

Edited and with an Introduction by
AUSTIN HARRINGTON



Georg Simmel
Essays on Art and
Aesthetics

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Introduction

Georg Simmel (1858–1918) is best known today as the author of several groundbreaking studies in modern European social criticism and philosophy. Many readers will know him for works such as *The Philosophy of Money* (1900) or *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms* (1908), and for essays such as “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” “The Stranger,” and “The Concept and Tragedy of Culture.” Yet less well appreciated are many highly original writings by Simmel on movements and personalities of the arts in European cultural history from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century. These include book-length studies of Goethe and Rembrandt, as well as a plethora of essays on figures from Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci to Auguste Rodin, on forms and media of art, on philosophies of the arts after Kant and Schopenhauer, and on sociological circumstances of the arts in modern culture and economy.

Scholars of Simmel’s writings have long recognized the importance of art and aesthetics to Simmel’s vision of modern forms of society. Commentators have long emphasized that artistic and aesthetic images of the world form at once an object of Simmel’s concerns and a medium—perhaps even *the* medium—of his entire style and practice of investigation. Constantly, Simmel writes in a way that elaborates symbols, metaphors, tropes, and analogies as experimental clues to an illumination of the deep structures of mind and behavior that preoccupy him. Yet the distinctively plastic, relational, even in some respects “diffuse,” character of his writing, combined with the highly dispersed fate of his publications after his death, has meant that for many years, the significance of art and aesthetics in his oeuvre has been difficult to determine in the overview.

Himself very aware of the scattered and incomplete nature of his writings on art, Simmel had at many stages sought to produce some form of integrated volume on the field. Repeatedly, he spoke to friends of his plans

for a major study of the *Philosophie der Kunst*, as he termed it. Writing to the philosopher Heinrich Rickert in May 1901, he described the project as a “burning” and “dominant interest” of his “for some years.” This declaration he reiterated to Rickert in April 1902, and again in 1905, and yet again in 1907 to his son Hans.¹ Yet the publication never materialized. By the summer of 1918, afflicted by a rapidly spreading cancer, Simmel set aside the idea and all other commitments to work on one last opus, his *Lebensanschauung*, or *View of Life*, asking his friend and former student and lover Gertrud Kantorowicz to prepare and edit folders of his unfinished manuscripts, including one marked specifically “philosophy of art.”² On 26 September 1918, Simmel died, barely six weeks before the end of the Great War—leaving behind a vast array of texts, many of them largely unknown before work began in the 1980s on a collected edition of his writings, the *Georg-Simmel-Gesamtausgabe*, published in Germany by Suhrkamp Verlag (1989–2014).

This collection of Simmel’s essays presents a thematic arrangement of his writings. It follows a format designed to suggest the shape of the project he might have sought to develop in his lifetime. Approximately a third of the volume’s content exists in English translations already, but the pieces are dispersed over journal issues and edited collections dating back to the 1960s, and some are not easily accessible. Those earlier translations, slightly edited, are here supplemented with fresh translations of the remaining two-thirds of Simmel’s texts. A thematic arrangement has been chosen to highlight Simmel’s prevailing concerns and to honor the priority he almost certainly would have given to substantive clusters over simple linear chronology.³

Readers wholly new to these writings, however, may appreciate first of all an account of the complex threads underlying the essays, few of which are likely to be clear from any one item read in isolation—or perhaps even two or three items. Thus this extended introduction begins by outlining the circumstances of Simmel’s involvement with artistic currents of his time and the concepts he brings to bear in his analyses (§§1, 2). Subsequent sections explain the key ideas driving his picture of formative events in European art history, together with the importance he attaches to urbanization, industrialization, and individualization as dynamics in the shaping of modern structures of culture (§§3, 4, 5). Four further sections elucidate Simmel’s statements on problems of autonomy, representation, and expression in art and on diverse forms, genres, and styles of modern art (§§6, 7, 8, 9). A final section surveys Simmel’s impact in twentieth- and twenty-first-century art theory and his import for debate today (§10).

