbolizing in general preoccupies Benjamin in all his reflections. The central concept of origin and the notion of the prehistoric refer back to the emergence of the symbol from an authentic experience. Benjamin refuses to see the symbol cleanly severed from the symbolized and from experience. "The origin is the goal" because one must always reconnect with the point of emergence. Above all, the enigmatic character of that emergence is tied to the fact that Benjamin deciphers in it both a symbolic process and a historical event of ontological and theological scope: The fact that a symbol comes into being constitutes a caesura in the messianic process of history. If we wish to discern the rational foundation of Benjamin's conception, we have to dissociate it

from its roots in the theory of language and in the mystical relation to the object of experience. The work of art is situated at the juncture of these fields, inasmuch as it constitutes a form of symbol that, before being publicly readable, presupposes a *break* with communication, the installation of a new "origin" of language, a "private" symbol, irreducibly unique and new, seeking to have its eloquence acknowledged. The artistic symbol, which might have been madness pure and simple, is rational only through the anticipation of an exemplarity that makes it intelligible, that makes it the object of an experience that can be shared: Its eloquence cannot in fact be acknowledged except inasmuch as the new symbol has the ability to reveal to us a new object of experience and to evoke a new reality that we were not capable of naming. The artistic symbol never fully accedes to the status of abstract and conventional meaning but—in an ever renewed disturbance of codified language—remains linked to its origin in a singular experience to which it bears witness, an individual but historically situated experience, exemplary in the issues it addresses and intelligible for all.

Benjamin, along with Baudelaire, links this experience that is "prior to" the artistic symbol (which refers back to its irreducibly unique origin) to the "Rousseauist" theme of Paradise lost[13]: "The *correspondances* are the data of remembrance—not historical data, but data of prehistory. What makes festive days great and significant is the encounter with an earlier life" (*Illuminations,* 182). Hence the kinship between festive days and works of art; both bring together a singular origin and an actualizing repetition. But, by reason of the historical process of secularization, the "ritual" experience is only the idyllic backdrop against which the contemporary reality of *spleen* or the destruction of the aura stands out: "*Le Printemps adorable a perdu son odeur!*" (Spring, the Beloved, has lost its scent); Benjamin interprets this line using a Proustian vocabulary:

> The scent is the inaccessible refuge of the *mémoire involontaire.* . . . If the recognition of a scent is more privileged to provide consolation than any other recollection, this may be so because it deeply drugs the sense of time. A scent may drown years in the odor it recalls. This gives a sense of measureless desolation to Baudelaire's verse. For someone who is past experiencing, there is no consolation. (*Illuminations,* 184)

*Spleen* results from the reification of time through the domination of voluntary memory and clock time; for experience, it substitutes the lived experience provoked by the shocks of modern life. According to Benjamin, "Spleen" and "Vie antérieure" are "the scattered fragments of genuine historical experience" (*Illuminations,* 185). True experience is an amalgam of "prehistory" and clock time.

Benjamin applies the results of his examination of experience to the

status of the arts of technical reproduction. Photography, the medium of the "optical unconscious" in "The Work of Art," is here an instrument in the service of voluntary memory:

> If we designate as aura the associations which, at home in the *mémoire involontaire,* tend to cluster around the object of a perception, then its analogue in the case of a utilitarian object is the experience which has left traces of the practiced hand. The techniques based on the use of the camera and of subsequent analogous mechanical devices extend the range of the *mémoire volontaire*; by means of these devices they make it possible for an event at any time to be permanently recorded in terms of sound and sight. Thus they represent important achievements of a society in which practice is in decline. (*Illuminations,* 186)

Technology is a stopgap measure allowing us to satisfy a need but not to preserve that vital resource of involuntary memory, the source of the aura. In "The Work of Art," film prevailed over painting, both owing to its ability to penetrate reality like a surgeon and its capacity for satisfying the demand for simultaneous perception by a large audience. Here, painting is rehabilitated; it alone is capable of offering to the gaze that of which our eyes "will never have their fill": "What distinguishes photography from painting is therefore clear, and why there can be no encompassing principle of 'creation' applicable to both: to the eyes that will never have their fill of a painting, photography is rather like food for the hungry or drink for the thirsty" (*Illuminations,* 187).

Painting satisfies infinite desire, whereas photography, according to this text, confines itself to satisfying a need that nothing can further transfigure. As in "The Storyteller," technical reproduction brings only losses:

> The crisis of artistic reproduction which manifests itself in this way can be seen as an integral part of a crisis in perception itself. What prevents our delight in the beautiful from ever being satisfied is the image of the past, which Baudelaire regards as veiled by the tears of nostalgia. . . . Insofar as art aims at the beautiful and, on however modest a scale, "reproduces" it, it conjures it up . . . out of the womb of time. This no longer happens in the case of technical reproduction. (The beautiful has no place in it.) (*Illuminations,* 187)

In "The Work of Art," Benjamin saw this as one of the *contributions* of the arts of technical reproduction, which were emancipated from an appearance linked to cult value. Here, he sees the absence of beauty and of involuntary memory as an insurmountable deficiency of photography. In

"The Work of Art," the anxiety and alienation of the movie actor in front of the lens were compensated for by the reversibility of roles: The difference between author and audience, actor and producer tended to become blurred. Here, Benjamin retains only the inhumanity of photographic equipment: "The camera records our likeness without returning our gaze." This alienation complements that which wrenches the photographic image away from the resources of involuntary memory:

> But looking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze. Where this expectation is met (which, in the case of thought processes, can apply equally to the look of the eye of the mind and to a glance pure and simple), there is an experience of the aura to the fullest extent. . . . [It] thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. This experience corresponds to the data of the *mémoire involontaire.* (*Illuminations,* 188)

This transposition of intersubjectivity to inanimate nature, adds Benjamin, is "one of the sources of poetry" (*Illuminations,* 189, translation modified). Intersubjectivity and involuntary memory are thus linked through traditional activities. Tradition is transmitted through language or, in a general way, through symbols. Benjamin makes this process enigmatic by attempting to conceive of it in terms of perception and the gaze. The intersubjectivity of the gaze without speech can only be "the observation of an observation." It is thus impossible to enter "into the views" of others and understand them. Revealingly, Benjamin discovers intersubjectivity, which has very little place in his thinking, only through the detour of the mystical or poetic relation to nature; such a relation takes the place of the break in the tie between persons whose gazes no longer respond to one another: Baudelaire "describes eyes of which one is inclined to say that they have lost their ability to look" (*Illuminations,* 189).

Finally, Benjamin once more takes up the theme of the "decline of the aura," this time through Baudelaire and in a manner that differs from his treatment of it in "The Work of Art" and that retrospectively makes it intelligible. In fact, one of the intentions of this last essay on Baudelaire is no doubt to make comprehensible—and perhaps to excuse—the experimental radicality of "The Work of Art." Through the example of Baudelaire, Benjamin attempts to show that the sacrifice of the aura corresponds to a profound necessity of artistic modernity. But this sacrifice must now be inscribed within the very *tradition* of art, instead of moving with

weapons and gear into the camp of that barbarous enemy, technical reproduction.

Benjamin thus rediscovers the "decline of the aura" in *The Flowers of Evil* through this theme of "eyes of which one is inclined to say that they have lost their ability to look." These are the eyes of nymphs, which replace the erotic magic of the returned gaze with the simple power of sexual attraction. As in the case of the *passante,* the passerby, Baudelaire has transformed a degraded lived experience into an experience in the full sense of the term. Moreover, like Benjamin, he seems "to feel something like pleasure in the degradation" of the dream (*Illuminations,* 191). Referring to the landscape painting of his day, Baudelaire says he prefers "the backdrop paintings of the stage": "Those things, so completely false, are for that very reason much closer to the truth, whereas the majority of our landscape painters are liars, precisely because they fail to lie" (quoted in *Illuminations,* 191). Benjamin does not attempt to analyze this passage; he simply suggests that Baudelaire "judge[s] landscapes by the standard of paintings in the booths at fairs." In some sense, the poet makes the practical demonstration of the Benjaminian theory of the disenchantment of art. The "magic of distances"—the aura—must be destroyed *in the name of truth.* Landscape paintings are a lie as soon as their supposed aura is a pure fiction. Baudelaire is opposed to an art of nostalgic compensation that would provide a substitute aura in the place of that which was disappearing from reality. For Baudelaire, "the lyric poet with a halo" is "antiquated." In "Perte d'auréole" (Loss of halo), one of the *Petits poèmes en prose* (Short prose poems), he anticipates the degradation to which Dadaism subjects the image of the artist with a halo. In Benjamin's view, this Baudelairean sacrifice corresponds to a profound logic of modern art. In a world in which, according to Apollinaire's title, the poet is "murdered" in the name of the most trivial interests, abandoned and "prodded" by the crowds, that is, by the very people in whose name he rebelled in abandoning the task of leading a life worthy of the name, he refuses to be the provider of a consolatory beauty. He is himself without a halo, and produces an art that sacrifices the halo to truth.

> This is the nature of lived experience to which Baudelaire has given the weight of true experience. He indicated the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock. He paid dearly for consenting to this disintegration—but it is the law of his poetry. (*Illuminations,* 194, translation slightly modified)

Benjamin does not distinguish between auratic beauty and aesthetic value. What matters here is the justification of an aesthetic quality in

Baudelaire's work that no longer has the status of a symptom. The foundation of that poetry is neither "ritual" nor "politics," the choice formulated in "The Work of Art." It resides in an aesthetic authenticity that has vanquished an experience void of substance.

## ALLEGORY, AVANT-GARDE, MODERNITY

Even before postmodern thinkers joined the fray, art theory had asked which philosophy best allowed it to account for the artistic avant-garde. Without a doubt, Adorno's ambition in *Aesthetic Theory* was to elaborate the avant-garde's conceptual bases after the fact; his borrowings (at times critical) from Benjamin's thought are considerable. In particular, his focus on the dialectic is more Hegelian. In response, Peter Bürger, drawing support from Benjamin in particular, disputes the pertinence of that philosophy of the avant-garde.[14] Adorno reestablishes the logic of aesthetic autonomy without taking into account the avant-garde critique of the "institution of art" and the project to reintegrate art into everyday life. Albrecht Wellmer might object, to Bürger, that the elimination of autonomy and of aesthetic appearance and the generalized practice of art, required in the mind of the avant-garde, runs the risk of leading to a false egalitarianism; according to Wellmer, it is only at the level of an aesthetics of reception that one can envision a "transformation of the *constellations* in which art and everyday life are found each time."[15]

In German aesthetics, avant-garde movements have been interpreted primarily in the light of the concepts elaborated by Benjamin and Adorno. In France, in contrast, whether or not a particular critic favors the avant-garde, he attempts to understand it through Nietzsche.[16] A philosophical opposition to Nietzsche may bring with it an aesthetics-based hostility to avant-garde art; conversely, "to be avant-garde" amounts to considering Nietzsche's thinking indisputable.

Independent of any particular analysis of an avant-garde moment and its possible presuppositions—Nietzschean, Benjaminian, or Adornian—we must first set aside any confusion due to an inadequate differentiation between the normative bases of philosophy and attempts to account for the most radical artistic movements. Nietzsche makes the sovereignty of modern art the foundation of his philosophical discourse. Inasmuch as that art tends to set aside any criterion *brought in from* the logical or moral order, letting stand only the criteria of force and lived intensity,[17] "truth" is only a vital illusion and the truth of art a tonic lie.[18] For Benjamin and Adorno, in contrast, the "truth content" of the work of art has not lost its logical and ethical stakes. Unlike Nietzsche, these thinkers have a tendency to make the opposite mistake: They refuse to allow for a modern or avant-garde art

that would obey a purely aesthetic logic. Where Nietzsche brings philosophy down to the level of a radically differentiated art, in relation both to discursive knowledge and to moral imperatives, Benjamin and Adorno invest art with their own imperatives, truth and justice, which are ultimately *theological.*

It remains to be seen whether the real avant-garde is more of a "Nietzschean" orientation, in the sense of embracing amoralism and throwing out a challenge to discursive knowledge, or of a Benjaminian or Adornian orientation, in the sense of possessing a strong imperative for truth and justice. Along with Kafka, Arnold Schönberg may be among the most enlightening examples of Benjaminian or Adornian orientation[19]—if these artists can really be considered representatives of the avant-garde. There is no doubt that the rejection of traditional harmony has strong ethical resonances for these artists. For them, theology functions as a barrier against a unilateral logic of art. It is not certain, however, that this is true of the other masters of the avant-garde, such as Picasso or Duchamp, Wassily Kandinsky, or Joyce. Each of them had interpreters who were convinced that they had before them the *true* avant-garde art. In any case, all modern art is the field of a polar tension: between a sovereignty of aesthetic logic that no cognitive or moral criterion can arrest, and a totality that would reintegrate these criteria.[20] Benjamin himself knew the temptation of the first of these paths, through romanticism and then surrealism and the cinema. But each time, he rejected this subversion in the name of a *theological* subversion that seeks to be more radical, by postulating, from the disorder it creates, the restoration of an ethical order.

In Benjamin's work, the second tendency takes on successively the forms of an aesthetics of the sublime, a "politicization" of avant-garde art, and a "sacrifice of the aura" in the modern work of art. In every case, art moves away from the trajectory that the spontaneous movement of modernization would impose on it. In situating the break with the aura *within* the work of art and no longer in the move to a postartistic practice that favors only an apprenticeship of perception, the late Benjamin defined the framework within which Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* would unfold. We do not find a univocal model of what modern art, avant-garde art, or contemporary art should be. The lesson of Benjamin's writings is, rather, that one must be wary of any general model and must adjust theory to phenomena. From *Einbahnstrasse* to "The Work of Art," from surrealism to revolutionary cinema, Benjamin attempts to conceptualize certain avant-garde movements. Beginning with "The Storyteller," he interests himself only in "modern" works of art: In the late reflections on idleness in bourgeois society and its religious counterpart, "study," he links Baudelaire to Kafka (*G.S.*, 1:1175–1180). "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" abandons any allegorical interpretation of *The Flowers of Evil.* Certain critics have deduced from this

that Benjamin, having underscored the difference between baroque allegory and modern allegory in the fragments of "Central Park," had finally abandoned the concept of allegory in relation to Baudelaire.[21] He nevertheless maintained until the end the project of complementing "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" with other "chapters" of the book, of which the first was to deal with "Baudelaire as allegorist." Allegory, which links revolt to the authoritarian gesture, remains in his view a pertinent response to abstract meaning as it characterizes modernity; through it, a theological promise irrupts in homogeneous and empty time.

More critics, however, have made of allegory the very model for an art that is no longer "organic," that is, for the avant-garde work of art in general.[22] This is hardly defensible. And finally, the method projected for *Paris Arcades*—in particular the "montage" of quotations—has often been considered "allegorical."[23] Certain formal analogies invite such extrapolations: the fragmentary character of allegory; the abstractly superimposed meaning; the melancholic relation to an apocalyptic history; the doubt in relation to the value of art. In addition, allegory, as well as the avant-garde work of art, breaks with the principles of classical art: "Artists who produce an organic work," writes Peter Bürger,

> treat their material as something living. They respect its significance as something that has grown from concrete life situations. For avant-gardistes, on the other hand, material is just that, material. Their activity initially consists in nothing other than in killing the "life" of the material, that is, in tearing it out of its functional context that gives it meaning. Whereas the classicist recognizes and respects in the material the carrier of a meaning, the avant-gardistes see only the empty sign, to which only they can impart significance. The classicist correspondingly treats the material as a whole, whereas the avant-gardiste tears it out of the life totality, isolates it, and turns it into a fragment.[24]

Even if such a distinction between the "classicist" and the contemporary artist can be allowed, it would still be difficult to recognize in the avant-garde artist thus defined a baroque playwright or a Baudelaire. In contrast to baroque art, whose fragmentation is opposed to the harmonious totalities of the Renaissance—and in which the discovery of nonsense threatening an immanence that had become profane was reversed when this empty world was reflected in abstract transcendence—we need to distinguish modern art, which is more internalized, more subjective, more emancipated from representation, and more conscious of its paradoxical social role. Finally, we need to distinguish such modern art, still respectful of the forms transmitted, from an avant-garde art that sovereignly makes use of its material to translate "a derangement of all the senses," an

experience radically foreign to everyday perception. Benjamin never pretended to present a theory of allegory in general, or, above all, a theory of modernity or of the avant-garde that would be in the first place a theory of the allegorical form.[25] At the very most, he attempted to explain the resurgence of an undeniably allegorical technique and spirit in Baudelaire's poetry.

In Benjamin's oeuvre, the interest in allegory grows out of an *antimodern* impulse; it is nevertheless inscribed within a movement characteristic of aesthetic modernity. To elucidate the complex relation it entertains with "modernity," we need to recall the overlapping itinerary of his oeuvre. Benjamin begins, first, from a philosophy of language that is biblical in inspiration and opposed to any modern linguistics of the "arbitrariness of the sign," but that refers to the modern poetry of Mallarmé; he begins, second, from the *modern* aesthetics of German romanticism, one of Mallarmé's sources, which had already opposed the vital sources of poetry—which was reestablishing its links to ancestral traditions—to social and scientific modernity. This *aesthetic* modernity seeks precisely to conquer, in the medium of language, the empty abstraction that results from the historical process constitutive of *social* modernity, of desacralization and rationalization. But, at the same time, it is in solidarity with this movement through its tendency toward *disenchantment,* that is, inasmuch as it is opposed to the myth of the harmonious beautiful appearance that conceals the true nature of historical life. The essay on Goethe deploys this double orientation both in its opposition to myth—through the sublime caesura of the work of art—and in the rescue operation of messianic hope in artistic beauty. *Elective Affinities* attempts to undo the myth of the Enlightenment, of modern morality and law, which it denounces as a fabric of illusions and finally as the source of a renewed fall into archaic destiny. Never, then, does Benjamin succeed in perceiving the *modern* complementarity between the radicality of subversive art and that of profane reason.

In his book on tragic drama—which also takes up the polemic among modern, romantic, and idealist aesthetics, which are accused of having misunderstood the theological dimension of allegory and the symbol—allegory crystallizes this double movement. In the end, the destruction of the beautiful appearance and the revelation of the deathly face of history change into a messianic promise: Evil *is only* allegorical, a reflection of the empty world in the plenitude of God. The most disenchanted art, deprived of all the charms of beauty, comes to provide support for a promise of happiness as it is constituted in the profound nature of art. But the theological horizon of the baroque forbids any assimilation between that art and modernity. What is missing from German tragic drama, what keeps it from being modern, is first, the principle of aesthetic autonomy and, second, radical independence from the social powers of the court and the church.

Avant-garde milieux led Benjamin to understand this; he then entered a *second* period in his aesthetic thought. From baroque allegory, he moves not to mo ernity but to the avant-garde, and especially Dadaism, surrealism, and Brecht's political theater. From a hidden, theological, heteronomy, he turns toward a subversion of aesthetic autonomy in the name of an attempt to integrate art and life. He then sets aside aesthetic value and becomes interested in art's contribution to the apprenticeship of perception among members of a society rich in dangers of every kind. The disenchantment in this case reaches the point of a *destruction* of art. But such a horizon presupposes the promise of a radical change in life itself. Art is sacrificed in the name of exotericism and the social utility of techniques of reproduction.

In the end, overcome by doubt regarding the consequences of a liquidation of tradition, Benjamin turned away from the avant-garde to defend a certain modernity. The avant-garde's rejection of the theological foundations of art could be justified only insofar as it gave birth to a social solidarity that honored theological imperatives. In the absence of such a solidarity, the beautiful remains the essential mediator of a memory of ritual solidarity, in the expectation of secularization. In "The Storyteller," Benjamin underscores the *beauty* of an art condemned to disappear; Baudelaire's oeuvre reveals to him a disenchantment that *preserves* the autonomy of aesthetic form. In this modern work of art, allegory no longer has the sense merely of an irruption of transcendence in the profane world. It fulfills a twofold function, both bursting the harmonious beautiful appearance that a highly pathogenic modern society seeks to bestow on itself, and safeguarding, in the autonomy of the work of art, the promise of happiness constitutive of art.

The promise of happiness is inherent in the heroic effort through which artistic modernity, particularly in allegory, is related to the greatness of ancient art. This effort consists in transforming into "true experience" the vulgar and humiliating sensations that make up the daily life of modernity. When Baudelaire addressed the "*hypocrite lecteur,*" his "*semblable,*" his "*frère,*" the intimate enemy of poetry and nonetheless his accomplice whom he cannot do without, he "indicated the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock" (*Illuminations,* 194). In opening the abyss between daily experience and the autonomous law of the work of art that no longer represents it, the aesthetic shock of the modern work of art also denounces any reconciliation with a social world that is itself unreconciled.[26] Aesthetic autonomy and the shocking break with a trivial world are only two faces of a single logic that, unable to pursue the escalation of shocks, at every moment risks making modern art veer toward its self-dissolution. "What guarantees the authentic quality of modern works of art?" asks Adorno. "It is the scars of damage and disruption inflicted by them on the smooth surface of the

immutable. Explosion is one of the invariable traits of art, whose anti-traditional energy becomes a voracious eddy that consumes everything. To that extent modernism is myth turned against itself."[27] To a great extent, this process is due to a confusion between the medium of experience proper to art, and the imperative for truth that is traditionally associated with it; the destruction of harmony, of appearance, of totality is a subversion only of a traditional form of the medium of artistic experience, not of the medium itself.

Like Benjamin, Adorno shrinks from the radicality of contemporary art because he is seeking in it the guarantees of a concept of truth that transcends the limits of reason. Yet, inasmuch as philosophy has managed to establish the autonomy of the debate on truth, independent of the criteria provided by the most significant works of art, contemporary art has also liberated itself from the constraints that the avant-garde imperative for truth imposed upon it.

## CHAPTER III

# History, Politics, Ethics

### THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF PARIS ARCADES

Benjamin consigned his ideas on history to a folder entitled "Re the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress": He published a few elements of them—excluding, however, the "theological" aspects—in his 1937 essay "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian."[1] In January 1939, while reworking his essay on Baudelaire into "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," he announced to Horkheimer that he was beginning a new overall plan for *Charles Baudelaire*

> from the viewpoint of the theory of knowledge. At the same time, what is becoming important is the concept of history and the role progress plays in it. The act of destroying the representation of a continuum of culture, a destruction postulated in the essay on Fuchs, must have consequences for the theory of knowledge. One of the most important of these seems to be to determine the limits within which the concept of progress can be used in history. (*G.S.*, 1:1225, letter of January 1939)

A year later, another letter announced the provisional completion of the "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

> I have just completed a certain number of theses on the concept of History. They are linked to views outlined in chapter 1 of "Fuchs" but should also serve as a theoretical armature for the second essay on Baudelaire. They represent a first attempt to set down an aspect of history that can establish an irremediable scission between our way of seeing things and the relics of positivism which, in my view, so profoundly mark even those concepts of History that in themselves are the closest and most

familiar to us. (*G.S.*, 1:1225, letter in French to Horkheimer, 22 February 1940)

Benjamin adds that these texts not only represent the already announced introduction to the *Paris Arcades* project—or to *Charles Baudelaire,* which was excerpted from it—but also attest to the fact that he felt moved "by the theoretical problems that the world situation unavoidably presents us with" (*G.S.*, 1:1226).[2] In April 1940, he explained to Gretel Adorno that the theses would reveal the long-standing foundations of his thought. Thesis 17 seemed particularly important to him, since it "ought to make the hidden but conclusive tie appear between these reflections and my earlier work, whose method it succinctly announces." And he added: "The war and the constellation from which it developed have led me to put on paper a few thoughts, which I can say I have kept to myself, even kept before me, for nearly twenty years" (*G.S.*, 1:1226). Benjamin was no doubt alluding to the theological ideas whose open expression he had set aside when he began to place his thinking within a materialist framework—not for twenty years, but for about fifteen; what went back twenty years was the apocalyptic perspective of the "Theologico-Political Fragment."

His first theological writings had represented a break with university neo-Kantianism. In a sense, the return to those themes was provoked by the analogy—through the idea of progress—between that neo-Kantianism and a certain Marxist and social democratic tradition. Numerous neo-Kantians—in the drafts of the "Theses" we find the names "Schmidt and Stadler, Natorp and Vorländer" (*G.S.*, 1:1231)—were in fact eminent social democrats. As in his youth, then, Benjamin felt the need to mark a radical break, not this time with neo-Kantianism but with an ossified Marxism; and once more, theology seemed to him to offer the means for such a break.

However, he ruled out the possibility of publication, which, he felt, could not fail to elicit "enthusiastic misunderstandings" (*G.S.*, 1:1227, letter to Gretel Adorno, n.d. [April 1940]). He probably feared such misunderstandings above all from those of his friends who had established their solidarity with the U.S.S.R. and who, it seemed to him, would have had a hard time accepting his return to theological themes and categories. In fact, however, Bertolt Brecht, whose reaction he seemed to fear, received this text very favorably, though with some reservations (*G.S.*, 1:1227, excerpt from Brecht). It is true, however, that Brecht read it only after learning of Benjamin's death. Another reason for Benjamin's reluctance to publish the "Theses" may have been his awareness that he had not reached a definitive formulation. The theses are presented in no set order, with no sequential argument. Certain of them intersect; others have an elaborately literary form and can be read in various ways. They are more like formulas and formulations to which he had become attached, even

though they were redundant from the theoretical point of view. He wrote them down so as to see clearly into his own thinking, but they did not yet allow him to explain his thoughts to others. Nor can they serve as a basis for a theoretical elaboration. Hence we can give only hypothetical interpretations of them.

It was just before the *Paris Arcades* project in its "materialist" form that, for the first time, Benjamin called himself a "historian" rather than a "critic." *Paris Arcades* was an attempt to provoke a "historical awakening" through a criticism of the nineteenth century, whose impact was still being felt. Benjamin seemed to realize that his philosophy of language did not in itself allow him to ground the sociological and historical research he had undertaken. In 1935, he felt the need to elaborate, as a function of the *Paris Arcades* project, something equivalent to the "epistemo-critical prologue" that had served as an introduction to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama.* "Whereas the baroque book mobilized its own theory of knowledge, this will be the case for *Arcades* at least to the same extent" (*Correspondence,* 482).

The figure of the historian took shape with "The Storyteller" when Benjamin, revising the notion of "liquidation" proclaimed in "The Work of Art," reintroduced the concepts of tradition and memory. The historian thus emerged bearing the "theological" features of the "chronicler," who, according to Benjamin, is the precursor of modern historiography:

> The historian is bound to explain in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with displaying them as models of the course of the world. But this is precisely what the chronicler does, especially in his classical representatives, the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, the precursors of the historians of today. By basing their historical tales on a divine plan of salvation—an inscrutable one—they have from the very start lifted the burden of demonstrable explanation from their own shoulders. Its place is taken by interpretation, which is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world. (*Illuminations,* 96)

Just as he had little appreciation for the modern novelist, Benjamin was suspicious of the rational historian who "explained" events in terms of causality and motivation instead of presenting them as significant illustrations of the "history of nature." Far from converting to an explanatory approach, the "historian" of the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" inherited certain qualities from the chronicler:

> A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that

> has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l'ordre du jour*—and that day is Judgment Day. (*Illuminations,* 254; *E.F.,* 340)[3]

For Benjamin, the chronicler remains the model for the historian: Both theological and materialist history considers events from the point of view of a decisive deliverance. In giving narrative history precedence over explanatory history, Benjamin emancipates historiography from any scientific character, since he suspects the "science" of history of having empathy for and systematic complacency with regard to the victor. Between historicism and a history written from a messianic perspective, he sees little place for a critical historiography.

History is always both an act of narration in relation to a determined horizon of interest into which the past is reappropriated and an orientation in relation to theoretical imperatives, without which the selection of material to be transmitted could only be arbitrary.[4] Benjamin pushes the break with historicism to the point of a break with scientific history. He cites Nietzsche's *The Use and Abuse of History*: "We need history, but not the way a spoiled loafer in the garden of knowledge needs it" (quoted in *Illuminations,* 260; *E.F.,* 345). Benjamin is not simply aiming for a history that has been reappropriated from a "living" perspective. He thinks that the vital interest of history is linked to the point of view of the social class that, in each instance, carries the torch of emancipation. The problem, then, is to ascertain whether it is possible to write history from the point of view of the "struggling class" by gaining access in a single stroke to the "truly universal" viewpoint of the chronicle or of messianic history. It is only in this case that the difference between historiography and the narrative prose of the chronicler would disappear.[5] In contrast, if the "virtually universal class" is only a theoretical construct, then that difference is insurmountable and the tension between historical objectivity and narrative identity remains. If the history of the oppressed can no more gain access to the perspective of the ideal chronicler than can a history that adopts the point of view of the bourgeoisie, then scientific explanation, the confrontation of arguments, is the only method capable of settling once and for all the divergent interests of different identities.

## *THEOLOGY AND MATERIALISM*

In Benjamin's later works the theory of history occupies the place that, in his earlier writings, fell to the philosophy of language. Certain structural

analogies are evident. The theory of the name as absolute expression or revelation, as it was developed in "On Language as Such," is opposed to a "bourgeois" linguistics of "abstract meaning," of the word considered as an arbitrary sign (*Reflections*, 318); in the same way, the mimetic and "materialist" theory of language as the "onomatopoeia" of a "nonsensuous similarity" between language and world is opposed to a conception of language as "a conventional system of signs" (*Reflections*, 334). In the "Theses," this corresponds to a theory of the present as "the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time" (*Illuminations*, 263) as opposed to a conception of history as a "homogeneous, empty time" (*Illuminations*, 261; see discussion 261–264). In each case, a substance is substituted for a function, a living presence for an abstraction, a false homogeneity, or a void. What characterizes both the power of the name in the philosophy of language and the power of seizing the now, of apprehending the constellation between the present era and "a definite earlier one" (*Illuminations*, 263), is the break with a process of degradation, falsifying abstraction, and banalization—a true original sin affecting the authenticity, the "origin" of language or of history—and the will to reconquer the "intensive totality" (*Reflections*, 318) of a practical and immediate relation to the natural and human world. Benjamin is linked to a tradition of thought that suspects Western rationalism of impoverishing and devitalizing the original substances of culture. Unlike Hegel, he does not think that reason possesses within itself the resources that would allow it to correct its defects; what distinguishes him from Nietzsche is that, to find a corrective for disastrous abstraction, he attempts to return not to an irrational "pre-Socratic" foundation but to one of the *sources* of this rationalism, namely, biblical thought.

At both the beginning and the end of his career, Benjamin seeks to reappropriate an alienated part of redemptive forces. Certain fragments among the drafts of the "Theses" attempt to show that the concept of history could, so to speak, substitute for that of language in its foundational role:

> The messianic world is the world of universal and full actuality. It is only in it that there will be a universal history. What today bears that name can only be a kind of Esperanto. Nothing can correspond to it as long as the confusion brought on by the Tower of Babel is not eliminated. [That universal history] presupposes the language in which one could fully translate any text of a language, living or dead. Or better, it is that language itself. But not as written language: rather as a language celebrated as a holiday. Such a holiday is purified of any solemnity; it knows nothing of song. Its language is the idea of prose itself and is understood by all men, just as babies born on Sunday understand the language of birds. (*G.S.*, 1:1239)[6]

The ideas of "The Task of the Translator," taken up again in "The Storyteller," form the link between the theory of language and the theory of a universal, messianic history. The hermeneutics of translation must allow one to reach an integral actuality both of transmitted meaning and of the forgotten past, that of oppressed and vanquished humanity.

Just as the philosophy of art was in Benjamin's early works linked to a theological critique of myth and violence, the philosophy of history is, in Benjamin's late works, placed under the sign of "theology." The famous apologue that opens the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" confines itself to affirming theology's secret and indispensable role: historical materialism, compared to a chess-playing automaton, cannot "win" without the help of a "theological" philosophy whose services it enlists. This means that "materialism" is in the end a mechanistic philosophy. As such, it is indispensable, of course: "Seek for food and clothing first," says Benjamin with Hegel, "then the Kingdom of God shall be added to you" (Quoted in *Illuminations,* 254). But it has no living soul.

Must *theology* breathe life into it? In other words, is theology the only means to correct mechanistic materialism? To that question, Benjamin responds with a reflection borrowed from a syncretist philosopher from the nineteenth century, Hermann Lotze: " 'One of the most remarkable characteristics of human nature,' writes Lotze, 'is, alongside so much selfishness in specific instances, the freedom from envy which the present displays toward the future' " (*Illuminations,* 253; *E.F.,* 339ff.).[7] For Benjamin, this self-sufficiency of the present is the starting point for a consideration of history. He deduces from it the need to turn to theology to conceive history and, to that end, introduces the notion of *happiness* to complement that of *envy* introduced by Lotze:

> Reflection shows us that our image of happiness is thoroughly colored by the time to which the course of our own existence has assigned us. The kind of happiness that could arouse envy in us exists only in the air we have breathed, among people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. [The image of salvation is its key. Does not the air breathed by the deceased of earlier times still hang about us somewhat? Do not the voices of our friends sometimes hauntingly echo the voices of those who walked upon the earth before us? And is the beauty of women of another age so unlike that of our lady friends? It thus falls to us to realize that the past calls for redemption, the tiniest part of which may be within our power.] (*Illuminations,* 253–254; *E.F.,* 340; the bracketed section does not appear in the English edition)

Not only does Lotze speak only implicitly of happiness, but he speaks neither of salvation nor of theology. Another fragment of his book, cited among the fragments of *Paris Arcades*, indicates the sense of his reflection: "Whatever its various movements," Lotze writes, "history cannot reach a destination that does not lie within its own plane, and we will save ourselves the trouble of searching for progress in the duration of history, since history is not fated to make such progress longitudinally, but rather in an upward direction at every single one of its points" ("N" 13a, 2, p. 72). Fundamentally, Lotze is speaking of the rather trivial and widespread idea that true "progress" belongs not to humanity as a whole but only to the fulfilled individual, whatever his era. According to Lotze, such "spiritual" fulfillment does not stem from a linear progress of history but from a "vertical" progression that everyone should seek to realize by his or her own means. What Benjamin means is quite different. Like Lotze, he is convinced that fulfillment, the happiness of each individual in every age, is independent of progress. But unlike Lotze, he thinks that fulfillment is the object of a messianic expectation for *redemption* that each generation transmits to the following one, without its progressive realization being possible: "There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim" (*Illuminations,* 254; *E.F.,* 340). If we were expected by our ancestors, according to Benjamin, it is to redeem a part of the happiness they could not achieve. Every human generation is confronted with the *same* quest for fulfillment. The preceding generation does not envy us because it cannot imagine what happiness would be in a different context, but it expects something from us; it even has a *right* to our redemptive power, according to Benjamin. How so? Benjamin does not say. He simply evokes a profound *kinship* among the air, the timbre of voices, the beauty of the past, and those whom we know. The happiness we seek is of the same nature as the happiness that earlier generations dreamed of. They expected it and sought it *in the same way* we do and transmitted that quest to us, by virtue of what was granted or refused them. Such would be our debt.

This passage is a good indication of the modifications Benjamin's thought has undergone. The critique of the ideology of progress is by no means a new element (it was already in his earliest writings), and texts such as "The Work of Art" stem in a certain way from that ideology by granting to *technical* progress a key role in the history of humanity. In "Central Park," we find a fragment that tells the dialectician to "have the wind of world-history in [his] sails. Thinking means for him: setting the sails" ("Central Park," 44). The "Theses" represent a break in that confidence in the wind of history—the "wind of the absolute," according to another fragment ("N" 9, 3, p. 63). The "*weak* Messianic power" of which the "Theses" speak is

linked more to an *ethics* of solidarity than to a *philosophy of history* in the sense usually given that term (which is the sense of Marxism as well); this sense accords a determinate, precise meaning to the "wind," the general dynamic of history. When the "Theses" evoke the wind, it is a "storm" identified with progress, which is only an accumulation of ruins and catastrophes; nonetheless, that storm blows "from Paradise." This evil wind prevents the historian—or "the angel of history"—from being able to "stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (*Illuminations,* 257), in other words, to do the work of redemption. It is no longer a question here of setting sail. To follow the ethical impulse of rescue and reparation, the historian must be emancipated from the hold of that catastrophic push, which seems to be due to the very dynamic of Creation. Humanity must go against the historical movement, and perhaps, in a gnostic sense, against God. The weak messianic power on which humanity counts is the force of *individuals* who seek to satisfy the expectation for happiness, which, until now, has been betrayed throughout the course of history and on which the past has a claim.

Benjamin cannot imagine—and this is precisely what his rejection of the notion of progress consists in—a gradual modification. He does not conceive of historical transformations under the sign, for example, of a fragile "democratization" such as has taken shape in certain parts of the world since World War II—without, obviously, bringing about universal happiness. He would have assimilated this type of change, encumbered by compromise and half-measures, to the compromises of "social democracies" that certain of the "Theses" place on the pillory of history. This is because, on the one hand, he identifies *true* progress—which has not yet begun—with the advent of a happiness without compromise, though it is not certain whether it is historically realizable; on the other, he situates continuous "progress" in a purely empirical dimension. These two options are complementary: Both oppose a conception that would confine itself to aspiring toward a maximum of *conditions* for happiness and would situate "progress" in the dimension of a *normative apprenticeship* for humanity. Whatever the historical underside to democracy, its gains, once realized, can never be forgotten. Anything beyond objectives of this type can only stem from a "theological" aspiration or, perhaps, from an imaginary and artistic quest.

## *BENJAMIN'S POLITICS*

The notion of *justice,* which could have legitimately appeared alongside happiness as the object of human desire, appears in the "Theses" only as a general *vengeance* of the oppressed classes. Benjamin turns to Marx to contrast materialism to a political idealism concerned for the happiness of "liberated

grandchildren." This materialism serves as the mouthpiece for the "last of the enslaved classes," "the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden" (*Illuminations,* 260; *E.F.*, 345). Such would ultimately be the sense of "law" that the vanquished generations of the past would set up for us. Their accumulated desire for vengeance would be translated into "hatred" and the "spirit of sacrifice" (*Illuminations,* 260):

> Both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren. [Our generation has learned it the hard way, since the only image it will leave behind is that of a vanquished generation. That will be its only legacy to those who are to come.] (*Illuminations*, 260; *E.F.*, 345)[8]

These ideas of vengeance and hatred, which are among the most unpleasant and embarrassing aspects of the text, can be explained by Benjamin's refusal to make the struggle for justice and happiness a lasting one. Marx could still reject hatred as the driving power for revolution.[9] To the extent that Benjamin denounces confidence in the "process of natural history" (another name for progress), he reintroduces not the imperative for justice and legitimacy (needless to say, this would have been easier to do in a more peaceful context) but hatred and the desire for vengeance as the driving force of social revolution. Among the notes for the "Theses," we find this: "Critique of the theory of progress in Marx. Progress is defined there as the development of productive forces. Man—in other words, the proletariat—is part of it. But the question of criterion is merely displaced thereby" (*G.S.*, 1:1239).[10] The rights of past generations—vanquished generations like Benjamin's own—would thus extend to vengeance for past suffering.

We can easily imagine what a revolution of this kind would look like: It would be a massacre, as certain revolutions have in fact brought. Rather disagreeably, Benjamin's position here recalls the Nietzschean verdict on a socialism founded on resentment; this was *not* in Marx's theory. In any case, it cannot be a question of opposing to Benjamin's position a Marxian version of the theory of progress; he criticized the theory of progress for the good reason that he was deprived of the resources needed to have confidence in the march of history. Everything indicates, however, that *this form* of revenge for past suffering can only prolong the list of injustices committed and thus reproduce once more the desire for vengeance, ad infinitum.[11] Beyond the imperative for justice, Benjamin mobilizes passions for dispensing justice that have no rationale outside certain extreme situations of legitimate defense. To be precise—and in this Benjamin is consistent—he formulates his idea of vengeance within the perspective of a "permanent state of emergency":

> The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. (*Illuminations*, 257)

The recourse to an authoritarian policy, indissociable from the concept of the state of emergency forged by Carl Schmitt, is understandable within the desperate context of triumphant Nazism in Europe; but, contrary to what Benjamin's formulation implies, it cannot be generalized beyond that situation. If the state of emergency is the rule, then the only sensible policy is the worst-case policy. In the 1970s, the ethics of certain terrorist groups grew out of this despair; they described Western capitalist societies as fascist regimes, against which they attempted to "bring about a real state of emergency." When Benjamin's oeuvre was enjoying its greatest political influence, it was in the name of a *false* actualization. Whatever the ambiguities of postwar European regimes, their constitutions are those of states of law and do not rest on naked violence and oppression. We must be able to differentiate between fascist regimes and democratic regimes that include certain class privileges: Benjamin's thinking does not allow us to do so. The terrorist violence that has struck those regimes has mistaken its target, and, far from redeeming the suffering undergone by the victims of the preceding generation, has only created new injustices.

As a complement to the voluntarism of the state of emergency "brought about" through an instrumental conception of politics, the "Theses," in negating the possibility of gradual change, formulate a reduction of historical time to a scientist representation. Benjamin defends this way of thinking, which shrinks from participation in lived time by adopting the point of view of Sirius, in the name of theological messianism:

> "In relation to the history of organic life on earth," writes a modern biologist, "the paltry fifty millennia of *homo sapiens* constitute something like two seconds at the close of a twenty-four-hour day. On this scale, the history of civilized man would fill one-fifth of the last second of the last hour." The present, which, as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgement, coincides exactly with the stature which the history of mankind has in the universe. (*Illuminations*, 263; *E.F.*, 347)

This analogy between two abridgements is fallacious. The historian's "present" does not entail any objectification as in physics; it is intrinsically linked by a thousand ties to the particular moments of a history in which

its perspective is always partial, indissociable from the problems of its era. Benjamin suggests here that the messianic point of view, which brings about the true state of emergency, would succeed in embracing in a single glance the totality of history and in settling once and for all the problem of historical objectivity. Such a pretension is just as fallacious as that which he criticizes in the "universal history" of historicism.

A thesis added as Appendix B also deals with the notion of the instant, this time explaining messianic time in terms of the Jewish tradition. In opposition to the mythical time of seers who claim to predict the future, there stands a future in which "every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter" (*Illuminations*, 264). Benjamin defends this Jewish tradition as a theory of history turned primarily toward the past. To be precise, "the Torah and prayers" teach the Jews "remembrance" (*Illuminations*, 264), interpreted in this case as the memory of an "oppressed past." Judaism thus symbolizes a mode of thought that is not prisoner to the fetishism of the future characteristic of the modern cult of progress, which is a secularization of Christian millennialism. Judaism's expectation of the Messiah, which fills all future time, is converted into a presence of mind grasping the "revolutionary chance" (*Illuminations*, 263; *E.F.*, 347). Whatever the legitimacy of such an interpretation, which makes the historian's vigilant intervention the key to the present and to the future, it characterizes through and through the short-circuit between theology and revolutionary politics that is the mark of the "Theses."