§1. Simmel and European modernism, 1890–1918

In contrast to his great contemporary in German sociology, Max Weber, relatively little is known about Simmel's personal circumstances and the direct sources of inspiration for his writings. Rarely a user of footnotes, Simmel seldom offers clues to the contexts, motives, and origins of his ideas, and much of what was almost certainly a voluminous correspondence with friends and associates, which might have revealed these impulses, is today lost.⁴ Nevertheless, we know that as *Privatdozent*, or affiliate lecturer, at the University of Berlin from 1885 to 1914 and subsequently as professor at the University of Strasbourg till his death in 1918, Simmel lectured continually on topics in the arts and acquired a large number of acquaintances in European literary and artistic circles.⁵ In the late 1880s, through his Berlin friend Sabine Lepsius, daughter of Gustav Graef and wife of Reinhold Lepsius—all three painters—Simmel met his future wife, Gertrud Kinel (herself a painter), and, together, the couple played host to and attended numerous salons of artistic figures throughout the following two decades.

Among the prominent personalities with whom Simmel came into contact—in some cases quite regularly—were the writers Stefan George, Paul Ernst, Gerhart Hauptmann, Richard Dehmel, Rainer Maria Rilke, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and Kurt Tucholsky, as well as the painters Max Liebermann and Max Klinger, the architect Henry van de Velde, and the composer Richard Strauss.⁶ At the turn of the century, Simmel published more than a dozen short pieces in the Viennese journal *Die Jugend*, organ of the Jugendstil, and met frequently in Berlin with the influential symbolist poet Stefan George, who dedicated poetry to Simmel and on whom Simmel published three essays.⁷ In addition, Simmel took a keen interest in painters of the Berlin Secession (led by, among others, Max Liebermann and Lovis Corinth), which opposed the policies of Berlin galleries dominated by the conservative cultural politics of Kaiser Wilhelm II; and he was involved equally in two other circles, the *Vereinigung für ästhetische Forschung* (Association for Aesthetic Research) and the *Deutsche Künstlerbund* (League of German Artists), the latter influential in the selection of artists to represent Germany at the St. Louis world's fair in the United States in the summer of 1904.⁸ Perhaps most significantly, Simmel corresponded with Auguste Rodin, publishing four essays on the sculptor between 1902 and 1917 and visiting him once in Paris in late April 1905 and again about a week later at his studio in Meudon, near Paris. In part through Rodin, Simmel solidified a lifelong friendship with

Rainer Maria Rilke, whom Simmel first met in November 1897 through Lou Andreas-Salomé, at a reading of poetry by Stefan George, hosted by Simmel's friends Reinhold and Sabine Lepsius.⁹

It is well known that Simmel struggled to win formal recognition in German academic life, despite popularity with students and a rapid rise to international renown. Born to Jewish parents but baptized as a Protestant, in the fashion of many middle-class Jewish families of the period, he remained to some extent a victim of anti-Semitic prejudice throughout his intellectual life—gaining tenure only late in his career at Strasbourg in the summer semester of 1914. Nevertheless, he enjoyed warm working relations at an early stage with other academic scholars of the arts, as well as with numerous younger followers of his lectures, themselves of major subsequent visibility in twentieth-century art criticism. We know that he nurtured a strong professional relationship with Heinrich Wölfflin, author of *The Principles of Art History* (1915) and professor in Berlin from 1901 to 1912. In 1909 Simmel invited Wölfflin to join him on the editorial committee of the newly created journal *LOGOS: Internationale Jahresschrift für Philosophie der Kultur*, which Simmel helped establish, together with its editor Georg Mehlis, and in which he published several of his last essays on art.¹⁰ In late 1907, from his friend the poet Paul Ernst, Simmel received and read a copy of the doctoral dissertation of Wilhelm Worringer, supervised by Wölfflin and influenced by Simmel's writings, which Worringer published the following year as the seminal work *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*.¹¹ And we know that through Wölfflin, Simmel supported the career of the art historian Max Raphael, who met Rodin in Paris in 1912 thanks to a letter of introduction from Simmel, and that Simmel worked closely with the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, likewise *Privatdozent* in Berlin from 1906 and subsequently professor at Hamburg from 1919, in association with the archive of art history founded there by Aby Warburg.¹²