Four theses (10–13) are devoted to the "fundamental vices of leftist politics" (*E.F.*, 344; this expression is not in the English version). They interrupt the philosophical series of passages dedicated to the critique of historicism and the exposition of the historian's method. As in 1914, when neo-Kantianism transformed itself into German nationalism, Benjamin again turned to theology following a betrayal:

> At a moment when the politicians in whom the opponents of Fascism had placed their hopes are prostrate and confirm their defeat by betraying their own cause, these observations are intended to disentangle the political worldlings from the snares in which the traitors have entrapped them. (*Illuminations*, 258)

These remarks have often been read as a reaction to the German-Soviet pact.[12] In fact, at the end of the 1930s, they could hardly have applied to anything but the U.S.S.R. and Western Communist parties; at the time, the social democrats no longer existed as a political force.[13] According to other interpreters, these reflections are general. In his letters, Benjamin had

already expressed the same idea regarding the Front Populaire.[14] The "leftist politics" of his age appeared to him as the continuation of a confidence in progress that went back to nineteenth-century historicism. In particular, it was founded on the conviction that "moving with the current" (*Illuminations,* 258) by virtue of technological development would automatically bring about social progress owing to a boundless exploitation of nature, and, as a result, it allowed the hope of a better future for one's grandchildren. It is to this conception of history that Benjamin opposes his ideas—which are just as problematic—of combative hatred and vengeance for past suffering (Thesis 12). He plausibly proposes to distinguish between the progress of humanity and that of its aptitudes and knowledge; at the same time, he disputes the boundless and irresistible character of progress. These remarks are compatible with a nonempirical conception of history that sets the real dynamic against a logic of evolution.[15]

But what Benjamin criticizes above all is the notion of *time* that underlies the social democratic ideology and that leads him to the heart of his reflection: "The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself" (*Illuminations,* 261). The concept of time characteristic of historicism would be identical to that of the social democrats: Benjamin's essential thesis is that the concept of "homogeneous, empty time," the linear time of immanence, is opposite to the idea of "fulfilled time," which historical materialism itself must borrow from "theology," lest it fall into the ideology of progress. At the level of history, this is the equivalent of the language of the name opposed to abstract meaning.

Inasmuch as the "task of liberation" was far from taking shape at the time of the "Theses," there remained, as the concrete element of deliverance, only the act of the historian who redeems a past threatened with forgetting or misunderstanding. Benjamin identifies that act—fundamentally, the act of the critic establishing a correspondence with a revealing past—with revolutionary action itself. Among the different versions of the theses, we find this:

> In reality, there exists not a single instant that does not entail *its* revolutionary chance—we must simply define it as a specific chance, in other words, the chance for a completely new solution in the face of a completely new task. For the revolutionary thinker, the political situation reinforces the revolutionary chance of every historical instant. But this chance is also reinforced for him through the power of the keys that allow him at that instant to enter an entirely determinate room of the past that has been closed until now. Entering that room is rigorously

> identical to political action; and it reveals that action—however destructive it might be—as a messianic action. (*G.S.*, 1:1231)

What is unfulfilled in human lives, "everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful" (*Origin,* 166), cannot be redeemed by the progress of future generations, but only—in the absence of a decisive revenge of the oppressed—by a recollection, which it is the historian's task to elicit. Benjamin considers all his work just such a "theological" recollection, which saves certain essential fragments of the past from the "oppression" of forgetting or deformation. When no other action is possible—such as, for example, the positive formulation of a criticism addressing the overestimation of the impact the historian can hope for—there remains the force of thought: "Every line we succeed in publishing today—no matter how uncertain the future to which we entrust it—is a victory wrenched from the powers of darkness." (*Correspondence,* 623, letter of 11 January 1940).

## *THE HISTORIAN'S METHOD*

For Benjamin, the issue is to save *certain* concealed meanings capable of revealing the present to itself and of guiding decisive action, which will put an end to all oppression. It is uncertain whether we can confer on such an undertaking the *systematic* place of conserving the semantic potentials necessary for the hermeneutic renewal of meaning.[16] Benjamin's project abandons, without regret, entire vistas of transmitted meanings. Each time he seeks to rediscover the authentic meaning of the romantic criticism of *Elective Affinities*, for example, or of baroque allegory, or Baudelaire's poetry, he undertakes to save some *threatened* meaning that forms a precise constellation with a critical experience of the present. In his last period, he attempts to erect *that* operation of the critic into revolutionary action par excellence. Now the critic's task is a matter not of simply transferring into the world of Ideas fragments of a literary heritage that have been excluded from it but, rather, of intervening in history by discovering certain concealed meanings that appear highly illuminating to the critic and vital for the era. It entails conferring an immediate *political* function on the critic's activity.

Like Karl Kraus, who is in fact cited in an epigraph to Thesis 14, Benjamin's historian wants to *cite* the past from the viewpoint of the Last Judgment; he wants to "call the past by its name." To write history from this perspective is an exercise in view of the final "chronicle" that, according to Thesis 3, can cite the past "in all its moments." He wants to write history from the inaccessible point of view of the last historian, from the point of view of the "end of history." Hence his claim to an objectification that is at

once scientistic and messianic. But the interest of the Benjaminian theory of history resides primarily in his effort to formulate his own critical approach. The exposition of this approach is distributed throughout a number of aphorisms in the "Theses" themselves, in the draft notes, and in the series of posthumous fragments dealing with the theory of knowledge in *Paris Arcades.* We can distinguish three moments in these writings, each with a different commentary attached: first, the analysis of the conditions of the instant, "the now," when *historical knowledge is possible,* conditions that stem from a (Freudian or Proustian) theory of memory and a (Marxian) theory of class consciousness; second, the analysis of the nature of the *dialectical image,* as it is presented to the historian who fulfills these conditions; and third, the construction of the historical object as *monad.* Of these central concepts, the first two do not figure in the "Theses" as such but are implicitly present and can be reconstituted from variants.

## *The Sociopsychological Conditions of Historical Knowledge*

Regarding the "refined and spiritual" things that intervene in the social struggles for "crude and material" things, Thesis 4 evokes courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude. These qualities, according to Benjamin, are not exhausted in the present: "They have retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers. As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history" (*Illuminations,* 255; *E.F.,* 341).

In addition to the transmission of the "*weak* Messianic power," this "heliotropism" is another indication of a link existing between past and present experiences. In the first case, an expectation for deliverance was transmitted to us; here, it is rather a questioning of the past by the present. But in both cases, the present is the place for redemptions, the imperative for which traverses history. More precisely—such is the meaning of "heliotropism"—each present is challenged by a determined past that it echoes and whose knowledge is reserved for it. That is what Benjamin calls the "now of its possible knowledge":

> According to its broader determination, the image of the past that flashes up for a fleeting moment in the now of its possible knowledge is a memory image. It resembles images from a man's own past that appear to him at the moment of danger. We know that these images arise unbidden. History in the strict sense is thus an image from involuntary memory, an image that suddenly presents itself to the subject of history at the moment of danger. The historian's legitimacy depends on his keen

> consciousness of the crisis that the subject of history is encountering each time. This subject is far from being a transcendental subject; it is the struggling class, the oppressed class in the most exposed situation. There is historical knowledge only for it and for it only in the historical instant. (*G.S.*, 1:1243)

This brief synthesis establishes a link between the aspects of Proustian memory (applied to the collectives of history), the instant (that is, the temporality of knowledge), the danger (which both legitimates and motivates the interest in knowing), and the historical subject. Can the Proustian (and Freudian, according to the Benjaminian interpretation) concept of *involuntary memory,* which was one of the theoretical foundations of "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," be extended beyond individual biography to the social groups engaged in historical processes? Can what the historian remembers at the critical moment be taken for such a memory? For that to be the case, there would have to be, as Benjamin had supposed in his 1935 Exposé of *Paris Arcades,* a "collective unconscious." Yet, although collective acts of forgetting may exist, inasmuch as the members of a group—individually—have an interest in not remembering certain facts, is it plausible to speak of an "involuntary memory" at the social level?

Such is in any case Benjamin's wager. His historical reflection is founded on the idea of a *reawakening,* a form of disenchantment that converts the dream, the nightmare, or the myth of the past into a knowledge allowing one to lucidly confront the present and the future. That ambitious operation is designated "the *Copernican revolution in the vision of history*" (*G.S.*, 5:490, my emphasis) and thus, according to the sense of the Kantian expression, as the recentering of history around the subjective conditions of knowledge:

> We considered the "Then" a fixed point and we thought the present was tiptoeing toward the knowledge of that fixed element. Now this relation must reverse itself and the Then become a dialectical reversal and an irruption of awakened consciousness. Politics now takes precedence over history. Facts become something that have only just struck us this very instant, and establishing them is the stuff of remembrance. (*G.S.*, 5:490–491)

That Copernican revolution in the vision of history thus frees us from the requirement of establishing a chimerical "truth" about past events; what matters is the vital significance of these events for our present and for the interest that such a rediscovered past represents under different auspices.

According to other fragments, the contemporary age seems to have a particularly good chance of experiencing such a Copernican revolution. For the knowledge of the past to necessarily have the character of a reawakening,

the continuity between past and present must be pathologically broken. That seems to be the case for the current era. For Benjamin, as we have seen, the current era is hardly distinguishable from the "state of emergency" that the historical process has always been, but it may offer a new chance for knowledge. When "the prehistorical impulse to the past . . . is no longer hidden, as it once was, by the tradition of church and family" ("N" 2a, 2, p. 49), the past takes on a prematurely obsolete, archaic aspect and elicits a "surrealist" gaze (*G.S.*, 5:493). At the same time, the historian is transformed into a "ragpicker" who collects castoffs the way the psychoanalyst gathers the "residue" of the phenomenal world that has been deposited in dreams:

> Method of this project: literary montage. I need say nothing. Only exhibit [*zeigen*]. I won't filch anything of value or appropriate any ingenious turns of phrase. Only the trivia, the trash—which I don't want to inventory, but simply allow it to come into its own in the only way possible: by putting it to use. ("N" 1a, 8, p. 47)

For Benjamin, this means fanning the spark of hope, saving what has been forgotten or set aside in the name of the new. But it also means bringing about an awakening. In that spirit, the actualization of the obsolete past "lights a fuse of the explosive that is buried in the Then (and whose authentic figure is *fashion*). To thus approach the Then means to study, not as in the past historically, but politically, with political categories" (*G.S.*, 5:495). The "Copernican revolution in the vision of history" is once more placed under the double sign of *messianic* remembrance of the expectations of the past and a *surrealist* gaze on a past that has prematurely fallen into ruins through the decline of tradition. That double inspiration, linked to the rejection of the idea of progress, determines the *instantaneous* nature of remembrance. According to Thesis 5,

> The true picture of the past flits by. The past can only be seized as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. . . . For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (*Illuminations*, 255)

This conception is linked to that of involuntary memory. It presupposes that the *instant* of possible knowledge is extremely fleeting, both because of the continuity of forgetting and oppression and because of the modern discontinuity with tradition. It is hardly possible to verify such an assertion. The knowledge of the past can be made easier through the analogy between

certain past and present experiences; we must nevertheless suppose that a sufficiently sensitive hermeneutic method is capable of surmounting the absence of such analogies and of emancipating itself from the projection of the historian's immediate interests.

We should also note that Benjamin links the truth of knowledge to the form of the fleeting *image*, not to the concept: "That in which the past and the present join to form a constellation is an image" (*G.S.*, 1:1242). The privilege of the image lies in its capacity to enter into correspondence with other images. Furthermore, the image—according to an old theme of romanticism and German idealism—possesses the power to speak to everyone, while the concept is addressed only to the educated classes. Knowledge through images is more accessible, more universal, but it is also more ambiguous. An image can be interpreted in more ways than a concept.

What primarily legitimates and motivates the interest in knowledge is the *danger* that makes the image of the past flash up. That is the theme of Thesis 6:

> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious. (*Illuminations*, 255; *E.F.*, 342)

In his work as a critic, Benjamin's task was always to wrest an unjustly "oppressed" and forgotten past from a conformism that was threatening it. In doing so, he obeyed an ethical imperative that he never formulated as such. But, in applying his idea to the tradition of Marxism threatened from the outside and from the inside (by its social democratic deformation), he attempts here to give an *immediately* political significance to his criticism, when such a significance can no doubt only be mediated. The political effect that consists in reestablishing authenticity in the interpretation of a tradition can stem only from a public questioning and a patient and long-term transmission.

The danger that Benjamin perceives in nineteenth-century historiog-

raphy resides in the fact that it had become complicitous with the underlying barbarism of all earlier culture:

> Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. (*Illuminations,* 256; *E.F.,* 343)

This radicalization of skepticism with regard to culture—which Adorno will improve on—would come close to attacking Benjamin himself if he did not make an exception for a single authentic and nonbarbaric culture, which transmits the expectations of redemption, happiness, and justice, and is addressed to us by the vanquished past. We must, then, always "brush history against the grain" (*Illuminations,* 257; *E.F.,* 343), especially since Benjamin is intimately acquainted with the mechanisms that lead to the grandiloquent attitude toward the victors who write official history:

> It is a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, *acedia,* which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical images as it flares up briefly. Among medieval theologians it was regarded as [one of the seven deadly sins,] the root cause of sadness. (*Illuminations,* 256; *E.F.,* 342ff., bracketed section not in English edition)

This indolence of the heart called *acedia,* or mortal sadness, had been analyzed in Benjamin's earliest writings, especially in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Origin,* 155), in a way that attested to his familiarity with melancholy. It was partly to escape from it that he turned away from his initial metaphysics in order to place his thinking in the service of social transformation. Benjamin considers his critical work to be that of a historian in solidarity with the oppressed. It is owing to an identification with their battle that the access to the knowledge of a past acquires the value of political action in the fullest sense.

According to Benjamin, the subject of history is the struggling class, the oppressed class, but as a historian, he willingly forgets that he is only its advocate and that his arguments are open to dispute. Nothing guarantees that such a legitimation is adequate. Every struggling class interprets

history in conformity with its own interests. For there to be no other interest but the truth, it would have to have, according to Marx's expression, nothing to lose but its chains; it would have to be universal in power, to a point that cannot even apply to the proletariat. It would also have to assume the legitimate interests of all humanity, including the issue of individual rights. Yet the "truths" formulated by those who have claimed to represent the struggling class remain just as disputable as those of authors who aspire for a scientific objectivity without relying on a universal "class interest." There is no privileged class that allows the historian to accede in its name to an indubitable historical objectivity; the historian's arguments must be solid. Benjamin senses this when he opposes the "theoretical armature" (*Illuminations*, 262) of historical materialism to the additive approach of universal history. But, believing with Brecht that he holds the elements of a "doctrine" that is beyond dispute, he does not draw all the consequences.

Such is, then, the psychosociological constellation that conditions the method of historical thought for Benjamin: involuntary memory; the instantaneous seizing of a fleeting image; a rescue operation called for by an imminent danger; the oppressed class as the subject of history. In the spirit of the philosophy of the subject, Benjamin's own political project consists in bringing humanity to accede in a single leap to a transparent knowledge of self and to rediscover the origin from which it has been alienated. The antinomies within which the philosophy of consciousness evolved from Hegel to Husserl to Freud, as Foucault distinguishes them in *The Order of Things*—"the empirical and the transcendental," "the cogito and the unthought," and "the withdrawal and the return of the origin"[17]—are also found in Benjamin's philosophy of history: a finite subject that is seeking to transcend itself; an empirical continuity of oppression to which is opposed a transcendental subject of history, in this case, a struggling class that inherits all the aborted revolts of the past; the tension between the mythic opacity of history and the transparence of reawakening; and, finally, the opposition between an alienated origin and a final reconquest of the past.[18] These antinomies, associated with the ambition for a radical reappropriation, whether instantaneous (through a "reawakening" or coming to consciousness) or progressive (through the historical process of an "odyssey of the mind") are due to the uncrossable gulf between a subject and an object that can never come together. The thinker who proposes to bring forth the unconscious of society both overestimates his or her own strength and underestimates that of the subjects who are prisoners to myth and ideology.

At this collective level, consciousness can progress only through public debate, which presupposes the existence of a democratic context, of which Benjamin knew only the premises. He was limited by the fact that he did not recognize normative values. His strength is to have sensed the disaster of 1939–1940, but the radical absence of free and critical debate in Europe was

a situation to which his catastrophic thinking was always drawn. That mode of thinking offers no solution to such a crisis, but some of his discoveries deserve to survive the decline of the philosophy of the subject. This is particularly true for the critique of the concept of "timeless truth." Truth, writes Benjamin, is linked to "a time-kernel [*Zeitkern*] that is planted in both the knower and the known" ("N" 3, 2, p. 51). The historical "object" and the knowing subject are tied precisely by the force of truth that calls for their correspondence: to reveal one through the other. Benjamin is opposed to the idea that truth, as a stable and immobile object, "will not run off and leave us" ("N" 3a, 1, p. 51; cf. *Illuminations*, 255). He does not wish to relativize the idea of truth in that way; rather, he wishes to link it to the *current imperative* for truth that must always again be proved, that cannot be stabilized in the form of a proposition that would be truly independent of its assertion. This idea can be taken up again by a pragmatic theory of truth.

## *The Nature of the Dialectical Image*

The historical image, writes Benjamin, is opposed to any representation of a historical *process*. We have already seen one reason for this discontinuity: the continuity of history is that of oppression. Revolt and freedom are only instants in a mythical and catastrophic continuum, immediately stifled and forgotten. Thus, deliverance can intervene, according to Benjamin, only if the historical process comes to a *standstill*. To the dynamic of history, Benjamin opposes a constellation. He speaks of the "dialectic at a standstill" and of a "dialectical image," concepts whose precise explanation he was unable to complete and that therefore remain rather difficult to grasp.

The 1935 Exposé is the first of Benjamin's writings[19] to introduce these concepts:

> Ambiguity is the pictorial image of dialectics, the law of dialectics seen at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image therefore a dream image. Such an image is presented by the pure commodity: as fetish. Such an image are the arcades, which are both house and street. Such an image is the prostitute, who is saleswoman and commodity in one. (*Reflections*, 157, translation modified)

The dialectical image would move from a "dream image" to an "involuntary memory of humanity delivered" (*G.S.*, 1:1233). This involves only a slight displacement, inasmuch as the image in *Paris Arcades* must also appear to us at the moment of awakening or of deliverance, as anticipated by the historian. The dialectic at a standstill slices across the historical process, in order to extract from it an image of revealing ambiguities: both dream of happiness and mythic phantasmagoria. It is incumbent upon us to recover

the utopian expectation of the past and to deliver it from the phantasmagoria that have condemned it to failure. There is every indication that Benjamin considered the Marxian analysis of the commodity as the model for such an evocation of a dialectical image ("N" 4a, 5, p. 54). But it also seems that this concept did not reach a definitive clarification. An impressive number of aphorisms attempt to focus on it, from different angles, without ever succeeding in elucidating it fully.

In certain texts, the dialectical image is linked—as one image is linked to another—to the philosophy of language that Benjamin had developed around "the mimetic faculty." The most developed form of that mimetic faculty is reading:

> If we are to consider history as a text, then what is true for literary texts, as a recent author has explained it, is also true for history: the past has left images comparable to those that light leaves on a photosensitive plate. "Only the future possesses chemicals active enough to perfectly develop such negatives" (Monglond). The historical method is philological; its foundation is the book of life. In Hofmannsthal we find: "Read what has never been written." The reader we must imagine in this case is the true historian. (*E.F.,* 354)

The classical theme of reading in the Book of Life or in the Book of Nature is modified by this philology of Benjamin's, which consists in reading "what has never been written." Such a reading resembles the displacements that a theory such as Freud's brings about in classical tragedy. Another fragment explicitly establishes the link between the dialectical image and language as a medium of transmission:

> It isn't that the past casts its light on the present or the present casts its light on the past: rather, an image is that in which the Then [*das Gewesene*] and the Now [*das Jetzt*] come into a constellation like a flash of lightning. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For . . . the relation of the Then to the Now is dialectical—not development but image[,] leaping forth [*sprunghaft*].—Only dialectical images are genuine (i.e., not archaic) images; and the place one happens upon them is language. ("N" 2a, 3, p. 49)

Discontinuity is essential to the dialectical image. Benjamin links it to the moment of standstill, the caesura, which, according to the essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities,* suspends the movement of tragedy and introduces an "inexpressive" moment of reflection:

> Thinking involves both thoughts in motion and thoughts at rest. When thinking reaches a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions,

> the dialectical image appears. This image is the caesura in the movement of thought. Its locus is of course not arbitrary. In short, it is to be found wherever the tension between dialectical oppositions is greatest. The dialectical image is, accordingly, the very object constructed in the materialist presentation of history. It is identical with the historical object; it justified its being blasted out of the continuum of the historical process. ("N" 10a, 3, p. 67)

Thesis 16 underscores the unique and nonreiterable character of the moment when the historian discovers that the dialectical image is destined for *him* and for the historical moment when he can save such a constellation of memory:

> A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the "eternal" image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called "Once upon a time" in historicism's bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history. (*Illuminations*, 262)

Against historicism, Benjamin seeks to safeguard the originality of an unprecedented relation to the past.[20] In claiming the historical materialist is "man enough," he is referring to Nietzsche's notion of virility, which denounces historicism in the name of a certain vitalism:

> Here we see clearly how necessary a third way of looking at the past is to man, beside the other two [monumental and traditionalist]. This is the "critical" way, which is also in the service of life. Man must have the strength to break up the past, and apply it, too, in order to live. He must bring the past to the bar of judgment, interrogate it remorselessly, and finally condemn it. Every past is worth condemning. . . . *You can explain the past only by what is most powerful in the present.*[21]

To that, Benjamin adds a notion of the present's weight of *responsibility* not only for the future but also for the past, inasmuch as, through suffering and unfulfilled expectations, we owe it to the past to remember.

## *The Construction of the Historical Object as Monad*

In addition to the psychosocial conditions of historical knowledge and the fleeting nature of the dialectical image—a constellation formed between a past and a present—Benjamin includes the work of the historian properly

speaking, which consists, according to him, in "liquidating the epic element in the representation of history" (*G.S.*, 1:1243). That entails a constructive aspect and a destructive aspect. The destructive aspect obeys a critical impulse; it is directed against the false continuities of history.

In that way, the historian knows he is in solidarity with revolutionary movements:

> The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their action. The great revolution introduced a new calendar. The initial day of a calendar serves as a historical time-lapse camera. And, basically, it is the same day that keeps recurring in the guise of holidays, which are days of remembrance. Thus the calendars do not measure time as clocks do; they are monuments of a historical consciousness of which not the slightest trace has been apparent in Europe in the past hundred years. (*Illuminations*, 261–262; *E.F.*, 345)

Here, Benjamin establishes a direct relation between the aesthetic reflections on time that he developed in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" and the time of history, especially the time of revolutions. The days that matter for Benjamin "are days of completing time, to paraphrase Joubert. They are days of recollection" (*Illuminations*, 181). They are linked to the "rituals with their ceremonies" and to festivals (*Illuminations*, 159). In a manner we again find in Hannah Arendt, Benjamin confers an implicitly aesthetic quality on these inaugural moments of history, that is, on revolutions. Revolutions have that density of a full and fulfilled time that characterizes works of art and celebrations. In them, an origin is renewed, without any dissociation between signifier, signified, and referent, and without "homogeneous, empty time." History, art, and religion come together to illustrate fulfilled time, for which, here as in Rousseau, celebration provides the model. In this case, however, the celebration is not the instantaneous suppression of all mediations but, rather, the reassertion of an origin and the reinforcement of a memory.

The calendar, the reiterated memory of an inaugural moment, points to a problem that risks annulling the break in continuity. Benjamin formulates it as a "fundamental aporia": "The history of the oppressed is a discontinuum." "The task of history consists in seizing hold of the tradition of the oppressed" (*E.F.*, 352). He seeks to solve this problem by asserting that "the representation of the continuum ends with a leveling and the representation of the discontinuous is at the foundation of any authentic tradition" (*E.F.*, 352). The *authenticity* of tradition thus lies in the fact that a representation is *wrenched from* a historical continuity placed under the sign of oppression, conformism, and falsification: continuity

levels out both suffering and revolt. The French Revolution is the example of this:

> History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate. It evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes costumes of the past. Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger's leap into the past. (*Illuminations*, 261)[22]

What interests Benjamin about the French Revolution is not its institutional innovations and their consequences in the field of values, but the very *experience* of revolutionary discontinuity, which, on principle, cannot last. Benjamin is also not bothered by the fact that the revolutionaries' desire, to give new life to the Roman republic, was illusory and was no doubt partly responsible for the failures that the "ideas of 1789" encountered in the early days; he is not embarrassed by the fact that historical action is placed on the same level as fashion, which, according to the first Exposé of *Paris Arcades,* was allied with the fetishism of the commodity. What counts for him in these examples is the fact that a present can abruptly recognize itself in a past and, through that dazzling discovery, can create the new. Here again, artistic innovation provides the model for historical action.

This analysis is confirmed by the last concept that Benjamin introduces in presenting his theory of history, that of the *monad,* which had already figured in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Origin,* 47) and in the essay on Fuchs:

> Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. (*Illuminations,* 262–263; *E.F.*, 346)

It is striking that this same concept of monad could have figured in the preface to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* without being linked to a revolutionary historical methodology. Benjamin at the time was concerned with extracting from the empirical succession of history certain privileged forms that had the quality of "origin" or of *authenticity.* Baroque tragedy as

such was not a revolutionary form but, rather, the expression of the most profound melancholy elicited by a disabused contemplation of the course of history. It was, however, a form that had been the victim of a forgetting characteristic of the official history of German literature: the forgetting of a radical lament concerning the vanity of all things and a subversion of art through the consciousness of death. Such forms, which are blasted out of the continuum of history, nevertheless contain historical time. According to Benjamin, suspended time returns within the moment wrenched away from continuity:

> [The historian] takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history—blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time cancelled [*aufgehoben*, in the Hegelian sense]; in the lifework, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history. (*Illuminations*, 362; *E.F.*, 347)

To judge from this passage, Benjaminian "monadology" is in fact a kind of "genetic structuralism" that seeks the sense of historical acts and works in coherent signifying structures.[23] The "monad" is such a structure, constitutive of a "vision of the world." The number of these visions is limited, as is the number of Benjamin's "Ideas," and each monad possesses a "prehistory" and a "posthistory," through the repeated themes and variations of these Ideas over the course of history. The particularity of the Benjaminian monad—due to his original vision of history—resides in the fact that on each occasion it incarnates the "revolutionary chance" to redeem a part of the forgotten past and (this is the principal justification for its name) in the fact that the monad in itself sums up the whole of history: the conflict between an awakening and the forgetting of a messianic chance.

The aesthetic element of this philosophy of history is not simply a confusion of categories. Benjamin insists unilaterally on an aspect neglected by objectivist historiography. He emphasizes the fact that the historian is never indifferent to his or her objects, that they belong to the historian's own irreplaceable experience and that he or she is responsible for a past always threatened by the interests of the present. Beginning with World War II, the history of the victims has earned its rightful place in the discipline, even though history as "giver of meaning" and "affirmation of national identities" is far from dead.[24] But an orientation that thus "brushes history against the grain" is also not without risk. It can serve as a pretext for a conception of history that simply opposes the victors' history. Such an inversion would change nothing in the underlying error. If we believe that no essential progress has ever come about and that, under its appearance of

commitment and with its rational thought, morality, and profane law, democratic society is only a new disguise for ancestral domination, *more* totalitarian than antiquity perhaps,[25] we establish a false continuity. Through Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* on which Benjamin's "Theses" have left their mark, such a vision of history has become canonical for a contemporary mode of thought that can no longer point to the despair of the years 1940–1944. There is a very good chance that Benjamin would have broken with such a reformed conformism.

## *ETHICS AND MEMORY*

It would be vain to try to make Benjamin into a good democrat. He had known the empire of William II, World War I, Nazism, exile, the German refugee camps in France, and persecution, and he was unable to consider the babbling of the Weimar Republic and the half-measures of a leftist politics—that of the Front Populaire—"with which the rightists would provoke revolts" (*Correspondence,* 542) as models for a credible politics. In his view, the "state of emergency" was the rule, and democracy was dupery or, at most, a vain effort to forestall the decisive rescue operation. In addition, there is no way to fully share Benjamin's skepticism in the context of Western democracies, where the state of emergency has, in any case, not been the rule for more than half a century and where the problem of injustice, though far from disappearing, is not posed in the same terms as during the age of Nazism. The idea of a "redemptive" working class operating in the name of the tradition of the oppressed seems to have been definitively set aside (*G.S.,* 1:1246, ms. 486).

A third error—along with styling Benjamin as a democrat or sharing his skepticism—would be to believe that a *radical* demand for justice and the realization of democratic principles no longer has any rightful place, given the gains of our Western societies. An ocean of misery and oppression surrounds these islets of democracy and prosperity. And these democracies are and have been, in the past and in the present, largely responsible for that state of affairs, which they favored through colonization and the often advantageous exchange of technological expertise for raw materials; linked to humanitarian aid to ease our consciences, fueled by ancestral traditions, the cynicism about inequality and injustice inhabits our societies.

Benjamin never heard of Auschwitz, but having experienced the Nazi era and forced exile, the prospect of a Europe without Jews hardly astonished him; he discussed it with Scholem. In reaction, he adopted an extreme position that effaced the distinction between might and right. But if the state of *emergency*—fascism—is the *rule* in history, in the name

of what idea can we criticize such a state? Not in the name of any right or law, in any case. In fact, Benjamin always considered law a mythic reality. The historical "fact" of genocide is of an enormity such that the imperative for "law"—even emancipated from myth—no longer has any hold on it. Thus Benjamin wrote: "The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are "still" possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge—unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable" (*Illuminations,* 257).

Benjamin is speaking ironically of a *naive* conception of progress that supposes that this century *ought to* be safe from barbarism. But at the same time, he excludes any notion of a *regression* in history. As a result, there is no longer any criterion allowing us to distinguish degrees of inhumanity. For most of those who have reflected on it, Auschwitz crossed a threshold. What constitutes the horror of the death camps is not that there existed oppression and massacres, which had always existed throughout history: In its scope, the inhumanity was not simply regressive but went beyond anything that had ever been perpetrated. In that sense, Benjamin might have found confirmation for his thesis; Adorno, in fact, interpreted all the history of the West, from the massacre committed by Ulysses to Auschwitz, as a continuous escalation. But this was also a case of barbarism surging up from within a *civilized* society whose constitution, that of the Weimar Republic, was founded on humanist, universalist, and democratic values. Not to admit that there was regression is to fail to take seriously the age-old struggle for the realization of democracy and the generalization of universalist principles. Progress in this sense does not mean, as Benjamin supposes, that humanity has definitively acceded to a "messianic" stage that henceforth excludes barbarism but, rather, that certain normative gains can be repressed but not forgotten. Just as there will probably never be a society without violence and individual murders, no society will ever be able to exclude barbaric regressions on a larger scale. We must nevertheless maintain the notion of regression, and thus also of a "progression" in the apprenticeship and the institutionalization of legal and moral norms. Despite the naiveté of expression, what is right in the astonishment about the fact that such things "are 'still' possible" is the revolt against such a regression. Without such a revolt against regressive violence and injustice—a revolt that appeals to an *acquired* level of institutionalized norms—there is no notion of law; there is only hatred, thirst for vengeance, and a messianic hope that is not of this world. Benjamin does not place himself in the domain of law, because he is convinced of the powerlessness of any norm before the massive empirical *fact* of continual oppression. He faces no opponent in the guise of normative expectations; he speaks of victors and vanquished in the third person; he resigns himself to merely observing relations of force.

In Benjamin's work, the contemporary debate on ethics is confronted with a mode of thought situated to one side of what seems to have become its immutable framework, the opposition between Kantians and Aristotelians or Hegelians. Here again, Benjamin occupies a peculiar place: He is claimed both by thinkers who, like Ricoeur, lean toward a neo-Aristotelian philosophy and an anchoring of ethics in narration,[26] and by those who, like Habermas, defend a procedural ethics of discussion.[27] How are such contradictory claims possible? We find very little moral theory in Benjamin; thus the two sides can draw support only from his intuitions and implicit presuppositions.

Benjamin's thought is both traditionalist and critical. It is even *critical* precisely to the extent that it lays claim to a *tradition* of the forgotten and the oppressed. It seeks to give voice to what in history has been condemned to mutism. The essay on Carl Gustave Jochmann and his *Rückschritte der Poesie* (Regression of poetry) provides an example. Benjamin exhumes a nearly forgotten Baltic author who wrote in German and who emigrated to France, and exhumes with him an entire culture of Baltic liberation movements of which almost every trace has disappeared. Jochmann's mode of thinking went against the current. At a time dominated by romanticism, he was its intransigent adversary: He was opposed to the nostalgic hunt for false riches, the insatiable thirst for and assimilation of the past, "not through a progressive emancipation of humanity by virtue of which it considers its own history with increased vigilance, but through the imitation and relentless acquisition of all the works of disappeared peoples and eras" (*G.S.,* 2:581). Before Adolf Loos, Jochmann was one of the first opponents of nineteenth-century historicism, which Benjamin targets in his *Paris Arcades* project. "Of what belongs to the past," he writes, "all is not lost; of what has been lost, all has not been lost irremediably; of what has not been replaced, all is not irreplaceable" (*G.S.,* 2:582). What counts for Jochmann, as for Vico, from whom he draws inspiration, are the heights of a very old heroic humanity and of its poetry. When he comes in contact with it, "his prophetic gaze catches fire" (*G.S.,* 2:578). In that poetry, humanity for the first time discovered its own nature and drew strength for the long voyage that awaited it (*G.S.,* 2:585). Like Benjamin midway between the *Aufklärung* and romanticism, Jochmann turned toward this distant past to gather hope and a promise of emancipation.

Friedrich Schlegel said that the historian was a "prophet turned toward the past." Benjamin translates this into a method whereby the historian sees "his own era through the medium of past destinies" (*G.S.,* 1:1250). The ethical dimension is introduced through the notion of a "rescue operation": It is a matter of saving an image from the past that *legitimately expects* to be

delivered because we have a *debt* toward it. For it transmits to us that "weak Messianic power" that will redeem history from being that of the victors alone. The rescue operation confers on the past its "incompletion." We pursue its insurrectional initiative because we owe it that much.

Among the fragments from *Paris Arcades,* we find on this subject the excerpt from an exchange of letters between Benjamin and Horkheimer. According to his essay on Eduard Fuchs, Benjamin had spoken of the "incompleteness of the past" in the case of a historian who considered culture not a transmitted good but, rather, a set of meanings whose sense later history reveals and modifies. Horkheimer then makes this observation: "The assertion of incompleteness is idealistic, if completeness isn't included in it. Past injustice has occurred and is done with. The murdered are really murdered. [In the last instance, your claim is theological.] If one takes incompleteness completely seriously, one has to believe in the Last Judgment" (Horkheimer's letter of 16 March 1937, quoted in "N" 8, 1, p. 61; bracketed section not in English version).[28]

In responding to Horkheimer's letter, Benjamin avoids taking on the criticism that he remains prisoner to idealism and theology. In a note for *Paris Arcades,* in contrast, he calls for theology. After the passage from Horkheimer, he writes:

> The corrective to this line of thought lies in the reflection that history is not just a science but also a form of memoration [*eine Form des Eingedenkens*]. What science has "established," memoration can modify. Memoration can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete. That is theology; but in memoration we discover the experience [*Erfahrung*] that forbids us to conceive of history as thoroughly atheological, even though we barely dare not attempt to write it according to literally theological concepts. ("N" 8, 1, p. 61)

What is "theological" in Benjamin's mind is the profane faculty of memory to make death and past suffering incomplete. Remembrance is theological through its function of transmitting a "messianic" power. Without that function of memory, the narcissistic present forgets its debt toward all aspirations for freedom that have been vanquished in the past. Yet the injustices of the past that have not been redeemed haunt us and poison us all the more when they are forgotten: They can then be reproduced with impunity.

*Art* is a privileged manifestation of such a memory. Even if that is not its first goal, it saves from mutism and forgetting certain irreplaceable experiences to which society assigns no other rightful place. Its works make public and conserve through time the possibilities of humanity, the hope

they elicit, the defeats they have undergone. Art is the symbolic crystallization par excellence of those of humanity's aborted dreams that cannot or could not be translated into action or institutions, that could leave no trace in history. In that sense, criticism has an ethical task before any consideration of the ethical implications of works of art. It must gather together and amplify, by wrenching away from oblivion, the exemplary experiences that question those that are accepted and defused. That is how it contributes to writing "the history of the vanquished."

But such a "history of the vanquished" or "tradition of the oppressed" is itself an ambiguous reality. Like any tradition, it submits its norms to the laws of empirical transmission: The fact of being transmitted counts more for the tradition than the legitimacy of what is thereby transmitted. The tradition of the oppressed conserves the memory of injustices committed and suffering undergone, but it also transmits the *deformations* and pathologies of oppression: accumulated hatred, the desire for vengeance and revenge, the thirst to dominate those by whom one has been dominated. In his solidarity with every revolt against power, Foucault came to realize the perversity of such a reversal, when the domination of the formerly oppressed proved to be just as appalling, or even more atrocious, than the domination against which they had arisen. Such reversals are always possible, and even probable, within the framework of a revolt animated by hatred and vengeance and this risk even exists in the Benjaminian model for a decisive vengeance of *all* the oppressed of history by a redemptive class. Instead of considering hatred and the desire for vengeance—which is not to be confused with indignation and the imperative for justice—as precious driving forces in the struggle for emancipation, he would have had to see in them the pathological symptoms of resentment.

The Benjaminian history of the vanquished rests on an ethics of solidarity but not of reconciliation. "What Benjamin has in mind," writes Habermas,

> is the supremely profane insight that ethical universalism also has to take seriously the injustice that has already happened and that is seemingly irreversible; that there exists a solidarity of those born later with those who have preceded them, with all those whose bodily or personal integrity has been violated at the hands of other human beings; and that this solidarity can only be engendered and made effective by remembering.[29]

That presupposes that everyone, including the heirs of the oppressors, participate in such a remembrance, to which Habermas, referring to Benjamin, relentlessly calls the Germans of today:

> The universalist content of a form of patriotism that is crystallizing around the constitutional democratic state must no longer be linked to a history of victories; it is incompatible with that crude state of nature—but to the second degree—that characterizes a historical consciousness remaining obtuse regarding the profound ambivalence of all tradition, the chain of irreparable damage—the dark side of all cultural conquests up to the present.[30]

Adapting the Benjaminian idea to his own ends, Habermas sets aside what in Benjamin *limits* ethical universalism: the hatred and thirst for vengeance that, for the author of the "Theses" in his despair of 1940, enables the oppressed class to find the way to decisive deliverance. The Benjaminian ethic of solidarity is deficient because it thinks it can rise above the abstraction of a formal principle of justice, which the oppressed themselves would be obligated to respect. That is, Benjamin confuses the categories of historical narration and ethics, in the name of a tradition of injustice, which he wrenches away from mutism and forgeting.

On the one hand, in "The Storyteller," Benjamin evokes with nostalgia the figure of the *just man,* the man of counsel, who disappears at the same time as the art of storytelling. Benjamin cannot conceive of a kind of justice that would no longer be incarnated in substantial virtues such as those of the exemplary man of antiquity. Yet the validity of modern morality does not depend on its exemplary incarnation in a just man. In that sense, Benjamin is not a modern: He cannot dissociate ethics from narration, justice from the just man. If literature and the arts—tragedy, the novel, and film—despite their autonomy of structure, are never indifferent to ethical issues, this is not true of literature's—or, in general, narration's—importance for ethics. Ethical action or discourse can *draw support from* narrative givens, but their structure is not narrative. They are guided by reasons that can justify the acceptability of an action or the norm that inspires it.

On the other hand, Benjamin brings out an important aspect of ethical universalism. He formulates the intransigent imperative for *social justice,* without which a supposed reconciliation between oppressors and oppressed will always be worthless. However indispensable the *symbolic* recognition of sins committed against the oppressed and the exploited, it cannot replace reparation in the form of a modification of the structures of power and of economic relations. As long as the good things in life belong for the most part and with rare exceptions to an immutable circle of social groups who assure the transmission of cultural privilege, social relations, and material advantages to their posterity, nothing will prevent the reproduction of hatred and violence in those who, as a general rule, remain excluded. Equality of opportunities remains a promise that has not been kept, and recreation centers in poor neighborhoods will not change a thing about that.

The statistics on the social origin of the delinquents and criminals who people our prisons speak volumes.[31]

John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* formulates "two principles of justice." According to the first, "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with a similar liberty for others." This principle is limited by the economic realism of the second: "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and b) attached to positions and offices open to all."[32] At the level of universal principles excluded a priori from the discussion, Rawls introduces a justification for inequalities, in the name of "the advantage of everyone." Thus, the imperative to redistribute freedoms and goods must take into account the risk of inefficiency, which would produce disadvantages for all—which means that the leaders of the economic system should fix limits on redistribution in the interest of everyone or guarantee the balance of dissatisfaction in the way it has been maintained since the Keynesian rebalancing of the liberal economy. On the other hand, everyone must have an equal chance to accede to positions and functions that society cannot do without. This means that *everyone* must have the "chance" to become a garbage man or warehouse worker, unless society extends unemployment through automation and robotization.

This important theory's historical merit is to have served as a starting point for the contemporary debate on ethics, political theory, and subjects such as civil disobedience; it is, in fact, presented here only in the form of an almost caricatured reduction. Hillary Putnam has added to it a third principle that moves toward the Benjaminian imperative: "Do not make the underprivileged wait forever." We could add: Do not abandon the defense of this principle to the political organizations of resentment. Whatever the practical reality that could be given to such a principle, the *theory* of justice cannot, without ideological deformation, anticipate the principles in whose name a just *action* would or should be directed. It can at the most define—or, rather, reconstruct—the conditions under which justice has the chance to come into being and of which we have an intuitive notion.

In such a theory of justice, ethics would not be founded solely on memory. In a general way, memory—or tradition—could not be a *criterion* for justice. It goes without saying that there would be no justice *without* memory, but there would also not be no justice without living beings, without the possibility and the reality of injustice, and so on. In actuality, justice is always practiced as a function of traditions. But as soon as different traditions confront one another, they are obliged to move toward more universal principles. It is a strike against Benjamin that the act of founding ethics on memory, even the universal memory of injustice, stems from a particularist attitude. It does not accede to the principles and procedures of

a universalist ethics. Yet *without* such a conceptual horizon, the act of decentering ethical universalism in order to include in it redemption for past injustices leads to a regression that is manifested in the tendency toward hatred.

Ethics is not the strong point of Benjamin's thought. In 1940, he found himself in an apocalyptic situation, facing opponents who flouted the most elementary bonds among human beings; although they may excuse Benjamin, such considerations cannot be erected into a valid principle beyond that situation. In relation to ethical universalism, the history of the vanquished stems from moral skepticism and reasoning in terms of relations of forces.

Benjamin remains one of the most remarkable thinkers of his century, through the force he was able to give to the reading of works of art and historical documents and, in particular, through his ability to make aesthetic criticism the field for a highly political practice of memory, the exercise of the most intense presence of mind and one most favorable for consciousness-raising. The examples he provided make the history of Western ideas before him seem like a tradition truncated from some of its most subversive artistic intuitions. That tradition does not survive—and does not deserve to survive—except as it is questioned from within.

# Conclusion

To seize the unity of Benjamin's thought is no easy task; its very identity seems to escape at times, to amount to no more than a style. The systematization and periodization of Benjamin's thinking in this book should allow readers to understand and reduce to a minimal coherence the multiplicity of facets this thinker presents to posterity. But this systematic character is not *proper* to Benjamin's thought. It is a construction, a schematization introduced for purposes of clarification. For the most part, the unity of Benjamin's philosophical thought is assured only by the reflections he devotes to it in his *Correspondence,* under pressure from the questions raised by his baffled friends; he admits at times that he has not succeeded in reconciling the extremes that constitute the poles of his mode of thinking. Without these letters, it would hardly be possible to get our bearings in his multiform oeuvre; hence the considerable place they legitimately occupy in the German edition of his works. The fact that the *Correspondence* constitutes the principal link in a mode of thought that is in fact splintered indicates that the coherence is less conceptual than, if not biographical, then at least tied to the hermeneutic effort to constitute an intellectual, literary, and political biography that presents a minimum of continuity.