Widely known is that many younger associates of Simmel before the war—among them, Georg Lukács, Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, Béla Balázs, Karl Mannheim, and Ernst Bloch—went on, in their own celebrated writings from the interwar period, to fuse aspects of his teaching with Marxian concepts. A frequent guest of Simmel and doyen of Max Weber's salon in Heidelberg, Lukács studied with Simmel from the autumn of 1908 and early in his career wrote several pieces that Simmel read and appreciated. These included a chapter on Stefan George in Lukács's 1911 collection of essays *Soul and Form*, as well as the last chapter in that volume, titled "The Metaphysics of Tragedy," which Lukács had published separately a year earlier, with Simmel's recommendation,

in the journal *LOGOS*, alongside Simmel's essay "The Concept and Tragedy of Culture."¹³ Walter Benjamin, who read Simmel's 1913 monograph on Goethe and acknowledged the work as an impetus for his thoughts on Goethe and the concept of "origin" in *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, referred explicitly to Simmel's statements on fashion, spectacle, and the crowd in his studies of Baudelaire and nineteenth-century Paris.¹⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, the journalist and film theorist and critic at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* from 1921, who studied architecture in Berlin from 1907 to 1913 and simultaneously philosophy with Simmel, deployed Simmel's precepts extensively in his studies of white-collar workers, urban popular culture, and phenomena of the "mass ornament."¹⁵ Béla Balázs (né Herbert Bauer), the German-speaking Hungarian writer, film theorist, and librettist of Béla Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle*, attended Simmel's seminars at an early stage and dedicated to Simmel his early short paper of 1907 "The Aesthetics of Death," a version of which he read out to Simmel at a seminar.¹⁶ Similarly, Karl Mannheim, the Hungarian-born sociologist and associate of Lukács and Balázs in Budapest during the war, attended lectures by Simmel in Berlin from 1912. And Ernst Bloch took classes with Simmel from 1908 to 1911, forming a lifelong friendship with Lukács through Simmel and earning praise from Simmel for his book *Spirit of Utopia*, of 1918.¹⁷

This introduction to Simmel's essays on art is not the place to rehearse at length Simmel's wider core arguments in sociology and philosophy. However, a working summary for the purposes of this exposition would be to say that Simmel is concerned, fundamentally, with questions of the relation of the individual and society, and in particular with questions of the meaning and problem of spiritual freedom and wholeness of the individual in an age of modern industrial social transformation.¹⁸ Throughout his writings, Simmel is preoccupied with themes of "relativity" in systems of knowledge, belief, and morality, and is motivated normatively by questions of the fate and validity of European humanistic ideas of the many-sided individual, steeped in powers of universal education or *Bildung*. Although Simmel's foci shift somewhat over time, journeying through a range of engagements with anthropology and sociology in his early writings toward more demonstrably metaphysical themes in his later work, his thinking is thoroughly philosophical in cast at the outset and still sociological in his later years.

In three early works, *On Social Differentiation* (1890), *Problems of the Philosophy of History* (1892), and *Introduction to the Moral Sciences* (1892–1893), Simmel presents a broadly ethno-evolutionary account of change and variety in social systems, influenced to some extent by the

ideas of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. In his seminal essays of the 1890s on sociology as a new paradigm of analysis, he conceptualizes diverse forms of integration of individuals into recurring orders of society; and in the six or seven great works for which he is best known, including *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms* (1908), and the essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), he sets out the fundamental terms of his vision of modern socio-cultural change.

With expansion of the market economy and rising specialization in systems of division of labor, Simmel tells us, traditional community bonds give way to more differentiated relations based on greater cooperative interdependence of individuals.¹⁹ In their simpler as well as more evolved states of development, different “forms of association,” or *Formen der Vergesellschaftung*, emerge from different situations of “interaction,” or *Wechselwirkung*, of individuals. Social life arises from typical group structures of mind and behavior, reflective of factors of either sameness or difference, membership or exclusion, involvement or detachment. Over time, and particularly in urban settlements, as the places of greatest speed and intensity of social change, social relations gain in complexity as individuals encounter one another in multiple roles, functions, and identities of life.