If every reader has managed to appropriate a different Benjamin in privileging either the "theological" approach, the "materialist" approach, or a purely aesthetic approach and, within these overall visions, one "moment" rather than others—a baroque Benjamin; a modern close to Baudelaire; a critic committed to the avant-garde, Kafka, Proust, surrealism, or Brecht; a theorist of the media; a literary writer, author of *Einbahnstrasse* and *Berliner Kindheit*—if such an atomization has been possible, it is also because of a peculiarity in this aesthetic *criticism* that has been erected into a full-blown philosophy. In approaching a work of art or an artistic or literary current, it deals each time with a "way of seeing the world" whose coherence is irreducible.

The *suggestion* of Benjamin's writings is that each of these "moments" of his criticism, each of the "visions" considered significant, is related to a virtual philosophical unity that was never formulated as such. The writers and artists seem to be linked by an intellectual solidarity, defined above all by their shared *rejection* of an order of the world symbolized by totalitarianism. In fact, however, there is little conceptual synthesis possible between the profane approach of surrealism, the modern versions of Judaism in Kraus and Kafka, the political theater of Brecht, and the poetry of Baudelaire. Through the schemata of his interpretations, Benjamin makes us believe that such an ideal unity exists. He did not adequately distinguish between the principles of an aesthetics and the considerations of a criticism that, in each case, is indebted to a particular work of art and its context of reception. He did not do so because his concept of *truth* obliged him to decipher individual works of art and their context as unforeseeable indexes of a doctrinal unity to come. The fragility of that undertaking lies in a theory that places truth in a dependent role in relation to historical events; the chance events of literary and art history and of political upheavals make Benjamin the plaything of contexts, to the point that his identity seems at times to escape us. Independent of real history, there is no imperious necessity in the succession of periods and moments that compose his oeuvre; no internal logic that would lead from theology to materialism and from materialism to an indelible residue of theology; no teleology leading from a philosophy of language founded on the idea of a communication with God to a conception of history founded on the principle of the memory of the vanquished and forgotten. Benjamin would not be a thinker worthy of the name if his incessant changes were merely opportunistic and incoherent. They always obey the same fundamental quest for salvation in the search, first, for the power of lost naming; second, for presence of mind and political effectiveness; and finally, for the memory of the vanquished and the oppressed through a broadening solidarity with the dead and forgotten.

From a systematic point of view, the center of all this work of reflection is the question of the work of art. The work of art constitutes the strategic place where the theological situation of the contemporary age, the source of tradition and of memory, manifests itself; but the modern work of art is also the stakes in multiple subversions that target the deceptiveness of art's appearance, its illusory beauty, myth, and ideology. The fundamental aporia of Benjaminian thought forms around a philosophical need for art, formulated in the name of truth, and a need to reduce the ambiguity and illusions that are linked to art in the name of that same truth. Hence the process of disenchantment combined with the recurrent image of a rescue operation. But this process is also close to that of modern art itself and its self-destructive adventure, of which Benjamin has become, for that very reason, one of the exemplary theorists.

# *Notes*

## *NOTES TO INTRODUCTION*

1. For works on Benjamin's life, see the Bibliography.

2. See especially N. Bolz and W. van Reijen, *Walter Benjamin* (Frankfurt & New York: Campus, 1991), 117–126.

3. See J. Bouveresse, *Le mythe de l'intériorité: Expérience, signification, et langage privé chez Wittgenstein* (Paris: Minuit, 1976).

4. References to Walter Benjamin's works will be cited in the text; full publication information appears in the Bibliography.

5. The set of works by P. Ricoeur constituted by *La métaphore vive* and *Temps et récit* provides another example of this.

6. "My concept of origin [*Ursprung*] in the *Trauerspiel* book is a strict and compelling transfer of this fundamental principle of Goethe's from the realm of nature to that of history. Origins—the concept of the primal phenomenon, carried over from the pagan context of nature into the Jewish contexts of history" ("N" 2a, 4, pp. 49–50); "I will let my Christian Baudelaire be taken into heaven by nothing but Jewish angels. But arrangements have already been made to let him fall as if by chance in the last third of the ascension, shortly before his entrance into glory" (*Correspondence,* 612, letter of 21 September 1939). This indicates that Baudelaire's complete rescue seems impossible to Benjamin.

7. See G. Scholem, "Walter Benjamin," in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 172–197.

8. See G. Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship,* trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1981): "Benjamin knew next to nothing about Jewish affairs. . . . About details of Jewish history he was totally uninformed" (72).

9. See Scholem's letter to Benjamin, 26 August 1933, in W. Benjamin and G. Scholem, *Briefwechsel 1933–1940* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), 87ff.

10. According to Scholem ("Walter Benjamin and His Angel," in *On Jews and*

*Judaism in Crisis,* 233–234n.), Benjamin was acquainted with the notion of *tiqoun,* messianic redemption, through the book by F. J. Molitor, *Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition* (1827–1853), which he had owned since 1916 (*Correspondence,* 82, letter of 11 November 1916), and through an article by Scholem himself that appeared in the *Encyclopoedia Judaica,* but only in 1932.

11. F. Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption,* trans. W. W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1971). See also S. Mosès, *Système et révélation: La philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig* (Paris: Seuil, 1982).

12. See D. Janicaud's critique, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (Combas, France: Eclat, 1991).

13. See J. Habermas, "Zu Max Horkheimers Satz: 'Einen unbedingten Sinn zu retten ohne Gott, ist eitel,' " in *Texte und Kontexte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 121ff.

14. M. Foucault, course on Kant's *Was ist Aufklärung?* (What is Enlightenment?), *Magazine littéraire* 207 (May 1984): 39.

15. See G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Minuit, 1991).

16. T. W. Adorno, *Prisms,* trans. S. Weber and S. Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 229–241.

17. Scholem sees in Benjamin a metaphysician of language and "the legitimate heir of the most productive and most genuine traditions of Hamann and Humboldt" (*Correspondence,* 374).

## NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. See, for example, *Correspondence*: "my particular place as a philosopher of language" (372, translation modified); and "Curriculum vitae" (6), p. 41.

2. An exegetical exercise often undertaken by the mystics of language; see Jakob Böhme, *Mysterium magnum* (1623) and Johann Georg Hamann, *Aesthetica in nuce* (1762).

3. [In French, this distinction is grammatical: *Le verbe,* in addition to signifying the word of God (the logos), also means "verb." *Le nom* is the word both for "noun" and for "name."—J. M. T.]

4. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 19e (aphorism 38).

5. R. Jakobson, "Linguistique et poétique," in *Essais de linguistique générale,* trans. N. Ruwet (Paris: Minuit, 1963), 218 [J. M. T.'s translation from the French].

6. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus,* in *The Wittgenstein Reader,* ed. A. Kenny (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994): "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (#7, p. 31). But Wittgenstein further explains: "There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical. 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 has given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions" (#6.522, 6.53, p. 31). Thus, Wittgenstein would have used this method against Benjamin.

7. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1994): "Hence the critique of the correctness of names in the *Cratylus* is the first step toward modern instrumental theory of language and the ideal of a sign system of reason" (418).

8. Ibid., 384.

9. Ibid., 474.

10. Ibid., 490–491.

11. See the detailed study by W. Menninghaus, *Walter Benjamins Theorie der Sprachmagie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980).

12. D. Diderot, *Correspondance* 4, ed. Georges Roth and Jean Varloot (Paris, 1955–1970), 57; quoted in Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1980), 147.

13. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 383–389, 395–396.

14. J.-J. Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues,* ed. J. Starobinski (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 68 [J. M. T.'s translation].

15. J. G. Hamann, *Aesthetica in nuce,* preceded by *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* (1759–1762) (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986), 87, and 81 [J. M. T.'s translation].

16. Cf. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time.* trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962): "If, however, *truth* rightfully has a primordial connection with *Being,* then the phenomenon of truth comes within the range of the problematic of fundamental ontology" (256, para. 44). He here clearly contrasts this conception of truth as "disclosedness" and "Being-uncovering" (263–264) to the "traditional concept of truth" according to which "the 'locus' of truth is assertion (judgment)" (257).

17. Cf. E. Tugendhat, *Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl und Heidegger* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967).

18. Ibid.

19. T. W. Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin,* rev. ed. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), 35ff.

20. Cf. my article, "De la philosophie comme critique littéraire: Walter Benjamin et le jeune Lukács," *Revue d'Esthétique* 1 (1981), repr. 1990. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* Benjamin often cites *Soul and Form,* but only the essay on tragedy.

21. G. Lukács, *Soul and Form.* trans. A. Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), 16.

22. There is a very similar definition of philosophical activity as a "creation of concepts," compared to science and art, in G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Minuit, 1991).

23. Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*: "Plato was the first to show that the essential element in the beautiful was aletheia . . . . The beautiful, the way in which goodness appears, reveals itself in its being: it presents itself" (487).

24. Benjamin is alluding here to "The Task of the Translator."

25. Cf. K. Bühler, "L'onomatopée et la fonction représentative du langage" (1932), in J.-C. Pariente, ed., *Essais sur le langage* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 111–132.

26. Regarding the difference between similarity and denotation, cf. N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis & New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968): "A picture, to represent an object, must be a symbol for it, stand for it, refer to it; and . . . no degree of resemblance is sufficient to establish the requisite relationship of reference. Nor is resemblance *necessary* for reference; almost anything may stand for almost anything else. A picture that represents—like a passage that describes—an object refers to, and, more particularly, *denotes* it. Denotation is the core of representation and is independent of resemblance" (5).

27. Cf. Thesis 5 in "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again" (*Illuminations*, 255).

28. Benjamin will refer to this in 1935 in "Probleme der Sprachsoziologie," his essay written for the Frankfurt School's *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, but this late discovery did not have any influence on his own thinking.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

### 1. Aesthetics of the Sublime

1. "Dichtermut" (1800) and "Blödigkeit" (1803), two versions of the same poem.

2. A concept borrowed from Hölderlin's essay on Sophocles.

3. Benjamin is citing a passage from a book by C. Pingoud, *Grundlinien der ästhetischen Doktrin Fr. Schlegels* (Stuttgart, 1914).

4. I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York & London: Hafner, 1968), 17.

5. J. G. Fichte, *The System of Ethics Based on the Science of Knowledge* (London: Kegan Paul, 1897) [J. M. T.'s translation].

6. See E. Tugendhat, *Selbstbewusstsein und Selbstbestimmung: Sprachanalytische Interpretationen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), 62; see also D. Henrich, "La découverte de Fichte," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (1967): 154–169.

7. See C. Menke, *Die Souveränität der Kunst* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1988; Suhrkamp, 1991).

8. G. Lukács, *Theory of the Novel,* trans. A. Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 57. See also R. Rochlitz, *Le jeune Lukács* (Paris: Payot, 1983).

9. This is the origin of Benjamin's concept of resemblance, which he will still be using in 1939 in reference to Baudelaire, when he defines the beautiful as "the object of experience in the state of resemblance" (*Illuminations,* 199).

10. This text and *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," and "Theses on the Philosophy of History" must be considered among Benjamin's key works.

11. In fact, the journal never appeared: The publisher who had requested it went bankrupt.

12. As an example of the mythic ambiguity of the law, Benjamin cites the well-known claim by Anatole France that "poor and rich are equally forbidden to spend the night under the bridges" (*Reflections,* 296). Inasmuch as Benjamin links the normative dimension of the law to the factual dimension of injustice that results from its application, he can situate justice only in the transcendent and ungroundable sphere of "divine violence."

13. For an analogous and equally problematic ethical model in the work of the young Lukács (*On Poorness of Spirit*), see my book *Le jeune Lukács,* 125–139.

14. J. Habermas, "Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism: Walter Benjamin's Contemporaneity," *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979): 40.

15. See A. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

16. See R. Bubner, "De quelques conditions devant être remplies par une esthétique contemporaine," trans. R. Rochlitz, in R. Rochlitz, ed., *Théories esthétiques après Adorno* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1990), 83ff.

17. I. Kant, *Verkündigung des nahen Abschlusses eines Traktats zum ewigen Frieden in der Philosophie.* In *Werke,* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968), 408–409 [J. M. T.'s translation].

18. See Bubner, "Quelques conditions," 87.

19. In 1937, Benjamin published a French translation of a fragment of his essay on Goethe under the title "L'angoisse mythique chez Goethe" (Mythic anxiety in Goethe), trans. P. Klossowski, *Cahiers du Sud* (1937): 194.

20. "Clear the land where only madness has until now grown in abundance. Advance with the sharpened ax of reason, looking neither right nor left, so as not to succumb to the horror that, deep in the virgin forest, seeks to seduce you. All the earth must one day be cleared by reason, stripped of the brush of delirium and myth. That is we what we wish to do here for the fallow land of the nineteenth century" (*G.S.,* 5:579). It is nevertheless *reason*—an incorruptible lucidity, a sobriety that resists all seduction—that he invokes, raising the question of beauty in relation to *Elective Affinities:* "To confront it, we need a courage which, from the safety of indestructible reason, can abandon itself to its prodigious, magical beauty" (*G.S.,* 1:180).

21. For theological reasons: "For it is not a work made by the hand of man but the work of the Creator himself" (*G.S.,* 5:60).

22. When T. W. Adorno affirms in his *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. C. Lehnhardt (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), that the "redemption of appearance" is "central to aesthetics" (157, translation modified), he starts from the same theological idea as does Benjamin, whose intuitions he is translating.

23. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art,* trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

24. "Tragic poetry is opposed to epic poetry as a tendentious re-shaping of tradition" (*Origin,* 106).

25. D. Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique,* in *Oeuvres esthétiques.* ed. P. Vernière (Paris: Garnier, 1968), 252 [J. M. T.'s translation].

26. See F. C. Rang, *Historische Psychologie des Karnevals* (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 1983).

27. Cf. C. Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty,* trans. G. Schwab (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).

28. Max Weber is not cited in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* but a text that its publishers date from 1921, entitled "Capitalism as Religion" (*G.S.,* 6:100ff.), shows that Benjamin had read Weber's writings on the sociology of religion. According to Benjamin, capitalism is not simply, "as Weber thinks," a structure conditioned by religion (i.e., Protestantism) but "an essentially religious phenomenon." It is a religion without dogma, reduced to ritual pure and simple, which universalizes guilt by extending it to God, thus plunging the world into despair. Benjamin cites Nietzsche (and his theory of the overman), Freud (and the "capitalization" of the repressed), and Marx (and the capitalization of debt) as thinkers of capitalist religion, a religion from which any idea of conversion and purification has been eliminated; hence the idea of vanquishing capitalism through a critique of its mythic religion, which is compared to "primitive paganism" (6:103) and is characterized as being of a purely "practical" orientation and devoid of all "moral," "higher" interest.

29. M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. T. Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; London: Georg Allen & Unwin, 1952), 181.

30. Ibid., 85.

31. Ibid., 80.

32. See H. Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik* (Munich: Max Hueber, 1963), 139.

33. Ibid., 140–141 [J. M. T.'s translation].

34. D. Diderot, *Essais sur la peinture,* in *Oeuvres esthétiques,* 712 [J. M. T.'s translation].

35. Nietzsche, however, links the Dionysian to a particular "intoxication" that is foreign to Benjaminian allegory but that will return in the "intoxication" and

"profane illumination" that are the watchwords of Benjamin's second aesthetics; see F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 40.

36. See A. Wellmer, "Dialectique de la modernité et de la postmodernité," trans. M. Lhomme and A. Lhomme, *Les Cahiers de Philosophie* 5 (Spring 1988): 120.

37. These themes are developed by J. Derrida in *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), but from a perspective that claims to be atheological.

38. Two references were probably seminal for Benjamin as he was drafting *The Origin of German Tragic Drama:* Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* and Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* (which he does not cite, although he does quote *Soul and Form*); in his correspondence, he also invokes *History and Class Consciousness,* which he discovered as he was completing *The Origin of German Tragic Drama.* Benjamin's "theological" perspective is so close to that of the *Theory of the Novel* that the work on tragic drama could be read as a development of the theory of Shakespearean drama that is merely outlined in Lukács's book.

39. As Scholem has shown, Benjamin attributed Satanic qualities to himself (see G. Scholem, "Walter Benjamin and His Angel," in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* [New York: Schocken Books, 1976] 213ff.); Benjamin's critique of Goethe's demonism can be understood as a self-criticism.

40. "Irony, the self-surmounting of a subjectivity that has gone as far as it was possible to go, is the highest freedom that can be achieved in a world without God" (Lukács, *Theory of the Novel,* 93).

41. In a letter to Scholem (16 September 1924), written before the completion of the book, Benjamin goes so far as to suppose that the Marxist theory of the primacy of praxis over theory in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* approaches epistemological "principles [that] resonate for me or validate my own thinking" (*Correspondence,* 248).

42. See J. Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 198.

43. See Lausberg, *Elemente,* 139.

## *2. Art in the Service of Politics*

1. See his remarks in *Origin* (53–55), where he calls the twenty years of expressionist literature a period of "decadence" (55).

2. In another text, "Traumkitsch" (Dream kitsch; probably from 1925), where we also find the first sign of Benjamin's interest in surrealism, we read the following: "What we used to call art only begins two meters from the body" (*G.S.,* 2:622).

3. This aphorism appears under the advertising rubric "For Men," which suggests a play on the word *überzeugen* (to convince). *Zeugen* means "to procreate," an activity that would thus be more "fruitful" than that of trying to convince other people.

"Procreation" is also the last word in *Einbahnstrasse,* a magic formula for a kind of Nietzschean Marxism: "The living being conquers the frenzy of destruction only in the intoxication of procreation" (*Reflections,* 94, translation modified).

4. "Mallarmé's [typographical experiments] . . . grew out of the inner nature of his style. . . . [Hence] the topicality of what Mallarmé, monadically, in his hermetic room, had discovered through a pre-established harmony with all the decisive events of our times in economics, technology, and public life" (*Reflections.* 77).

5. "If the elimination of the bourgeoisie is not accomplished before an almost calculable moment of technical and scientific evolution (indicated by inflation and chemical warfare), all is lost" (*G.S.,* 4:122).

6. Telepathy is also the center of the theory of language that Benjamin develops in 1933 under the name "mimetic faculty," which he links to Freud's essay on "Telepathie und Psychoanalyse" (Telepathy and psychoanalysis). See *Correspondence,* 521, letter of 30 January 1936.

7. In a 1926 essay entitled "Carl Albrecht Bernouilli, Johann Jacob Bachofen, und das Natursymbol" (*G.S.,* 3:43–45), Benjamin refers to the "great philosopher and anthropologist" Ludwig Klages, who like Benjamin was a graphologist and who was the author of *Geist als Widersacher der Seele* (Mind as the adversary of the soul). "Among the realities of 'natural mythology,' which Klages, in his research, attempts to restore to human memory, by wrenching them from a millennial oblivion, we find in the first place what he calls 'images,' real and active elements, by virtue of which a deeper world, which is discovered only in ecstasy, exerts its power through the intermediary of man, in the world of the mechanical senses. But images are souls, whether the souls of things or human souls; they are the souls of a distant past that constitutes the world, where the consciousness of primitive men, comparable to the dream consciousness of modern man, receives its perceptions" (*G.S.,* 3:44).

8. "For in the joke, too, in invective, in misunderstanding, in all cases where an action puts forth in its own image and exists, absorbing and consuming it, where nearness looks with its own eyes, the long-sought image sphere is opened, the world of universal and integral actualities, where the 'best room' is missing—the sphere, in a word, in which political materialism and physical nature share the inner man, the psyche, the individual, or whatever else we wish to throw to them, with dialectical justice, so that no limb remains unrent. Nevertheless, indeed, precisely after such dialectical annihilation—this will be a sphere of images and, more concretely, of bodies" (*Reflections,* 191–192).

9. See G. Bataille, *La littérature et le mal,* in *Oeuvres complètes,* vol. 9 (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 271–286.

10. This metaphor will later be found in Heidegger, in the notion of a "retreat" of Being, present in its absence.

11. See the letters of 20–25 May 1925 (*Correspondence,* 266–270) and 7 May 1940 (*Correspondence,* 628–635).

12. This interest seems to have been elicited by Werner Kraft.

13. "Karl Kraus liest Offenbach" (Karl Kraus reads Offenbach), published in *Die*

*literarische Welt* (20 April 1928), *G.S.*, 4:515–517; "Karl Kraus," published in the Dutch journal *i 10* (20 December 1938), *G.S.*, 2:624ff.; and "Wedekind und Kraus in der Volksbühne" (Wedekind and Kraus in the people's theater), published in *Die literarische Welt* (1 November 1929), *G.S.*, 4:551–554).

14. All Benjamin's writings and notes on Kafka can be found in the *Gesammelte Schriften.* In addition to the long 1934 essay (*G.S.*, 2:409–438), see also the 1931 essay "Franz Kafka: Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer" (Franz Kafka: On the construction of the wall of China; *G.S.*, 2:675–683) and the notes and reflections (*G.S.*, 2:1190–1264). The majority of these texts, as well as excerpts from the correspondence with Scholem, W. Kraft, and Adorno, have been brought together in H. Schweppenhauser, ed., *Benjamin über Kafka: Texte, Briefzeugnisse, Aufzeichungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981).

15. "It was therefore Loos's first concern to separate the work of art from the article of use, as it was that of Kraus to keep apart information and the work of art. The hack journalist is in his heart at one with the ornamentalist" (*Reflections*, 241).

16. See, in addition to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* "Karl Kraus," "the origin is the goal" (*Reflections*, 265, translation modified), a quotation from Kraus that is also used as an epigraph for the fourteenth thesis of "Theses on the Philosophy of History," and " 'origin'—the phenomenon's seal of authenticity" (*Reflections*, 266, translation modified).

17. See T. W. Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1964), 8.

18. Yet Kraus does disappoint Benjamin in 1934 in his "capitulation to Austrofascism" (*Correspondence*, 458, letter of 27 September 1934), a fall that Benjamin attributes to the triumph in Kraus of the demon over the inhuman angel, and which signifies the loss of his authority. That is not the only explanation possible for this lapse. Inasmuch as no judgment is infallible, the distinction between opinion and judgment is problematic. It is the claim to infallibility that links thinkers as diverse as Kraus, Benjamin, and Heidegger in the cult of authenticity.

19. That "the age has not been able to find a new social order to correspond to its own technological horizons" (*G.S.*, 5:1257) will be one of the guiding ideas for the work on *Paris Arcades.*

20. "The not insubstantial importance to me of Kafka's work resides not least in the fact that he doesn't take up *any* of the positions communism is right to be fighting" (*Correspondence*. 440, letter of 6 May 1934).

21. See the letter from Scholem to Benjamin on 14 August 1934: "Too many quotations and too little interpretation," in W. Benjamin and G. Scholem, *Briefwechsel 1933–1940* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), 169.

22. Ibid., 175.

23. The figure of the "little hunchback" also appears at the end of *Berliner Kindheit.*

24. "Art in its beginnings still leaves over something mysterious, a secret foreboding and a kind of longing, because its creations have not completely set forth their full content for imaginative vision. But if the perfect content has been perfectly

revealed in artistic shapes, then the more far-seeing spirit rejects this objective manifestation and turns back into its inner self. This is the case in our own time. We may well hope that art will always rise higher and come to perfection, but the form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of the spirit. No matter how excellent we find the statues of the Greek gods, no matter how we see God the Father, Christ, and Mary so estimably and perfectly portrayed: it is no help; we bow the knee no longer" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art,* trans. T. M. Knox [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975], 1:103).

25. M. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology,* ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 155.

26. Although it did not play a comparable theoretical role, the term had already appeared in 1930, especially in texts involving experiments with hashish. Opposing the theosophical conception of the aura in particular, Benjamin wrote: "1) The authentic aura is manifested in every thing, and not only in determinate things as people imagine; 2) the aura absolutely changes altogether with every movement of the object of which it is the aura; 3) the authentic aura cannot be imagined in any way as the magic of spiritualist light rays that the books on vulgar mysticism describe. What characterizes the authentic aura is rather: the ornament, an ornamental circle in which the thing or being is solidly enclosed as in a container. Nothing, perhaps, gives such an accurate idea of the true aura as the late paintings of Van Gogh where—this is how one could describe these paintings—the aura of every thing is painted along with the things" (*G.S.,* 6:588). This conception of the "authentic aura" could be linked to observations about the halo and the oval form of old photographic portraits. See M. Stoessel, *Aura: Das vergessene Menschliche* (Munich: Hanser, 1983).

27. See J.-M. Schaeffer, *L'image précaire: Du dispositif photographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 81.

28. In the early versions of the text, this analogy between primitive society and modern society is explained through the different stages of the confrontation between technology and nature: technology blending with ritual in the first phase to dominate primitive nature, and emancipated technology confronting a second nature, society, that escapes human control; see *G.S.,* 1:444.

29. N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis & New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 112.

30. Ibid., 116.

31. A. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 135.

32. In *La chambre claire* (Gallimard, 1980), Roland Barthes formulates an idea similar to this conception of the aura: Between the general features drawn from semiology and the idiosyncratic pleasure that I take, he too abandons the notion of an art that can be evaluated according to *shared* criteria. For him, the aura is the *punctum* of an image that touches me for reasons that are mine alone.

33. See J. Habermas, "Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism: Walter Benjamin's Contemporaneity," *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979): 52–54.

34. That is why Adorno—who also has no concept of the "autonomy" of aesthetic validity in relation to cognitive, instrumental, utilitarian, or ethical functions (the autonomy of art in relation to society is virtually meaningless)—attempts in his *Aesthetic Theory* to redeem aesthetic "appearance," a project that for him is the *central* problem of contemporary aesthetics itself.

35. [This French edition brings together all Benjamin's writings relating to the *Paris Arcades* project. It has no exact equivalent in English.—J. M. T.]

## *3. The Price of Modernity*

1. See the contributions of B. Lindner, B. Witte, and H. T. Lehmann in H. Wismann, ed., *Walter Benjamin et Paris* (Paris: Cerf, 1986).

2. For certain of these texts, there are in fact versions in verse; see *G.S.,* 7:705–714.

3. See S. Mosès, "L'idée d'origine chez Walter Benjamin," in Wismann, ed., *Walter Benjamin et Paris,* 809–826.

4. Ibid., 812 [J. M. T.'s translation].

5. G. Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship,* trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 201–202.

6. "Television, the record player, etc., make all these things problematic. Quintessence: we didn't ask for so many precisions. Why is that? Because we have fears founded on the discovery that it is all going to be disavowed: description by television, the words of the hero by the phonograph, the morality of the story by the next statistic, the person of the storyteller by everything we learn about him.—The idiocy of death. Well, then, storytelling is also idiocy. Thus, *to begin with,* will the whole aura of consolation, wisdom, and solemnity that we have placed around death disappear? *So much the better.* Don't cry. The absurdity of any critical prognosis. Film in the place of storytelling. Nuance, the source of eternal life (*G.S.,* 2:1281).

7. The 1933 essay "Erfahrung und Armut" (Experience and Poverty) celebrated the loss of this same experience in the name of a new "positive barbarism."

8. H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1994), "The Rehabilitation of Authority and Tradition," 281.

9. "The *apache* abandons all virtues and all laws. He voids once and for all the social contract. He believes that in so doing a world separates him from the bourgeois, and does not see on the face of that bourgeois the features of his accomplice" (*G.S.,* 1:582).

10. Similarly, we might suggest that Georges Bataille defends the condemnable

character of "modern passions," which he does not wish the public at large to accept in any way.

11. In a letter to Scholem on 20 May 1935, Benjamin defines the *Paris Arcades* project as a whole as the "unfolding of a handed-down concept . . . the fetish character of commodities" (*Correspondence,* 482).

12. "The motif of the *perte d'aureole* (loss of the aura or halo) is to be brought out as a decisive contrast to the motifs of *Jugendstil*" ("Central Park," 34).

13. The conceptual couple aura/reproduction obeys the logic of the "supplement," substitution of a deficiency, whose principle Derrida deduced from Rousseau. But this logic is not ineluctable except inasmuch as one confuses rationalization with a pathological process entailing the destruction of traditional substance. But rationalized "society" is not unavoidably more pathogenic than is traditional society, inasmuch as it succeeds in replacing the "vertical" principle of authority with a "horizontal" principle that preserves the transmission of experience.

14. P. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

15. A. Wellmer, "Vérité—apparence—réconciliation: Adorno et le sauvetage esthétique de la modernité," in R. Rochlitz, ed., *Théories esthétiques après Adorno* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1990), 283. In his book *Prosa der Moderne* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), Bürger moves closer to Adornian aesthetics and recent French aesthetics.

16. See, in particular, the work of G. Deleuze; in J.-F. Lyotard's works, the influence of Adorno and Benjamin can be felt, though it gives way to a nonrationalist interpretation of the Kantian aesthetics of the sublime. In contrast, L. Ferry, like Deleuze (to whom he pays tribute), understands the avant-garde as essentially Nietzschean; see his *Homo Aestheticus: L'invention du goût à l'âge démocratique* (Paris: Grasset, 1990) "Nietzsche can be considered the true thinker of avant-gardism," 212.

17. See F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche,* trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968).

18. See Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus,* 243ff.

19. Ibid., 304, where the author refers to Adorno to interpret Schoenbergian "dissonance" along Nietzschean lines.

20. See J. Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990) 18.

21. Such is the idea defended by C. Imbert, for example, in his important essay, "Le Présent et l'histoire," in Wismann, ed., *Walter Benjamin et Paris,* 743–792, esp. 776–779. It is hardly probable, however, that the concept of allegory was *replaced* by that of dialectical image; in fact, according to Benjamin, the commodity and the prostitute are dialectical images as such, independent of any allegorical *figuration,* by virtue of the ambiguity inherent to them.

22. As does, for example, Bürger in *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* who links "montage," the formal principle of the avant-garde, to the technique of allegory.

23. See, for example, H. Meschonnic, "L'Allégorie chez Walter Benjamin, une aventure juive," in Wismann, ed., *Walter Benjamin et Paris,* 707ff., esp. 716.

24. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* 70.

25. W. Menninghaus underscores this point in *Walter Benjamins Theorie der Sprachmagie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 142.

26. See J. Habermas, "Modernity—an Incomplete Project," in H. Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 3–15.

27. T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. C. Lehnhardt (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 34.

## *NOTES TO CHAPTER III*

1. We find, for example, elements of Theses 6, 14, 16, and 17 in "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian."

2. Benjamin is thinking in particular of the German–Soviet pact of 28 September 1939, which deeply disturbed him.

3. {The author cites the uncompleted French version of Benjamin's essay whenever possible. I have retained his reference to the French edition and have translated sections from it (including variants) that do not appear in the English edition—J. M. T.}

4. Cf. A. Danto, *Analytic Philosophy of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965). Danto also evokes (critically) the figure of the "ideal chronicler."

5. For the tension between a narrative history constitutive of identities and the imperative for objectivity, see P. Ricoeur, *Temps et récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), vols. 2 and 3.

6. Cf. *E.F.,* 350: "The idea of prose intersects the messianic idea of universal history. Cf. in 'The Storyteller': the different kinds of artistic prose form something like the ghost of historical prose."

7. The passage from Lotze is taken from his book *Mikrokosmos* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1864), vol. 3.

8. Benjamin's observation concerning his own generation appears only in the French version.

9. "I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense *couleur de rose.* But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them." K. Marx, *Capital,* preface

to the first German edition, in *The Marx–Engels Reader,* 2d ed., ed. R. C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 297.

10. Cf. *G.S.,* 1:1231, ms. 1100: "Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of universal history. But perhaps they are something completely different. Perhaps revolutions are humanity's effort, as it takes a train trip, to pull the emergency brake." See also *G.S.,* 1:1232, ms. 1103.

11. Cf. R. Tiedemann, "Historischer Materialismus oder politischer Messianismus? Politische Gehalte in der Geschichtsphilosophie Walter Benjamins," in P. Bulthaup, ed., *Materialien zu Benjamins Thesen "Über den Begriff der Geschichte": Beiträge und Interpretationen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 108.

12. Cf. the prudent reflections of C. Kambas, "Actualité politique: Le concept d'histoire chez Benjamin et l'échec du Front populaire," in H. Wismann, ed., *Walter Benjamin et Paris* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 249–272.

13. See Tiedemann, "Historischer materialismus," 102.

14. See P. Ivernel, "Paris capitale du Front populaire ou la vie posthume du XIXe siècle," in H. Wismann, ed., *Walter Benjamin et Paris,* 249–272.

15. See J. Habermas, "Geschichte und Evolution," in *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen materialismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976).

16. See J. Habermas, "Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism: Walter Benjamin's Contemporaneity," *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979).

17. M. Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 329–346 [J. M. T.'s translation].

18. See J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures,* trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987).

19. In his book on Kierkegaard, Adorno had already used the concept of dialectical image, referring to Benjamin's thought and particularly to his concept of allegory; see also "N" 2, 7, pp. 48–49.

20. Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* 11–16.

21. F. Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History* (Indianapolis & New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 20–21, 40.

22. The first line of this quotation repeats a sentence in the essay on Eduard Fuchs.

23. Basing his work on Jean Piaget and on certain texts in the dialectical tradition, L. Goldmann in particular has elaborated a method of this kind. See, for example, "Le tout et les parties," in *Le dieu caché* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 13–31.

24. See *Devant l'histoire: Les documents de la controverse sur la singularité de l'extermination des Juifs par le régime nazi* (Paris: Cerf, 1988).

25. Many thinkers inspired by Nietzsche and Heidegger defend such an "an-archistic" theory. In fact, in the case of both Foucault and Adorno, it is not incompatible with reformist political interventions.

26. See P. Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 193ff.

27. See Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* 11–16.

28. See Tiedemann, "Historischer Materialismus," 87.

29. Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* 14–15; cf. J.-M. Ferry, *Les puissances de l'expérience,* vol. 2, *Les ordres de la reconnaissance* (Paris: Cerf, 1991), 217ff.

30. J. Habermas, "Geschichtsbewufstsein und posttraditionale Identität," in *Eine Arts/Schadensabwicklung,* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987), 168f.

31. On this point, M. Foucault's analyses in *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) remain valuable.

32. J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1971), 60.

# *Bibliography*

## 1. CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF WALTER BENJAMIN'S PRINCIPAL WORKS

The texts are listed in order by the year of completion. The original title, date of original publication if during Benjamin's lifetime, volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972–1989; 2nd ed. 1991), and the location of the English translation are given in square brackets.

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*Begriff: Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik.* In *Gesammelte Schriften,* Vol. 1.

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*1926*

[*Einbahnstrasse*, 1928, 4:83; partial translation as "One-Way Street" in *Reflections*, 61–94].

*1927*

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*Note:* The abbreviation "WB" refers to Walter Benjamin. References to notes are identified by "n." or "nn." Titles of works in French or German are alphabetized under initial articles (e.g., "Das Telephon" is under "D" and not under "T").


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## BOOK REVIEW

**The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences** by Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm. University of Chicago Press, 2017, 411 pp. ISBN 978-0226403366.

**Reviewed by Dmitri Cerboncini Fernandes and Alexander Moreira-Almeida**

NUPES—Research Center in Spirituality and Health, Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Brazil
dmitri.fernandes@ufjf.edu.br

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We live in a contradictory world. Self-proclaimed "skeptics," as the original meaning itself suggests, should first of all strive for scientific rationality, for reflective and objective distancing in the apprehension of reality, for methodological caution, and for an extensive ability to theoretically and philosophically understand intricate problems. In practice, too often there is entrenchment in dogmatic groups. Inquisitors endowed with an appearance of religious fanaticism, in the worst sense of the term, invest their energies in crusades of attacks against everyone to whom they attribute mistakes, naïvete, or even bad intentions—the universe of those who do not fit in their often restricted, idealized, and naïve views of scientific practice. In those cases, there is hardly a possibility of frank dialogue, or openness to research fields outside preconceptions of what science and philosophy can approach and how they should operate. Researchers who dare to go beyond the limits some people establish for science and rationality can be disqualified as charlatans, backward, true believers, or superstitious.

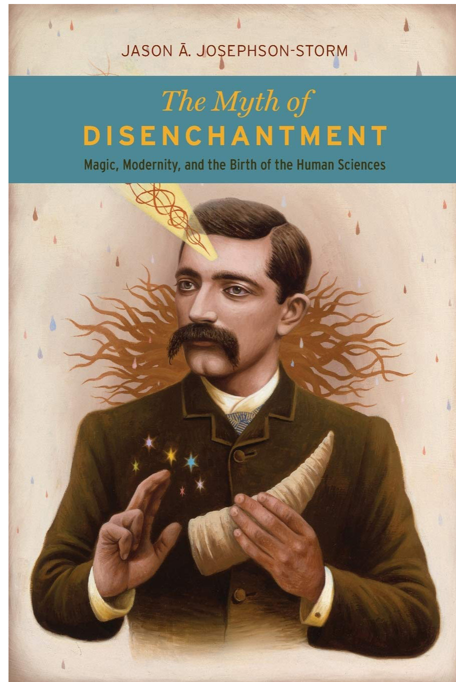
To substantiate their certainties, such self-proclaimed skeptics often claim to base their approach to science on examples given by highly regarded scientists and philosophers of the past. We speak here of scholars of the stature of Giordano Bruno, Francis Bacon, René

Descartes, Isaac Newton, the Encyclopedists, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, Sigmund Freud, James Frazer, the Vienna Circle, Max Weber, etc. Despite their different approaches, we are talking about many of the very founders of modern Western knowledge. The self-proclaimed contemporary "skeptics" claim their inscriptions in the tradition inaugurated by these illustrious intellectual ancestors. They claim to defend with determination such a rationalist tradition against "pseudoscientists" and "mystic-religious" philosophers who, in their opinion, wish to corrupt it through insidious insertions into fields not rightfully belonging to them.

But what if we realized that the "founding fathers" of Western science and rationalism have never corresponded to what skeptics would have liked them to have been? Even worse, what if the methodological, epistemological, and theoretical developments of their discoveries were deeply embedded in the methodology inherited from magic, in activities such as alchemy, in the experiences of spiritualist séances, in mystical knowledge, and in all sorts of paranormal experiences which each of these would-be "disenchanters of the world" were interested in? This is precisely the task assumed by the brilliant, extensive, well-documented, and almost too-ambitious book *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* by Jason Josephson-Storm: To demystify what he calls the "myth of disenchantment," that is, a truth regime that presupposes a self-representation (at least in Europe and North America) of fully "disenchanted" cultures.

Inscribed in a series of robust studies that emerged in the last decade (Harrison, 2015; Numbers, 2009; Sommer, 2014) are questions about the commonplaces established about the history of science—such as, for example, the supposed "eternal struggles" between faith and reason, religion and science, magic and rationality, myth and reality, etc. Josephson-Storm's doctoral dissertation, transformed into a book, brings us a vision that is at least disconcerting. The role played by the main heralds noted above with respect to the overlapping between "magic" and the process of Western rationalization is not even close to what we usually learn in college. The compelling demonstration, with abundant documentation (mainly from primary sources) of this fact, is perhaps its greatest merit. His demolition of the Myth of Disenchantment is in line with the provocative and highly cited paper "Secularization, R.I.P.,"

published two decades ago by the sociologist of religion Rodney Stark (1999).




Josephson-Storm brings to light many largely unknown facts about the intellectual biographies of many celebrated leaders of Western Enlightenment and scientific development. These biographical facts were often found in their own writings, but nevertheless were subject to misrepresentation or systematic cleaning by renowned interpreters. To give clarity to this mechanism, the concept of "occult disavowal" (p. 18) is coined by the author. This is a process that has given a predetermined direction to the ideas espoused by disenchanting interpreters: They projected their own narratives back into the works and lives of the great names of Western thought in a proselytism contrary to magic, paranormal phenomena, and the spiritual element. These interpreters also stressed that the contributions of these leading philosophers and scientists would be part of an explicitly secular and materialist framework and that these leading scientists would have actively contributed to a catechesis against what they believed to belong to the realm of superstition or the supernatural. However, recently found letters, updated information, and other materials have consistently reported the close contact of these respected intellectuals with the "forbidden" spheres of the sacred, spirituality, and the paranormal, revealing a reality and quite different history from that painted by the interpreters.

In addition to bringing these discoveries to light, Josephson-Storm recovers the role played by apparently secondary characters in canonical intellectual history, stressing their importance for the

constitution of the current scientific–philosophical universe. We speak here of "curses" in the official intellectual world, people of the Paracelsus strain, Madame Blavatsky, Aleister Crowley, Baron Karl von Prel, Ludwig Klages, Stefan George, and others commonly linked to the fields of mysticism, magic, religion, the occult, and thus usually thought to be opposed to the realm of legitimate science and knowledge. Josephson-Storm abundantly demonstrates how these figures played an active role in the exchange of ideas with the intellectuals celebrated in the academic environment. The forgotten or deliberately hidden contributions of these "magicians" shaped the supposedly "secular" or "disenchanted" intellectual environment that we live in today. They often were the formulators of concepts, findings, and theories that, adapted or concealed, served as a basis for the "legitimate" intellectuals to give rise to the creation and development of modern science and philosophy. Among these concepts, Josephson-Storm launches a bold hypothesis: that what we know as the "disenchantment of the world" is the paradoxical fruit of these same alleged "enchanters," although this was an unforeseen development.

These unusual encounters and intertwinings of knowledge and resulting experiences between two apparently disparate universes become the background of the pertinent—and ambitious—theoretical questions raised by Josephson-Storm. He builds his research based on three very general questions: 1) Was there really a pattern of development in history that could be called the disenchantment of the world? 2) Was there really a rupture between a time when magic predominated, on the one hand, and another time that saw the product of the world's disenchantment? 3) Does modernity define a singular period? (p. 17). The answers to these questions, which are not easy to solve, are sought through an evaluation of more than five hundred years of the history of culture and of ideas.

The inculcation of what he calls a "disciplinary norm," in other words the self-image that the affluent West was building of itself as a rational, disenchanted, modern territory is a long-term historical trend resulting from the participation of several agents. The straitjacket of a very limited and specific version of "rationalism," which wears well to many self-proclaimed "skeptics," has an embarrassing history to be told. And it is to its genealogy that Josephson-Storm embarks on his

long undertaking, divided into ten chapters grouped in two parts. In the first part he analyzes many founding fathers of the Enlightenment, followed by the German metaphysicians and the British evolutionary anthropologists of the 19th century. Magicians, alchemists, spiritualists, and esoterics of the same time period are presented and discussed. In the second part he discusses the articulations established by Freud and psychoanalysis, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, the Vienna Circle, and the most famous user of the concept of disenchantment of the world, the sociologist Max Weber, with the "magic" and the "occult" through the hidden characters who shaped their thoughts in the background of history.

Josephson-Storm raises current data that cast doubt on the modern belief that we live in an era in which magic and the sacred have disintegrated amid the wonders of the advent of modernity and the increase in the education of peoples. Contrary to what the defenders of secularism preach, not only "backward" countries live with voodoo, possessions, black magic, spiritual healing, mystical experiences, etc. The most advanced capitalist countries in the world, including the United States, England, and Germany, maintain a high rate (usually the majority of their populations) of belief in spirits, extra-sensorial perception, and in the survival of the soul, with most of their population reporting having already had some form of paranormal experience in their lives. This evidence makes clear that the raising of educational levels does not mean the automatic fall in the belief in the existence of transcendence, as defenders of a vulgar version of the Enlightenment erroneously believe. The occult is present in television series of worldwide success; and literature on magic, angels, and near-death have increased exponentially in recent times (Kripal, 2010). A profusion of different types of "charms" flourishes in every corner.