Money, Simmel argues, plays a pivotal role in these processes, binding diverse spaces of life into intersecting networks of exchange and assigning disparate contexts of work, need, and desire to common orders of value.²⁰ Driving processes both of formal equalization and of distinction and differentiation among things and people, money assumes increasingly a character of ambivalence in modern life. As a generalized medium of exchange, it generates, on the one hand, a sense of universal quantitative commonality and, on the other hand, a perception of universal relativity, relationality, and flux of things across space and time. Money assimilates and standardizes, yet also sparks change, ferment, and innovation. Money stimulates goal-oriented activities in trade, manufacture, and competition and creates ever-widening disparities of wealth and power—and yet it also fosters pluralistic moral outlooks and individualized styles of life and calls into being more and more nonpurposive kinds of activity that reject conscious goal-orientations, such as leisure, tourism, entertainment, and, importantly, creative and artistic expression.

Complex organizational structures in general, Simmel observes, become in this way the battleground of rival claims of authority in modern life.²¹ Systems of exchange seek to incorporate individuals into themselves as indifferent parts of their own functioning. Yet individuals stand apart

from these systems as moral loci of freedom and assert increasingly a claim to wholeness of being in their own names. Tensions thus arise more and more between “objective” and “subjective” phenomena of modern culture. Personal beliefs, feelings, and outlooks seek cognitive articulation in shared institutions—in moral, political, religious, scientific, and artistic forms and norms. Yet periodically, and increasingly in an industrial age, these generalized forms come to appear alien and remote to the individual. In what Simmel calls an emerging condition of the “conflict,” “crisis,” and “tragedy” of culture, objective forms stand over against the individual as stifling constraints on personal growth. Outward systems of organization appear to take on a life of their own and ignite urges in society to break them asunder.²²

Particularly in Simmel’s later writings, though already to a degree in his work before 1900, many of these themes fuse with a commitment in his thinking to inwardly understood human “life” and “lived experience” (*Leben, Erlebnis*) as paramount concepts of philosophy.²³ In the sense of the broad idiom of thought known in Germany at the time as “life-philosophy,” or *Lebensphilosophie*, “life” and “lived experience” signify for Simmel that natural and social phenomena have meaning and reality for the self only in patterns of continuous symbolic “shape,” or *Gestalt*, over time. Much in the sense urged at the turn of the century in France by Henri Bergson, whose works Simmel began studying and promoting in Germany after 1909, his understanding is that consciousness rests crucially on a possibility of continuously lived inner “flow” and “duration” of the ego through time.²⁴ Yet precisely such bases of experiential flow of the ego, Simmel maintains, tend to come into jeopardy at times stamped by an effect of the uncoupling of “objective and subjective culture.” Such moments in history are the conjunctures of life colored by legacies of ossified institutions of belief and morality, as well as increasingly by expanding mechanistic structures oriented to mass calculation and administration of phenomena. Such structures threaten to replace organic qualities of interconnectedness in experience with atomizing schemes of representation, based on concepts of things as discrete units of being in time and space.

Art and mental life in general, Simmel considers, reflect frequently these constellations of rigidification in culture. Yet art, and in other ways also philosophy and religious thought, retains a capacity to redress such “thinglike” conditions of existence. Creative action in the widest sense claims a power to dissolve stagnant forms into new flows and energies of life. Bound up with definite material and institutional relations of economy, art reacts to structures of the social world in ways always able in principle to revive damaged, distorted, or inhibited qualities of sensation,

feeling, and understanding. At any given moment, art expresses and enables a quest of the self for free integrity of sensuous life and for redemptive coherence of experience, even amid ineluctable facts of conflict and fragmentation of individuals on the stage of society.