These indications do not mean that there is no rise in atheism or a marked decline in attendance at churches and in traditional religions, at least in Europe and North America. These two factors combined, apparently proving the thesis of the growing secularization of the world, actually do not mean a conversion to a purely materialistic perspective of life and of the universe. Even in those regions, belief in the paranormal or in a transcendent aspect of reality is held by most people. If we take the entire world population, 84% report having a

religious affiliation (Center, 2012). Based on recent worldwide Gallup polls in 163 nations, Stark (2015) has argued that today "the world is more religious than it has ever been." Josephson-Storm proposes that secularization even seems to increase enchantment, or at least the belief in an enchanted, supernatural, world (p. 32), a view also somewhat endorsed by Stark (2015) and Kripal (2010). This would be because such beliefs are empirically based on experiences people actually have (p. 34). That is, although many no longer have a set of beliefs and practices guided by a conventional religion, to paraphrase Max Weber, they still have transcendental experiences and other types of relationships with the sacred that are independent of institutionalized religion.

The grand narratives of modernity that consider any belief in the transcendent as debris from past times and superstition, have been overthrown throughout the 20th century. They were replaced by theories that questioned the advent of a progressive reason capable of indefinitely disenchanting the world. Intellectuals such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Ernst Gellner, George Ritzer, and others kicked off a radical critique that did not spare the Enlightenment, modernity, and capitalism. Such institutions were said to be steeped in the enchanted and irrational artifice at their cores, even as they expressed theories of Cultural Industry, commodity fetishism, and cathedrals of consumption. Late capitalism was nothing more than a return to the realm of enchantment. On the other hand, the subsequent advent of postmodernity and the eruption of related movements, such as the New Age, gave rise to interpretations that framed them as correlated ways of rejecting the Enlightenment and its values. The death of God announced by Nietzsche may have been a valid way to further the escape from the coldness of the world through magical devices. All this converges to the thesis that both modernity and post-modernity formed enchanted periods. The interest in all the themes linked to the paranormal, the supernatural, or the reality of spirits and the survival of the soul after death has never ceased over the past centuries.

Starting his historical analysis with the so-called patriarchs of the Enlightenment—Giordano Bruno, René Descartes, Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, and the Encyclopedists—Josephson-Storm demonstrates that, behind the development of the thinking for all of them, the same hidden principle reigned: that of magic. And magic not

understood in a restricted definition, but as dynamic and mutant, as defined by those who practiced it in their respective time periods:

> What follows will take precisely *not* as given the meaning of magic, religion, or science. This is necessary because the key terms of our analysis had different meanings in different historical moments, and their reoccurrence obscures breaks, discontinuities, and important shifts. Moreover, concepts are partially defined differentially, and current terminology often bears the legacy of lost oppositions. Accordingly, we must pay careful attention to the construction of putative antagonisms (e.g., between myth and enlightenment). (pp. 10–11)

The author shows that the philosophical and scientific elite before the 19th century was basically formed by mystics, religious devouts, and alchemists. The representation that the group of "heroes of the era of Reason" was composed of zealots of mechanistic and secular thought would be a reinterpretation initiated by influential science popularizers of the 19th century, an image that has been constantly nurtured to the present day. A similar analysis has also been recently proposed by the historian of science Andreas Sommer (2016).

Throughout the book, Storm presents his argument that a cleansed history concealed intellectual aspects linked to magic, spiritualism, mysticism, and the sacred in general, a denial operating successfully over time. An illustrative example is provided from Bacon, regarded as the "father" of experimental knowledge: "Knowledge is power" (from Bacon's 1597 *Meditationes Sacrae*), which is used by Horkheimer and Adorno to unveil the meaning that knowledge took in the early days of the Enlightenment (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). For them, the de-spiritualization of nature, the calculation, the mechanical and rationalizing model of a science serving the established power finds in Bacon one of its main sources. Josephson-Storm, using on Bacon's own writings, reveals to us that the original meaning of this phrase had little to do with the conclusions of Horkheimer and Adorno. For Bacon, it was a matter of equating the power of God with knowledge (p. 47). This is in keeping with the fact that Bacon saw himself much more as "as an alchemist with a prophetic mission" (p. 45) than as a disenchanter of the world ready to erect a mechanistic model of explanation. Rather, it

was a question of finding a method that would lead him to the creation of purified magic, which would be "a pragmatic, or instrumentalist, form of natural philosophy" (p. 46). Natural philosophy, distorted by scholasticism, in Bacon's view had to be restored to its beginnings for the authenticity of true magic to surface, giving rise to its subjection to public scrutiny in a methodical manner. Here are the principles of experimentalist philosophy at its hidden root: that of the foundation of rational and publicly controlled magic.

Interesting and noteworthy are also the genealogy and transformations in the use of the term "superstition," as a means of attacking and legitimizing specific groups. Throughout power struggles in history, the word superstition has assumed different (and often opposing) meanings as a target to be attacked and devalued. As traced by Josephson-Storm, it first appeared in the 13th century as opposite to true religion, as used by Thomas Aquinas in the sense of "[. . .] offering 'divine worship either to whom it ought not, or in a manner it ought not' " (p. 47). In the 16th century, Catholics still used it to refer to a "misdirected worship," especially witchcraft. Protestants, on the other hand, used the word "superstition" to attack Catholic beliefs and practices. In the 18th century, the oppositional structure of the true-religion-versus-superstition binary began to shift into that of science versus superstition. At that moment, according to Joseph-Storm, "Scientists inherited the theologians' list of superstitions, and indeed both groups often attacked the same paradigmatic superstitions, such as astrology, magic, and spirits" (p. 49). It was only in the 19th century that the binomial that opposed science versus religion would prevail, especially on the part of historians such as Jacob Burckhardt, thus relegating religion to the gray and illegitimate region of superstition. It is at this moment that the concept of science with its unitary meaning also emerges, close to what we know today, something linked to the progress of knowledge.

The major thesis of the book is that "modernity is a myth," first because "the term modernity is itself vague" (p. 306); and, second, because if modernity is understood as disenchantment of the world, as embracing a materialistic and mechanistic worldview, it has never happened—neither in the "developed" Western general population nor among intellectuals. "The struggle between 'the Enlightenment' and

'counter-Enlightenment' is mainly a twentieth-century myth, projected backward" (p. 311).

Joining threads of apparently disconnected aspects of the history of philosophy, Josephson-Storm unravels the tacit articulation between different moments and intellectual movements over time. In the German idealism of Mendelssohn, Fichte, Herder, Jacobi, Schiller, Schlegel, Kant, Hegel, Stirner, and Novalis, he finds the roots of the regret of the loss of myth, as well as the discussion that arises about pantheism and its ethical consequences (nihilism) and epistemology (the rise of mechanistic explanations), the disenchantment of the world, alienation, and, of course, the later death of God. In the elements that shaped what we know as modernity, the dawn of rationalism emerges amid this small circle of German rationalists. What almost no one says is that the works of mystics such as Jakob Böhme and Emanuel Swedenborg were commonly debated among them, serving as paths to be opened even when some were opposed to others in philosophical terms (p. 81). Schiller's vitalist philosophy, for example, which rejected the mechanistic model of clockwork in favor of a dynamic dialectic, which resulted in a superior synthesis, is indebted to debates promoted by the esoterics and spiritualists by which he and so many others were explicitly inspired.

Deepening his argument, Josephson-Storm presents a rich analysis of the development of the theories of 19th-century scientists, such as the evolutionary anthropologists Edward Tylor, James Frazer, and Andrew Lang, and the philologist Max Müller, who contributed to substantiating what was conventionally called the "science of religion" or comparative studies of religion, magic, science, and folklore. He reveals that such scholars have had an intense intellectual exchange with mystics and esoterics, such as Eliphas Levy, Aleister Crowley, and Madame Blavatsky, contributors whose theories and impact are usually erased by conventional historians of Western thought. The very notion of comparative studies of religion originated from the attempt to carry out a pioneering synthesis of the sacred by such spiritualists of the 19th century, who sought to reveal through the comparison between different religions, beliefs, and rites the same hidden essence within all manifestations of the sacred around the world.

We must remember that spiritualism was one of the largest

transnational movements of the 19th century. Therefore, its importance and its discussions reverberated far beyond the specific terrain of the sacred, so much so that almost all these spiritualist and occult advances tried to serve as mediation, and often as a practical and theoretical resolution to eventual conflicts between religion, science, and philosophy. Along with the birth of sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis, research, and inquiries that dealt with spirits, ghosts and all kinds of paranormal experiences were often considered viable and pertinent. Such movements exchanged methods, language, themes, and problems with what was conventionally called institutionalized or "legitimate" science.

The second part of the book begins with the following question: When did scholars begin to suppress—or to repress—their interests in the occult? Josephson-Storm claims ". . . they did so much later and more sporadically than is conventionally supposed and that much of the cleanup has been retroactive" (p. 181). To address this question, he explores the example of the "father" of psychoanalysis and his socio–historical environment. Sigmund Freud acknowledges his debt to "that brilliant mystic du Prel" (p. 179) in the development of his theory of "the unconscious," a word used and analyzed by the spiritualist Baron Karl von Prel fifteen years before Freud. In addition to being an admirer of von Prel, Freud attended spiritualist sessions, believed in telepathy, was a member of the British Society for Psychical Research, and encouraged Carl Jung and Sándor Ferenczi to scrutinize the universe of the occult. However, in order to protect psychoanalysis' scientific respectability, and under the strong advice of his biographer and friend Ernst Jones, he concealed those interests. In this way, Freud became an engaged and normative defender of disenchantment. Provocatively, Josephson-Storm "psychoanalyzes" Freud, suggesting that the superego, represented by introjected society values, made him repress his own beliefs in favor of an identification with the authority that had been gestating: that of disenchantment as an episteme within the scientific milieu at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century.

Then Josephson-Storm brings us the case of the philosophers, artists, and mystical poets who orbited around Ludwig Klages, his Cosmic Circle. They maintained close contacts with the intellectuals of the so-called Frankfurt School, especially with Walter Benjamin,

whose works focused directly on the thoughts of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, according to a refined analysis of the work of the forgotten, but not unimportant, Ludwig Klages. The School's central theses, such as the radical critique of instrumental reason, and its inevitable consequences, such as the impulse for domination and the domestication of nature, find their source in the works of the referenced German mystics, long before they surfaced in the famous writings of Literary Theory and Criticism. Through the concept of logocentrism by Klages, the disenchantment of the world was not only explicitly thematized, but was also a consequence of his theory of commodity fetishism. From Benjamin, to Bataille, Habermas, and Derrida, these theses and contributions were adopted.

But perhaps it is in dealing with the most famous skeptical and materialistic philosophers of the 20th century, whom no one would ever imagine flirting with the occult, that Josephson-Storm's thesis surprises us: the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle. More specifically, Otto Neurath, Rudolf Carnap, and Hans Hahn, the most leftist members of the group. Nurturing the same contempt for metaphysics, theology, and religious thought that characterized the other members of the group, they tried to develop a scientifically "corrected" Marxism, which eliminated metaphysics—an element seen as an illusion in the service of the bourgeoisie by Neurath, for example. They were accused by Martin Heidegger of being directly responsible for the process of de-divinization of the world. This was not enough, however, to fully remove these philosophers from interest in the fields of magic, spiritualism, and parapsychology.

The immersion in areas of spiritualist and paranormal research or even in pagan circles marked the lives of some of them, such as the mathematician Hans Hahn and Rudolf Carnap, who joined in these endeavors with other famous scientists, such as the mathematician Kurt Gödel. Vienna was lavish in its interest in the paranormal—so says Freud! It is argued that the fixed demarcation of rigid boundaries between rational and irrational, science and magic, etc., are exceedingly difficult to defend.

Finally, Josephson-Storm, through scrutiny of the Max Weber case, crowns his argument and clarifies once and for all the question that permeates the book: the concept of the disenchantment of the

world. Once again it is surprising what he reveals in biographical terms: the deep involvement of Max Weber, the most famous user of the world's disenchantment concept, with the enchanted spheres of magic and mysticism. The preponderance of these aspects in the internal organization of Weber's theory is also shown by the author. The virtually unknown experience of Weber's in the community of the heterodox psychoanalyst Otto Gross, on Monte Veritá ("Mount Truth" in Switzerland with its many utopian communities during the 20th century), and his contacts with the mystic poet Stefan George yielded more than the reader might have imagined. On the one hand, his plunge into a world full of enchantments and magic in 1913 provided Weber with the elements for the development of its opposite: the concept of disenchantment of the world, glimpsed in his work shortly after his return from such an environment. On the other hand, Weber's well-known neurasthenia, which prevented him from writing and teaching for many years, endowed him with a new sensitivity, attracting his attention to the work of the charismatic poet Stefan George, with whom he became close—and from then on he developed the sociological concept of charisma, which became central to his work.

Weber's pessimism and his criticism of what would become alienated modernity may find its roots hidden in the mystic Ludwig Klages, much more than in the celebrated influence Nietzsche exercised over him. Weber confessed (in an unknown continuation of a letter he wrote to Ferdinand Tönnies, different from what appears in the biography written by his widow) that he has never been anti-religious or irreligious. On the contrary, the documentation said that he felt like a mystic, to the amazement of many. A new view, then, emerges not only of the concept of disenchantment of Weber's world, but also of all of his theory. Josephson-Storm defends Max Weber trying to suture the modern gap between magic and rationality, choosing mysticism as a kind of prophylaxis to this disenchanted world.

After all, Joseph-Storm demonstrates that Max Weber's concept of disenchantment of the world can live very well with the permanence of magic in this world. Rationalization does not necessarily imply an extinction of the sacred, the mystical, and spiritual experiences. Such practices would be endowed with relative autonomy, such as economic, religious, legal, etc., and would continue to be perpetuated, especially

at the individual level. The main consequence of this observation is that the myth of modernity, which encompasses the myth of the disenchantment of the world as one of its central products, cannot be sustained. The concept of modernity is broad, taking into account all the phenomena it intends to describe, and if that means a rational explanation that covers the domination of nature and the disappearance of magic, it is wrong-headed. And so Josephson-Storm has answered a clear no to the three questions posed at the beginning of this work, about whether there was a clear development of the disenchantment of the world, a set time when magic vanished, and a set time when modernity started.

Of course, a book of this intellectual size, with such ambition, would leave flanks open to several criticisms. From a methodological point of view, the fact that the author relied only on a kind of traditional history of ideas is noteworthy. That is to say, it left aside what a materialist analysis, carried out through a sociology of intellectuals in the manner of Pierre Bourdieu, for example, could render from the diverse unpublished biographical information brought to the fore by various intellectuals and their socio–historical contexts. An example would be the establishment of poles of force in the dispute for truths, which are clear in the book, but not theoretically worked out in this way.

It is also noteworthy that the author has made little use of the analysis of the paranormal events themselves, emphasizing more the narratives that have been raised around the events and their epoch. Perhaps by providing us stronger materiality for the phenomena behind the narratives, his own argument would become clearer. Some assertions, on the other hand, are generalized and not very defensible, such as "The tyranny of reason or instrumental rationality never occurred. We are not stranded in the 'desolate time of the world's night', forced to scan the horizon for glimmers of the messianic dawn. [. . .] We are already free." (p. 314). This statement is more the expressed will of the author, to which we may be bound, but which, unfortunately, is not a verifiable fact in our societies. And finally, a gap: The book misses the contributions of spiritualism and psychical research for the debate on science/rationality and the occult/spiritual in 19th-century France, England, Italy, and the US, which brought together several well-known and influent intellectuals, such as William Crookes, Ernesto

Bozzano, Gabriel Delanne, Camille Flammarion, George Sand, and Victor Hugo, among others. Of the few criticisms raised, however, we are sure that they do not in any way diminish Joseph-Storm's brilliance and vast contributions to several fields, including those of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, critical theory, studies on religion, etc. This is, without a doubt, a necessary book for anyone who wants to delve into any of these branches of knowledge.

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Thomas Elsaesser

# Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment

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DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

Philipps Universität Marburg

# Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment

*Thomas Elsaesser*

## The Meaning and Memory of a Word

It is hard to ignore that the word "cinephile" is a French coinage. Used as a noun in English, it designates someone who as easily emanates cachet as pretension, of the sort often associated with style items or fashion habits imported from France. As an adjective, however, "cinéphile" describes a state of mind and an emotion that, one the whole, has been seductive to a happy few while proving beneficial to film culture in general. The term "cinephilia," finally, reverberates with nostalgia and dedication, with longings and discrimination, and it evokes, at least to my generation, more than a passion for going to the movies, and only a little less than an entire attitude toward life. In all its scintillating indeterminacy, then, cinephilia – which migrated into the English language in the 1960s – can by now claim the allegiance of three generations of film-lovers. This fact alone makes it necessary to distinguish between two or even three kinds of cinephilia, succeeding each other, but also overlapping, coexisting, and competing with each other. For instance, cinephilia has been in and out of favor several times, including a spell as a thoroughly pejorative and even dismissive sobriquet in the politicized 1970s.[1]

In the 1960s, it was also a contentious issue, especially during Andrew Sarris's and Pauline Kael's controversy over the auteur theory, when calling one's appreciation of a Hollywood screwball comedy by such names was simply un-American.[2] It was a target of derision, because of its implied cosmopolitan snobbery, and the butt of Woody Allen jokes, as in a famous self-mocking scene outside the New York's Waverly Cinema in ANNIE HALL (USA: 1977).[3] Yet it has also been a badge of loyalty for filmgoers of all ages and tastes, worn with pride and dignity. In 1996, when Susan Sontag regretted the "decay of cinema," it was clear what she actually meant was the decay of cinephilia, that is, the way New Yorkers watched movies, rather than what they watched and what was being made by studios and directors.[4] Her intervention brought to the fore one of cinephilia's original characteristics, namely that it has always been a gesture towards cinema framed by nostalgia and other retroactive temporalities, pleasures tinged with regret even as they register as pleasures. Cinephiles were always ready to give in to the anxiety of possible loss, to mourn the once sensu-

ous- sensory plenitude of the celluloid image, and to insist on the irrecoverably fleeting nature of a film's experience.

Why then, did cinephilia originate in France? One explanation is that France is one of the few countries outside the United States which actually possesses a continuous film culture, bridging mainstream cinema and art cinema, and thus making the cinema more readily an integral part of everyday life than elsewhere in Europe. France can boast of a film industry that goes back to the beginnings of cinema in 1895, while ever since the 1920s, it has also had an avant-garde cinema, an art-and-essay film club movement, Each generation in France has produced notable film directors of international stature: the Lumière Brothers and Georges Méliès, Maurice Tourneur and Louis Feuillade, Abel Gance and Germaine Dulac, Jean Renoir and René Clair, Jean Cocteau and Julien Duvivier, Sacha Guitry and Robert Bresson, down to Leos Carax and Luc Besson, Cathérine Breillat and Jean-Pierre Jeunet. At the same time, unlike the US, French film culture has always been receptive to the cinema of other nations, including the American cinema, and thus was remarkably free of the kind of chauvinism of which the French have since been so often accused.[5] If there was a constitutive ambivalence around the status of cinema, such as it existed in countries like Germany, then in France this was less about art versus commerce, or high culture versus popular culture, and more about the tension between the "first person singular" inflection of the avant-garde movements (with their sometimes sectarian cultism of metropolitan life) and the "first person plural" national inflection of French cinema, with its love of stars, genres such as *polars* or comedies, and a vaguely working-class populism. In other words, French public culture has always been cinephile – whether in the 1920s or the 1980s, whether it was represented by art historian Elie Faure or author André Malraux, by television presenter Bernard Pivot or the Socialist Minister of Culture Jack Lang – of a kind rarely found among politicians, writers and public figures in other European nations. A respect for, and knowledge of the cinema has in France been so much taken for granted that it scarcely needed a special word, which is perhaps why the particular fervor with which the American cinema was received after 1945 by the frequenters of Henri Langlois' Paris Cinémathèque in the rue d'Ulm and the disciples of André Bazin around *Cahiers du Cinéma* did need a word that connoted that extra dimension of passion, conviction as well as desperate determination which still plays around the term in common parlance.

Cinephilia, strictly speaking, is love of cinema: "a way of watching films, speaking about them and then diffusing this discourse," as Antoine de Baecque, somewhat primly, has defined it.[6] De Baecque judiciously includes the element of shared experience, as well as the need to write about it and to proselytize, alongside the pleasure derived from viewing films on the big screen. The cinephilia I became initiated into around 1963 in London included dandified rituals

strictly observed when "going to the movies," either alone or less often, in groups. Cinephilia meant being sensitive to one's surroundings when watching a movie, carefully picking the place where to sit, fully alert to the quasi-sacral feeling of nervous anticipation that could descend upon a public space, however squalid, smelly or slipshod, as the velvet curtain rose and the studio logo with its fanfares filled the space. Stories about the fetal position that Jean Douchet would adopt every night in the second row of the Cinémathèque Palais de Chaillot had already made the rounds before I became a student in Paris in 1967 and saw it with my own eyes, but I also recall a cinema in London, called The Tolmer near Euston Station, in the mid-1960s, where only homeless people and alcoholics who had been evicted from the nearby railway station spent their afternoons and early evenings. Yet, there it was that I first saw Allan Dwan's SLIGHTLY SCARLET (USA: 1955) and Jacques Tourneur's OUT OF THE PAST / BUILD MY GALLOWS HIGH (USA: 1947) – two must-see films on any cinephile's wish list in those days. Similarly mixed but vivid feelings linger in me about the Brixton Classic in South London, where the clientele was so rough that the house lights were kept on during the feature film, and the aisles were patrolled by security guards with German shepherds. But by making a temporary visor and shield out of *The Guardian* newspaper, I watched the Anthony Mann and Budd Boetticher Westerns – BEND OF THE RIVER (USA: Mann, 1951), THE FAR COUNTRY (USA: Mann, 1954), THE TALL T (USA: Boetticher, 1957), RIDE LONESOME (USA: Boetticher, 1959), COMANCHE STATION (USA: Boetticher, 1960) – that I had read about in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Movie Magazine*, feeling the moment as more unique and myself more privileged than had I been given tickets to the last night of the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall.

For Jonathan Rosenbaum, growing up as the grandson of a cinema owner from the Deep south, it was "placing movies" according to whom he had seen them with, and "moving places," from Florence, Alabama to Paris to London, that defined his cinephilia,[7] while Adrian Martin, a cinephile from Melbourne, Australia has commented on "the monastic rituals that inform all manifestations of cinephilia: hunting down obscure or long-lost films at suburban children's matinees or on late-night TV."[8] The "late-night TV" marks Martin as a second-generation cinephile, because in the days I was referring to, there was no late-night television in Britain, and the idea of watching movies on television would have been considered sacrilege.

## Detours and Deferrals

Cinephilia, then, wherever it is practiced around the globe, is not simply a love of the cinema. It is always already caught in several kinds of deferral: a detour in place and space, a shift in register and a delay in time. The initial spatial displacement was the transatlantic passage of Hollywood films after World War II to newly liberated France, wh`
ose audiences avidly caught up with the movies the German occupation had embargoed or banned during the previous years. In the early 1960s, the transatlantic passage went in the opposite direction, when the discourse of auteurism traveled from Paris to New York, followed by yet another change of direction, from New York back to Europe in the 1970s, when thanks to Martin Scorsese's admiration for Michael Powell, Paul Schrader's for Carl Dreyer, Woody Allen's for Ingmar Bergman and Francis Coppola's for Luchino Visconti these European masters were also "rediscovered" in Europe. Adding the mediating role played by London as the intellectual meeting point between Paris and New York, and the metropolis where art school film buffs, art house audiences, university-based film magazines and New Left theorists intersected as well, Anglophone cinephilia flourished above all in the triangle just sketched, sustained by migrating critics, traveling theory and translated magazines: "Europe-Hollywood-Europe" at first, but spreading as far as Latin America in the 1970s and to Australia in the 1980s.[9]

On a smaller, more local scale, this first cinephilia was – as already implied – topographically site-specific, defined by the movie houses, neighborhoods and cafés one frequented. If there *were* displacements, they mapped itineraries within a single city, be it Paris, London or New York, in the spirit of the Situationists' *detournement*, circumscribed by the mid-week movie sorties (in London) to the Everyman in Hampstead, the Electric Cinema on Portobello Road, and the NFT on the South Bank. Similar maps could be drawn for New York, Munich, or Milan, but nowhere were these sites more ideologically fixed and more fiercely defended than in Paris, where the original cinephiles of the post-war period divided up the city's movie theatres the way gangs divided up Chicago during prohibition: gathering at the MacMahon close to the Arc de Triomphe, at the Studio des Ursulines in the 5é or at La Pagode, near the Hotel des Invalides, each cinema hosted a clan or a tribe that was fiercely hostile to the others. If my own experience in London between 1963 and 1967 was more that of the movie house *flaneur* than as a member of a gang, the first person inflection of watching movies by myself eventually gave rise to a desire to write about them, which in turn required sharing one's likes, dislikes, and convictions with others, in order

to give body to one's love object, by founding a magazine and running it as a collective.[10]

However spontaneous, however shaped by circumstance and contingency, the magnetic pole of the world's cinephilia in the years up to the early 1970s remained Paris, and its marching orders retained something uniquely French. The story of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics and their promotion of Hollywood studio employees to the status of artists and "auteurs" is too wellknown to require any recapitulation here, except perhaps to note in passing another typically French trait. If in *La Pensée Sauvage*, Claude Levi-Strauss uses food to think with; and if there is a time-honored tradition in France – from the Marquis de Sade to Pierre Klossowski – to use sex to philosophize with, then it might not be an exaggeration to argue that in the 1950s, the cinephile core of French film critics used Charlton Heston, Fritz Lang, and Alfred Hitchcock, in order to theologize and ontologize with.[11]

One of the reasons the originary moment of cinephilia still occupies us today, however, may well be found in the third kind of deferral I mentioned. After detours of city, language, and location, cinephilia implies several kinds of time delays and shifts of temporal register. Here, too, distinctions are in order. First of all, there is "oedipal time": the kind of temporal succession that joins and separates paternity and generational repetition in difference. To go back to *Cahiers du Cinéma*: the fatherless, but oedipally fearless François Truffaut adopted Andre Bazin *and* Alfred Hitchcock (whom Bazin initially disliked), in order to attack "le cinéma de papa." The Pascalian Eric Rohmer (of MA NUIT CHEZ MAUD [France: 1969]), "chose" that macho pragmatist Howard Hawks *and* the dandy homosexual Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau as his father figures, while Jean-Luc Godard could be said to have initially hedged his bets as well by backing *both* Roberto Rossellini *and* Sam Fuller, *both* Ingmar Bergman *and* Fritz Lang. Yet cinephilia also connects to another, equally deferred tense structure of desire: that of a lover's discourse, as conjugated by Roland Barthes: "I have loved and love no more;" "I love no more, in order to better love what I once loved;" and perhaps even: "I love him who does not love you, in order to become more worthy of your love." This hints at a third temporality, enfolding both oedipal time and the lover's discourse time, namely a triangulated time of strictly mediated desire.

A closer look at the London scene in the 1970s and early 1980s, under the aspect of personal friendships, local particularities and the brief flowering of film magazines thanks to funds from the BFI, would indicate the presence of all these temporalities as well. The oedipal time of "discovering" Douglas Sirk, the dissenting re-assessments of neo-realism, the rivalries over who owned Hitchcock: *Sight & Sound, Screen* or *Movie*. The argument would be that it was a delayed, deferred but also post lapsarian cinephilia that proved part of the driving

force behind what came to be known as Screen theory.[12] The Theory both covered over and preserved the fact that ambivalence about the status of Hollywood as the good/bad object persisted, notwithstanding that the love of cinema was now called by a different name: voyeurism, fetishism, and scopophilia.[13] But naming here is shaming; nothing could henceforth hide the painful truth that by 1975, cinephilia had been dragged out of its closet, the darkened womb-like auditorium, and revealed itself as a source of disappointment: the magic of the movies, in the cold light of day, had become a manipulation of regressive fantasies and the place of the big male escape from sexual difference. And would these torn halves ever come together again? It is not altogether irrelevant to this moment in history that Laura Mulvey's call to forego visual pleasure and dedicate oneself to unpleasure was not heeded; and yet, the feminist project, which took its cue from her essay, made this ambivalence productive well beyond the cinema.`

## The Uses of Disenchantment

These then, would be some of the turns and returns of cinephilia between 1960 and 1980: love tainted by doubt and ambivalence, ambivalence turning into disappointment, and disappointment, which demanded a public demonstration or extorted confession of "I love no more." Yet, instead of this admission, as has sometimes happened with professional film critics, leading to a farewell note addressed to the cinema, abandoned in favor of some other intellectual or critical pursuit, disappointment with Hollywood in the early 1970s only helped renew the legitimating enterprise at the heart of auteurism, converting "negative" or disavowed cinephilia into one of the founding moments of Anglo-American academic film studies. The question why such negativity proved institutionally and intellectually so productive is a complex one, but it might just have to do with the time shifting inherent in the very feeling of cinephilia, which needs the ever-present possibility of disappointment, in order to exist at all, but which only becomes culturally productive against the knowledge of such possible "disenchantment," disgust even, and self-loathing. The question to ask, then – of the cinephile as well as of the critics of cinephilia – is: What are the uses of disenchantment? Picking the phrase "the uses of disenchantment" is, of course, alluding to a book by Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, where he studies the European fairy tale and its function for children and adults as a mode of storytelling and of sensemaking. What I want to borrow from Bettelheim is the idea of the cinema as one of the great fairy-tale machines or "mythologies" that the late 19th century bequeathed to the 20th, and that America, originally

inheriting it from Europe, has in turn (from the 1920s up to the present day) bequeathed to Europe under the name of "Hollywood," from where, once more since the 1980s, it has been passed to the rest of the world.

By turning Bettelheim's title into "dis-enchantment" I have also tried to capture another French phrase, that of "déception," a recurring sentiment voiced by Proust's narrator Marcel whenever a gap opens up between his expectations or anticipations and the reality as he then experienced it. It punctuates *À la recherche du temps perdu* like a leitmotif, and the gap which disenchantment each time signals enables Marcel's mind to become especially associative. It is as if disappointment and disenchantment are in Proust by no means negative feelings, but belong to the prime movers of the memory imagination. Savoring the sensed discrepancy between what is and what is expected, constitutes the semiotic act, so to speak, by making this difference the prerequisite for there to be any insight or feeling at all. Could it be that a similarly enacted gap is part of cinephilia's productive disenchantment? I recall a Hungarian friend in London who was always waiting for the new films by Losey, Preminger or Aldrich "with terrible trepidation." Anticipated disappointment may be more than a self-protective shield. Disenchantment is a form of individuation because it rescues the spectator's sense of self from being engulfed by the totalizing repleteness, the self-sufficiency and always already complete there-ness that especially classic American cinema tries to convey. From this perspective, the often heard complaint that a film is "not as good as [the director's] last one" also makes perfect sense because disappointment redeems memory at the expense of the present.

I therefore see disenchantment as having had a determining role within cinephilia, perhaps even going back to the post-World War II period. It may always have been the verso to cinephilia's recto, in that it lets us see the darker side, or at any rate, another side of the cinephile's sense of displacement and deferral. In the history of film theory, a break is usually posited between the auteurism and cinephilia of the 1950s-1960s, and the structuralist-semiotic turn of the 1960s–1970s. In fact, they are often played off against each other. But if one factors in the temporalities of love and the trepidations of possible disenchantment, then Christian Metz and Roland Barthes are indeed key figures not only in founding (semiologically inspired) film studies, but in defining the bi-polar affective bond we have with our subject, in the sense that their "I love / no longer / and choose the other / in order to learn / once more / to love myself" are the revolving turnstiles of both cinephilia *and* its apparent opposite – semiology and psychosemiotics. Disenchantment and its logic of retrospective revalorization hints at several additional reversals, which may explain why today we are still, or yet again, talking about cinephilia, while the theoretical paradigm I have just been alluding to – psychosemiotics – which was to have overcome cinephilia, the way en-

lightenment overcame superstition, has lost much of its previously compelling power.

Raymond Bellour, a cinephile (almost) of the first hour, and a founding figure in film studies, is also one of the most lucid commentators on cinephilia. In an essay entitled – how could it be otherwise – "Nostalgies," he confesses:

> There are three things, and three things only, which I have loved in the same way: Greek mythology, the early writings of the Bronte sisters, and the American cinema. These three worlds, so different from each other, have only one thing in common which is of such an immense power: they are, precisely, worlds. By that I mean complete wholes that truly respond at any moment in time to any question which one could ask about the nature, the function and the destiny of that particular universe. This is very clear for Greek mythology. The stories of gods and heroes leave nothing in the dark: neither heaven nor earth, neither genealogy nor sentiments. They impose an order on the idea, finite and infinite, in which a child could recognise its fears and anxieties. [...]
>
> Starting with the invention of the cinema there is an extraordinarily matching between cinema as a machine (apparatus?) and the continent of America. [Because] America recognised straightaway in this apparatus for reproducing reality the instrument that it needed for inventing itself. It immediately believed in the cinema's reality.[14]

"America immediately believed in the cinema's reality": this seems to me one of Bellour's most felicitous insights about cinephilia-as-unrequited love and perhaps even envy, a key to perhaps not only French fascination-in-disenchantment with Hollywood. For it is around this question of belief, of "*croyance*," of "good faith" and (of course, its philosophically equally interesting opposite "bad faith," when we think of Jean Paul Sartre's legacy) that much of French film theory and some of French film practice, took shape in the 1970s. French cinephile disenchantment, of which the same *Cahiers du Cinéma* made themselves the official organ from 1969 onwards, also helped formulate the theoretical-critical agenda that remained in force in Britain for a decade and in the USA for almost two. Central to the agenda was the need to prove that Hollywood cinema is a bad object, because it is illusionist. One might well ask naively: What else can the cinema be, if not illusionist? But as a cinephile, the pertinence of the problem strikes one as self-evident, for here, precisely, arises the question of belief. If you are an atheist, faith is not an issue; but woe to the agnostic who has been brought up a believer because he will have to prove that the existence of God is a logical impossibility.

This theological proof that heaven, or cinephilia, does not exist, is what I now tend to think screen theory was partly about. Its radicalism can be most plausibly understood, I suggest, as an insistent circling around one single question,

namely how this make-belief, this effect of the real, created by the false which is the American cinema, can be deconstructed, can be shown to be not only an act of ideological manipulation but an ontology whose groundlessness has to be unmasked – or on the contrary, has to be accepted as the price of our modernity. It is one thing to agree that the American cinema is illusionist, and to define what "believing in its reality" means. For instance, what it means is that one takes pleasure in being a witness to magic, to seeing with one's own eyes and ears what the mind knows to be impossible, or to experience the uncanny force of cinema as a parallel universe, peopled by a hundred years of un-dead presences, of ghosts more real than ourselves. But it is something quite other to equate this il-lusion or suspension of disbelief with de-lusion, and to insist that we have to wake up from it and be dis-enchanted away from its spell. That equation was left to *Screen* to insist on, and that is what perhaps was fed to film students far too long for film theory's own good, percolating through university film courses in ever more diluted versions.

But what extraordinary effervescence, what subtle intellectual flavors and bubbling energy the heady brew of screen theory generated in those early years! It testifies to the hidden bliss of disenchantment (which as Bellour makes clear, is profoundly linked to the loss of childhood), which gripped filmmakers as well as film theorists, and did so, paradoxically, at just the moment, around 1975 when, on the face of it, practice and theory, after a close alliance from the years of the Nouvelle Vague to the early work of Scorsese, Paul Schrader or Monte Hellman, began to diverge in quite different directions. It is remarkable to think that the publication of Stephen Heath's and Laura Mulvey's famous articles coincides with JAWS (USA: Steven Spielberg, 1975), THE EXORCIST (USA: William Friedkin, 1974) and STAR WARS (USA: George Lucas, 1975-77) – films that instead of dismantling illusionism, gave it a fourth dimension. Their special-effect hyperrealism made the term "illusionism" more or less obsolete, generating digital ontologies whose philosophical conundrums and cognitive-perceptual puzzles still keep us immersed or bemused. Unfortunately for some of us, the time came when students preferred disbelieving their eyes in the cinemas, to believing their teachers in the classroom.

## Cinephilia: Take Two

It is perhaps the very conjuncture or disjuncture between the theoretical tools of film studies and the practical film experiences of students (as students *and* spectators) that necessitates a return to this history – the history of cinephilia, in order to begin to map the possible contours of another cinephilia, today's cine-

philia. For as already indicated, while psychosemiotics has lost its intellectual luster, cinephilia seems to be staging a comeback. By an effect of yet another act of temporal displacement, such a moment would rewrite this history, creating not only a divide, but retrospectively obliging one to differentiate more clearly between first-generation cinephilia and second-generation cinephilia. It may even require us to distinguish two kinds of second-generation cinephilia, one that has kept aloof from the university curriculum and kept its faith with auteur cinema, with the celluloid image and the big screen, and another that has found its love of the movies take very different and often enough very unconventional forms, embracing the new technologies, such as DVDs and the internet, finding communities and shared experiences through gender-bending *Star Trek* episodes and other kinds of textual poaching. This fan cult cinephilia locates its pleasures neither in a physical space such as a city and its movie houses, nor in the "theatrical" experience of the quasi-sacral space of audiences gathered in the collective trance of a film performance.

I shall not say too much about the cinephilia that has kept faith with the auteur, a faith rewarded by that special sense of being in the presence of a new talent, and having the privilege to communicate such an encounter with genius to others. Instead of discovering B-picture directors as auteurs within the Hollywood machine, as did the first generation, these cinephiles find their neglected figures among the independents, the avant-garde, and the emerging film nations of world cinema. The natural home of this cinephilia is neither the university nor a city's second-run cinemas, but the film festival and the film museum, whose increasingly international circuits the cinephile critic, programmer, or distributor frequents as *flaneur*, prospector, and explorer. The main reason I can be brief is not only that my narrative is trying to track the interface and hidden links between cinephilia and academic film studies. Some of the pioneers of this second generation cinephilia – the already mentioned Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin – have themselves, together with their friends in Vienna, New York, San Francisco, and Paris, mapped the new terrain and documented the contours of their passion in a remarkable, serial publication, a daisy-chain of letters, which shows the new networks in action, while much of the time recalling the geographical and temporal triangulations of desire I have already sketched above.[15]

Less well documented is the post-auteur, post-theory cinephilia that has embraced the new technologies, that flourishes on the internet and finds its *jouissance* in an often undisguised and unapologetic fetishism of the technical prowess of the digital video disc, its sound and its image and the tactile sensations now associated with both. Three features stand out for a casual observer like myself, which I would briefly like to thematize under headings "re-mastering, re-purposing, and re-framing."

*Re-mastering* in its literal sense alludes, of course, directly to that fetish of the technical specification of digital transfers. But since the idea of re-mastering also implies power relations, suggesting an effort to capture and control something that may have gotten out of hand, this seems to me to apply particularly well to the new forms of cinephilia, as I shall try to suggest below. Yet re-mastery also hints at its dialectical opposite, namely the possibility of failure, the slipping of control from the very grip of someone who wants to exercise it. Lastly, re-mastering also in the sense of seizing the initiative, of re-appropriating the means of someone else's presumed mastery over your emotions, over your libidinal economy, by turning the images around, making them mean something for you and your community or group. What in cultural studies came to be called "oppositional readings" – when countering preferred or hegemonic readings – may now be present in the new cinephilia as a more attenuated, even dialogical engagement with the object and its meaning. Indeed, cinephilia as a re-mastering could be understood as the ultimate "negotiated" reading of the consumer society, insofar as it is within the regime of universalized (or "commodified") pleasure that the meaning proposed by the mainstream culture and the meaning "customized" by the cinephile coincide, confirming not only that, as Foucault averred, the "control society" disciplines through pleasure, but that the internet, through which much of this new cinephilia flows, is – as the phrase has it – a "pull" medium and not a "push" medium.[16]

One of the typical features of a pull medium, supposedly driven by the incremental decisions of its users, is its uncanny ability to *re-purpose*. This, as we know, is an industryterm for re-packaging the same content in different media, and for attaching different uses or purposes to the single product. It encompasses the director's cut, the bonus package of the DVD with its behind-the-scenes or making-of "documentaries," as well as the more obvious franchising and merchandising practices that precede, surround, and follow a major feature film release. The makers of THE MATRIX (USA: Andy & Larry Wachowski, 1998) or LORD OF THE RINGS (USA: Peter Jackson, 2001-2003) already have the computer game in mind during the filming, they maintain websites with articles about the "philosophy" of their plots and its protagonists, or they comment on the occult significance of objects, character's names and locations. The film comes with its own discourses, which in turn, give rise to more discourses. The critic – cinephile, consumer guide, enforcer of cultural standards, or fan – is already part of the package. Knowledgeable, sophisticated and expert, this ready-made cinephilia is a hard act to follow, and even harder is it to now locate what I have called the semiotic gap that enables either unexpected discovery, the shock of revelation, or the play of anticipation and disappointment, which I argued are part of cinephilia take one, and possibly part of cinephilia *tout court*.

This may, however, be the jaded view of a superannuated cinephile take one, unable to "master" his disenchantment. For there is also *re-framing*, referring to the conceptual frame, the emotional frame, as well as the temporal frame that regulates the DVD or internet forms of cinephilia, as well. More demanding, certainly, than selecting the right row in the cinema of your choice for the perfect view of the screen, these acts of reframing require the ability to hold in place different kinds of simultaneity, different temporalities. What is most striking about the new cinephilia is the mobility and malleability of its objects, the instability of the images put in circulation, their adaptability even in their visual forms and shapes, their mutability of meaning. But re-framing also in the temporal sense, for the new cinephile has to know how to savor (as well as to save her sense of identity from) the anachronisms generated by total availability, by the fact that the whole of film history is henceforth present in the here-and-now. Terms like "cult film" or "classic" are symptomatic of the attempt to find ways of coping with the sudden distance *and* proximity in the face of a constantly reencountered past. And what does it mean that the loved object is no longer an immaterial experience, an encounter stolen from the tyranny of irreversible time, but can now be touched and handled physically, stored and collected, in the form of a videotape or disk? Does a movie thereby come any closer or become more sensuous or tangible as an experience? In this respect, as indeed in several others, the new cinephilia faces the same dilemmas as did the old one: How to manage the emotions of being up close, of "burning with passion," of how to find the right measure, the right spatial parameters for the pleasures, but also for the rituals of cinephilia, which allow them to be shared, communicated, and put into words and discourse? All these forms of re-framing, however, stand in yet another tension with the dominant aesthetics of the moving image today, always seeking to "un-frame" the image, rather than merely reframing the classical scenic rectangle of stage, window, or painting. By this I mean the preference of contemporary media culture for the extreme close-up, the motion blur, wipe or pan, and for the horizon-less image altogether. Either layered like a palimpsest or immersive like a fish tank, the image today does not seek to engage the focusing gaze. Rather, it tries to suggest a more haptic contact space, a way of touching the image and being touched by it with the eye and ear. Contrast this to the heyday of mise-en-scène, where the art of framing or subtle reframing by the likes of Jean Renoir, Vincente Minnelli, or Nicholas Ray became the touchstone of value for the cinephiles of the first generation.