Clear is that many of these themes resonate closely with concepts of “alienation” and “reification” of life under capitalist economy in the thought of Marx and his disciples. Indeed in ways elaborated shortly after his death by figures such as Lukács and Bloch, and later Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and other associates of the circle of theorists known as the Frankfurt School, Simmel’s ideas dovetail intricately with Marxian conceptions of the tendency of modern market relations to reduce qualitatively distinct facets of sensibility to standardized quantities of experience—in particular on the terrain of mass consumer spectacle in advanced capitalist “cultural industries.”²⁵

Yet while Simmel writes with an enormous alertness to problems of structural inequality in modern market economies, which debar all but the wealthiest and most leisured sections of society from involvement in fully autonomous artistic activities, his thinking does not embrace a more decidedly political language of critique, in the sense of the explicitly socialist frames of reference of his early left-wing students. Lukács’s in some ways less-than-complimentary characterization of Simmel as the “most important transitional thinker” of his time here captures one salient character of Simmel’s philosophical style.²⁶ Straddling a fault line in European consciousness, Simmel is indeed a writer of the more “bourgeois” world of late nineteenth-century culture, still on the far side of the caesura of World War I and revolution after 1914. Yet in other aspects, he is also the prescient modernist thinker, articulating horizons of “transition” in modernity as *problems* for thought and action—a writer able to see situations of essential ambivalence of direction as inescapable challenges for thought, and resistant to resolving these challenges under any too neatly unifying theory or paradigm of collective emancipatory praxis.

Certainly it is true that from the perspective of materialist criteria in cultural analysis, some of Simmel’s statements on art may appear somewhat “romantic” or overly idealized in tone or rhetoric—in ways faulted by critics such as Lukács and Bloch. Admittedly, when read in the light of the many avant-garde movements of his lifetime that call emphatically for reintegration of artistic practices and everyday life and labor—such as De Stijl, Russian Constructivism, or early Dada or (barely a year after his death) Walter Gropius’s Bauhaus—Simmel’s pronounced attachments in his essays to ideas of “autonomy” in art can seem rather out of step with their time. His largely cursory remarks on photography and cinema

as new mass mediums are not especially refined; and notwithstanding the many rich ideas he brings to bear on forms of abstraction in modern European painting and sculpture, few readers can help but notice that no mention appears in his texts of figures such as Picasso and Braque, Cézanne and Matisse, Kandinsky, Malevich, or Klee—or indeed of any major prose writer or composer of the early century.²⁷

Yet important to appreciate is that in the disparate writings he completed by the time of his death but failed to systematize in the way he anticipated, Simmel is unlikely to have felt any strong urge to present an encompassing conspectus of the major currents and personalities of art of his time. The diverse congeries of manuscripts he produced over the course of his lifetime follow for the most part from an array of invitations and opportunities from friends and editors to explore the wider foci of his thinking concerning structural tendencies of modern sociocultural life. His essays on art should therefore be seen largely as felicitous by-products of his broader pursuits, and as a rule can be most fruitfully approached today with an eye to matters addressed in them explicitly, rather than to topics they might be thought to ignore or evade.

The next two sections of this introduction explicate Simmel's terms of appraisal in sociology and aesthetics and the main contours of his vision of epochal transformation in art from the Middle Ages to the late nineteenth century.

§2. Sociology and the philosophy of art

Despite publishing several pathbreaking early essays on sociological aspects of the arts, and despite the many richly sociological passages on art to be found in his magnum opus of 1900 *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel never penned any programmatic statement of concepts for a “sociology of the arts.” Nor, in the summa of ideas for sociology he published in 1908, which brought together his earlier studies, did he choose to rework any of his previous reflections on matters of aesthetics. Instead, he appears at this time to have viewed art as increasingly an object of *philosophical* concern, and not to have felt a strong impulse to spell out how his foundational conception of the “forms of association” might apply significantly to practices of the arts in society.²⁸

However, this is not to say that a distinctively sociological approach to art cannot be gleaned from his early writings and related in its contours to his later, more recognizably philosophical priorities. To begin this reconstruction, it will be helpful first to consider how Simmel's observations on “forms” and “contents” of social life articulate a key interest of his early

thinking in evolutionary social inquiry. This focus appears particularly in the essay “Sociological Aesthetics” of 1896, as well as prior to this in “Psychological and Ethnological Studies on Music,” a manuscript Simmel prepared originally as a doctoral thesis and published in 1882.