Cinephilia take one, then, was identified with the means of holding its object in place, with the uniqueness of the moment, as well as with the singularity of sacred space, because it valued the film almost as much for the effort it took to catch it on its first release or its single showing at a retrospective, as for the spiritual revelation, the sheer aesthetic pleasure or somatic engagement it pro-

mised at such a screening. On all these counts, cinephilia take two would seem to be a more complex affair involving an even more ambivalent state of mind and body. Against "trepidation in anticipation" (take one), the agitation of cinephilia take two might best be described by the terms "stressed/distressed," having to live in a non-linear, non-directional "too much/all at once" state of permanent tension, not so much about missing the unique moment, but almost its opposite, namely about how to cope with a flow that knows no privileged points of capture at all, and yet seeks that special sense of self-presence that love promises and sometimes provides. Cinephilia take two is therefore painfully aware of the paradox that cinephilia take one may have lived out in practice, but would not ultimately confront. Namely, that attachment to the unique moment and to that special place – in short, to the quest for plenitude, envelopment and enclosure – is already (as psychoanalysis was at pains to point out) the enactment of a search for lost time, and thus the acknowledgement that the singular moment stands under the regime of repetition, of the re-take, of the iterative, the compulsively serial, the fetishistic, the fragmented and the fractal. The paradox is similar to what Nietzsche expressed in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: "*doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit*" ("all pleasure seeks eternity"), meaning that pleasure has to face up to the fact of mortality, in the endless repetition of the vain attempt to overcome it.

Looking back from cinephilia take two to cinephilia take one, it once more becomes evident just how anxious a love it has always been, not only because we held on to the uniqueness of time and place, in the teeth of cinema's technological change and altered demographies that did away with those very movie houses which were home to the film lover's longings. It was an anxious love, because it was love in deferral and denial. By the 1960s, we already preferred the Hollywood films of the 1940s to the films made in the 1960s, cultivating the myth of a golden age that some cinephiles themselves have since transferred to the 1960s, and it was anxious in that it could access this plenitude only through the reflexiveness of writing, an act of distancing in the hope of getting closer. It was, I now believe, the cinephile's equivalent to the sort of *mise-en-abyme* of spectatorship one finds in the films of early Godard, such as the movie-house scene in Les Carabiniers (France: 1963, The Riflemen), where Michel-Ange wants to "enter" the screen, and ends up tearing it down. Writing about movies, too, was trying to seize the cinematic image, just as it escaped one's grasp. Once the screen was torn down, the naked brick wall that remained in Godard's film is as good a metaphor for this disenchantment I am speaking about as any. Yet cinephilia take two no longer has even this physical relation to "going to the movies" which a film as deconstructive, destructive, and iconoclastic as Les Carabiniers still invokes with such matter-of-factness. Nowadays, we know too much about the movies, their textual mechanisms, their commodity status,

their function in the culture industries and the experience economy, but – equally important, if not more so – the movies also know too much about us, the spectators, the users, the consumers. The cinema, in other words, is that "push" medium which disguises itself as a "pull" medium, going out of its way to promote cinephilia itself as its preferred mode of engagement with the spectator: the "plug," in Dominic Pettman's words, now goes both ways.[17]

Cinephilia take one, I suggested, is a discourse braided around love, in all the richly self-contradictory, narcissistic, altruistic, communicative and autistic forms that this emotion or state of mind afflicts us with. Film studies, built on this cinephilia, proceeded to deconstruct it, by taking apart mainly two of its key components: we politicized pleasure, and we psychoanalyzed desire. An important task at the time, maybe, but not a recipe for happiness. Is it possible to once more become innocent and political? Or to reconstruct what, after all, cinephilia take one and take two have in common, while nonetheless marking their differences? The term with which I would attempt to heal the rift is thus neither pleasure nor desire, but memory, even if it is no less contentious than either of the other two. At the forefront of cinephilia, of whatever form, I want to argue, is a crisis of memory: filmic memory in the first instance, but our very idea of memory in the modern sense, as recall mediated by technologies of recording, storage, and retrieval. The impossibility of experience in the present, and the need to always be conscious of several temporalities, which I claimed is fundamental to cinephilia, has become a generalized cultural condition. In our mobility, we are "tour"-ists of life; we use the camcorder with our hands or often merely in our heads, to reassure ourselves that this is "me, now, here." Our experience of the present is always already (media) memory, and this memory represents the recaptured attempt at self-presence: possessing the experience in order to possess the memory, in order to possess the self. It gives the cinephile take two a new role – maybe even a new cultural status – as collector and archivist, not so much of our fleeting cinema experiences as of our no less fleeting self-experiences.

The new cinephilia of the download, the file swap, the sampling, re-editing and re-mounting of story line, characters, and genre gives a new twist to that anxious love of loss and plenitude, if we can permit ourselves to consider it for a moment outside the parameters of copyright and fair use. Technology now allows the cinephile to re-create in and through the textual manipulations, but also through the choice of media and storage formats that sense of the unique, that sense of place, occasion, and moment so essential to all forms of cinephilia, even as it is caught in the compulsion to repeat. This work of preservation and re-presentation – like all work involving memory and the archive – is marked by the fragment and its fetish-invocations. Yet fragment is also understood here in a special sense. Each film is not only a fragment of that totality of moving

images which always already exceed our grasp, our knowledge and even our love, but it is also a fragment, in the sense of representing, in whatever form we view or experience it, only one part, one aspect, one aggregate state of the many, potentially unlimited aggregate states by which the images of our filmic heritage now circulate in culture. Out there, *the love that never lies* (cinephilia as the love of the original, of authenticity, of the indexicality of time, where each film performance is a unique event), now competes with *the love that never dies*, where cinephilia feeds on nostalgia and repetition, is revived by fandom and cult classics, and demands the video copy and now the DVD or the download. While such a love fetishises the technological performativity of digitally remastered images and sounds, it also confers a new nobility on what once might have been mere junk. The new cinephilia is turning the unlimited archive of our media memory, including the unloved bits and pieces, the long forgotten films or programs into potentially desirable and much valued clips, extras and bonuses, which proves that cinephilia is not only an anxious love, but can always turn itself into a happy perversion. And as such, these new forms of enchantment will probably also encounter new moments of dis-enchantment, re-establishing the possibility of rupture, such as when the network collapses, the connection is broken, or the server is down. Cinephilia, in other words, has re-incarnated itself, by dis-embodying itself. But what it has also achieved is that it has un-Frenched itself, or rather, it has taken the French (term) into a new ontology of belief, suspension of disbelief, and memory: possibly, probably against the will of the "happy few," but hopefully, once more for the benefit of many.

## Notes

1. Paul Willemen's essay on "Cinephilia" accurately echoes this severity of tone and hints at disapproval. See "Through the Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered," in Paul Willemen (ed.). *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 223-257.
2. The Andrew Sarris-Pauline Kael controversy can be studied in Sarris, Andrew. "Notes on the *Auteur* Theory in 1962," *Film Culture*, 27 (1962-63), 1-8; Kael, Pauline. "Circles and Squares," *Film Comment*, 16/3 (Spring 1963), pp. 12-26. For biographical background to Sarris' position, see <http://www.dga.org/news/v25_6/feat_sarris_schickel.php3>.
3. ANNIE HALL (USA: Woody Allen, 1977): "We saw the Fellini film last Tuesday. It was not one of his best. It lacks a cohesive structure. You know, you get the feeling that he's not absolutely sure what it is he wants to say. 'Course, I've always felt he was essentially a – a *technical* filmmaker. Granted, *La Strada* was a great film. Great in its use of negative imagery more than anything else. But that simple, cohesive

core.... Like all that *Juliet of the Spirits* or *Satyricon*, I found it incredibly *indulgent*. You know, he really is. He's one of the most *indulgent* filmmakers. He really is...."

4. Sontag, Susan. "The Decay of Cinema," *The New York Times*, 25 February 1996.
5. Jean-Paul Sartre returned to Paris from his visit to New York in 1947, full of admiration for the movies and the cities, and especially about Orson Welles' CITIZEN KANE (USA: 1941). See *Situations IV: Portraits*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, pp. 34-56.
6. Baecque, Antoine de. *La cinéphilie: Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture, 1944–1968*, Paris: Fayard, 2003.
7. Rosenbaum, Jonathan. *Moving Places: A Life at the Movies*, New York: Harper & Row, 1980, pp. 19-35.
8. Martin, Adrian. "No Flowers for the Cinephile: The Fates of Cultural Populism 1960-1988," Foss, Paul (ed.), *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Cinema*, Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988, p. 128.
9. For Latin American cinephilia, apart from Manuel Puig's novel *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1979), see Perez, Gilberto. *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
10. The cinephile magazine collectives that I headed as editor were *The Brighton Film Review* (1968-1971) and *Monogram* (1971-1975).
11. "Charlton Heston is an axiom. By himself alone he constitutes a tragedy, and his presence in any film whatsoever suffices to create beauty. The contained violence expressed by the somber phosphorescence of his eyes, his eagle's profile, the haughty arch of his eyebrows, his prominent cheekbones, the bitter and hard curve of his mouth, the fabulous power of his torso; this is what he possesses and what not even the worst director can degrade," Michel Mourlet, quoted in Roud, Richard, "The French Line," *Sight and Sound,* Autumn 1960. On Lang, see Moullet, Luc. *Fritz Lang,* Paris: Seghers, 1963; Eibel, Alfred (ed.). *Fritz Lang*. Paris: Présence du Cinéma, 1964. On Hitchcock see Rohmer, Eric, Claude Chabrol. *Hitchcock*, Paris: Éditions universitaires, 1957; Truffaut, François. *Le cinéma selon Hitchcock*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1966; Douchet, Jean. *Alfred Hitchcock*, Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 1967.
12. A good account of Screen Theory can be found in the introductions and texts assembled in Phil Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
13. Heath, Stephen. "Narrative Space," *Screen*, 17/3 (1976), pp. 19-75; and Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, 16/3 (autumn 1975), pp. 6-18.
14. Bellour, Raymond. "Nostalgies," *Autrement: Europe-Hollywood et Retour*, 79 (1986), pp. 231-232. [*Il y a trois choses, et trois seulement, que j'ai aimées de la meme façon: la mythologie grecque, les ecrits de jeunesse des soeurs Bronte, le cinema americain. Ces trois mondes si dissemblables n'ont qu'une chose en commun, mais qui est d'une force immense: ce sont, precisement, des mondes. C'est-a-dire des ensembles complets, qui repondent vraiment, a tel moment du temps, a toutes les questions que l'on peut se poser sur la nature, la fonction et le destin de l'univers. Cela est tres clair dans la mythologie grecque. Les recits des dieux et des heros ne laissent rien dans l'ombre: ni le ciel ni la terre, ni la genealogie ni les sentiments; ils imposent l'idee d'un ordre, fini et infini, dans lequel un enfant pouvait imaginer ses peurs et ses envies....*

    *Des l'invention du cinema, il y a une extraordinaire adequation entre la machine-cinema et le continent-Amerique. [Car] l'Amerique reconnait d'emblee, dans cette machine a repro-*

*duire la realite, l'instrument qui lui est necessaire pour inventer la sienne. Sa force a ete d'y croire instantanement*.]

15. Martin, Adrian, Jonathan Rosenbaum (eds.), *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia*, London: British Film Institute, 2003.
16. The terms "pull" and "push" come from marketing and constitute two ways of making contact between a consumer and a product or service. In a push medium, the producer actively persuades the customer of the advantages of the product (via advertising, marketing campaigns, or mailings). In a pull medium, the consumer "finds" the product or service by appearing to freely exercise his/her choice, curiosity, or by following an information trail, such as word-of-mouth. The search engines of the internet make the World Wide Web the typical "pull" medium, obliging traditional "push" media to redefine their communication strategies.
17. Dominic Pettman, remark at the Cinephilia II Conference, Amsterdam 2003.

J. C. D. CLARK

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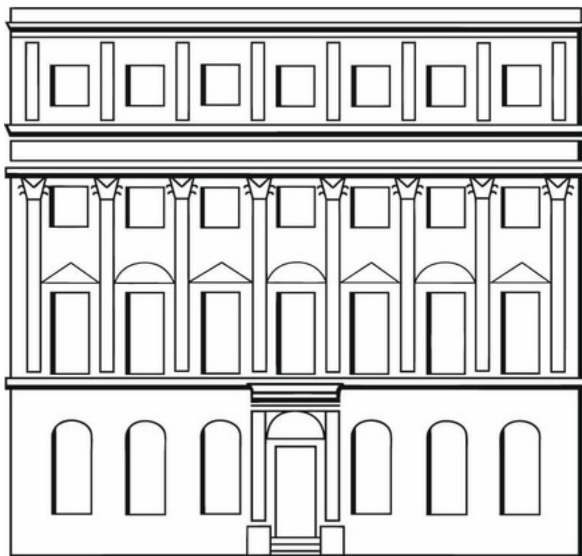

German Historical Institute London

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# 2

# The Re-Enchantment of the World? Religion and Monarchy in Eighteenth-Century Europe

J. C. D. CLARK

The present volume, deriving from a conference held at the British Academy under the auspices of the German Historical Institute, will surely have one unnoticed result: the conjuncture of monarchy and religion as subjects for historical study will quickly be taken for granted. Yet even thirty years ago, such an outcome would have been inconceivable. So much is evident from a preceding conference, organized by the German Historical Institute in 1987 and devoted to the period *c.*1450–1650: even at that late date its proceedings disclose different priorities from the papers assembled here. From today's perspective the previous conference showed the same willingness to compare courts across Europe, but was notable for the substantial omission of religion.[1] To understand how the historical study of monarchy and religion has developed, and now converged, we need to trace the development of scholarship since the early 1970s.

The eighteenth century was then seen with formidable unanimity as the site of modernization and secularization, the starting point for the domino effect of transformative populist revolutions that were held to have created the world as then understood; permissible topics for discussion included industrialization, urbanization, the rise of democracy, and soon the spread of consumer society and the growth of the fiscal–military state. We were aware that courts survived: political historians could hardly avoid that fact. We knew that churches survived: several distinguished chairs were devoted to ecclesiastical history. But

[1] Ronald G. Asch and Adolf M. Birke (eds.), *Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age c.1450–1650* (Oxford, 1991). Asch's 'Introduction' (1–38) is an important overview of the state of court studies to that date.

these two things hardly intruded into mainstream historical consciousness. They were unrelated in respect of substance, or by any explanatory methodology. Monarchy and religion were instead understood separately from each other, as 'survivals' from a 'traditional' world, doomed by the iron historical laws of modernism to long-term decline. It was known that Louis XVI (1774–93) had summed up 14 July 1789, the day the Bastille fell, with a diary entry of a single word: *rien*. This laconic dismissal was taken to symbolize monarchy's irrelevance in the world of revolution and popular sovereignty that was to follow. It was not widely known that, within the world of the court, this term was merely shorthand for the absence of public engagements. The king remained at work, with his ministers, in his private apartments. He did not do, or perceive, 'nothing'.[2]

## I

Behind this set of assumptions and priorities, taken as self-evident in the historical vision of *c.*1970, lay the analysis of earlier, but no less programmatic, generations. Two especially influential figures gave shape to that historiography: Walter Bagehot (1826–77) and Max Weber (1864–1920), the second given a peculiar currency in the USA thanks to Americanizing translations by a Congregationalist and sociologist, Talcott Parsons.[3] The distorting influence of these figures on discussions of monarchy and religion will become apparent later in this essay.

The tardy acceptance of sociology in England gave a special prominence to a remarkable economist and social commentator.

[2] Philip Mansel, *The Court of France 1789–1830* (Cambridge, 1988), 2.

[3] '[T]he original Whig interpretation, adapted by Weber for polemical reasons, was reimported by Parsons and others into the Anglo-American realm and helped reinforce the American orthodox understanding of an inherent connection between Protestantism and liberal democracy.' Guenther Roth, 'Introduction', in Hartmut Lehmann and Guenther Roth (eds.), *Weber's Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts* (Cambridge, 1995), 1–24, at 3; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and other Writings*, ed. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (Harmondsworth, 2002), pp. xxv–xxxii; Gisela Hinkle, 'The Americanization of Max Weber', *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, 7 (1986), 87–104. For an argument about the process by which a pre-1914 German Social Democratic polemic was exported to the USA, magnified by US sociology, political science, and history, and re-exported to Europe, see J. C. D. Clark, *Our Shadowed Present: Modernism, Postmodernism and History* (London, 2003), ch. 7.

Despite his secular image, Walter Bagehot's theological interests and motivations were profound and lasting, although he displayed almost no concern for the institutional expression of religion. Born to an Anglican mother, his father was a piously Unitarian banker who conducted Sunday services in his drawing room. 'Oxford and Cambridge were debarred owing to Mr. Bagehot [the father] objecting on principle to all doctrinal tests which were then required of the undergraduates at the older Universities,' and Walter was educated instead at University College London, lodging with 'a certain Dr. Hoppus, a Unitarian'. Bagehot wrote in 1858: 'From my father and mother being of different—I am afraid I might say—opposite sentiments on many points, I was never taught any scheme of doctrine as an absolute certainty in the way most people are.'[4]

His college and lifelong friend, the Unitarian R. H. Hutton, recorded that Bagehot had begun by sharing 'his mother's orthodoxy' but moved away from it; 'however doubtful he may have become on some of the cardinal issues of historical Christianity', he never 'accepted the Unitarian position', but this was evidently because of a greater scepticism than Hutton's. 'Certainly he became much more doubtful concerning the force of the historical evidence of Christianity than I ever was', added Hutton. 'Possibly his mind may have been latterly in suspense as to miracle altogether.' Thus Bagehot maintained, according to Hutton, both a 'profound belief in God' and a 'partial sympathy with the agnostic view that we are, in great measure, incapable of apprehending, more than very dimly, His mind or purposes'. Without openly rejecting formal religion, Bagehot posited an intuitive moral sense that united all men of goodwill, however diverse. Naturally, Bagehot 'condemned and dreaded' the Roman Catholic Church for 'her tendency to use her power over the multitude for purposes of a low ambition'.[5]

It followed that Bagehot 'did not like the m l l lany unreal

[4] Mrs Russell Barrington, *Life of Walter Bagehot* (London, 1914), 61, 78, 101, 109, 111, 226–8, 264, 366, 455–6. Bagehot has been overlooked by most recent studies of Victorian religious doubt, though see A. O. J. Cockshut, *The Unbelievers: English Agnostic Thought 1840–1890* (London, 1964), 172–80; Harry R. Sullivan, *Walter Bagehot* (Boston, 1975), 111–29; and Norman St John-Stevas, 'Bagehot's Religious Views', in id. (ed.), *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, 15 vols. (London, 1965–86), xv. 245–302.

[5] R. H. Hutton, *Memoir*, in St John-Stevas (ed.), *Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, xv. 89, 97, 101–2; Bagehot, 'Bishop Butler', ibid. i. 217–61, at 242, citing Butler, Kant, and Plato.

fictions of constitutional monarchy, nor did he esteem highly the prepossessions in which national fidelity to a hereditary dynasty is rooted'.[6] Given his intellectual antecedents, it is understandable but important that Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution* (1867) ignored the Church of England and sought to disenchant the monarchy by using nascent social science. The programmatic jurisprudential, anthropological, and sociological assumptions on which that book rested were made explicit in his articles that immediately followed, collected as *Physics and Politics* (1872), indebted especially to Henry Maine, Sir John Lubbock, and Edward Tylor.[7] *Physics and Politics* was not an explicit critique of established religion; rather it bypassed religion. For Bagehot, anthropology and Darwinian ideas of evolution succeeded ecclesiastical history as the source of what would today be called the 'grand narrative' of mankind's development.

In *The English Constitution* Bagehot set up his target in claiming that not the church but the monarchy 'consecrates our whole state'; his account of how this consecration occurred was wholly in terms of superstition, mystery, and custom. He therefore pointed the way to the rational disenchantment of a world so described with his warning that 'We must not let in daylight upon magic'; yet his argument sought to do just that. Indeed, read closely, his text argued that the English had already done so: after 1714, 'It was quite impossible to say that it was the duty of the English people to obey the House of Hanover upon any principles which do not concede the right of the people to choose their rulers, and which do not degrade monarchy from its solitary pinnacle of majestic reverence, and make it one only among many expedient institutions.' This clear understanding had been lost; people thought their obligation to obey Queen Victoria (1837–1901) was a 'mystic obligation', but this was only the 'credulous obedience of enormous masses'.[8] Religion, understood as

[6] Hutton, obituary, ibid. xv. 40.

[7] Walter Bagehot, *Physics and Politics: Or Thoughts on the Application of the Principles of 'Natural Selection' and 'Inheritance' to Political Society* (London, 1872), ibid. vii. 15–144. For this book as 'the beginning of the psychological approach to politics' and the incompatibility of Bagehot's social-scientific premisses with the notion of a Fall, see C. H. Driver, 'Walter Bagehot and the Social Psychologists', in F. J. C. Hearnshaw (ed.), *The Social and Political Ideas of Some Representative Thinkers of the Victorian Age* (London, 1933), 194–221, at 205–6, 215.

[8] Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, in St John-Stevas (ed.), *Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, v. 165–409, at 231–3, 243.

magic, was a subject for social science. For most of the twentieth century, Bagehot's use of anthropology as a guide to the general course of development of British society enjoyed a wide currency.

A second framer of assumptions shaping historical thought in this area was Max Weber. He had taken up the thesis, propounded by the economic historians Eberhard Gothein and Werner Sombart, of a link between Protestantism and capitalism, and put it to more extensive uses.[9] As Weber later came to be understood, he wished to treat economic development as an index of the decline of what Émile Durkheim was to call the 'sense of the sacred'. According to this later understanding, in Weber's vision Protestantism became the ally of capitalism in the destruction of 'traditionalism', a destruction that was held to be necessary for capitalism's flowering; Protestantism thereby itself became a route to secularization. For modern readers of Weber, 'disenchantment' became 'a drive of Western development'.[10]

Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism*, first published in 1905, was indeed programmatic, but in a different way: it was 'a plea for Imperial Germany to grow up: to cast off a politically authoritarian, outmoded system, dominated by the Junker landed class, and embrace the modern industrial order', a democratic and economic system that he particularly associated with England.[11] Weber's 'romanticism led him to glorify English Protestantism in its heroic age—largely a Whig reconstruction—for the sake of promoting German modernization'.[12] This Junker social order he regarded as underpinned by Lutheranism's sanction of the state. Weber therefore framed his alternative by appeal not to an atheistic French Enlightenment model but to what he understood to be an Anglo-American Puritan one: his term 'Protestant' meant not Lutheran, but Calvinist.

Whether Calvinism bears the weight required by Weber's use of it to identify the origin of radical individualism has been much

[9] W. G. Runciman (ed.), *Max Weber: Selections in Translation* (Cambridge, 1978); Stanislav Andreski (ed.), *Max Weber on Capitalism, Bureaucracy and Religion: A Selection of Texts* (London, 1983).

[10] Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton, 2002), ch. 11: 'The Great Process of Disenchantment', 155–74, at 168.

[11] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ed. Baehr and Wells, p. x; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Max Weber and German Politics 1890–1920* (1959; Chicago, 1984).

[12] Guenther Roth, 'Weber the Would-Be Englishman: Anglophilia and Family History', in Lehmann and Roth (eds.), *Weber's Protestant Ethic*, 83–121, at 121.

debated.[13] Weber's preoccupation in 1905, however, was not with religion's decline but with powerful and continuing religious predispositions to economic activity.

Weber saw a large number of possible investigations along these lines. How had the ascetic rationalism of the Puritans affected the organization and the daily life of social groups, from the congregation all the way up to the nation state? How was it related to humanistic rationalism, to scientific empiricism, to the development of modern technology and culture? But Weber did not pursue this line of inquiry further.[14]

So secularization remained, in his analysis, weakly conceptualized. Since he assumed that the patterns of religious rationalism had been successfully transposed to the economic sphere at the Reformation, any later decline of religion was oddly unimportant for him.

Nevertheless this thesis of 1905, politically programmatic as it was, became in due course further extended into a theory of secularization. As Marianne Weber summarized it after her husband's death:

the process of *rationalization* dissolves the magical notions and increasingly 'disenchants' the world and renders it godless. Religion changes from magic to doctrine . . . It was this union of a theoretical and a practical rationalism [at the Reformation] that separated modern civilization from ancient civilization . . . As a result, his [Weber's] original inquiry into the relationship between religion and economics expanded into an even more comprehensive inquiry into the *special character of all Western civilization.*[15]

So vivid is the picture conjured up by the image of 'the disenchantment of the world', so apt did it later appear as a summation of the retreat of the religious realm, that it has long escaped notice that the phrase was absent from the 1905 edition of *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism.*[16] It first appears with

[13] For a review of the literature, see especially the essays by David Zaret, Kaspar von Greyerz, Guy Oakes, Gianfranco Poggi, Philip Benedict, and James A. Henretta, in Lehmann and Roth (eds.), *Weber's Protestant Ethic*, 245–346; Richard F. Hamilton, *The Social Misconstruction of Reality: Validity and Verification in the Scholarly Community* (New Haven, 1996), 32–106.

[14] Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (1960; Berkeley, 1977), 66.

[15] Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography* (New York, 1975), 333.

[16] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ed. Baehr and Wells, gives the 1905 text; see ibid. p. xl for the absence of 'disenchantment' (*Entzauberung*). Weber used the word in the 1920 edition, although not prominently. Talcott Parsons, in his translation of this edition (London,

any prominence in a later work, the essay 'Science as a Vocation', delivered as a lecture in 1918 and published in 1919:

The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations.[17]

Even then, the phrase was placed in inverted commas (it has been taken to be a quotation from the poet Friedrich Schiller). The idea of disenchantment is not developed: it was merely a logical consequence of an alleged 'process of intellectualization', and was not supported by any empirical evidence on religion. Weber wrote of the scientific profession and of careers within it, not of religion. These later writings were published after years of indignant and acrimonious defence of the work of 1905, after Germany's defeat in war, and after the death of a brother: 'disenchantment' was evidently an emotive term.[18] Yet it was never as central to his analysis as it was later assumed to be.

Secularization, far from being a process that had created the modern world from the Reformation, was evidently, for Weber, a process just beginning; and it was not at the centre of his attention. In an essay published in 1906 and written just after his return from a visit to the USA, Weber recorded that even there, and even among Yankees of English descent, 'the "secularisation" of life has still not gone very deep';[19] in general, Weber's picture was of an American culture permeated by church affiliation. Secularization

1930), 105, 117, 149, rendered 'Entzauberung' as 'the elimination' or 'the radical elimination of magic from the world'. I am grateful to Dr Peter Baehr for this information. The term 'disenchantment' is similarly not used in the corresponding passages of Stephen Kalberg's translation (Chicago, 2001), 60, 70, 97. These assumptions about the relation of religion to magic had their fullest expression in Keith Thomas's important monograph *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971), for which see below.

[17] Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, 1946), 129–56, at 155.

[18] Weber had also been engaged from 1911 on a major project posthumously published as *Religionssoziologie* within his larger work, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1921–2): Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, intro. Talcott Parsons (Boston, 1963). This work, however, touched on secularization only in passing (171, 175) and the translation does not employ the term 'disenchantment'.

[19] ' "Churches" and "Sects" in North America', in Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ed. Baehr and Wells, 203–20, at 204. The inverted commas may have signalled an unfamiliar term.

hardly features in this essay. Nevertheless, the course of events in the twentieth century meant that secularization was soon understood as having been Weber's main point, and assumed to validate, and be validated by, his critique of Prussian Junkerdom. Moreover, the hypothesis of 1905—a close correlation between English Calvinism, Puritanism or Protestant Nonconformity, and economic development—was specific and relatively testable; it has not survived research. But the more general idea of a connection between modernization and secularization, the 'disenchantment of the world', was difficult to test, politically much more important, and proved much more long-lasting.[20]

Weber encouraged consideration of the changing role of religion, but the assumption that his work demonstrated a radical secularization of the world (of which economic development was an index) could lead to an antithesis between an early quasi-magical set of beliefs and a later, Enlightened, rational set.[21] Such a scenario neglects, among much else, the ways in which earlier ideas of monarchy could express, not a superstitious credulousness, but deliberate 'fictions of government', generically similar to the fictions that were later devised to underpin republican governments (which themselves, as in the USA, often claimed a religious sanction).[22] It neglects also the specifically Christian idiom of most political theory in Western Europe, an idiom that

[20] The term was widely influential, and eventually became synonymous with secularization, in e.g. Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (1985; Princeton, 1997). Gauchet indeed argues for a far more profound transition between religious and post-religious societies than was found in the analysis of Émile Durkheim: 'For Weber this expression specifically meant "the elimination of magic as a salvation technique". I do not believe that broadening it to mean the impoverishment of the reign of the invisible distorts this meaning' (3). Nevertheless, for the incompatibility of religion and modernity in Weber, see Thomas Ekstrand, *Max Weber in a Theological Perspective* (Leuven, 2000). For Weber's theological background, see Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, 'The German Theological Sources and Protestant Church Politics', in Lehmann and Roth (eds.), *Weber's Protestant Ethic*, 27–49.

[21] Paul Monod, *The Power of Kings: Monarchy and Religion in Europe 1589–1715* (New Haven, 1999) disclaims 'secularism' as the end-point of his study in 1715 but nevertheless posits 'a momentous change' from 'a religiously based obedience to an abstract, unitary human authority, combined with a deepened sense of individual moral responsibility', that is, 'the foundations of what will be called the rational state'; he argues that this was at least 'the beginning' of Max Weber's 'disenchantment of the world', which would eventually transform 'Christian subjects into citizens' in response to 'the rise of the rational state' (3, 324–5).

[22] Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York, 1988).

proved powerful irrespective of social-structural change.[23] These conclusions were not apparent in 1970; the influence of what was understood as Weber's message was still dominant.

## II

Even so, monarchy and religion never wholly disappeared from the historical agenda. Interest in the world of princes and prelates had been sustained, albeit exiguously, by the remains of late-humanist assumptions about the noble and the magnificent, cultivated by some authors after 1945 as antidotes to the ethic of the welfare state. This usage was challenged as nostalgia or antiquarianism by a dominant phase of 'labour history', understood in binary terms as history 'from below'. Paradoxically, such an antithesis to some degree sustained the study of history 'from above': it needed an opposite to validate its Manichean vision. It needed princes to oppress peasants; it needed superstition to explain why reason did not immediately and everywhere triumph. The real enemy of the history of court culture and of religion was the celebratory study of the 'middling sort', the argument that unideological, secular, acquisitive urban man provided the world-view of the eighteenth century and after. The unresponsiveness of this school to religion and to élites was more effective than the antipathies of scholars of the calibre of Christopher Hill or E. P. Thompson had ever been, and it expanded to fill the void that the collapse of 'labour history' after the late 1980s opened up.

Turning from the inner dynamics of the historical profession to its dominant methodologies, the picture for the study of monarchy and religion during most of the twentieth century was again one of tenuous survival but approaching extinction. English positivism, since the age of Leslie Stephen,[24] had squeezed

[23] For recent overviews see esp. Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge, 1998); id. and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (eds.), *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought 100–1625* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1999).

[24] Leslie Stephen's key text was *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London, 1876), in which its subject matter was reordered to provide agnostic answers to questions prompted by Victorian religious doubt. He was also the author of *An Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays* (London, 1893).

religion out of university departments of history almost as effectively as the classics had been squeezed out of departments of English: the history of religion survived as the retrospective loyalty of the committed, but was seldom treated as other than an irrelevance to the major engines of change. If it appeared on research agendas, it did so in only functionalist or institutionalist form. In an era of historical positivism, religion and monarchies were just able to hang on: they had generated the archives, and as long as historians still prioritized archival research these topics could hardly be avoided.

The development of historiography in the twentieth century was memorably conceptualized by Lawrence Stone in an essay of 1976, widely known when republished in his book *The Past and the Present* in 1981. It was, he argued, a series of phases defined by history's productive and fertile borrowings from adjacent social sciences. Moribund conventional history, the narrative of kings and queens and ministries and wars, had been revitalized by the exciting and intellectually liberating influence, one after another, of the social sciences. Stone traced this succession of dominant genres from *c.*1930: economics in the 1930s, sociology in the 1950s, demography in the 1960s, anthropology in the 1970s. As a result there were six areas of historical enquiry that were in their 'heroic phase of primary exploration and rapid development': the history of science; demographic history; the history of social change; mass culture; urban history; and the history of the family. And possibly three others, he added: the new political history built around the computerized study of voting records; psychohistory; and econometric economic history.

All these had made the present, argued Stone, a 'Golden Age of historiography'. But what of the future? Would some other discipline come to prominence in the next decade, 'perhaps social psychology'? He doubted it: 'it is probable that intellectual stagnation will set in', he predicted, and the future would see only the 'quiet consolidation of received wisdom', that is, of historiography as it stood in 1981.[25] There is much to be said for Stone's explanatory scheme, if not for his predicted end-point, and we can now better appreciate how the study of religion and of monarchy had survived during the phases of scholarship that Stone celebrated.

[25] Lawrence Stone, *The Past and the Present* (London, 1981), pp. xi–xii; 'History and the Social Sciences in the Twentieth Century', ibid. 3–44, at 15, 23–6, 32.

Economic history found religion and monarchy grist to its mill, for both had generated economic records that proved irresistible to the researcher. Yet even the most theologically aware economic historian failed to achieve a synthesis. R. H. Tawney had re-examined Weber's thesis to discern how, from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, it could be argued (wrongly, Tawney insisted) that religion and economics were 'separate provinces', so that religion fell silent before 'the idolatry of wealth, which is the practical religion of capitalist societies'.[26] As a Christian Socialist, Tawney had little interest in Weber as an analyst of Christianity's failure in the twentieth century, and Tawney's attempt to reintegrate Christianity and economics was, consequently, unsuccessful.

As a result, the prevalent assumption among historians was that the church had an economic dimension; economics did not have a theological dimension.[27] Christopher Hill's first book, a distinguished economic history of the church,[28] took an external view of religion. Lawrence Stone's lifelong interest in whether the gentry were rising or falling, whether new men were buying country estates, said much about the importance of analysing the economic structure of élite society but nothing about its religious premisses. For the long eighteenth century, the work of Chandaman showed the financial basis of the restored monarchy taken as a purely secular institution.[29] P. G. M. Dickson's work, first on England's finances, then on the court of Maria Theresa, displayed two national cases of the survival of monarchy and its attempted regeneration through the bottom line of national finance and administration.[30] Despite such occasional interest, economic history was implicitly committed to models of growth that derived in turn from models (since questioned) of an

[26] R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926; New York, 1937), pp. ix–x, xiii–xix (preface to 1937 edn.), 279–87.

[27] This assumption has recently been most notably challenged by the work of A. M. C. Waterman.

[28] Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (Oxford, 1956); cf. Phyllis Hembry, *The Bishops of Bath and Wells, 1540–1640: Social and Economic Problems* (London, 1967); Geoffrey Best, *Temporal Pillars: Queen Anne's Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the Church of England* (Cambridge, 1964).

[29] C. D. Chandaman, *The English Public Revenue 1660–1688* (Oxford, 1975).

[30] P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit* (London, 1967); id., *Finance and Government under Maria Theresia 1740–1780*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1987).

'Industrial Revolution'; it could hardly not assume churches and monarchies to be less than optimal influences on gross national products. Moreover, as Weber argued in 1895: 'It is dangerous, and in the long run irreconcilable with the interests of a nation, if an economically sinking class holds political authority in its hands.'[31] A theory of past economic development underwrote a theory of future political development, and thanks to Bagehot and Weber this assumption became widely prevalent far beyond Marxist circles.

Sociology might attend to élites and churches as definers of the social. Élites were more a preoccupation of continental European thinkers than of their British colleagues, for on the Continent twentieth-century wars and revolutions indeed saw the widespread destruction of élites that were, in Britain, symbolically vindicated if practically eroded: Britain had no real equivalents to Pareto and Mosca.[32] If British sociology attended to élites at all, the historiographical expression of this reached not to the court but rather, most famously with Sir Lewis Namier, to the House of Commons (in which the clergy did not sit). Although continental European sociologists had attended to the state, they had had less to say about monarchy, and less again about religion except as a matrix of economic growth. Norbert Elias's *Die höfische Gesellschaft* (1969), translated in 1983 as *The Court Society*, was almost all the sociology on monarchy available in English by the early 1980s. It is important that Elias's model was wholly secular, and had not established links with the work of the most famous sociologist to attend to religion, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917). Durkheim's approach to religion, moreover, elevated it to a generalized human aspiration or ideal, and distracted sociological attention from the ways in which Christianity in particular had been seen as offering an endorsement or critique of specific social and political institutions.[33]

[31] Quoted in Harold James, *A German Identity 1770–1990* (London, 1989), 84. For this view as a self-evident truth, and with no acknowledgement of Weber, see David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, 1990).

[32] Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), *The Rise and Fall of the Elites: An Application of Theoretical Sociology*, intro. Hans L. Zetterberg (Totowa, NJ, 1968); id., *The Ruling Class in Italy before 1900* (New York, 1974); Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941), *The Ruling Class*, ed. Arthur Livingston (New York, 1939). Parallel studies dealing with England were few, though see W. L. Guttsman, *The British Political Elite* (London, 1963); id. (ed.), *The English Ruling Class* (London, 1969), 293–310, briefly attended to the clergy, but only in terms of income and status.

[33] The evidential base of his most famous work was revealed in his subtitle, normally

Psychoanalysis too found some of its retrospective patients among the clerical and political élite.[34] Erik Erikson's book[35] was one of the pioneering studies in this field, and its subject, as well as its method, commanded attention. Namier regarded analysis as a key to the motivations of his political players, and applied it to George III (1760–1820).[36] Much depended on whether that monarch suffered from a metabolic disturbance, or was in some psychological sense intermittently insane.[37] E. P. Thompson's account of popular religion largely in terms of its alleged psychological function is famous, especially his description of Methodism as 'a component of the psychic process of counterrevolution'.[38] Work on the dream-life of Archbishop Laud might have reinforced this assumption.[39] Yet in the era of modernism, and especially of logical positivism, the relationship of psychoanalysis to religion was confrontational. When in 1957 the Bishop of Chichester wrote privately to Bertrand Russell, reproving him for his promiscuity, Russell passed the letter to Ernest Jones, biographer of Freud, as 'a document worthy to go into your case-book'. Jones replied, deriding the Bishop and hailing Russell as 'our leading apostle of true morality'.[40] This was the Jones who had earlier offered an analysis of Britain's constitutional monarchy in terms of the working out, on a national stage, of 'the famous Oedipus complex', the child's

omitted in English: *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie* (Paris, 1912). Appropriately, Durkheim condemned 'the disdain with which too many historians still regard ethnographers' work': *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York, 1995), 6.

[34] For an outline history of work in this field see William McKinley Runyan (ed.), *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1988), 12–19.

[35] Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, 1958).

[36] 'His insanity was a form of manic-depression.' Lewis Namier, 'King George III: A Study in Personality', in id., *Crossroads of Power: Essays on Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1962), 124–40, at 139. For a 'lack of psychological understanding' in Charles Townshend, id., 'Charles Townshend: His Character and Career', ibid. 194–212, at 203.

[37] Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business* (London, 1969).

[38] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), 381.

[39] Charles Carlton, *Archbishop William Laud* (London, 1987).

[40] Jones wrote: 'If you want a psycho-analytic comment of the letter there is a clue in the omnipotence he attributes to you (ability to stop wars, etc.). That can only point to a gigantic father-figure (an earthly God), whose only sin, much resented by the son, was his sleeping with his mother. It is curious that such people are never shocked at God's adulterous behaviour with the Virgin Mary. It needs a lot of purification.' Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 3 vols. (London, 1967–9), iii. 173–5.

rebellion against the father being accommodated by the inevitable destruction of the prime minister while the monarch remained 'untouchable, irremovable and sacrosanct, above even criticism'.[41] Such views of the institution seldom invited further study.

Anthropology in turn needed its sample of witch doctors and tribal chiefs, and sometimes conducted its fieldwork on the church or the court. Indeed, the language of symbolism and ritual could be found to be spoken most eloquently in such dangerous territory.[42] Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) was a landmark in this genre, and its treatment of religion gave it a congruence with Weberian assumptions that allowed it to become an importantly programmatic work as well as a scholarly one. That text will be considered at the end of this essay to show how academic study of these themes now proceeds differently.

This was how the landscape looked when Stone's *The Past and the Present* appeared in 1981, most of its contents arranged in a section unproblematically entitled 'The Emergence of the Modern World'. The powerful desire of many historians to use their craft for presentist purposes and to enlist social scientific disciplines to relativize or to ridicule past phenomena with apparent analogies in the present had given religion and royalty a short stay of execution, but not a reprieve. Their death warrant was signed, indeed repeatedly countersigned, by these new social-scientific disciplines, and would soon be put into effect. As Stone wrote: 'There has been a deliberate attempt to break away from this ancient fascination with the hereditary holders of political and religious power, the monopolizers of the bulk of capital wealth, and the exclusive consumers of high culture' in favour of 'the masses'. And, as he correctly pointed

[41] Ernest Jones, 'The Psychology of Constitutional Monarchy', *New Statesman and Nation*, NS, 11 (1 Feb. 1936), 141–2.

[42] For one example of an invocation of anthropology to justify the translation of religion into ritual and the courtly into the ceremonial, see David Cannadine, 'Introduction: Divine Rites of Kings', in id. and Simon Price (eds.), *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1987), 1–19: 'Kings may no longer rule by divine right; but the divine rites of kings continue to beguile and to enchant . . . And if this is so for the present, then how much more true is it of the past?' (7); 'the ceremonial and the divine kings of a primitive, Frazerian society were in many ways very different from the ceremonial and the dignified kings of a modern, Bagehotian, society' (18). Such work reminds us that the identification of certain societies as 'traditional' is normative, not historical.

out: 'The impetus for this radical shift of subject matter undoubtedly came from anthropology and sociology.'[43]

By 1981 these 'new ways in history' seemed to be settling into a new orthodoxy. And then, strangely, unexpectedly, in the early 1980s something happened, not only in Britain but much more widely; indeed, it happened in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam together, a mood, a movement, or a moment captured by Gilles Kepel's book *La Revanche de Dieu* (1991).[44] In the small corner of the field that was English historiography, what happened can be expressed in the terms of Lawrence Stone's analysis. Another discipline came to prominence as an influence on historical study: theology. In respect of the substantive outcome, studies began to be published entitled 'religion and . . . '. The lives of bishops continued to be written, but what changed was that religion as religion returned to propose reinterpretations of area after area from which it had been excluded. Secularization, hitherto assumed to be chiefly a matter for quantification, now came to be challenged and tested through studies of the applicability in particular places of specific models.[45]

How this happened, for many scholars working on widely separated subjects, is something that we do not yet well understand. I recall my own sense of surprise and discovery in the early 1980s when I became aware that the historiographical vision embodied in the Cambridge History Tripos, which had provided my own intellectual formation and was still being presented to me by a number of senior historians, shared a common premiss: it was secular, either unthinkingly or programmatically. This applied even, perhaps more surprisingly, to the genre of the history of ideas often termed the 'Cambridge school', and is indeed, as we now see, the Achilles heel of that enterprise.[46] It is the almost entire exclusion of religion from the

[43] Stone, 'History and the Social Sciences', 22–3.

[44] Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (Cambridge, 1994) focused on events in the public realm, and did not explore parallel developments in academic disciplines. For sociologists' debates on 'the return of the sacred' see S. J. D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870–1920* (Cambridge, 1996), Introduction, esp. 3–4.

[45] Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, Introduction.

[46] Paul A. Marshall, 'Quentin Skinner and the Secularisation of Political Thought', *Studies in Political Thought*, 2 (1993), 85–104. This secular project may explain the dichotomy in Skinner's writing between its grand narrative (the early origins and steady unfolding of the secular state, almost necessarily a republic) and its professed methodology (which

Cambridge-based history of political thought that compromises that discipline in respect of its substance, and that reveals its nature as a programme as well as an academic enquiry. In retrospect, this is obvious; but this limitation was not fully appreciated in 1980.

In the early 1980s, the implications of this previous exclusion of theology from the historical agenda only gradually became apparent. Many at that time would have denied that it had been excluded. All historians acknowledged religion's persistence through the eighteenth century, but they would then deal with it through the disciplines of sociology, psychoanalysis, or anthropology. The rather different implications of the reviving analysis of religion via theology were worked out, piece by piece, in the scholarship of the next two decades. What, in general, were the consequences of that initial proposition for the study of monarchy and religion, first in Britain, then elsewhere in Europe? Six broad thematic changes may be suggested in the case of Britain, but they will help to show how things were similar, and how they were different, on the Continent.

First, it began to emerge that the genre hitherto known without question as 'political thought' was not self-sufficiently secular. Locke began to be explained through his religious biography and the *Two Treatises* emerged as a retrospective critique of the late-Stuart monarchy for reasons essentially religious, rather than as a blueprint for a future liberal or acquisitive society for reasons essentially democratic or capitalist. This reinterpretation could even be carried forward to England's anti-monarchical writers on the eve of the destruction of the *ancien régime* in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Far from addressing a secular genre appropriately described as 'the history of political thought', historians now dealt with a politico-theology, and a politico-theology that, according to many of its authors, tied Christianity by various debatable means to monarchy, itself also an 'essentially contested concept'. But societies are identified not least by the concepts that they most bitterly contest: the idea of consensus, dominant in the 1950s, gave way in the 1980s to that of hegemony.

seemed to promise an emancipation from such a teleology). The early arrival of the secular state is a thesis difficult to sustain in the light of evidence now available for the long 18th century; as a result, 'the secular' can now be explained historically as a theological position, not as a position independent of theology.

Second, if political thought was a politico-theology, that tired subject called 'church-and-state' was immediately revitalized. From being a recondite corner of a moribund secular activity called 'constitutional history', it was recovered as the central interface between ideology and action, the site of the most keenly argued debates and the hardest-fought practical contests. If anthropology encouraged historians to discuss religion and monarchy in terms of symbolism and ritual, always, indeed, a condescending or trivializing perspective, the rise of theology restored the politico-theological life of the state to its status as a practical activity of the highest sophistication, played for the highest stakes.

Third, church–state relations were revitalized in a way that shone a spotlight on the institution of monarchy. In England, the Revolution of 1688 ceased to be seen as a symbolic moment when a secular-contractarian understanding of monarchy was imposed on kings; it became a moment when a common ground of political theology was torn in two, locking people in lasting conflict over the conclusions to be drawn from a body of ideas that was largely shared. This led in turn to a major revision in our implicit model of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century alignments. No longer could historians picture two homogeneous, clearly distinguished positions, libertarian versus authoritarian. Increasingly, the options and the commitments of this period were visualized as arranged along a bell curve, with the activists and theorists formerly taken as epitomes of those two consensual positions now often located as extremists, far out on either wing. Attention focused on the middle ground, and for the majority of Englishmen in this period the middle ground was occupied by monarchies and by churches, normally established churches.[47]

Fourth, the study of the religious preoccupations of people in the past identified ways in which their understanding of a social order might be hierarchical, and these recoveries of popular attitudes challenged a predominant economic and sociological analysis in terms of class. If it was Christianity that provided the ideological explanation of hierarchy, objections to this social form were also expressed in theological terms. If class analysis in recent history had been chiefly indebted to the influence of sociology,

[47] For the persistent strength of this ideal see Stewart J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland and Scotland 1801–1846* (Oxford, 2001).

the rise of theology now posed a substantive alternative that flatly contradicted the modernist understanding of itself. In other words, class was not a natural formation. Class-based politics no longer identified as anachronistic either monarchy or a social hierarchy validated by Christianity.

Fifth, in areas of social life hitherto dominated by assumptions about popular psychology, taking religion seriously meant a new perspective on popular involvement in the public realm. In 1965, in a review article devoted to E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, Geoffrey Best had asked a then-novel question: 'How strong then was that flag-saluting, foreigner-hating, peer-respecting side of the plebeian mind of which there is not only so much eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evidence but still plenty in our own day?'[48] And, we might add, the monarch-respecting side too? Psychohistory had done little to help at this point; perhaps, indeed, it was not the autonomous discipline that its champions claimed it to be, but more indebted than it admitted to surrounding assumptions and essentially intended to debunk figures of authority rather than to recover their motivations. Within the positivist historiographical assumptions of late modernism, the question of the sources and extent of popular loyalism, conservatism, religiosity, or monarchism proved surprisingly hard to answer, and few historians had tried to answer it. Now, the return to theology meant that a new window into that world was opened; a popular *mentalité* could again be recreated, distanced from the teleologies of economically reductionist labour history.

Sixth, in the longer term the consequences of a theologically informed analysis of English society could be extrapolated geographically. This resulted in a renewed appreciation of England's relations with Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, and the nature of the Union as a dynastic state with religious problems and dimensions. This was part of a reinterpretation of what were formerly termed the 'English' civil wars of the 1640s as a series of events within the British Isles across religious denominations, indeed a parallel with the Thirty Years War on the Continent. If England, Britain, and the United Kingdom was a 'multiple monarchy' turning into a 'composite kingdom', analogies could

[48] Geoffrey Best, 'The Making of the English Working Class', *Historical Journal*, 8 (1965), 271–81, at 278.

be drawn with continental Europe, especially in terms of monarchy and religion. A related consequence was a new and non-secular understanding of the American Revolution, discrediting the implied or explicit claims of the present-day United States to be in any sense a yardstick or exemplar of 'modernity'. If the American Revolution can be explained in terms other than those still securely embedded within the USA's myth of origins, then republicanism ceases to be normative: it ceases to be a natural projection of something formerly termed 'modernity', and becomes just another form of government, requiring historical analysis like every other. It is now obvious that republics and monarchies have equally ancient origins. The establishment or survival of either can no longer be taken for granted, or read off from what are presumed to be the historical dynamics of the age. No longer, then, is the European *ancien régime* confronted by a secular, transatlantic phenomenon, the democratic revolution, as described in the 1950s vision of the American historian R. R. Palmer.[49]

If these were the positive effects of a revival in the influence of theology, they were paralleled by difficulties, discreditings, and declines in many of the social sciences that Lawrence Stone had listed.[50] In retrospect, we could begin to see that these social-scientific emperors had had rather few clothes (although they did, indeed, have some). Monarchy and religion had seldom been subjects of study for the social sciences, which were committed to their normative dismissal, and those disciplines had seldom managed to offer other than shallow understandings of these two subjects.

Consider one such discussion, by Robert Waelder, of 'The Revival of the Popularity of the British Monarchy', published in a prestigious collection of psychohistory in 1971. 'In conformity with the age's general trend toward the left', he argued, 'the

[49] R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1959–64).

[50] That is not the subject of the present essay, although, as one instance, one might cite the fading of the programmatic claims for psychohistory formerly expressed in works such as Benjamin B. Wolman (ed.), *The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of History* (New York, 1971); George M. Kren and Leon H. Rappoport (eds.), *Varieties of Psychohistory* (New York, 1976); or William McKinley Runyan (ed.), *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1988). *The Psychohistory Review*, launched in 1971, failed to establish many close links with historical subjects other than Hitler and Nazism; it ceased publication in 1999.

popularity of the British monarchy seemed to decline during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.' But there was then a 'remarkable resurgence of enthusiasm' for the institution, which he attempted to analyse. With the relative decline of British power in the twentieth century, he contended, the monarchy acquired a new role as symbolic head of the Commonwealth. 'Thus, the monarch had suddenly become the protector of the British people against the anxiety of their loneliness . . . If this interpretation is correct one would expect the decline of monarchic sentiment as the Commonwealth is progressively revealed as an illusion.'[51] Remarkably, Waelder offered no deeper analysis than that, and thought it necessary to cite no evidence whatever. In retrospect, his argument was clearly derivative from general assumptions or from low-level history, and demonstrated no novel and evidentially grounded insight derived from psychoanalysis. It is a conclusion that applies more widely to the history inspired by the social sciences: such work now stands or falls chiefly as history and, as such, seems highly questionable.

These developments in the social sciences contribute to showing that the age of what we now call modernism is over, but for reasons other than those posited by postmodernists. Modernism now stands revealed as a programmatic movement of the late nineteenth century, not as an insight into the general nature of things.[52] Just what that programme consisted of can best be sensed by consulting the entries for 'modernization' and 'secularization' in guides to the social sciences. There we will often find an essentially circular argument: modernization is defined in large part in terms of secularization; secularization is defined in large part in terms of modernization. In that merely definitional sense, the completion of the modernist project itself creates postmodernism: if God really is dead, then the categories disintegrate, and meaning is in the mind of the reader, not the author. But circular arguments are fragile as soon as their circularity is appreciated.

[51] Robert Waelder, 'Psychoanalysis and History: Application of Psychoanalysis to Historiography', sub-section 'The Revival and Popularity of the British Monarchy', in Wolman (ed.), *The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of History*, 3–32, at 20–2.

[52] It is, of course, the case that some historians still wish to defend an older model of Britain as 'the first modern society', and some of their colleagues in the USA seek patriotically to claim colonial America as the 'crucible of modernity'. Such rhetoric is itself now vulnerable to historical explanation.

So secularization was revealed as a programme, not as a general condition of things, and an exceptional programme, occurring in England as late as Bentham (in whom it gave rise to a new ideology, 'radicalism'). The historical assumptions of the 1970s have been reversed: secularization, if it occurred, has to be proved. It cannot just be invoked as a generally valid nostrum, like the 'rise of the middle class'. Quite how far the reinstatement of religion might go can be seen from the first volume of Hew Strachan's trilogy on the First World War, published in 2001. He there reviews the familiar positivist accounts of the causes of that formative modernist episode and instead concludes: 'The issues were moral and, ultimately, religious.'[53] But if religion survived, so did monarchy. It is a conclusion that recalls Arno J. Mayer's argument in a book published in 1981: if 1848 had marked the survival of the crowned heads, 1914 was also a war between them. Yet Mayer had presented his book as 'a Marxist history from the top down', and although he perfunctorily mentioned the church as 'another vital constituent and pillar of the *ancien régime*',[54] it had played little part in his materialist-reductionist text. This seemed natural in 1981; today, it is equally clearly a major omission.

Much, then, has been gained in British history in recent years; and yet it is not securely gained. For a further innovation in method proceeded parallel with the reintroduction of theology, namely, the more widespread adoption of postmodernism. Postmodernism, as befits its French Marxist origins in the 1960s, is a radically secularizing doctrine. It is explicitly committed against the 'grand narratives'; but Christianity itself, claiming to narrate the story of mankind's creation, fall, and redemption, is the grandest of these grand narratives, and stands to lose even more than the economically reductionist social history of the 1960s and 1970s[55] from the argument that there is nothing outside the text and that meaning is imputed by the reader alone.

[53] Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (Oxford, 2001– ), i. 1115.

[54] Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York, 1981), pp. x, 7. Mayer's analysis realistically subordinated anthropological influences to economic-reductionist ones—'the crowned heads did not reign by symbols and ceremonies alone' (146)—but attended to religion chiefly in respect of the 'material base of the Church' (244–53, at 251).

[55] This genre of history is presented as the chief casualty of postmodernism in Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, 1997).

## III

Before recent scholarship is swept away in this new current, it will be helpful to review what has been gained, and how the themes of monarchy and religion have been read back into the story of governance and commitments in Britain and Europe in this period. If the picture in Britain over the last few decades was as described here, what were the broad currents elsewhere in respect of the study of religion and monarchy?

The answers of historians were different in different national traditions, and an overview of recent writing on monarchs and churches might reveal how far long-standing preoccupations with certain themes remain in place, how little religion has yet been systematically integrated into the story in some countries. Indeed, it might be said that the work of the scholars represented in this volume is still often programmatic. Nevertheless, much has changed. The period addressed by the previous conference organized by the German Historical Institute, 1450 to *c.*1650, spanned the Reformation and its resulting wars: religion was inescapable. It makes much more difference to the received picture to explore religion in the period that followed, the long eighteenth century.

The characteristic idiom of each court has often found a reflection in the preoccupations of much later historiography, as with the extreme formalism of the Spanish court and the dedication of many German courts to matters of bureaucratic organization and state-building.[56] Italian historiography has concentrated on the role of court patronage in the arts and literature, especially in the Renaissance. Many of these preoccupations with the arts and with symbolism have been echoed by French historians of the role of Versailles, projecting as it did the power of the monarchy through ceremonial and artistic display. Yet the French case was not necessarily helpful. Norbert Elias's important study took Louis XIV's Versailles as its ideal type, so seemingly downplaying the importance of courts elsewhere[57]—

[56] For a convenient summary of different national traditions of scholarship see R. O. Bucholz, *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture* (Stanford, Calif., 1993), 5–8.

[57] Elias, *Court Society*, 36 n. 2, 188–9 (cf. 68 for England) noted that small German courts 'had a very different social and cultural importance than did similar formations in

just as the implicit use of a French model for the Enlightenment[58] until recently discouraged attention to other intellectual traditions in eighteenth-century Europe.

Elias's model of court culture was secular, like the dominant paradigms of a French 'Enlightenment'. As Chantal Grell has shown, the French monarchy was often being discussed in secular and satirical terms by the 1770s,[59] but if we dispense with the assumption that these trends constituted a rightful rejection of myth, we can appreciate 1789 as a consequence of the adoption of negative discourse rather than an awakening to secular realities. If the French élite was not destined to fall, it is easier to understand how it helped to saw off the branch on which it sat.

Until recently few of these national traditions broke from the secular assumptions of modernist historiography and gave much attention to religion. A nineteenth-century secular construct, 'the Enlightenment', still dominates research strategies to a far greater degree than that undoubted eighteenth-century reality, the Roman Catholic Church; and it is relevant that the leading exponent of this French-centred, anti-religious model of the Enlightenment, Peter Gay, was also a champion of psychohistory. Yet it is the recovery of religion that has been the salient theme in British historiography in revising the older model of a unitary Enlightenment as a secularizing project, and this development now begins to be paralleled in the historiography of continental Europe also.[60]

France'; but his chosen method was to construct a Weberian ideal type rather than to explore the divergences.

[58] Most notably in Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment*, 2 vols. (London, 1966–70). For the cool reception of the French idea of the *philosophe* at the court of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, and the dominant alternative ideal of the 'Christian philosopher', see Derek Beales, 'Christians and "philosophes": The Case of the Austrian Enlightenment', in id. and Geoffrey Best (eds.), *History, Society and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Owen Chadwick* (Cambridge, 1985), 169–94, at 179; reprinted in Derek Beales, *Enlightenment and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London, 2005), 60–89.

[59] See the essay in this volume by Chantal Grell on Louis XVI's *sacre* of 1775.

[60] e.g. W. J. Callahan, *Church, Politics and Society in Spain, 1750–1874* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton, 1986); Jeffrey W. Merrick, *The Desacralization of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, La., 1990); Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560–1791* (New Haven, 1996); J.-L. Thireau (ed.), *Le Droit entre laïcisation et néo-sacralisation* (Paris, 1997); Catherine L. Maire, *De la cause de Dieu à la cause de la nation: le jansénisme au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1998); James E. Bradley and Dale Van Kley (eds.), *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2001); Ran Halévi (ed.), *Le Savoir du Prince: Du Moyen Âge aux Lumières* (Paris, 2002).

Religion could support monarchy, and monarchy support religion, in different ways: change should not automatically be read as decay. Derek Beales's study of Joseph II (1765/80–90) has shown how the Enlightenment in Austria was oriented towards the royal imposition of reform on a reluctant Roman Catholic Church. The sense in which Joseph II's reign had theological premisses, or was bound up with the church's survival, would be more apparent from a study of events in the decades after his death in 1790, as Austria resisted the expansion of revolution.[61] Even by the end of the next century, so eminent a student of religion as Max Weber was convinced that Lutheranism provided an important foundation for what he saw as the authoritarianism of the Prussian state and the Wilhelmine German Empire: perhaps secularization was, for Weber, more of a goal to be pursued than something that had, in Germany at least, already occurred. The simplified funeral planned for himself by Joseph II and the wholly secular one intended by Frederick the Great of Prussia (1740–86), but not carried out as planned,[62] tell us something about the changing nature of monarchy's religious premisses, but not everything.

Scholarship on Russia is substantially different. Perhaps the Orthodox Church has benefited from the absence of domestic imperatives to align it with or against the Enlightenment. In the work of Paul Bushkovitch, for example, we encounter a Russia that was open to Western influence far earlier than we had thought, often via religious channels, and a Russian society that not only found a central role for religion, but in which that role was subject to 'continuous change', especially initiated by Tsar Peter I (1689–1725) after 1689. Bushkovitch documents a move away from an earlier pattern of church–state relations towards a new tsarist absolutism that relegated the church to a subordinate role. Seventeenth-century Russia also saw a development of inward-looking religious life, an emphasis on sermons and personal morality, away from liturgical and public religious observance.[63] Did this facilitate a redefinition of church and

[61] Derek Beales, *Joseph II*, i. *In the Shadow of Maria Theresa 1741–1780* (Cambridge, 1987); for the origin of Joseph's policy towards the Church, 441–73. Beales does, however, give close attention to 'court culture'.

[62] See the essays by Mark Hengerer and Eckhart Hellmuth in this volume.

[63] Paul Bushkovitch, *Religion and Society in Russia: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York, 1992), 176.

state that allowed the monarchy to fill a vacuum? Or, as Simon Dixon's work implies, did an older religiosity survive, if overlaid at times by a tsarist imperative to celebrate military victories rather than the name-days of saints?[64]

Even in the case of the English court, its changing role is still most frequently structured in terms of the characters of the individual monarchs, and the secular political purposes they intended their courts to serve. Geoffrey Elton's thesis in the 1950s of a Tudor revolution in government, and its preoccupation with the question of when the business of government moved out of the court, diverted attention away from court studies. The seminal collection of essays edited by A. G. Dickens in 1977, with distinguished contributors including Robert Evans on the Habsburgs and John Elliott on Philip II (1556–98), had little to say about England; and as it moved beyond the seventeenth century that book had less to say about religion.[65] The rehabilitation of the English court, when it came, extended only to the outbreak of the civil war.[66]

Early-Stuart historians apparently assumed that the big questions of their era were solved practically by the 'financial revolution' and symbolically or ideologically by the Glorious Revolution. Yet, although matters of administration (whether the court still included elements of the bureaucracy) or politics (how far it operated as a 'point of contact' between the monarch and the political élite) were still dominant, it may be that the distinctive feature of the English court from the reign of Henry VIII to the nineteenth century was not how far it anticipated Versailles (hardly at all), but how it prepared the ground for, and implemented, a novel polity, uniting church and state, allegedly

64 See the essay by Simon Dixon in this volume.

65 A. G. Dickens (ed.), *The Courts of Europe: Politics, Patronage and Royalty 1400–1800* (London, 1977) ended its treatment of England with Charles I (1625–49). Religion plays a much larger role in an otherwise similar collection, John Adamson (ed.), *The Princely Courts of Europe: Ritual, Politics and Culture under the Ancien Régime* (London, 1999).

66 David Starkey et al., *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London, 1987) warned (p. ix): 'even the words themselves may seem a little strange. But they are not barbarous, and they have been taken from contemporary usage and not from the abstractions of the social sciences.' But the contributors to this volume were still reacting against an agenda set by Sir Geoffrey Elton, and religion did not feature prominently in their pages. For a greater attention to *mentalité*, see R. Malcolm Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England* (Philadelphia, 1987); Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (London, 1990); id., *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge, 1991).

producing a considerable access of power to the latter that deserves comparison with the case of Russia.

The rehabilitation of monarchy began with the most unlikely British sovereign, George II (1727–60), thanks to J. B. Owen,[67] and continued with Ragnhild Hatton's reinstatement of the similarly uninspiring George I (1714–27).[68] For the period after 1688, the study of the English court was most indebted to scholars from elsewhere, including J. M. Beattie's pioneering and neglected book in 1967,[69] Edward Gregg's life of Anne (1702–14),[70] Stephen Baxter's work on William III (1689–1702), R. O. Bucholz's work on the court in Anne's reign,[71] and Marilyn Morris's on George III.[72] These North American works, standing somewhat outside the British historiographical developments discussed here, gave no central place to religion. Yet it is the long eighteenth century that has been radically desecularized, and that development gives these American works an added significance.

For British historiography, one unexpected source of revived attention to monarchy and religion has been the recovery of Jacobitism as a serious subject of historical research, since the social and political coherence of the Stuart interest in exile was inevitably provided by its structure as a court. Religion was inevitably central since it played so large a part in the expulsion

[67] J. B. Owen, 'George II Reconsidered', in Anne Whiteman, J. S. Bromley, and P. G. M. Dickson (eds.), *Statesmen, Scholars and Merchants: Essays in Eighteenth-Century History Presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland* (Oxford, 1973), 113–34.

[68] Ragnhild Hatton, *George I: Elector and King* (London, 1978).

[69] J. M. Beattie's *The English Court in the Reign of George I* (Cambridge, 1967) was an isolated exception to the neglect at that time of the court as an institution after the reign of Charles I, and did not reverse the general neglect.

[70] Edward Gregg, *Queen Anne* (London, 1980).

[71] For an argument that 'personal monarchy survived the Revolution', see Stephen B. Baxter, 'William III as Hercules: The Political Implications of Court Culture', in Lois G. Schwoerer (ed.), *The Revolution of 1688–1689: Changing Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1992), 95–106, at 97. This stemmed from work earlier expressed in Baxter, *William III* (London, 1966). Bucholz's scholarly *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture*, which draws important Continental parallels, recommends that the court historian 'enter into the territory of the art historian, the anthropologist, and the sociologist' (5), and says little on religion.

[72] Marilyn Morris, *The British Monarchy and the French Revolution* (New Haven, 1998) shows a partial adoption (101–16) of the recent research that has reintegrated religion into accounts of political ideology, but retains enough of the older view that divine-right monarchy was so compromised by 1649 and 1688 as to hinder the book's reconstruction of monarchy's theoretical premisses in later decades: 'The civil war had been *the first step* in *the process* of dismantling divine right' (27, italics added; cf. 39); by 1790, 'monarchs could no longer claim to rule by divine right' (63).

of James II (1685–8) and his successors' inability to mobilize a larger share of English opinion than they did.[73] Such a political idiom, once recovered, can be shown to have been substantially shared: partisans of the houses of Hanover and Stuart all appealed to divine dispositions, and argued rather over the inferences to be drawn from a common body of principle.

What is not yet prominent in the historiography is the function of the court as the prime locus of 'politeness'. Even the dull and formal court of Queen Anne prompted Jonathan Swift to observe: 'The Court serves me for a Coffee-house, once a week I meet acquaintance there that I should not otherwise see in a quarter.'[74] Thanks to a German historiography indebted ultimately to Max Weber, the ideal of 'politeness' is still located in what is depicted as a rival venue, the coffee house. It has, however, escaped notice that Habermas's widely influential thesis of the decline of court culture in England after the reign of Charles II (1660–85) and the rise of an alternative *locus* of social life summed up as 'the town' was supported in his text of 1962 only by references to writings of G. M. Trevelyan (1944) and Leslie Stephen (1903).[75] Admittedly, Habermas was attempting to engage with a historiography of England in the long eighteenth century that was, at the time he wrote, intellectually impoverished. His frame of reference was, however, wholly and inappropriately secular, and cannot be reconciled with the results of research since Trevelyan.

Hanoverians as well as Stuarts enlisted popular loyalty. The sense of personal attachment to monarchs also varied over time, and was often contested by others to whom the monarch on the throne was anathema; nevertheless, the popular affection for monarchy, prominent with Queen Anne, disastrously forfeited under George I and II, came back with George III, was squandered again by his two successors, and re-established by Victoria in a way that had a marked effect on popular sentiment into the

[73] See esp. Eveline Cruickshanks and Edward Corp (eds.), *The Stuart Court in Exile and the Jacobites* (London, 1995), and Eveline Cruickshanks (ed.), *The Stuart Courts* (Stroud, 2000), which considers the dynasty from James I to the court in exile at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. R. Malcolm Smuts (ed.), *The Stuart Court and Europe: Essays in Politics and Political Culture* (Cambridge, 1996) explores Continental relations to 1688.

[74] Jonathan Swift, *Journal to Stella*, ed. Harold Williams, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1948), ii. 522.

[75] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962; Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 32 nn. 8, 9 et seq.

twentieth century. We must beware of halting our enquiries at any particular point and taking the situation at that moment to stand for the future.

Nor was popularity all. The historiography of Hill, Hobsbawm, and Stone posited social trends that ought to have produced a decline in the position of the court after 1688. Yet, paradoxically, we see during the eighteenth century a growing use of the term 'Court' in English political discourse, widening from the geographical entourage of the monarch to mean all the supporters of the king's ministers, by the 1820s defined in defence of the 'Protestant Constitution' against its Whiggish opponents. Monarchy became more, not less, of a target as the eighteenth century went on; if it was not an issue under George I, by George III's reign Thomas Paine had made it one. Subjects of George II would have been astonished at the prominence that the rebels of 1776 gave to his successor.

The favour of the monarch diminished over time as a fount of employment and opportunity. Yet this was not so much the result of a stadial shift, court society being replaced by society identified by some other label, as by the steady development of new arenas and opportunities parallel with the court. 'Old Corruption' was a powerful presence to the early 1830s, although reforms had already eroded its foundations before the final collapse.[76] Before 1832 there was no moment of modernization after which British monarchs failed to notice that they were living in a new world.

Courts changed. Yet if the personal political role of the monarch diminished over time, a longer perspective shows that it often rose again. In England, the monarch's practical ability to select ministers was a reality into the 1810s, and although the personal unsuitability of George IV (1820–30) and William IV (1830–7) diminished their power, Victoria's position was very different from the minimal, figurehead role ascribed to her in Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution* (1867). We can now see Bagehot not as a man with an uncanny insight into the nature of things, but as a man with a mission, eager to encourage his country down the road to a republic, in some ways a middlebrow English anticipation of Max Weber.

[76] Philip Harling, *The Waning of 'Old Corruption': The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779–1846* (Oxford, 1996).

Religion changed. The baroque pieties of late seventeenth-century Catholic and Anglican states found certain ways of characterizing the monarch; in France and England, though not elsewhere, an early-medieval doctrine ascribed to monarchs a thaumaturgic gift. Religion in this sense, sometimes positing a close interrelation between events in the political and the natural worlds, was later often dismissed as 'superstition' by believing Christians; yet this did not automatically mean secularization. If miracles declined, providence as an explanatory scheme survived and flourished.[77] Since early modern monarchs were not 'divine' (over churches they claimed a *potestas jurisdictionis*, not a *potestas ordinis*), their modern successors were not committed by negation to be 'secular'.

Monarchy and religion changed, but according to no set chronology and no linked inner logic. The restored High Churchmanship of Charles II's reign, in which monarchs could plausibly touch for the 'king's evil', was not 'disabused' of 'superstition' by the new science; it forged an alliance with that science that lasted to the mid-nineteenth century. It was religion (imported Calvinism and Lutheranism) not 'modernity' that led William III and George I to abandon their claim to thaumaturgic gifts where their French counterparts did not.[78]

All monarchs appealed to sacred imagery. The practice of days of thanksgiving remained commonplace; church services and published sermons on grand and solemn occasions were important *loci* of public doctrine. They changed, as studies of sermons preached on 30 January show; but not until 1858 did Parliament formally end the observance of the 'state services' of 5 November, 30 January, and 29 May. The theme of the familial unity of the nation long outlasted Locke's critique of Filmer. Queen Anne's coronation sermon was preached on the text 'And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers' (Isaiah 49: 23); even William III, in his speech from the throne at the opening of his last Parliament, claimed to

[77] See J. C. D. Clark, 'Providence, Predestination and Progress: or, Did the Enlightenment Fail?', *Albion*, 35 (2003), 559–89. I shall consider these themes at greater length in a book to be entitled *Providence, Chance and Destiny*.

[78] Jean-François Solnon, *La Cour de France* (Paris, 1987); Mansel, *The Court of France 1789–1830*, 185–96, for the contrasting styles and effectiveness of the courts of Louis XVI (1774–93), Napoleon (1799/1804–1814/15), Louis XVIII (1814–24), and Charles X (1824–30): 'service had replaced class as the principle dominating the court' after 1814.

be 'the common Father of all My People'.[79] The desire of the monarchy to symbolize national unity was a constant; what changed were the images through which this was expressed.

Appropriately, a reconsideration of gender relations is enlivening court studies. Courts can be as much about queens as kings, and here again the chosen time frame contains a hidden answer—measuring from Charles II to William IV gives a much more male-dominated world, and a less robust institution, than measuring from Anne to Victoria.[80] Even in France, where Salic Law prevented queens regnant, it may be that the main liability in 1789 was not the reforming Louis XVI, but his queen, Marie-Antoinette. Louis hardly featured in Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790); the individual most needing Burke's defence was the Queen.

If courts (that is, monarchy and religion brought to a focus) have only just begun to be studied in their interrelation, there is as yet little comparative study of the unitary phenomenon across national boundaries. This was true of the two component parts, taken in isolation. Monarchy as a secular phenomenon was seldom compared across the strengthening boundaries of the nation-state; the Christian religion in the hands of denominational loyalists resisted serious comparisons between denominations.[81] Instead, 'comparative religion' normally involved comparisons between Christianity as such and non-Christian religions.

Despite much technical scholarship in the last twenty years, older assumptions are deep-rooted. It is still widely held that monarchy, and religion, were destined for destruction. Historians still assume that things that they know, with hindsight, are about to fail will first decline. But this is unjustified: perhaps court culture was even stronger in 1815 than in 1648? What subsequently happened to these phenomena demands research, not an easy extrapolation from presumed eighteenth-century trends. Our end point is not a securely secular 1789: historians have no defined end points, and must be as open to

[79] *Commons Journals*, xiii. 647; quoted from Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, 343.

[80] Clarissa Campbell Orr (ed.), *Queenship in Britain 1660–1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics* (Manchester, 2002).

[81] A recent distinguished exception is W. R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime, 1648–1789* (Cambridge, 1999), an achievement which reminds one how little comparative work relates Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Anglicanism.

the reinstatements of 1814 and 1815 as to the negations of 1776 and 1789.

## IV

What, then, is the significance of these themes of monarchy and religion? Of marginal significance, if they are taken in isolation. In a Weberian and secularizing context, there seems little to be said against a Bagehotian analysis of monarchy. We may postpone the decline of the institution of monarchy; indeed we may postpone it as late as 1914 for some states, but its decline seems assured, and its status as an anomaly seems secure.[82] Similarly for religion: if religion was merely a matter of irrational choices within a private sphere, then its marginality is clear, and shown repeatedly in the eighteenth century and after by the involvement in public affairs of secular philosophy, of political economy, and of the emergent social sciences. It is the close association of religion and monarchy in the eighteenth century, indeed of religion and everything else, that has identified for us a different mentality, not unseated by a reified Enlightenment, within which not only monarchy but other social institutions require rethinking.[83]

[82] John Cannon, 'The Survival of the British Monarchy', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 36 (1986), 143–64; Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy* (London, 1988); Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven, 1995); William Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism: the Transformation of the British Monarchy, 1861–1914* (London, 1996); Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Aldershot, 1997). The unacknowledged Bagehotian or Weberian assumptions of this genre of writing are well captured by Williams in a work that began as a Cambridge Ph.D. thesis supervised by David Cannadine: 'What did Victorians make of the archaic, hereditary institution, which stood atop a society priding itself on progress, political reform, middle-class energy and self-made success?' He offered a solution within the same framework: by the end of the reign 'the Crown, now above party, politics and society, was grandly feted as the *symbol* of national and imperial self-esteem at a time of increasing taste for the elaborate, *irrational* and "*magical*" in public affairs'; or, more briefly, 'for all its progress and rationality, nineteenth-century England was still rife with flunkeyism' (5, 266; italics added).

[83] A purely secular, pragmatic analysis of monarchy is still possible, e.g. Vernon Bogdanor, *The Monarchy and the Constitution* (Oxford, 1995). Such an analysis still ambiguously concedes a significance to the religious dimension that it cannot explain: 'Were disestablishment to come, the position of the monarchy would be radically affected . . . There can be no doubt that a secular monarchy would be a very different type of monarchy from that to which we have historically been accustomed, and this would involve a breach with its historic origins. But a secularized monarchy might nevertheless prove to

Monarchy changed; religion changed. But to account for these changes, we cannot posit attitudes approaching to a norm: republican, in the case of politics; atheist, in the case of metaphysics. We can now understand campaigns for major change in both areas as programmatic: in England's case, from the linked seventeenth-century attempts to destroy monarchy and an episcopal church to the nineteenth-century attempts to confine monarchy to the figurehead role described by Bagehot, and to confine religion within the boundaries of private opinion.

Despite the programmatic efforts briefly illustrated here from Bagehot and Weber, and summarized by Stone, those areas of human activity indicated with the shorthand terms 'monarchy' and 'religion' survived; and it can now be argued that they survived neither as 'superstition' nor as 'tradition'. To take monarchy seriously as a historical subject is to record its contested nature, including the ways in which its adherents attributed, and still attribute, to it sacred premisses.[84] How do historians picture those sacred premisses?

Here much more has changed in the last thirty years than in the institutions of monarchy or the practice of religion themselves, for the historical recovery of religion via theology has called in question a variety of social-scientific approaches that had earlier mapped out a course of decline. How much has changed can be appreciated by contrasting recent work with an earlier classic embodiment of very different assumptions. In English historiography the key text, standing near the end of the phase of thought that Lawrence Stone identified in 1976, was Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic*,[85] and it is this strategic location, as

be a monarchy more in tune with the spirit of the age' (239). Elsewhere Bogdanor writes of 'the magical monarchy' as something that 'may be coming to an end' only in the 1990s. Yet the 'magical' element can hardly have been adequately diagnosed by the argument that 'the magical monarchy depended upon social attitudes such as deference and respect for authority, which have been passing away' (305–6), since such putative supports are wholly secular.

[84] Ian Bradley, *God Save the Queen: The Spiritual Dimensions of Monarchy* (London, 2002).

[85] Thomas had earlier published an essay, 'The Tools and the Job', the first in *The Times Literary Supplement*'s series 'New Ways in History', 7 April 1966, 275–6, in which he foretold 'the coming revolution' when sociology, social anthropology, and social psychology would liberate English historians, or, at least, those not content to 'grub away in the old empirical tradition'. *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971; cited here from the 2nd edn., Harmondsworth, 1973) made repeated reference to the work of anthropologists, on the premiss (nowhere defended) that 'In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries England was still a pre-industrial society, and many of its essential features closely corre-

well as the book's merits, that justify a reconsideration of its influence. Thomas's work was undertaken as a study of phenomena that he declared to be 'now all rightly disdained by intelligent persons'. It emphasized the 'practical utility' of such beliefs in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century society, and took the story forward to 'the dawn of the Enlightenment', which Thomas then supposed to be 'the change in the intellectual atmosphere which is so striking in the years approaching 1700'.[86] The religion of the medieval church was presented as another variety of 'magic', the appeal of which lay in the promise it held out, spuriously as the historian felt obliged to record, of controlling the natural world and warding off the misfortunes of disease, famine, or the other disasters that rendered life so insecure. In the public sphere, Thomas depicted religion as 'a symbol of social order'. It was this set of folk beliefs that Protestantism, he claimed, had identified as 'superstition', an identification that social anthropology now seconded.[87]

So 'Protestantism' was made to be synonymous with the rejection of 'magic'; the rejection of magic was depicted as spreading with 'remarkable speed' among 'some of the common people'. This underwrote a model of the Reformation as the result of popular initiatives rather than of élite imposition, a model in which that episode was tantamount to secularization.[88] A Reformation so conceived could only have disenchanted the

sponded to those of "under-developed" areas today' (3); 'The social anthropologist can recognize in the millenarian sentiment of the Interregnum a parallel phenomenon to the chiliastic movements which still occur in the underdeveloped countries of today' (170); seventeenth-century English diviners were 'Like their African counterparts' (289, 402–3). On witchcraft and Africa, see 551–4, 616–17, and 676; on wife-beating and Africa, 630. For a general debt to the anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 744–6.

[86] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. ix–x. This identification of an Enlightenment with a clearly demarcated transition between a 'world we have lost' and the modern world was widespread in 1971, but has now collapsed.

[87] Ibid. 27, 39, 43, 58–89; 'the essential difference between the prayers of a churchman and the spells of a magician was that only the latter claimed to work automatically' (46); 'The Church's magical claims were also reinforced by its own propaganda. Although theologians drew a firm line between religion and superstition their concept of "superstition" always had a certain elasticity about it' (55–6).

[88] 'The Reformation . . . is justly commemorated for having robbed the priest of most of his magical functions' (ibid. 327). For the thesis that the wide appeal of a rational Christianity required that 'magic was suppressed among the general population to the greatest possible extent', see Max Weber, *General Economic History*, intro. Ira J. Cohn (New Brunswick, NJ, 1981), 363; cf. 314.

political realm also.[89] Although Thomas in 1971 did not explicitly draw this moral, he did not need to: it was evoked by his book from the unquestioned and almost universal belief of English historians at that time.

*Religion and the Decline of Magic* paid such extensive acknowledgement to anthropologists that it is easy to fail to notice that its chief debt was to a sociologist, Max Weber. In Thomas's picture, the essential transition was not between magic and religion, but between magic and the modern world: religion ultimately became only a transitional stage, and, therefore, in Thomas's scenario, largely disappeared. In England, he wrote,

> [i]t was the abandonment of magic which made possible the upsurge of technology, not the other way round. Indeed, as Max Weber stressed, magic was potentially 'one of the most serious obstructions to the rationalisation of economic life'. The technological primacy of Western civilization, it can be argued, owes a sizeable debt to the fact that in Europe recourse to magic was to prove less ineradicable than in other parts of the world. For this, intellectual and religious factors have been held primarily responsible. The rationalist tradition of classical antiquity blended with the Christian doctrine of a single all-directing Providence to produce what Weber called 'the disenchantment of the world'—the conception of an orderly and rational universe, in which effect follows cause in predictable manner. A religious belief in order was a necessary prior assumption upon which the subsequent work of the natural scientists was to be founded. It was a favourable mental environment which made possible the triumph of technology.[90]

Despite Thomas's repeated invocation of the names of social anthropologists, we can now see that his work did not depend on them: their presence in his footnotes did not secure his

[89] *Religion and the Decline of Magic* gave little overt attention to the monarchy except through the claim of English and French (but not other) kings to cure scrofula by the 'royal touch' (227–42), a practice that it associated more closely with magic than with 'orthodox religious beliefs' (230–1) and that could easily be depicted as rendered incredible by the change in the mental landscape that Thomas placed in *c.*1700: 'the decline of the doctrine of Divine Right and the triumph of the Hanoverian dynasty meant the end of royal miracles' (244). Even earlier, 'Inevitably there was a steady undercurrent of Protestant scepticism which regarded the whole ritual as superstitious humbug' (233). 'Faith in the royal miracle, thought Marc Bloch, was the result of a collective error, arising from a belief in the supernatural character of kingship'; Thomas also invoked the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard to explain this point (244). Thomas's general thesis was that 'we live in a society which has cut off its roots in the past' in respect of honouring the wishes of predecessors (719, 723) and, presumably, more generally.

[90] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 786–7.

arguments from reconsideration.[91] Thomas wrote as a historian, and in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* produced a work of great historical distinction; but, like all historical research, it was open to revision in some ways by further research. That is what has happened in the decades since its publication. In this key respect of religion our own intellectual climate has changed in ways that we could not then have imagined or foreseen. Neither monarchy nor religion were adequately explained by the social sciences in the last half of the twentieth century. As a result, the existence and the importance of these things remain on the agenda for historians. They can only be effectively investigated if the intellectual legacies of such men as Walter Bagehot and Max Weber are first understood, then superseded.

[91] Thomas quoted, in agreement, Clifford Geertz's observation of the lack of attention by anthropology to religion and irreligion (205 n. 120). Thomas's arguments on the role of religion were indeed more indebted to Max Weber, or to his own insights as a historian, than to any specific work by anthropologists on religion or monarchy in England.

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BOOK SYMPOSIUM

# The enhancement of enchantments in Melanesia

Mark S. Mosko, *Australian National University*

Comment on Jones, Graham M. 2017. *Magic's reason: An anthropology of analogy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

As Graham Jones (2017) argues, "magic" has played a central role in anthropological theorizing, highlighting the supposed irrationalities of non-Western cultures. He substantiates this claim in an ethnohistorical analysis of the mutual influences between French entertainment magicians and some of anthropology's founders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Stage illusionists waged a science-based campaign to expose the trickery involved in displays of supposedly supernatural powers in the ecstatic rites of North African ʻIsawa Muslim Sufi mystics. The colonial narratives that these encounters generated contributed to Tylor's and Frazer's "intellectualist" constructions that pitted the enchanted "primitive" non-West against the disenchanted "modern" West. Boas, Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, and Tambiah, among others, are credited with overturning that evolutionary paradigm, although, Jones argues, traces of it continue to reverberate in some quarters of anthropological thought. Inspired by Marilyn Strathern and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Jones extracts from this analysis a historical dialectic of analogy and disanalogy both within the magic institutions of single cultures and in comparisons between whole societies.

Nonetheless, Jones' scenario does not capture the complete story. It was during the periods when Tylor and Frazer devised the magic–science juxtaposition that both categories were also routinely contrasted in anthropological writings with "religion." I suggest that this more complex magic–religion–science nexus decisively shaped both the early and the later anthropological stereotypes of the non-West and the West: for example, in classic treatises of Durkheim, Hubert and Mauss, Boas, Freud, Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, and others. In the spirit of Jones'

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captivating account, I offer the following amendments based in an ethnographic shift to Melanesia, which, like Africa, has been identified with "pagan" religion as well as magical beliefs and practices.

First, Jones credits Malinowski's functionalist theorizing for the eventual overturning of the evolutionary intellectualist perspective on magic (chap. 6) with good reason; hence, Malinowski's influence bears close scrutiny. Malinowski (1922, 1935) demonstrated the embedded culturally specific rationales of Trobriand magical practices (*megwa*) in the full range of economic, kinship, political, subsistence, and ritual contexts, positing the key function of assisting in the organization of collective activities. As Jones notes, Malinowski's explanation of Trobrianders' belief in the efficacy of *megwa* spells—i.e., their psychological role of alleviating anxieties in areas beyond Islanders' technical expertise—confounded the simple rational/irrational dichotomizing of non-Western and Western peoples. However, in doing so, Malinowski reinscribed the rational-technical versus irrational-affective antinomy within Trobriand culture itself—an instance of the perpetuation of traces of the evolutionists' intellectualist assumptions in modern theorizing.

Further, it will be recalled that Malinowski ([1925] 1948) adopted Frazer's differentiation of magic from religion and both from science. Trobriand magic, in Malinowski's view, was an impersonal, instrumental practice separate from any religious propitiation of spiritual beings. For him, magic's efficacy resided in words.