As a student in Berlin in the late 1870s and early 1880s, supported financially after the death of his father by Julius Friedländer, a family friend and owner of the sheet music company Carl Peters, Simmel completed an undergraduate dissertation on Dante and subsequently a doctorate and a *Habilitation* on elements of the philosophy of Kant, in 1880 and 1885 respectively. His work on music, starting out from a study of yodeling in Swiss and south German agrarian communities and expanding to a wider focus on song and music in folk life, was to be his main doctoral submission—but the thesis was rejected, leading him to submit a second doctorate on Kant. Inspired partly by precepts in the ethnological research of Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal—the two leading mid-nineteenth-century German authors in the field—Simmel’s study on music documents his emerging thinking about creative practices and social form. He proposes that while ethnographic analysis suggests no clear evolutionary priority of vocal song over verbal language in the formation of oral cultures, it draws attention to a key role for rhythm, rhyme, meter, and nonverbal sound in the growth of speech and verbal memory, through repetition and reinforcement of syntactic strands. Enacted corporeally in dance and other ritualized performances, music throws light on regular properties and structures of social groups. Recurring choral refrains in particular, Simmel notes, express relations between the primordial group and an intervening solo voice, narrating the travails of the community in song and melody.²⁹

In the essay “Sociological Aesthetics,” Simmel further develops this basic evolutionary conception of expressive form and society, pointing to correlations in changes in social structure and developments in symbolic idioms of representation.³⁰ This understanding mirrors concurrent ethnological studies in Germany and follows a style of inquiry broadly comparable to the work of cognitive anthropological scholars then prominent in England, such as James Frazer and Edward Tylor.³¹ After beginning with a series of reflections on two contrasting types of aesthetic attitude to the world—seen as dwelling, in the one case, on feelings of the oneness and wholeness of all things and, in the other, on perceptions of incomparable uniqueness of things—Simmel turns to the central proposal of his essay concerning features of representational symmetry and schematism as the simplest, most “primitive” principles of social structure in symbolic form. This is the thread of his thinking—resumed in *The Philosophy of Money*—

that most clearly guides Wilhelm Worringer's later influential thesis of evolving relations of emotive closeness and distance to the world in his book *Abstraction and Empathy*.³²

Simmel argues that as social structures evolve from more or less simple orders of communality to higher levels of pluralization, representational idioms assume a more naturalistic character, less oriented to supernatural hierarchies of divine being and less bonded to mechanical schemes of arrangement of experienced elements of life. With these changes comes a decline in more abstract, more externally rationalistic qualities of form, evident in the largely schematic pictorial styles of archaic cultures, which cannot tolerate high levels of existential environmental complexity or uncertainty and so, in some degree, seek to suppress, reduce, or simplify this complexity. Later medieval and early modern art, by contrast, shows a turn toward more three-dimensional qualities of representation based on a more empathic mode of receptivity to contingent phenomena of experience. These reflect societies marked by stronger levels of cognitive security and control over a surrounding life-world. Social evolution in this sense shows, for Simmel, a general developmental shift from schematic modes of figuration and spatial organization toward more asymmetric features, led by closer emotive connection to felt irregularity of experience.

Simmel's evolutionistic analysis continues in various iterations in his later work and colors the basic framework of terms for "forms" and "contents" he expounds in his work on sociology from the 1890s onward. "Forms" are, for him, the recurring typical codes and patterns of conduct arising from situations of interaction and in turn regulating interaction as a priori or a priori-like conditions; while "contents" are the variable motives and dispositional states of individual parties to interaction.³³ Although Simmel offers no extended application of these terms to art, any number of passages in his *Sociology* of 1908, as well as in his shorter work of 1918, *Fundamental Questions of Sociology*, suggest ways in which he might have contemplated doing so. Along these lines, for instance, he mentions "schools of art" alongside religious communities, business firms, families, political parties, factions, and cliques as examples of "forms" of group unity, subsuming individual members, and of conflict and competition with other groups.³⁴ Similarly, he comments on cultures of rivalry among artists, on dress codes and status symbols, on visual displays of group hierarchies, and signs and ciphers of diffuse group influence and authority over space in saliently marked frames and boundaries of social life.³⁵ Likewise, in his 1910 essay "The Sociology of Sociability" and in two shorter excursions in *Sociology*, on adornment and "sociology of the senses," Simmel reflects on aspects of the aesthetic presence of individuals