> This power [of magic] is an inherent property of certain words, uttered with the performance of certain actions by the man entitled to do it through his social traditions and through certain observances which he has to keep. The words and acts have this power in their own right, and their action is direct and not mediated by any other agency. Their power is not derived from the authority of spirits or demons or supernatural beings. It is not conceived as having been wrested from nature. The belief in the power of words and rites as a fundamental and irreducible force is the ultimate, basic dogma of their magical creed. (1922: 427)

This is tantamount to the "Presto" theory of magic that Jones assimilates to the intellectualist viewpoint of Malinowski and his theoretical predecessors. Here Malinowski reproduces the colonialist, Frazerian view of non-Western people's irrationality, albeit different from that of religious devotion. In fact, Malinowski ([1916] 1992) devoted his first treatment of Trobriand culture to religion—i.e., the life of *baloma* spirits—before turning to the study of Islanders' magical practices in fishing, gardening, *kula*, sailing, sexuality, and so on, purged via disanalogy of anything of a religious nature.

In his hugely influential reinterpretations of Trobriand magic, Stanley Tambiah (1968, 1973) expanded upon Malinowski's basic claims about the efficacy of magical words accepting the nonparticipation of *baloma*. In a recently published volume (Mosko 2017), I demonstrate that knowledgeable Trobrianders credit ancestral *baloma* as the ultimate agents of their magical practices in conformity with anthropological theories of sacrifice. Magicians offer up detached components of their persons (spells) to elicit life-giving "blessings" (*bobwelila*) from *baloma* of Tuma, the invisible land of the dead. In turn, the "life" of the ancestral spirits is dependent upon the oblations of their living descendants. Through the performance of

sacrificial (i.e., religious) "magic," Islanders and their ancestors mutually sustain one another. This radically revises Malinowski's interpretation of Trobriand *megwa*, upturns anthropological treatises based upon it, such as Tambiah's, and complicates the narrow dynamic that Jones outlines between magic and science.

Melanesia provides another potential qualification to Jones' ethnohistorical account of the magic concept in early anthropological thought. Malinowski and others who contributed to the eventual overturning of the evolutionist-intellectualist viewpoint accepted the presumption that the magico-religious practices observed in postcontact circumstances reproduced customs unchanged "from time immemorial," despite the Islanders' early experiences of the vicissitudes of colonialism, Christianity, and capitalism. The mutual influences between French entertainment magicians and early anthropological theorists over the nature of 'Iswana religiously inspired performances outlined by Jones suggest that the situation in North Africa was similar. Ethnographic research conducted subsequently by Melanesianist (and Africanist) scholars argues that many seemingly "traditional" magical practices examined in postcontact contexts arose at least partly from villagers' engagement with exogenous forces. In Melanesia, the most famous and dramatic ethnographic illustrations are the magico-religious "cargo cults" and millenarian movements that enchanted the inhabitants of many regions, particularly after World War II. All major analysts agree that cargoism is not a mere continuation of preexisting cultural patterns but a complex transformation involving traditional and exogenous elements. On this point, Jones' account of 'Iswana ritual practice appears to affirm the assumption of the Western magicians and anthropologists he criticizes that they had witnessed a wholly traditional pattern.

Admittedly, Melanesians were not visited by secular entertainment magicians. However, they did encounter agents of modern Western rationality who displayed the technical skills of magical-cum-religious illusion. Melanesia, like Africa, was colonized from early stages by Christian missionaries caught irretrievably in conflicting impulses of enchantment and disenchantment. Deeply involved in promoting a spirituality that incorporated magical elements in ritual performances, they simultaneously professed allegiance to secular Western rationality in denouncing the morality and efficacy of local magic. Priests, ministers, and pastors justified their own presence on ultimately self-contradictory claims: renouncing the spirituality of local populations on rational grounds while professing their own superior spiritual authority on faith-based grounds. The whole prospect of converting religiously "pagan" Melanesians to Christianity was doomed to produce responses that were undesired (i.e., irrational from the missionaries' perspectives).

Missionaries were not the only early colonialists caught in the tensions between enchantment and disenchantment analogous to those that Jones describes. In 1875, Italian naturalist Luigi d'Albertis—the first European to settle for a time in the Roro-Mekeo region of coastal New Guinea—used simple stage tricks in his dealing with villagers. But unlike French stage magicians, d'Albertis attributed his powers to personal command of spirit allies. D'Albertis also terrified villagers with his daily use of dynamite, gunpowder, rifles, and pistols on his forays into the bush to secure thousands of bird and other specimens, attributing his pyrotechnical prowess to command of superior magic. On at least ten occasions, he used his munitions to threaten people into doing his bidding. When he encountered resistance, he staged

contests between himself and local "sorcerers" to demonstrate that his magic and spirits were the more powerful. Villagers identified d'Albertis as a nonhuman *faifai* ("nature-spirit")—a status that he fully exploited.[1]

> In the midst of people who have never seen or heard of a white man, the most potent means of defence possessed by the latter is to act upon their superstitious fears. . . . Make them believe you are something more than they; that you are not made of the same flesh and blood; make them as much afraid of you sleeping as waking; in a word, inspire them with a wholesome dread of approaching you at all. (1881: 397)

D'Albertis claimed his greatest regret was that his sleight-of-hand skills were not more extensive.

Soon after d'Albertis' narrative was translated into English, British colonization began. When the Cambridge Expedition to the Torres Strait visited Mekeo district in 1898, C. G. Seligman declared, "The belief in magic and sorcery is at least as firmly rooted in the Roro-Mekeo region as elsewhere in the Possession, and certainly bulks more largely in the daily life of the people of this area than in other parts of British New Guinea with which I am acquainted" (1910: 278)—a viewpoint which he and subsequent ethnographers have taken as evidence of the traditional precolonial hierarchy of chiefs and official sorcerers of peace and war. Accompanied by W. H. Rivers and A. C. Haddon, Seligman arrived on the scene amid a rebellion led by chiefs and sorcerers against resident government and church representatives (Mosko 2009). The precipitating cause was another large-scale dysentery epidemic associated with an El Niño drought and famine. In Mekeo cosmology, all human deaths are the result of "sorcery" (*ungaunga, fai'a*) perpetrated by living adepts in league with ancestral and other spirits. In this case, Mekeo blamed Catholic "sorcerers" and the government for causing this new large-scale sickness. The government agent Charles Monckton documented his four-month encounters with local magicians in a widely read tome, *Some experiences of a Melanesian resident magistrate* (1920). To discredit and subjugate the insubordinate leaders of the uprising, Monckton pitted his military-cum-sorcery against theirs, performing stunts of sleight of hand (following d'Albertis' playbook) and threatening to use his powers against the people if they disobeyed him. He publicly attributed his superiority and his immunity to the locals' magical attacks to the greater supernatural powers in his employ—in contrast to the self-identification of French illusionists in North Africa with scientific-technical skills.

Although space does not allow further documentation, the early activities of Catholic missionaries tended to harden and inflate villagers' certainties that their own indigenous beliefs regarding ancestral and other spirits were ontologically true. To the missionaries even today, villagers' ancestral spirits are real, evil beings in league with Satan since, in their lifetimes, they did not know Jesus—which is significant when it is considered that the Sacred Heart missionaries have monopolized the education of generations of Mekeo youth.

1. There was a downside to d'Albertis' supernatural identification, however, in that villagers held him responsible for the devastating epidemics of pneumonia and measles that erupted during his stay.

As a supportive amendment to Jones' otherwise excellent ethnohistory, most likely both African and Melanesian colonial agents (including early ethnographers) presumed that indigenous magico-religious beliefs and practices, especially their intensity, were indicative of precontact ritual life. Ironically, these seemingly irrational behaviors were often prompted by the colonial presence, intentionally or unintentionally encouraged through foreign agents' actions and rationalized in terms of superior religious and/or magical power. Entertainment magicians no doubt played a role in the development of early anthropological notions of magic as an analytical category. But in some colonial contexts there were other purveyors of Western disenchantment whose mixed messages actively enhanced preexisting enchantments.

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Mark S. Mosko is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the Australian National University.

*Mark S. Mosko*
*School of Culture, History, and Language*
*College of Asia and the Pacific*
*Coombs Building 9*
*Australian National University*
*Canberra ACT 0200*
*Australia*
*mark.mosko@anu.edu.au*

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ORIGINAL ARTICLES

# Enchantment - Disenchantment-Re-Enchantment: Postdigital Relationships between Science, Philosophy, and Religion

**John Reader, et al.** *[full author details at the end of the article]*

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**Abstract**
This collectively written article explores postdigital relationships between science, philosophy, and religion within the continuum of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment. Contributions are broadly classified within four sections related to academic fields of philosophy, theology, critical theory, and postdigital studies. The article reveals complex and nuanced relationships between various disciplinary perspectives, religions, and political positions, and points towards lot of commonalities between their views to the enchantment, disenchantment, re-enchantment continuum. Some commonly discussed questions include: Where do the mythical, mystical and spiritual end and the rational, objective and empirical begin? How do we find our bearings in the midst of this complexity and where do we search for resources that are trustworthy and reliable? While the article inevitably offers more questions than answers, a common thread between all contributions is the need for an open postdigital dialogue conducted in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect. It is with this conclusion that the article offers a possible route for further development of such dialogue in the future.

**Keywords** Religion · Science · Philosophy · Postdigital · Dialogue · Collective Research · Enchantment · Disenchantment · Re-Enchantment · Christianity · Islam

## Introduction (John Reader and Petar Jandrić)

For the biggest part of human history, science and philosophy have always been dialectically intertwined with religion. Looking at development of Western thought, Steve Fuller suggests that 'that we wouldn't have gone down the path of modern scientific inquiry at all without the predominance of the world-view associated with the Abrahamic faiths' (in Fuller and Jandrić 2019: 203); similar connections can be found in various Eastern traditions (Peters 2019). Yet, contemporary science and philosophy are strongly methodologically, practically, and politically separated from religion. While it is only reasonable to protect modern-day Galileos from various 'inquisitions', and while it would be meaningless to try and understand the Book of Genesis using scientific methods such as radiocarbon dating, our current divisions between science

and religion arrive at a high cost. Choosing to ignore millennia of shared history between science, philosophy, and religion, we do not merely 'protect' these grand systems of thought from each other. Along the way, unfortunately, we also lose their historicity, their shared wisdom, and opportunities for productive collaboration.

Religion works on the basis of an enchanted world (spirits; myths; magical or providential events; external interventions; etc.). Science then disenchants this world through the expulsion or denial of these elements of enchantment, and replacing them with objectivity (logic; reason; autonomy; etc.). In our 'hard to define; messy; unpredictable; digital and analog; technological and non-technological; biological and informational' postdigital reality (Jandrić et al. 2018: 895), philosophies such as New Materialism can now enter the fray as vehicles of re-enchantment. Each of these statements could be contested and/or developed in creative ways as being too simplistic. However, one of the key challenges of the postdigital era is to develop new ways of reaching beyond traditional disciplinary divisions; discern and construct new (collective) subjectivities to which religion, science, and philosophy might contribute. To address this challenge, John Reader and Petar Jandrić reached out to people of various religious denominations (including atheists and agnostics) with the following question:

*What can we learn from the enchantment - disenchantment - re-enchantment spectrum about a new or renewed relationship between religion, science and philosophy in the postdigital context?*

We received 21 responses, which arrive from a wide spectrum of disciplinary perspectives, religions, and political positions. The first section, 'Spirit of Philosophy, Philosophy of Spirit', collects responses which can roughly be classified into the academic field of philosophy. The second section, 'Material Proof: Between Blessing and Burden', roughly belongs to theology and presents responses from various Islamic and Christian denominations. The third section, 'Why Does It (Not) Feel Empowering?', collates contributions from wide variety of feminist, postcolonialist, and other perspectives, broadly understood as critical theory. The last section, 'Postdigital Enchantments and Their Enemies', focuses to pressing questions of our today's postdigital condition in broad areas from data and algorithms to the arts.

In our messy and unpredictable postdigital reality, borders between traditional academic disciplines are fluid. Questions and conclusions freely circulate amongst replies and sections, without much regard for academic conventions, joined in a common plea to transcend restrictions of our current systems of knowledge creation and dissemination. This plea, in our opinion, offers a guideline for reading these little germs of very different wisdoms. They are warm, open-minded, and honest attempts at creating personal and emotional bridges between disjointed yet equally valuable religious and non-religious approaches at making sense of our common reality.

## Spirit of Philosophy, Philosophy of Spirit

### Re-Enchantment of Science in the Epoch of Digital Reason (Michael A Peters)

Scientific research is increasingly data-intensive and algorithmically driven. For instance, Himanen, Geurts, Foster, and Ronke (2019) explain its challenges this way:

> Data-driven science is heralded as a new paradigm in materials science. In this field, data is the new resource, and knowledge is extracted from materials datasets that are too big or complex for traditional human reasoning—typically with the intent to discover new or improved materials or materials phenomena. (Himanen et al. 2019)

Himanen et al. (2019) merely register a phenomenon that has been growing since the first computerization of science in the post-war era with the development of big data, open data, and linked data that represent large scale observational, experimental, computational, and reference data sets (OECD 2015). Indeed, in the 'epoch of digital reason', data-intensive science finds its early beginnings in the algebrification of logic, Boolean systems, and the emergence of two-value digital logics and their application to computer systems. Data-intensive science thus constitutes the 'epoch of digital reason' (Peters 2017) that while taking a new instrumental direction that encourages numerical representation of reality is also often advanced in tandem with a more open, collaborative, participatory, and citizen-science perspective especially for projects with very large data sets.

These new open and citizen-based elements open the door to multiple versions with the promising prospect of a re-enchantment of science through a return to a new civil science that emphasize public knowledge and journal systems with a breaking down of professional/amateur roles and a greater recognition that science and science communication cannot avoid questions of value that it, itself cannot resolve. This neo-Enlightenment civil perspective involves a science of greater relevance and application, attuned to epistemic democracies and applied communities of inquiry focusing of the politics of shared environments. Movements of non-foundationalist, non-deterministic, and ecological of process philosophy demonstrate the shift from the outdated mechanistic and deterministic science of the early modern era (Peters and Besley 2019). This re-enchantment of science is also consistent with a new ecological worldview that supports a greater integration with world indigenous cultures and Eastern holistic philosophies. In the West, there are otherwise disparate strands in a generalized systems approach that makes much of cybernetic advances and developments of chaos and complexity theory in mathematics, notions of quantum physics and quantum computing in intelligent technologies.

These trends and developments also represent a clearer picture of the choice between an algorithmically driven science that feeds off cannibalized personal data, the result of property theft, that characterize the sciences of surveillance capital, and an augmented civil science that is oriented to the future of humanity and the survival of the species. The former data-driven science is instrumentalist and directed towards the control and manipulation of populations; whereas the latter is constituted in the participation of epistemic communities in the formulation of scientific goals that ultimately reach out to spiritual values of community and species awareness.

## On Recovering Spirit in the World (Ronald Barnett)

Can spirit be recovered in the world? Is this not a fundamental question of our time? Bernard Stiegler seems to think this it is indeed just such a fundamental question. But is it possible? If Protestantism was the spirit of capitalism, what might be—or should be—the spirit of our times? Is it already to be seen in a kind of spirit-of-STEM? Or is it emerging in a digital spirit? Or are we at the end of spirit, it being—in a certain sense—

a spiritless age? Or just might some other kind of spirit, perhaps an eco-spirit, be sought and promoted?

In the world today, is there a more troubling—not to say troubled—concept than that of spirit? For many, it speaks variously of the occult, of the mysterious, of the non-empirical, of the ethereal, of mysticism, and of certain kinds of religiosity. Except as an object of study, it is a concept that produces a frisson of nervousness and discomfort. It smacks of the non-serious, being reached for as a last resort when other concepts run into the buffers and seem inadequate to a task in hand.

But why should this be? Far from residing in some other-worldly realm, isn't spirit of the here-and-now? Especially in organizational life and markedly so in organizations that are people centred—schools, hospitals, universities, social care settings, hospices, and the like—isn't spirit palpably and immediately present? On entering the door, on an initial exchange with the reception desk, on walking down a corridor or on entering a communal space, the elements of spirit are there—or not, as the case may be. This spirit is not exactly the world as will, of which Schopenhauer spoke: it is non-physical but it isn't aimless. And it can infuse the life of organizations, and is absolutely necessary to their survival and growth.

Challenges to spirit are manifold and emanate from different directions. The jury is out on the computerization of the world. In principle, it could quicken spirit, give it a new liveliness, and open paths to an imaginative spirit. But, in practice, it has become so dominated by malign forces that digital presences unduly impose themselves on human being with its mere analogue resources such that its spirit is swamped—to coin a phrase.

The onward march of the STEM world is another cause of the diminution of spirit. Again, it is not necessarily so, for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics are all fields potentially full of spirit (to which those such as Richard Feynman bear testimony). But, coupled with its dominance in knowledge policy, world rankings, and academic audit, an over-interest in STEM has suppressed creative spirit not only in the sciences (as Peter Murphy's work suggests) but also in that of the humanities, which have been obliged to play the games of STEM-oriented work.

The fate of spirit is not uni-linear. If it can be diminished, it can also be increased. Spirit is generous and springs from otherness, from a sense of value being inherent in the world. Spirit is, therefore, ecological, being infused by a concern with the fate of the world and a displacement of self. A task of organizations, accordingly, is precisely that of resuscitating their own spirit—where it is flagging—and a first move could be that of finding enchantment in the world, and of discerning how an organization can contribute to the well-being of the world. Without such an eco-spirit, the fate of the world must be evermore in peril.

## Religious Transhumanism as A Solution to An Age of Despair (Marcin Garbowski)

Of all the recent intellectual currents where science, technology, and philosophy converge, transhumanism seems to be amongst the leading ones. And it is on the grounds of this intellectual framework, I shall describe as a meta-ideology in which we can observe as if in a lens the process of the re-enchantment of the techno-scientific discourse. Although proponents of transhumanism lure us with the vision of technological 'reality to be' and the enhanced 'post-human to be', transhumanism uncovers our anxieties as a species—such as the fear of death, feeling of evolutionary frailness

and irrelevance in the face of the cosmos—and provides us with a deeper insight on who we are and what we lack.

In the ongoing multi-lateral crisis invoked by the Covid-19 pandemic, certain hopes but also shortcomings of the transhumanist project are clearly visible. The state of quarantine offers a convincing allegory of what I call 'the sphere of ease' in relation to what technology can provide to the human condition. It may create a sort of cocoon of relative comfort, sustaining our worldly existence, separating the earth's dwellers from the outside, from the realm, where the natural forces reign beyond the control of human intentionality. The technosphere provides us with a temporal-spatial zone of relative comfort and safety, where one can maintain one's this-worldly existence potentially for a very long time, yet even with advanced capabilities of life extension or cyborgization—not indefinitely. What would be the purpose of this confinement? How can this sphere be filled with meaning if we can last within in it for a very long time? The realm beyond the sphere, though pushed out to the outskirts of our attention (just as the reality of pathogenic microbes until just recently) shall always be there, for even if by means of digitalized consciousness we were capable of escaping the hazards of the biological world, the limitations inscribed in the laws of physics would eventually reach us.

This leads us to the mounting question about the purpose of such a technological confinement which bereft of meaning might seem like a luxurious prison. Extending worldly life simply for the sake of 'buying time' to pass by, seems to be a vacuous endeavour indeed. Transhumanism provides hints on how to expand this sphere, to make this cocoon much more comfortable, but of itself it does not give a clear answer as to what this is for. On its own transhumanism is an escape from inevitable temporal processes, but to what end? The conceptual predecessors of transhumanism—Nikolai Fyodorov with his cosmism and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and his noosphere—inscribed this pursuit into specific eschatological processes. Is it time to re-enchant the current with this spiritual touch?

It seems that only by coupling the material transcendence of the transhumanist project with supernatural transcendence and a feeling of deeper purpose and participation specific for the Abrahamic religions, one can appreciate the fruits of technological progress as well as gain the humility and deeper perspective to stop fleeing from mortality and fortuitousness, but to rather embrace it. Thanks to the perspective of the 'real world' extending beyond what is physically detectible and examinable we can replace escapism from ultimate despair with a persistent, perpetual pursuit of virtue aimed at achieving the 'greater good'.

## On Philosophical Foundations of Modern Technology (Veronika Lipinska)

Contemporary science and philosophy are strongly methodologically, practically, and politically separated from religion. This is especially true at the institutional level, where state-funded universities and research institutes in the West pursue a science agenda under the rubric of 'ethics' rather than 'religion'. However, given that most modern commercial technology is developed away from state-controlled science labs and in the open market, it is unsurprisingly informed by private investors' beliefs, not least those of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs. This is where the science and technology become 'disenchanted' in somewhat specific sense,

reflecting the ignorance of seemingly agnostic scientists and entrepreneurs of their own cultural rootedness in the Abrahamic, usually Christian tradition. It influences their judgement just as much as the internal rate of return in making decisions that drive the future of technology.

Whilst the giants of technology such as Elon Musk publicly claim philosophical alliances with the likes of avowed atheist Sam Harris, transhumanism aims to provide a much clearer moral and philosophical impetus to the current techno-scientific enquiry. Avoiding nihilistic posturing, transhumanism, a socio-philosophical movement aimed at elevating the human condition through technology, urges the importance of moral imperatives in the technologized world.

One of the foundational moral imperatives of transhumanism is the Neo-Protestant ‘proactionary principle’ initially developed by Max More, which favours a considered risk-taking approach to science and technology, as opposed to the Hippocratic ‘above all do no harm’ principle. Transhumanism attributes the meaning to technology, partly through the value of the technology itself (humans becoming enhanced with the technology created) and partly through the process of engaging in scientific enquiry, overcoming adversity and forging characters in the flames of failure (transhumanism embraces the belief that true virtue is achieved through creative destruction and not all endeavours will be successful). Whilst transhumanism can be accused of assuming an ‘enchanted’ world like religion itself (e.g. imagining the worlds we could live in, science fiction), it openly appeals to the scientific method, including publicly declared predictions that are informed by facts. Whilst transhumanists contemplate the dangers of existing and future technologies, and embrace the opportunities so created, they have an utmost understanding that the living conditions and social changes so created require an overarching moral code alongside the progress in technology.

Whilst science is capable of disenchanting religion by providing factual explanations where belief had sufficed, technology is re-enchanting the transhumanist world, giving meaning where there was none. (After all, if you live to die, what is the point in living? Hence the transhumanist focus on immortality.) Transhumanists adore technology as it gives value to *being* and *becoming*—whilst religion has increasingly distanced itself from technology, as it pushes death away, which to religious believers strips the life of meaning.

There is now an urgent need to provide a meaningful techno-positive explanation to the world in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. With technology replacing human contact in the face of self-isolation and with the acceptance that only technology and science (in this case, ventilators, tests, telemedicine) can keep us alive as individuals and functioning as social beings, the time is now for society to come to terms with our dependence on technology. For, as long we do not commit to a technology-based human enhancement system, we will always be blindsided by nature and playing catch up with our basic biology.

### Disenchantment and the Meaning of Science (Sharon Rider)

I would not advise a re-enchantment of higher education or a renewal of the marriage of the scientific endeavor and religion, if by that one means that we can or should ignore or repress the rationalization of human life associated with modernity. It seems to me, for reasons that I will sketch below, that it would mean surrendering intellectual

integrity. Having said that, recognizing and acknowledging the limitations of science and technology mean leaving questions of meaning where they belong, namely, to the individual who has to take a stance in his own life and stand for his own values. The role of higher education then is largely to make explicit to him just what those values are, and, importantly, what they entail. My arguments are inspired by what I judge to be the still greatest articulation of the dilemma of modern thought, Max Weber's lecture 'Science as a Vocation' (Weber 2004).

Weber argues that in the modern world, one can justifiably ask: 'What is the vocation of science within the totality of human life and what is its value?'. It can no longer be to seek some unadulterated true being (the Ideas) as it was for Plato, the secrets of nature as it was for Bacon, or religious insight as it was for Swammerdam. The notion that science can lead to happiness, he thinks, can only be entertained by 'some overgrown children among the professoriat'. The reason is quite simple: we can't really believe in such things anymore without diminishing the intellectual demands that we, as scholars and scientists, should place on ourselves. It would mean pretending not to know what we in fact know, which, for Weber, is a cardinal sin in academic life. Citing Tolstoy, Weber reminds us:

> Science is meaningless because it has no answer to the only question that matters to us: 'What should we do? How shall we live?' The fact that science cannot give us is this answer is indisputable. The question is only in what sense does it give 'no' answer, and whether or not it might after all prove useful for somebody who is able to ask the right questions. (Weber 2004)

Given the irreducible plurality of worldviews, what academic instruction can do is provide clarity with regard to the *meaning* of the stance that one takes, one's ultimate values, and what 'can be inferred consistently, and hence also honestly', from that or that fundamental ideological or religious commitment or philosophical position. It is a matter of what can and cannot be inferred without doing violence to reason. He writes: 'To put it metaphorically, if you choose this particular standpoint, you will be serving this particular god and *will give offense to every other god*.' (italics from original) The point of higher education is to compel, or at least help, someone 'render an account of the ultimate meaning of his own actions', by making explicit to the student the circumstances and commitments involved in his moral orientation, 'to create a sense of duty, clarity and a feeling of responsibility.'

## Material Proof: Between Blessing and Burden

### Abu Hanifa and the Dahriya (Ibrar Bhatt)

At some point in the middle of the Eighth Century CE, by the banks of the River Tigris in Abbasid-ruled Mesopotamia, a debate had been scheduled to take place. The renowned Islamic theologian Abu Hanifa had been called to debate about the purpose

of the universe with a leading member of the *dahriya*[1], a name given to those who believed that the course of time (Arabic: *dahr*) is all that governs human existence. The *dahriya* were portrayed in the Persian and Arabic literature of this period as materialists who denied the existence of anything that cannot be perceived by the human senses. In modern terms: atheists.

As the dahri scholar and his associates waited, it became more and more apparent that the Imam was running late. Very unbecoming for a man of religious repute. Hours passed and the group of devotees awaiting the Imam became anxious, while the dahris and their representative became more emboldened. They even dared to suggest that perhaps the Imam had decided not to take up their challenge to debate about the topic due to fear of losing. Finally, the Imam arrived, and was immediately questioned about his lateness. He replied in the following manner:

As I reached the banks of the River Tigris, I needed a raft to get across and none was available. I continued to look around and decided to wait for a raft to assemble naturally over the course of my wait. Eventually, low and behold, the wind, water, and other forces of nature brought together all the required pieces of wood and nails to form a perfectly assembled raft for me to get across. That is why I am late.[2]

His opponent argued, understandably, that it is impossible and ridiculous to even suggest this as a cause of the Imam's lateness. Elements of nature do not assemble on their own into perfectly designed objects in this way for us to use. Rather, a raft suitable for crossing the River Tigris must require a maker. Abu Hanifa countered by asking why his story is uniquely impossible and ridiculous compared with the main foundational thesis of the *dahriya*: that the entire universe and everything within it is not ordered by a creator for whom there is a preponderance of 'signs' (Arabic: *ayat*).

The idea of 'enchantment' is central to Abu Hanifa's argument: an enchanted view of the universe is necessary to answer the 'why' question of its existence, and metaphysics allows room for answers related to the origins of consciousness and of the universe itself. To Abu Hanifa, the chief metaphysical question here is: Why is there something as opposed to nothing? Abu Hanifa's subsequent argument is based on evidence that is not 'beyond reasonable doubt'[3]—such as that which would have satisfied the *dahriya*—but rather one that is based on the *preponderance* of evidence (*ayat*) and therefore grounded in reason but also requiring faith and wonderment. Abu Hanifa's view demonstrated an inter-connectedness between religion, philosophy and science that was absent in the *dahriya's* disenchanted view of the universe, and therefore lacking in tools to explicate the mysteries of its existence.

In modern times, religion, philosophy, and science are much less interconnected, and the enchantment of a faith-based worldview, the type that Abu Hanifa was espousing, is one that opens up the vitality of human and non-human interconnectedness: That all objects (people and things) serve a purpose worthy of contemplating. Today, perhaps New Materialism can allow us to make room to question and probe

[1] Literally translated as 'those of the time'.

[2] The account is narrated in *Manaqib Imam Azam*, by Mawfiq bin Ahmad Makki, translated by Owaisi (1999). Some have even attributed the account to the twelfth century mystic Abdul Qadir Gilani. I rephrased the account for the sake of brevity.

[3] According to the classical view of Muslim scholasticism, as stated in the Kalam Cosmological Argument, for belief to be sound it has to be grounded in reason (Hanson 2017).

anthropic 'coincidences' (like the materialization of a magical raft?), without an unattainable burden of material proof.

### From Science's Enchantment and the World's Disenchantment to the Re-Enchantment Beyond Duality (Abdassamad Clarke)

The two interconnected arguments that religion, philosophy, and science have unnecessarily become disconnected from each other, and that, in the process, the enchantment of the old religious worldview has been lost, can better be expressed thus: A single worldview, without division except for the sake of intellectual delineation, has been challenged by the exclusivist claim of science to enchantment, to which the subsequent disenchantment of the world is an accidental bi-product.

When we talk about science, we are not talking about the Greeks, Babylonians, or the Arabs but about something that arose in post-Renaissance Europe during the Reformation for very particular reasons, with Galileo, Descartes, and Newton being decisive in their input. Although the experimental and observational approach is most prominent in our minds, their major contribution was to continue and extend the axiomatic work of Euclid (see Heidegger 1967) into the physical sciences, work that continues to this day. In a time in which religion was shaken by the devastatingly hot political, military and theological conflicts of the Reformation, this cool, indeed cold, approach was increasingly attractive to Europeans. This attraction was best expressed by Bertrand Russell who later said: 'I wanted certainty in the kind of way in which people want religious faith' (Russell in Kline 1982: 229-230). And it was certainty that the axiomatic way promised, with its definition of terms, statement of self-evident axioms that need no proof, advancement of hypotheses, careful proofs, and resultant theorems.

All three men, Galileo, Descartes, and Newton, were undoubtedly believing Christians. But what they did not anticipate was that what had not been established by this rigorous approach fell into doubt, i.e. non-mathematical philosophical approaches, theology, and indeed the great majority of everyday human experience. They could never have imagined Laplace's response when Napoleon asked why he had not mentioned the Creator in his work on celestial mechanics, and he said, 'I have no need of this hypothesis' (Kline 1982: 73). Nor could they have imagined the meltdown that was to occur in pure mathematics itself, the very core of science. Thus both the world and science, the very road to certainty, had fallen into doubt.

However, to understand the disenchantment produced by the division between our tripartite schema of religion, philosophy, and science, it is necessary to remember that science was originally 'natural philosophy', and that we actually have a bi-partite schema, a duality. Rather than seeing the necessity to reconcile two competing narratives, what we should address is the duality that lies at the base of the Western worldview (Palmer 2012) looking for its long hidden non-dualistic core that can restore wholeness.

### Omnipresent God, Missing Angels, and Avoidable Reductionism (Morteza Hashemi)

It is a simple but interesting sociological observation that angels have been largely excluded from the everyday life of even highly religious communities for over a

century now. This observation holds for many contemporary Muslim and Christian communities, both in Europe and the Middle East. Take as an example the abandonment of angels in Shia Islamic forms of art in Iran. Those Shia angels appear to be the victims of a classically Weberian process of disenchantment. Angels were traditional presences in Persian literature, popular stories, and even Islamic philosophy (Walker and Morgan 2011). Yet their depiction changed in around the sixteenth century, through the interaction of Iranian artists with their European counterparts. Iranian artists adopting elements of the more naturalistic, Renaissance style, which they skilfully synthesized with the traditional art of the Persian Safavid court.

Human-like depictions angels began to appear as a staple of that synthetic genre. The angels of artists, such as Mohammad Zaman, in the eighteenth century were, more or less, human-like inhabitants of the world. After the Safavid era, the Qajar dynasty came to power between 1789 and 1925. It has been shown that at this time the wings of the painted angels became smaller, and more like those of birds (Safarzadeh and Ahmadi 2014: 52). In a way, the angels of that era started moving towards the beasts found in Jorge Luis Borges' magical realist 'fantastic zoology'. In fact, Borges was himself aware of the disappearance of these divine beings. In 1926, he wrote that angels are the only creatures of our imagination which have survived so far, unlike such monsters as demigods, unicorns, and centaurs. 'We must not be too prodigal with our angels; they are the last divinities we harbour, and they might fly away' (Borges and Weinberger 1999: 19). The angels of Iran flew away in the late nineteenth century. Today, one cannot find many discussions of them even in the religious seminaries or published works in the holy cities of Qom and Mashhad.

Before happily confirming the Weberian framework as a way of understanding the departure of the Persian angels, we need to remember that Iran is a country which experienced a religious revolution in 1979. There is no empirical data showing any tendency towards the demise of religion as a political and social force in the Middle East. Not only is God still alive in Iran but also according to a Pew Research Center (2020), 'most Iranians believe religious figures have a role to play in government, but they are divided on just how big that role should be'. Thus, by no empirical measures can we call modern Iran a disenchanted world. God and his followers are omnipresent and shape everyday life.

God is not less invisible than angels, but neither science nor philosophy has been able to replace the Shia God of Iran. My suggestion is that there is an intrinsic simplification, reductionism and Eurocentrism in the concepts of disenchantment and re-enchantment, which make them unfit to explain the empirical facts of religion. In Iran, the divine beings taken as a whole have in part been abandoned, but in part strengthened in recent times. There has never been any simple, one-way process. The experience of the past century proves that a postdigital world could easily inherit the Eurocentric theoretical frameworks and reinvent its inherent reductionism. Alternatively, it could improve the tools we use to question such concepts and conceptions, by encouraging our contemplation of the complexity of the religious phenomenon. That is what we can (and should) learn.

### A Plea for Greater Mutuality and Valuing of Experience from a Minister of Religion (Andrew Bevan)

Theology, science, and philosophy share, at their roots, a human quest for understanding. The Western traditions might trace a development of thought and practice from Aristotle, via Aquinas, Newton, and others and into the nineteenth century. In each of these fields of human endeavour, the lived experience of a practitioner is a formative part of their understanding, whether or not that is acknowledged. The process builds on the work of those who have gone before and, at each growth point, someone's imagination exercises a determinative role in the generation of new knowledge. Perhaps we are reluctant, or just slow, to appreciate this gift as and when it occurs. Very few, like Einstein, gain widespread recognition for initiating a paradigm shift but, hopefully, the academy recognizes it every time a doctorate is awarded, without fear or favour, and rigorously defended, including against all financial and political influence.

When I studied mathematics, we had a tutor who struck me as very arrogant. He may have adopted this persona to remind his students of the rigour of the subject but it left an impression which clashed with my belief that the more we know, the more we know that we do *not* know. For me it is somewhere in the tension between knowing and not knowing that religious experience occurs. As a discipline, theology takes this experience, and religious practices, sufficiently seriously to try and understand them. Similar curiosity and a sense of responsibility motivate serious work in the other disciplines. Who would dare to differentiate the wonder experienced by someone who believed they had encountered the divine from that experienced by a biologist seeing the intricate life revealed by their microscope or a mathematician observing the severe beauty of a good theorem or equation?

For much of recorded history, institutional religion asserted its hegemony, often by brutal suppression of heresy and hierarchical control of knowledge. This stranglehold is no longer tenable in much of the postdigital world but there remain some strong and widespread exceptions. A truly plural context includes space for myriad accounts of experience and understanding. One aspect of our postdigital context is the capacity to process enormous amounts of data to create an overwhelming amount of information. The size and speed of these processes seem to have an inherent power but I believe all this information, by itself, does not confer understanding. Control of the information has endowed some of the richest people on earth but access to it and the uses to which it is put are fiercely contested. The open question whether it will be for private gain or the common good remains a challenge to us all: Will the mistakes of the past be repeated or not?

In terms of mapping the territory, and identifying possible resources for the future, a multi-disciplinary approach seems to be imperative, involving academics and practitioners:

> [This way of working recognises] knowledge as embedded and material rather than distant and abstract taking into account non-specialist perspectives, material practices and the insights of other disciplines. A willingness to acknowledge the other levels at which humans function, those of feelings and instincts as well as what is normally termed the logical and autonomous, and then the realisation that

> one is always already in relationship with the non-human in shifting and evolving assemblages. (Reader and Evans 2019: 35)

## Postdigital Poetic Re-Enchantment (Eric Trozzo)

The postdigital age is marked by the increased seamlessness of integration of the digital into our experienced reality, increasing access to data and relationships. In order to provide frameworks of meaning to the vastness of this now-accessible experience, new metaphors that can speak to such an expanded engagement are needed. A siloed approach to the creation of metaphors between spiritual, philosophical, and scientific aspects promotes a fragmented and conflicted approach to the world. A multidisciplinary approach to the creation and consideration of metaphors, on the other hand, allows re-imagining our engagement with the world.

Within the realm of religious thought, Caputo (2013) contrasts theology that understands itself to be presenting objective or factual statements with radical theologies that seek the event which stirs within the event of faith (termed 'theopoetics'). Theopoetics seeks to speak of events or callings harboured in the words for religious experience which cannot be spoken of directly, but rather requires an active creation of meaning through the limits of available words. Theopoetics is a re-envisioning of human life spurred by the hope of possibility that cannot be expected or explained through attempts at objective logic.

Theopoetic approaches find amendable dialogue partners in New Materialist thinkers who recognize the importance of metaphor for scientific inquiry. There is a growing recognition, for instance, of how conceptions of evolutionary theory are shaped by the metaphors of trees and ladders to understand it. These metaphors have shaped the discussion in terms of hierarchy in growth towards ever-greater complexity as continual improvement. Yet biology has uncovered examples of the 'de-evolution' of species towards greater simplicity that run counter to the narrative of progress and upsetting the helpfulness of dominant metaphors (Hejnol 2017).

As scientific and religious thought come to sharper awareness of the metaphorical nature of their constructions, it allows for a dialogue about how which metaphors come to the fore shape understandings of reality. Implicit in this is recognition that no single approach has an exclusive claim to an 'objective view'. The contribution of theological language is to attend to the excess or surplus that always lingers beyond any description of life, as well as to the recognition of the interwovenness of embedded relationality that calls us to care for the Other. The recognition in New Materialist thought of science's own metaphorical nature allows for a sharing of metaphors, particularly of experiences of excess and relationality. For instance, Keller's feminist relational theopoetics speaks (2015) of the mysterious excess that calls forth ethical and religious connection and obligation to one another using metaphors drawn from quantum entanglement (2015). Following her approach, we can see the value in crossing disciplinary boundaries in fostering a dialogue to formulate new articulations that can produce new insights.

The theopoetics production of metaphor is an act of re-enchantment. It recognizes the historical language speaking to the spiritual and relational experiences of a particular faith community, as well as the legacy of twentieth century 'de-mythologizing',

while seeking to sing a new spiritual and relational insights for a new age. This is not a rejection of a sense of an objective reality but rather a recognition of the poetic nature of human meaning-making through every interaction with that reality.

## Why Does It (Not) Feel Empowering?

### Faith and its Disenchantments: A Very Short Feminist Critique (Alison MacKenzie)

I am from the Isle of Lewis, a remote island off the North West coast of Scotland, where the Gaelic culture only just survives and the Protestant Church holds sway. I had a strict upbringing in which unquestioned belief in scripture and church attendance was a virtue. I was not, however, 'enchanted' with scripture or with God for that would have been a devilish, if not papish, state; but I did fear God. Until I was in my teens, I never questioned either the church or faith in God, and I did not question the status of women. Women were quietly spoken, respectful, and silent in church or when men were present. Men, I was brought up to believe, headed households. Women's work was in the home, and women, because of Eve's seduction, had brought sin to the world, which justified our inferior status. However, for me, Eve represented reason, a woman who wanted to know. Adam simply followed her, passively, and without thought, despite God's direct injunction to him not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge.

Both had rested in a state of bliss and enchantment, feeling no fear, shame or jealousy; no compassion, pity, or sympathy. A garden inhabited by only two people living a life of no moment until a snake slides along to hiss his seductions to Eve was a state of Edenic stupor that evidently did not satisfy Eve. 'What's the point of having a mind?', I asked. 'Why put the tree there and say "don't eat the apple"?', 'Does God not understand the psychology of the creatures he created?' The serpent did, but tempted not with material riches, but with the promise of knowledge.

What the allegory of the Fall unleashed, however, was far from enchanting. I cannot be enchanted with a book that demands faith in the impossible and the unknowable, and which is riven with misogyny. Exodus teaches that Eve brought sin and death, and precipitated the fall of God's perfect, if dumb, creation. She was punished and relegated to not-quite human status, while Adam, who obeyed, was accorded superiority and took advantage of the knowledge she released by that bite. Eve's unfortunate daughters were bonded in marriage, cursed to suffer the pain of birth, and play the role of a minor dependent on man's good will in silence and subjection for all her material wants; she was made incompetent and powerless, while incarnating all the world's temptations in her flesh. There is no charm, delight, or magic in regarding a class of human as the disposable property of men because they symbolize sin.

Can there be equality of status between philosophy, science, and religion? No. The means by which each produces knowledge is different. Faith and solipsistic argument do not use reason and do not require evidence. Faith is the negation of thought, a commitment to belief in the absence of evidence, and a form of irrationality that, with respect to my particular concern, has served men well, while degrading the status women to men's mere means. Science and philosophy rely on reason, observation, and panoply of methods and theories to make knowledge claims that produce evidence, are subject to scrutiny, and that are revised in the light of

evidence: the knowledge claim is contingent and susceptible to further refinements. Belief in the possibility that some proposition could be the case must be proportional to carefully gathered and assessed evidence. One is free, of course, to be enchanted by the processes and effects of faith, but it is not a valid cognitive process with respect to epistemology, and should not be accorded the same status as philosophy and science.

## Empty Sanctity: Ruminations on Christianity and Whiteness (Jared J. Aldern and Cheryl E. Matias)

### Whiteness, Racial Shame, and Jesus

It has been said that cleanliness is next to godliness. If that is so, why do those of the European diaspora possess such debilitating racial shame amidst the sanctimony, purity, and cleanliness of whiteness? First, it's important to understand the nature of the shame in question. Shame takes many forms (see Thandeka 1999), but the racial shame we speak of is Colonial, Precolonial, and indeed Postcolonial because it is unique to white-identifying people who have inherited, alongside unprecedented wealth and power, a unique guilt complex that saddles their racial discourse at every turn (see Baldwin 1998). Why the longevity? Of course it is because this guilt derives in part from religious tyranny—from the shame of birth which must be alleviated by giving of oneself to Jesus Christ alone, to storytelling about the racialized other who is perpetually in need of saving by a white heterosexual male Jesus. White shame, then, is emblematic of a long historical and biblical retelling of lies.

### Education, Emptiness, and Chaste

The purity and sanctity of the Virgin's whiteness could not be penetrated to spawn this ultimate teacher, kept instead in white chastity. This is the story of white Jesus. The Virgin should not be plundered by the filthy Others of the world, who may worship Him but never project their image onto Him, the way the white of European diaspora has. He (Capital H) must come from Thee Almighty, not he (small h), which would be un-sanct and un-sanitary—notice the common roots meaning saint. If He came from un-sanctity, He would not be He. Therefore we must behold He as The Way or be forever led astray by our innate unsanitary un-sanctity. A nearness to God is considered by Weil (1951) to be a great treasure in humility, allowing someone to be a good student, who, as Freire (2011) described, presents themselves meekly as a receptacle to be filled by the teacher. Or was there no sex after all? For, as Fanon (1952: 142) tells it, '[t] he intellectual gain calls for a loss of sexual potential'. She, the Virgin Mary, was merely the vestibule to the real womb – the tomb. No question is made of the sanctity of planting a seed in an unwitting female recipient. She must sacrifice by allowing herself to be used for the good of mankind and take backseat to her Holy Son giveth for her, to her, and through her, to save her from herself. She is womankind. She must subsequently give herself again to Him who she brought into being in the first place. The purity was always only skin deep; the chastity always empty. Coming to white Jesus is already a fool's errand.

### Artefacts of Western Thinking (Georgina Tuari Stewart)

The postdigital context facilitates the process of destabilizing truth, even while it appears to democratize knowledge by making knowledge more freely available. The Internet has the effect of defining the boundaries of 'what is known' so in the postdigital era the means of knowing has been captured by private interests. Science has repeatedly shown itself to be completely in thrall to profit. The current global owners seem intent on using up the rest of nature in their remaining few years. The findings of research into misinformation campaigns directed towards the 2020 US Presidential elections call into question the last remaining shreds of the notion of 'Western democracy'. The acceleration of climate change, the rise of global pandemics, and visible signs of coming mass extinction are all symptoms of out-of-control thinking that humanity can separate itself from the rest of the biosphere: an idea that arose in the fabled 'West' (i.e. the place of origin of modern science and the pinnacle of human evolution) and is out of step with every other form of cultural knowledge base.

The globalized Anglophone academy we see today is the product of a history of several centuries in duration, over which time it has defined itself and developed its canon by the process of excluding Indigenous and other forms of knowledge, including religion. This process of exclusion largely accounts for the 'disenchantment' part of the cycle. The disciplines consolidated as their archives grew more institutionalized and self-sustaining. The domains of the academy refined their boundaries, represented and manifested in the central criteria of each, and their relevant methods of inquiry. The structures of the modern academy developed alongside the process of separating the world of writing into science and literature by the late 1800s. The development of science is a strategic deployment of the power of the written word as discourse in Foucault's sense, as the mediation through language of power/knowledge and the construction of truth: the claim science takes upon itself. Contemporary science is the paradigm of the power of reductionist and technicist thinking. In one sense, what is happening today can be glossed as coming to the limits of Western thinking.

The 're-enchantment' arises as these limits become more and more difficult to ignore. An example is the increasing popularity in recent decades (in ecology, anthropology, philosophy, education, and other fields) of advocating for Indigenous knowledge as the best hope for increasing the security of humanity's future on this planet. Such claims have been short on detail and it is difficult to demonstrate their effectiveness, given the frameworks of technicist knowledge pervading every sector of economic activity in the global economy. But attention to the perceived 'value' of Indigenous knowledge continues to grow. In Aotearoa New Zealand, for example, a policy about Māori knowledge applies to all public sector research funding.

Indigenous knowledge has gone from being subjected to exclusion and Eurocentrism, to a contemporary context of ongoing appropriation that amounts to a symbolic form of neo-colonialism. From an Indigenous perspective, the cycle of disenchantment and re-enchantment between science, religion, and philosophy may amount to no more than an artefact of the Faustian bargain of Western knowledge: the pursuit of which involves accepting a reductionist, technicist notion of truth that eventually becomes the same as a lie, or a boot in the face.

#### Re-Enchanting the Indigenous Lens (Carl Mika)

A plausible argument is that the digital age produced a particular subjectivity for indigenous people. In many respects, the digital age is no different to the first onslaught of a highly ordered, constrained world, introduced with the written alphabet (Aranga, Mika, and Mlcek 2008). By highly ordered, I mean that things were placed into rigid categories that are foreign to a more holistic indigenous mind-set. There is a distinctly Heideggerian (1977) flavour in that view, except that indigenous peoples might propose a different rupture than Heidegger's (see Mika 2017). The subjectivity that builds from *being watched*, for instance, is one that comes from the strict discipline of the body, which in turn arises from a separation of things in the world; with indigenous peoples, the construction of the self occurs through the construction of all things in the world, due to their interrelationship (Deloria 2001). Thus, although it is possible to focus on the indigenous human self and how it has been disconnected through digital's many forms, in fact that fractured selfhood is no different from the fractured self of the world in total. To return to that brief example of surveillance, all things in the world are constrained and watched, even though it appears to be a deep concern of the human self. More specifically, in Maori thought, surveillance is an entity along with many others that suffuses throughout all things (Mika and Stewart 2015).

In the postdigital epoch, it is our challenge to reconcile modernity's entrenchment within indigenous pre-modern thought and practice. One way of doing this is to acknowledge that, while the disenchantment—the *anaesthesia*—that came with modernity is irreversible, the basic way in which modernity constructs things in the world can provide the platform for mystery. In itself, it is un-mysterious, but creatively encountered, it transforms into something else. For the indigenous subject, the ability to re-enchant things in the world is extremely important, and signals a step in countering colonization, if not completely undoing it.

Approaching ideas and things in this way is perverse, to the extent that it may be in bad taste. Ultimately, any indigenous resistance to disenchantment is a big step because, like indigenous claims to indigenous territory or language, it often asks for an irrational response. This is especially true for philosophy because one is basically left to creative thought that does not necessarily conjoin with rationality at all. Thus, to re-enchant is, in effect, to de-rationalize. In academia, the re-enchantment can take place through deliberately misreading another's utterance (a case of hearing, not listening); inappropriate or dark humour; transcending the given meaning of words and considering a holistic backdrop to them; playing with words, and so on.

But these interventions are never enough; the process is continuous. The digital epoch for indigenous peoples has bolstered the numerical view of the world that *did* originally arrive with the western alphabet; the digital (in the sense of the mathematical) now sits behind the indigenous lens, not simply in the world of appearances. Re-enchantment, whether through resistance or de-rationality, is only ever a work in progress for the indigenous subject—an ongoing challenge which acknowledges the inability of the self to really grasp what lies behind one's indigenous (but digitalized) lens.

### From Description to Humanization: A Dialectics of Liberation (Peter McLaren)

We human beings weren't born with a certain set of established hermeneutical frameworks; that's very clear. We were socialized into them. The factors that contributed to this socialization are legion and would require a broad excursus into the history of science, philosophy and religion as they developed within conditions of feudalism and more recently, authoritarian market capitalism with all its attendant bureaucratic modulations. One important project of our times is to consider re-socializing our theoretical approaches to religion, science and philosophy, to explore how they are conceptually entangled or otherwise intimately connected in a manner that enables us to look at science, religion, and philosophy from the perspective of creating a new beginning, a new society, a new world—in short, a social universe that is not anchored by the value form of labor but rather operates on sound socialist principles. Reason alone, after all, cannot transcend alienation in order to put us on a path of liberation. Only human praxis can achieve this.

For Hegel, the dialectic of self-consciousness is what moves history forward. And it is this historical movement of humanity through the sublation of contradictions that brings us closer to discovering possible new beginnings for humankind. The externalization of thought (creating ideas and objects of thought or objectified thought) and the transcendence of this externalization occur when thought returns to itself by knowing itself. This self-thinking thought—thought that thinks itself—is able to identify contradictions but is ultimately incapable of transcending alienation (Hudis 2005). Marx maintained that this dialectic of consciousness—this self-thinking thought as described by Hegel—cannot transcend alienation because it is ultimately disconnected from aspects of our species being, our corporeal, embodied nature. The subject as identified by Hegel is dehumanized and ultimately reduced to abstract thought, thought that has been denatured, deracinated, and thereby made inhuman. By contrast, Marx views history as a dialectic of labor, as the historical movement of laboring humanity, the self-actualization of the totality of human powers. For Marx, disembodied thought cannot be the subject of history (Hudis 2005) *since human actuality is not a product of thought; thought is a product of human actuality*. Because thought is a product of human actuality, it is therefore possible, according to Marx, to consider the transcendence of alienated labor (Hudis 2005). The answer to the exploitation and alienation of human labor is not the reconciliation of thought to itself but rather the actual abolition of the alienating determinations of the external world (Hudis 2005).

Science, religion, and philosophy all have the potential to be praxis oriented, to self-consciously work towards developing a more liberating society through the negation of the negation. This potential made it imperative for Marx that philosophy move beyond describing the world in order to change the world. Following this imperative we can stipulate that religion, philosophy and science must move beyond the idea of understanding the world, towards a politics of praxis, towards the idea of transcending our alienating world in order to change it. But it is impossible simply to 'apply' Hegel's concept of the negation of the negation, one has to reconstitute it within a larger philosophical framework that accommodates science and religion. And concretizing absolute negativity as a new beginning must be supported by a philosophy of liberation that illuminates what a postcapitalist society might look like (Hudis 2005). We must unite revolutionary subjects with science, with religion, and with philosophy in such a

way that we can posit a viable path to liberation, one which can be achieved through a unity of the embodied or 'enfleshed' subjects of revolt with the 'idealist' philosophy of liberation that is rooted in the dialectic of absolute negativity (Hudis 2005).

Science, philosophy, and religion, when grasped dialectically through an historical materialist analysis, can illuminate a new beginning for humanity since it is the seedbed of creativity (McLaren 2015). This stipulates that thought—and here we are affecting a transdisciplinary motion by referring to philosophical, scientific and religious thought—must achieve more than an attempt to correspond to reality. Scientific, religious, and philosophical thought must instead be grasped dialectically in order *transform reality*. Another way of putting this is to say that human beings must be at the center of religious, philosophical, and scientific thought. The negation of the negation makes it possible to recognize (or 're-cognize') that human beings are the source of negation and the shapers of history. Such recognition situates human beings as the point of departure of philosophy, science, and religion, as well as its point of return, a point of transcendent consciousness capable of transforming the world in the interest of creating a social universe freed from value augmentation and wage labor and grounded in freely associated labor.

## Postdigital Enchantments and Their Enemies

### Distraction and the Enchantment Spectrum (Derek R. Ford)

Theorizing the postdigital era consists, at least in part, in grappling with the ways in which the contours of social relations have been, and continue to be, reconfigured. The very concept of the postdigital itself names one of these reconfigurations: the contours between the analogue and the digital have shifted to such a degree that a new designation is justified, one that is, importantly, a question rather than a theory. One set of modified social relations are those of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment, relations that are both pedagogical and political. They are pedagogical in that they concern the fundamental processes of education—namely, stupor, knowledge, and questioning—and they are political in that they are the site of struggles over power.

Dominic Pettman's (2016: 27) examination of the rearrangement of attention and distraction via social media technologies provides a helpful map for this problematic. Where is the opening of quotation marks? Rather than redirecting attention to something else, distraction is now a form of attention; a phenomenon is composed of millions of tiny moments of engineered attention (or vice versa)'. Distraction is no longer when media corporations highlight trivial happenings instead of substantial issues. Instead, the substantial issues themselves spin off in a multiplicity of directions—some of which might be trivial—each of which are flattened. Click on any hashtag and you will know what Pettman means. Dominant systems of power are less concerned about the content we're looking at than they are about the variety of forms related to that content. The contradictions that could galvanize political struggles are thus dulled, 'not only because they come so thick and fast, but because each one is rendered equivalent to the other by virtue of its place in the Feed' (36). That place is, of course, determined by the opaque and ever-shifting algorithms produced by the corporate giants that own social media platforms.

By subsuming attention within distraction, the spectrum of enchantment is both intensified and weakened. It's intensified in that there is a limitless stream of questions to explore and unknowns to know, but it's weakened in that the force of the spectrum is blunted to such an extent that the foreign and new never impose an interruption or a break. Stupor, or the absence knowledge, is transformed into ignorance, or the capacity for knowledge; wonder, or the process of endless questioning, is reduced to research, or the production of new answers. The political struggle over the production, ownership, and use of social media technologies thus necessitates an educational struggle to reclaim the radical disorientation that defines each aspect of the enchantment spectrum.

### Trust, Faith, Critical Questioning, and Interpretation Of Evidence (Tim Fawns)

Through their shared history, science, religion, and philosophy have been used to open and close ways of thinking. Science has opened up domains of study, yet one of its goals is also to produce universal explanations that remove doubt. Philosophy emphasizes critique (of beliefs, assumptions, ideologies), and extends beyond hard evidence, yet its thought experiments are heavily constrained by rules of logic. Religions often encourage 'followers' to question themselves and others, yet may also defer knowledge to authorities (leaders, deities), suppress questioning, or insist upon faith-based answers.

Philosophy, at its best, extrapolates on the implications of particular cases *if they are right*, but remains open to them being *wrong*. Thus, when pilgrims in Qom, Iran, licked a shrine in the belief that they would be protected from the Covid-19 virus (Diseko 2020), or religious leaders encouraged followers to congregate in packed buildings (Alesse 2020), share spoons, and kiss monuments (Roth, Walker, and Phillips 2020), it was scientific knowledge, and not philosophy, that called such acts out as wrong, rather than right. On the basis of religious knowledge, these acts were ways of fighting the virus, backed by faith that the pious cannot be infected through holy materials and environments. Curiously, the dissemination of scientific knowledge on which accusations of wrongness were based, requires trust in scientists, accepting their interpretations over alternative explanations. While science cautions against blind trust, appealing to methodological rigour and empirical evidence, in practice, 'the science' is often held out as unassailable truth to further agendas and maintain control (see governmental responses to Covid-19, e.g. Devlin and Boseley 2020). Philosophically, both of these scientific and religious knowledges could be right (or wrong) because both could be satisfactorily explained in their own terms (e.g. increased rates of illness and infection data might be accounted for as a test of faith).

While we might characterize the above religious beliefs as dangerous, science and philosophy are also dangerous in isolation, because they are bound to ethical but not moral principles. A strength (and, perhaps, also a weakness) of religion is that it provides principles that inform moral action. Each domain produces knowledge and understandings that cannot adequately be explained by the others. Each was, arguably, born from curiosity and wonder, traits that, as an educator, I encourage in my students. It is a conundrum, then, that wonder, and enchantment with knowledge, might be diminished by finding definitive answers or accomplishing precise, pre-determined outcomes. Perhaps it is fortunate, then, that the complexity across and between each domain seems destined to always require something out of reach of the rational,

objective and empirical. Through an appreciation of complexity, knowing is never finished, and this allows both a re-enchantment of definite (and, thus, dead) knowledge, and a disenchantment of apparently unassailable truths.

For me, this is the foundation of a postdigital perspective. The digital is understood as complex, entangled with the social, material, and political. As such, algorithmic analyses of reductive, digital data (as in some learning analytics approaches), and the crude categorization and compartmentalization of knowledge and people (e.g. in claims about learning styles or digital natives) close down important ways of thinking. Similarly, attempts at controlled, scientific study of the effects of interventions on educational outcomes, while they may seem to bring clarity, come at the expense of context, diversity, and expert judgement (Goodyear and Ellis 2008). Through attempts to find 'best practices', 'optimal methods', and technological solutions, these acts violently shape concepts like learning, engagement, attitude, reflection, empathy, and more. That is not to discount these methods altogether, but to recognize the claims they produce for what they are: broad and blunt and imprecise; abstracted from context; simultaneously enchanted and disenchanted by representing themselves as more than they are, and by missing the rich and dynamic complexity of the interrelations of people and their social, material, and digital environments.

What we can we learn about complexity and uncertainty from the interrelation of science, religion, and philosophy? For one thing, by taking multiple perspectives, we can strive to hold open our ways of knowing, through a balance of trust, evidence, logic, and critique.

## The Enchantments of Data Science (Jeremy Knox)

In contemporary times of unfathomably powerful technology companies (Srnicek 2017), astonishing scandals involving social media manipulation (Ward 2018), enthralling accounts of 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff 2019), and the mesmerizing narratives of a coming AI-fuelled '4th industrial revolution' (Schwab 2017), we appear to be at our most enchanted with the digital. In an era where all digital technologies appear geared towards some form of data collection and processing, we are undoubtedly captivated, just as much by the promises of personalized convenience and precisely predicted outcomes, as by the perils of increasing surveillance and the loss of privacy. However, both our utopic obsessions with efficient Artificial Intelligence-infused societies (involving self-driving cars, smart cities, and emancipation from labour), and our dystopic visions of data-driven Orwellian authoritarianism (or indeed Huxleyan media-driven apolitical pleasures)[4], are grounded in mythology: 'the widespread belief that large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with the aura of truth, objectivity and accuracy' (Boyd and Crawford 2012). In other words, an assumption that data-driven technologies *actually function as promised* drives both our sanguine and our suspicious outlooks. However, as a recent study demonstrated, machine learning techniques were not able to demonstrate anything approaching accuracy in the prediction of life outcomes, utilizing data from a 15-year-long research project

[4] For more useful discussion of Orwell's and Huxley's competing visions of dystopia, see: Postman, N. (1985). Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business. Viking.

(Salganik et al. 2020)[5]. Yet, such evidence doesn't appear to dampen the general faith in our 'datafied' future.

It is important to recognize, therefore, that 'data science'—the field of expertise that has come to define the digital in our times—has never really been a 'disenchantment'. It has relied, unquestionably, on the warm fuzziness of human fascination and allure, just as much as on the cold, hard, and irrefutable domain of 'facts'. However, the point here is certainly not to dismiss any ideological notion of 'dataism'—'a widespread *belief* in the objective quantification and potential tracking of all kinds of human behavior and sociality' (van Dijck 2014: 198) (emphasis in original). Following Dourish and Bell (2011), the point is to recognize that anything 'mythical' about the digital is not simply false or erroneous but rather is indicative of what animates and gives shape to our contemporary 'datafied' society. For example, we need to acknowledge and take seriously the idea that our lives are infused with data, not simply because technological progress is 'inevitable' (by virtue of the fact that technologies are so unquestionably 'good' at what they do). Rather we need to see our condition as the result, both of society's collective *trust* in the idea that producing data for corporations and government will be beneficial, and upon a long-standing *devotion* to the notion of solving societal problems with a 'technical fix' (Robins and Webster 1989).

### Postdigital Conundrums of Technology and Religion (Maggi Savin-Baden)

As we live through the complexity of the management (or not) of a global pandemic, full of mixed messages, many of us are reflecting on mortality. Faith, mortality, and death are themes in T.S. Eliot's The Wasteland (Eliot 1922) along with sorrow and compassion.

> Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
> Turn in the door once and turn once only
> We think of the key, each in his prison
> Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
> Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
> Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus

Yet the poem, written in 1922 prompts us to question today how, if the world is getting smarter and more advanced, do we not know how to manage in the face of a virulent virus? How too then does our smart connected world deal with death? The meaning of the words by Eliot have resonance with our current situation, a sense of resignation (peace which passeth understanding). His words too seem to prompt us to consider an alternative set of values and recognize that we are, and will be living, in a culture and a value system new to us which may offer an alternative to our own dead world.

For most people, marking the end of life today increasingly includes memorials, whether at sites of roadside crashes or in online spaces. In a post-modern context of mixed religious beliefs and secular outlooks this affords a safe ritual space (Brock 2010: 64). Digital spaces are invisible seen as spaces of connection; yet as lock-down

[5] It should be noted that none of the techniques included in this study, including simple statistics, were able to make accurate predictions.

occurs, we are indeed very much, as Eliot points out, in our own prisons, both physically and metaphorically. Further, as the death toll rises the shock and loss does too and as science fails us instead, we turn to digital memorialization as a means of sharing our locked-down, locked-in grief.

However, the ideas and practices associated with digital afterlife have moved beyond digital memorialization towards a desire to preserve oneself after death, illustrating disenchantment with religious provision but also confusion about just where people go after death. The result is that many people create social media mourning rituals such as ‘speaking’ to dead loved ones on Facebook, others are enchanted by the idea of creating a legacy or an avatar to leave behind. What seems particularly puzzling is that neither science nor religion has many answers about death. One of the central difficulties is that Christianity and other faiths find digital afterlife creation disconcertingly disembodied, and it is not clear whether it promotes particular views about bodily forms in the afterlife. People of faith I have interviewed recently have no real sense of what the afterlife might mean for them, but many ponder on conundrums such as the environmental footprint that is left behind by the data of the dead, as the bereaved do not delete the footprint of the dead and neither do services such as Facebook or Twitter.

There are concerns too about the lack of laws that govern the data of the dead, this digital legacy, and the lack of religious guidance on digital afterlife practices. Yet perhaps the real enchantment of the digital is its perpetuity—the photographs, the messages, the legacy: the afterlife; an afterlife that prevents us from being free to die also introduces questions about how 'the dead' might be classified.

## The God of Cats: Education for Re-enchantment with Science and Religion (Liz Jackson)

The so-called separation of church and state comes with many costs. As mentioned, it reduces the history of social movements to the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’, although no such divide has existed. At the same time, it obscures questions about the way people and societies operate today, as if people have rational brains separated from their affective, social, existential selves. Classes that aim to historicize and contextualize human experience in the past and present are in vogue today, to help remedies these myopic ways of thinking. Exploring the postdigital context allows for even more critically nuanced approaches to human existence, by opening another door to how science and technology do not exist without human affect, fantasy, and enchantment.

A case in point is the human relationship with cats. It was appreciated, before the digital and postdigital ages, that humans had spiritual relationships with cats. In ancient Egypt, they were associated with the goddesses Isis and Bastet—Artemis in ancient Greece. Cats have been associated with good fortune in Japan, now popularized in Maneki Neko figures adorning shop windows in many Asian countries today. People tend to think of this history as antiquated, as if relationships of humans with cats have become more rational. A postdigital approach complicates this picture.

The postdigital condition is marked not primarily by being ‘after’ the digital age, but further by ‘dragging digitalization and the digital—kicking and screaming—down from its discursive celestial, ethereal home and into the mud’ (Jandrić et al. 2019; Arndt et al. 2019). In this context, an examination of the postdigital age reveals that it shares with

the predigital human fascination with cats. A nuanced exploration of the ancients would invite skepticism regarding simplistic conclusions about the past: Did the ancients really worship cats? Perhaps they simply liked to represent them. Similar inquiries can be made today. Jason Eppink's exhibit 'How Cats Took Over the Internet' shows that love of cats in online memes and websites says more about humans than it does about cats (Smith 2015). Cats 'rule' the internet, as they ruled artistic and other mediated spaces in the past. Might we worship cats in the same irrational way our apparently more religious and spiritually inclined ancestors did?

Far from being banal, the case of cats exposes the postdigital age as hardly more intellectual and rational. That cats dominate online space invites reconsideration of commodity fetishism, the way media operates upon deep parts of ourselves that are pre-rational, non-rational, or irrational (Marx 1867; Myrick 2015). The example also reminds that enchantment and the spiritual are not only celestial but part of everyday worldly life, while the concept of pure secular rationality remains quite abstract from that same world.

## Postdigital Caravaggio: Science, Art, and Education (Nina Hood and Marek Tesar)

Michelangelo Merisi (1571-1610), commonly known as Caravaggio, perhaps seems as an odd place to begin this short piece. But the contradictions, challenges, and conflicting relationships present in both Caravaggio's art and his life provide a fascinating launching pad. Caravaggio can be described as an unorthodox artist, whose distinctive style and work with light and shadows, as well as his risqué (for the time period) portrayal of non-religious subjects represented a break from traditional religious painting. Caravaggio was both a rebel artist and a rebel citizen. He resisted and pushed the boundaries and rules governing painting and art more generally, as well as those governing everyday life, as imposed primarily by the Church. For anyone who has encountered one of Caravaggio's paintings in situ, for example, in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome or at St John's Co-Cathedral in Malta, they will know the sense of awe that overcame them, a sense of enchantment, which starts from his rebel subjectivities.

There is something powerful about the relationality between ontology and aesthetics, about the interconnections and relationships among religion, art, and science. While on the surface seemingly oxymoronic, in the history of Western thought, they blend together in ever changing and ever questioning combinations. During his life, Caravaggio often was portrayed as an outsider, a challenger of orthodoxy, but at the same time balancing controversy and the pushing of boundaries with convention and tradition. Similarly, through history, scientists and the science they developed have similarly found themselves in this challenging and outsider space. Linking art, scientific discovery, and religion is the sense of enchantment, of wonder, as well as disenchantment and a corresponding questioning and at times unresolved wondering invoked across all three.

However, overtime, there is no doubt that science has redefined our ontologies of ourselves in relation to our lives and education (see Jandrić et al. 2019); while at the same time art and aesthetics, and axiology, have managed to keep their distinctive subjectivities. While techno art or bio-art are a current new normality, conducting an exploration of the ontology of contemporary art and linking it with Caravaggio, who enacted a shift towards a cutting-edge science of art and in doing so initiated a redefining of the art form (like so many artists before him and after him also did), demonstrates the origin of such connections in the seventeenth century. The tension

between Caravaggio's subjectivity and the religious world is ever manifest in his work. From sublime to the aesthetics, this liminal space pushes enchantment with the world. Just like the child being enchanted with a device; with a painting; with a newly learnt word. In the postdigital realities this does not come as a tension but as a progression; not as a cacophony but as something powerful and enchanting (see Hood and Tesar 2019; Tesar and Hood 2019). Just like with the child, this new logic of science and art has also made it necessary for artists to get acquainted with new epistemologies and a new logic of producing reality within the techno-scientific regime.

## Conclusion (John Reader and Petar Jandrić)

Our question about the enchantment, disenchantment, re-enchantment continuum elicited a wide and creative range of responses. A theme to emerge is that of continuities and discontinuities. Each term brings its own ambiguities and questions. Is that which we see as enchanted any more than a distorted form of human activity or does it contain ideas which are still of value? Is that which is supposedly disenchanted by science perhaps more enchanted in our postdigital reality than we care to imagine? Can any project of re-enchantment avoid the challenge of both returning to the past, such as indigenous cultures, and projecting into an unknown future, such as transhumanism?

Wherever any of us might place ourselves along this spectrum, there is the task of working out the social, intellectual, and political implications of where we stand. If a shared concern is that of transforming a world in which forms of reductionism endanger life, both human and non-human, then the stance that we adopt needs to possess the capacity to inform and shape practice as well as belief. As we ponder about philosophical and theological questions, we should never forget about inequalities and especially those who have been historically and presently oppressed by our theories and practices. Our epistemologies, and our ontologies, can never be divorced from our political economies.

There may be no straightforward or linear process that can be categorized as re-enchantment as we need to take into account both the continuities and discontinuities. The demarcation lines and boundaries that we draw between religion, science, and politics are themselves cultural and intellectual constructs and thus porous, fluid, and always open to question and revision. To this list, we should definitely add other important forms of human engagement with the world such as the arts. Ontological and epistemical differences, and their apparent incommensurability, should not prevent us from continuous engagement in various forms of (postdigital) dialogue (Jandrić 2017; Jandrić et al. 2019).

Extent, depth, and above all diversity of contributions to this article, indicate a strong need for such conversations and interactions across disciplinary perspectives, religions, and political positions. This collective exploration the enchantment, disenchantment, re-enchantment continuum indicates that various knowledge and belief systems have much more in common than our disciplinary approaches tend to represent: data theorists, and theologists, exhibit very similar levels of enchantment with the world. So where do the mythical, mystical, and spiritual end and the rational, objective, and empirical begin? How do we find our bearings in the midst of this complexity and

where do we search for resources that are trustworthy and reliable? Perhaps a new civil science alongside a new civil religion might contribute to a renewed public life for the postdigital age and guide us as we explore the possibilities of a post- or transhumanism? Both would require that we continue the conversations and deepen the interactions, both human and more than human.

## Open Review 1: Do We Really Want a 'Reenchanted' World? Be Careful What You Wish For (Steve Fuller)

We have been long accustomed to thinking about 'science' as a 'Western construct'. At first, this was to the credit of Europe, as when Joseph Needham (1954) tried to explain in the mid-twentieth century why the 'Scientific Revolution' took place there three centuries earlier rather than in the more advanced civilization of China. Nowadays, of course, 'Eurocentrism' carries an entire spectrum of negative connotations ranging from parochialism to imperialism. What is perhaps not so obvious is that 'religion' is equally a Western construct. This point is key to understanding the spirit in which Max Weber (1963) introduced the 'enchantment/disenchantment' binary, which roughly corresponds to 'religious/secular'. Thus, those who speak today about a possible 're-enchantment' of the world usually identify with a 'post-secular' mentality.

It is frequently observed that religions—perhaps especially the great 'world religions'—share little in terms of common doctrine, even with regard to such fundamental matters as the existence of God. This does not deny the filial relations among the Abrahamic religions, and that at least to Western eyes, Buddhism look like a Protestant-style revolt against Hinduism (e.g. Bergson 1977). But those who have gone the extra mile with Karl Jaspers (1953) in trying to comprehend the rise of the world religions in one 'axial age' of global spirituality appear on closer inspection to be engaged in wishful acts of 'synchronicity'. Nevertheless, the emergence of 'religion' as an analytic category—typically in the context of 'comparative religions'—in the mid-nineteenth century has a clear source. A 'religion' in this sense is simply a residual category for all pre-modern modes of complex social organization.

This explains the prominence of the 'world religions' to the study of religion (Masuzawa 2005). They are the most direct competitors, in terms of both scale and scope, to what modern nation-states aspire to deliver. Moreover, these religions have attempted to achieve these ends by means radically different from those used by the 'moderns' studying them. Consider the problem of 'social order', which looms large in modern sociology. In many world religions, matters of 'faith', understood as a certain receptive disposition to the world, can solve the problem in ways that have required coercion and even the threat of violence—or the 'monopoly of force', as Weber defined the state—in the modern period to achieve comparable results. Patterns of behaviour that now require explicit formulation ('enacted into law') from a contrived ('socially contracted') central authority had previously enjoyed a 'natural' intergenerational passage through the family as mores and customs.

Of course, this is no more than a stereotype of the world religions; let alone all religions. Nevertheless, it is the conception of religion that fascinated Weber and other modern sociologists. For some of Weber's contemporaries, this fascination carried a tinge of nostalgia for 'the world we lost'. However, Weber remained a modernist who accepted 'disenchantment' as the price we have paid for living in a world in which we

know enough about its inner workings that we can turn them to our advantage—and take responsibility for the consequences. Here Weber's German is telling: *Entzauberung* is his word for 'disenchantment', which implies a loss of magic, the breaking of a spell.

This helps to explain the centrality of *theodicy* to Weber's sociology of religion. In the Abrahamic tradition, starting with the Book of Job, it has referred to God's sense of justice, specifically the deity's tolerance of evil in the world. However, Weber broadened the concept to cover the meaning of life itself—and here he detected a pattern across all the world religions. In the 'enchanted' world, the meaning of life is ultimately hidden in, say, the mind of God or the outworking of fate. Thus, theology is preoccupied with guessing the 'reason why' things happen as they do—very much in the spirit of trying to guess how magic works. Eventually 'magicians' emerge who claim to know the answers. Frequently they were portrayed as arrogant charlatans, pretending to know things that no one could ever know. However, the privileging of humanity in the Abrahamic religions encouraged a second look. And the more that the magicians' claims were tested, the more it became possible both to explain and manufacture effects that were previously seen as beyond human comprehension and control. Modern science and technology are the legacy of this 'disenchanted' world.

Disenchantment involves humanity switching roles from spectator to conjurer of magic. It is a familiar trope from Existentialist theology, where it carries a heavy dose of irony. God looks glorious from afar and we desire to be one with Him. But upon arrival, we come to realize that we had been suffering from an optical illusion. This applies not only to pious traditional believers but also to the impious 'transhumanists' who at least since Ludwig Feuerbach have talked explicitly of a secular apotheosis (Fuller and Lipinska 2014: chap. 2). In the one case, 'God' turns out to be an empty signifier; in the other, it poses an impossible burden of responsibility over matters of life and death. But neither involves 'redemption' or 'salvation' in any obvious sense. The early 1960s US television series, *The Twilight Zone* was all about 'disenchantment' in this sense, the subtext of which is 'Be careful what you wish for'.

With all this in mind, is a return to 'enchantment' possible, let alone desirable? In the spirit of *Postdigital Science and Education*, let me propose that, for better or worse, a 're-enchantment' had already begun within a decade of Weber's declaration of 'disenchantment' and has continued apace for the past century. The vehicle of re-enchantment has been modern technology itself, especially as it has become increasingly consumer-facing, 'black boxed' and 'user-friendly'. The society that Aldous Huxley satirized in 1932 in *Brave New World* was founded as a cult surrounding Henry Ford, in which the grill from the front of an old Model T functions as a holy relic. Fast forward to the current century, we find billions of people deeply dependent on smartphones and social media, only a fraction of whom have the vaguest idea of how they work. In this context, McKenzie Wark's (2004) early call for a 'hacker' class consciousness and Douglas Rushkoff's (2010) pointed *cri de coeur*, 'Program or Be Programmed!', may come to read in retrospect as the starting shots in a new and salutary wave of disenchantment. But for this to happen, we need to realize that we have been long reenchanted by technology, and much of the recent 'post-secular' turn has been about ideology catching up with the material conditions of our existence.

### Open Review 2: At The Heart Of It All Is Trust… (Chris Baker)

The challenge of how to renew and sustain civic life within the context of a postdigital public sphere is a challenge highlighted by this fascinating collection. In short, this challenge relies on reproducing and sustaining social and political trust. In an era of fake news and the lurch to tribal populism, this challenge was extraordinarily complex already. It now takes on even greater political and ethical urgency in the new and as yet uncharted space of a post Covid-19 society. For me the focus of this challenge is located in the rush to develop a 'track and trace' app as part of the post lockdown response, and the near certainty of knowing that 'emergency' social measures policed by the use of digital technology will quickly become permanent features shaping the way we live.

In the UK, the option has been to go for a home-grown app developed by the digital development arm for the National Health Service (NHSX), which will transfer contact tracer data to centralized British Government / National Health Service servers. Most other governments have opted for the decentralized app developed by Google and Apple which will hold our data on their disparate private servers. The bottom line seems to be 'Who do you trust most to respect your privacy and the freedom that comes with it. The state or private corporations?' The answer will probably be neither, but then we seem to have already moved to a cultural payoff moment where we sacrifice our right to privacy for the right to access limitless information and new forms of digital 'enchantment' for our own consumption.

More disturbing still, however, is evidence from societies like China that have already developed their contact tracing apps into immunity-style digital 'certificates'. These can be shown on smart phones and allow you access to goods and services in the public space. A red (as opposed to green) colour of your app certificate, generated by algorithms over which you have no knowledge or control could become a gateway to a permanent exclusion and underclass – where let's face it - the elderly, minority communities, the poor, the disabled, political dissidents etc. will be corralled. They will be quarantined and stigmatized in such ways as to ensure that their quality of life and freedom of mobility will conspicuously constrained and inferior. In other words, it could be business as usual, but much worse, and now depoliticized under the mantra of preserving communal health and safety.

So how might we respond to the challenge to sustain civil religion, civil science and civil society, all of which rely on relationships of trust? The Irish philosopher of religion, Richard Kearney, defines the current era as 'anatheistic'. In the context of the West, he suggests that we have moved from theism (the belief in an 'Omni-God of sovereignty and theodicy' to the death of God (i.e. atheism) into a new liminal space of anatheism 'the option of a God still to come - or a God still to come back again … a supplementary move of aftering and overing' (Kearney and Zimmermann 2016: 17). He identifies three cultural shifts that epitomize the current anatheistic *Zeitgeist*; namely, a new appreciation of the Sacramentality of the Material; a renewed interplay between Religion and the Imagination; and what he defines as *The Transformative Call of the Stranger.*

This category is perhaps the one that best reflects the concerns of this volume. It encapsulates the call of the divine to engagement and participation through our response to the Other, whose demands either provoke a retreat into the familiar, or a foray into a new, more risky, but ultimately more satisfying future—what Kearney calls

a form of annunciation. It can often come in the guise of a 'cry in the street', i.e. an unexpected irruption into our lives by an Other that opens up new lines of flight in the assemblages of both our individual lives and the localities in which we live.

The anatheistic phase thus reflects for Kearney an era of sublimated longing for reconnection and re-enchantment that the postdigital age now mediates so ubiquitously for us and either distorts and weakens, or potentially enhances. For the sake of a viable public sphere populated by civil religion, civil society and civil science we need, across disciplines and ideologies, to locate, analyze and promote the latent potential of the digital to mediate physical bonds of connection and trust. Only in this way can we build up immunity against a de-politicized, spoon-fed, capitalistic, and bio-powered future being conjured up for us—right now!

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## Affiliations

**John Reader[1] · Petar Jandrić[2,3] · Michael A. Peters[4] · Ronald Barnett[5] · Marcin Garbowski[6] · Veronika Lipińska[7] · Sharon Rider[8] · Ibrar Bhatt[9] · Abdassamad Clarke[10] · Morteza Hashemi[11] · Andrew Bevan[12] · Eric Trozzo[13] · Alison MacKenzie[14] · Jared J. Aldern[15] · Cheryl E. Matias[16] · Georgina Tuari Stewart[17] · Carl Mika[18] · Peter McLaren[19,20] · Tim Fawns[11] · Jeremy Knox[11] · Maggi Savin-Baden[1] · Liz Jackson[21] · Nina Hood[22] · Marek Tesar[22] · Steve Fuller[23] · Chris Baker[24]**

✉ Petar Jandrić
pjandric@tvz.hr

John Reader
drjohnreader@hotmail.co.uk

Michael A. Peters
mpeters@bnu.edu.cn

Ronald Barnett
ron.barnett@ucl.ac.uk

Marcin Garbowski
marcin.s.garbowski@gmail.com

Veronika Lipińska
veronika.lipinska@gmail.com

Sharon Rider
sharon.rider@filosofi.uu.se

Ibrar Bhatt
I.Bhatt@qub.ac.uk

Abdassamad Clarke
abdassamad@icloud.com

Morteza Hashemi
Morteza.Hashemi@ed.ac.uk

Andrew Bevan
andrewbevan@me.com

Eric Trozzo
ejtrozzo@gmail.com

Alison MacKenzie
A.Mackenzie@qub.ac.uk

Jared J. Aldern
JARED.ALDERN@UCDENVER.EDU

Cheryl E. Matias
cheryl.matias@uky.edu

Georgina Tuari Stewart
georgina.stewart@aut.ac.nz

Carl Mika
carl.mika@waikato.ac.nz

Peter McLaren
peter.mclaren1@gmail.com

Tim Fawns
tfawns@ed.ac.uk

Jeremy Knox
jeremy.knox@ed.ac.uk

Maggi Savin-Baden
m.savinbaden@worc.ac.uk

Liz Jackson
lizjackson@hku.hk

Nina Hood
n.hood@auckland.ac.nz

Marek Tesar
m.tesar@auckland.ac.nz

Steve Fuller
s.w.fuller@warwick.ac.uk

Chris Baker
c.baker@gold.ac.uk

[1] University of Worcester, Worcester, UK
[2] Zagreb University of Applied Sciences, Zagreb, Croatia
[3] University of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton, UK
[4] Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China
[5] University College London, Institute of Education, London, UK
[6] The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland
[7] Independent Scholar, London, UK
[8] Department of Philosophy, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden
[9] Queen's University, Belfast, UK
[10] Independent Scholar, Nakskov, Denmark
[11] University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
[12] Independent Scholar, Oxford, UK
[13] Australian Lutheran College, University of Divinity, Adelaide, Australia
[14] Queen's University, Belfast, UK
[15] School of Education and Human Development, University of Colorado, Denver, CO, USA
[16] Interdisciplinary Research Institute for the Study in (In)Equality, University of Denver, Denver, CO, USA
[17] Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand
[18] University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand
[19] Northeast Normal University, Changchun, China
[20] Chapman University, Orange, CA, USA
[21] University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
[22] The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand
[23] University of Warwick, Coventry, UK
[24] Goldsmiths, University of London, London, UK

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# Disenchantment

In social science, **disenchantment** (German: *Entzauberung*) is the cultural rationalization and devaluation of religion apparent in modern society. The term was borrowed from Friedrich Schiller by Max Weber to describe the character of a modernized, bureaucratic, secularized Western society.[1] In Western society, according to Weber, scientific understanding is more highly valued than belief, and processes are oriented toward rational goals, as opposed to traditional society, in which "the world remains a great enchanted garden".[2]

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## Enlightenment ambivalence

Weber's ambivalent appraisal of the process of disenchantment as both positive *and* negative[3] was taken up by the Frankfurt school in their examination of the self-destructive elements in Enlightenment rationalism.[4]

Jürgen Habermas has subsequently striven to find a positive foundation for modernity in the face of disenchantment, even while appreciating Weber's recognition of how far secular society was created from, and is still "haunted by the ghosts of dead religious beliefs."[5]

Some have seen the disenchantment of the world as a call for existentialist commitment and individual responsibility before a collective normative void.[6]

## Sacralization and desacralization

Disenchantment is related to the notion of *desacralization*, whereby the structures and institutions that previously channeled spiritual belief into rituals that promoted collective identities came under attack and waned in popularity. According to Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, the ritual of sacrifice involved two processes: sacralization and desacralization.

The process of sacralization endows a profane offering with sacred properties – consecration – which provides a bridge of communication between the worlds of the sacred and profane. Once the sacrifice has been made, the ritual must be desacralized in order to return the worlds of the sacred and profane to their proper places.[7]

Disenchantment operates on a macro-level, rather than the micro-level of sacralization. It also destroys part of the process whereby the chaotic social elements that require sacralization in the first place continue with mere knowledge as their antidote. Therefore, disenchantment can be related to Émile Durkheim's concept of anomie: an unmooring of the individual from the ties that bind in society.[8]

# Re-enchantment

In recent years, Weber's paradigm has been challenged by thinkers who see a process of *re-enchantment* operating alongside that of disenchantment.[9] Thus, enchantment is used to fundamentally change how even low-paid service work is experienced.[10]

Carl Jung considered symbols to provide a means for the numinous to return from the unconscious to the desacralized world[11] – a means for the recovery of myth, and the sense of wholeness it once provided, to a disenchanted modernity.[12]

Ernest Gellner argued that, although disenchantment was the inevitable product of modernity, many people just could not stand a disenchanted world, and therefore opted for various "re-enchantment creeds", such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, Wittgensteinianism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology.[13] A noticeable feature of these re-enchantment creeds is that they all tried to make themselves compatible with naturalism: i.e., they did not refer to supernatural forces.[13]

## Disenchantment as myth

The American historian of religion Jason Josephson-Storm has challenged mainstream sociological and historical interpretations of both the concept of disenchantment and of reenchantment, labeling the former as a "myth". Josephson-Storm argues that there has not been a decline in belief in magic or mysticism in Western Europe or the United States, even after adjusting for religious belief, education, and class.[14] He further argues that many influential theorists of disenchantment, including Weber and some members of the Frankfurt School, were not only aware of modern European magical and occult movements, but consciously engaged with them.[15] Foundational theorists of disenchantment, such as Weber and James George Frazer, did not envision a rigid binary between rationality or rationalization and magical thinking, nor did they describe a process of "reenchantment" to reverse or compensate for disenchantment.[16] According to Josephson-Storm, this information necessitates a reinterpretation of Weber's idea of disenchantment as referring more to the sequestering and professionalization of magic.[17]

# See also

- Desacralization of knowledge
- Iron cage
- New Age
- *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
- Romanticism
- Tripartite classification of authority
- Urbanization

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2. Weber 1971, p. 270.
3. Cascardi 1992, p. 19.
4. Borradori 2003, p. 69.
5. Collins & Makowsky 1998, p. 274.
6. Embree 1999, pp. 110–111.
7. Bell 2009, p. 26.
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9. Landy & Saler 2009.
10. Endrissat, Islam & Noppeney 2015.
11. Jung 1978, pp. 83–94.
12. Casement 2007, p. 20.
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