and groups in differential relations of bodily nearness and distance, in sight, sound, touch, and smell, in contact of the eye, in coldness of the stare, in secrecy of the whisper to the ear, and so on.³⁶ In these pieces, also, Simmel dwells at length on situations such as the intimacy felt by members of a theater or concert audience in contrast to the more detached public experience of exposure felt by visitors to an art gallery.

In each of these cases, Simmel's concern is with ways in which typical social dispositions and mentalities can be aesthetically sustained, sanctioned, and reproduced in various respects, and at least implicitly with ways in which practices and institutions of art can reveal and realize definite forms of social power and identity of groups and individuals.

Closely related are the parallels Simmel also suggests in his early work between social relations of form in art and social relations of religious life. Adopting an approach not dissimilar to Émile Durkheim's later, more comprehensive work in the area, Simmel writes of religious beliefs and practices as largely the products of feelings of special common belonging in social interaction.³⁷ Communally shared states of awe, fear, devotion, and yearning, he tells us, evolve into more conscious mental images of the cosmos, which in turn find expression in symbols of supernatural agencies. In like manner, he suggests, artistic and general mythopoetic narratives articulate social relations of shared vital perception and solidarity. Religious and artistic visions express common social textures of experience, solidified in definite rituals and repertoires of conduct, in speech, song, imagery, and iconography.

In his writings after 1900, however, Simmel begins to refer to both art and religion less prominently as socially or sociologically relevant phenomena of form and instead more as *sui generis* regions of *mind as such*.³⁸ Although sociological interests still pervade his writings, increasingly they give way to a more philosophical orientation of his thinking, tending to serve only to illuminate philosophically relevant shifts in epochal conjunctures of art at moments in history, rather than more empirically specific, smaller-scale situations and events. Art (and religion) are now more often the sites of illumination of a priori forms of *mind* than of forms of society. Works and practices of art, while still fundamentally social in meaning, are from this point onward, for Simmel, more the historically unique deposits of deep general categories of perception over the *longue durée*. Accordingly, artists feature in his discussion less as points of intersection in preexistent social fields and more as expressive makers and interpreters of social relations in their own right.

Paradigm-setting in these connections are the many writings Simmel prepares after 1900 on philosophical conceptions of art in early

nineteenth-century German romantic thought after Kant and Goethe.³⁹ Notably, in a series of lectures on “philosophy of art” from the winter semester of 1913–1914, his last lecture course at Berlin before moving to Strasbourg, Simmel clarifies that his concerns are jointly with art and other elements of mind as more or less differentiated spheres of understanding that crystallize gradually into a priori structures of perception within general cognitive developmental processes.⁴⁰ The a priori or a priori-like “forms” that “make society possible,” in the sense in which he speaks in his earlier writings, are now more saliently the world-making ideal categories of mental synthesis that shape experience into unitary frames of meaning.⁴¹ Together with religion, philosophy, and science, art emerges as a distinctive language of understanding that arranges experience in particular ways, such that modern ideas of autonomy of art express only one feature of a universal process of “autonomization” in orders of consciousness.

Broadly in the manner of Wilhelm Dilthey’s historicist reworking of Kantian philosophy at the turn of the century, and of German neo-Kantian philosophy more widely, Simmel revisits Kant’s outline of the three cardinal domains of knowledge, morality, and aesthetics and re-describes their significance for philosophy as socially produced outcomes of an evolutionary historical process.⁴² Works of art, on this account, begin as forms of picturing experience within frames of ideal value and desire. These forms of world-picturing gradually come to be set down in material media and performances as objects with a generalized meaningfulness or “validity,” or *Geltung*, for particular communities. Works of art thus originate as formative acts of “vision of the world,” or *Weltanschauung*, externalized in sensory objects. Particular frames of perception serving practical purposes as means of orientation in the world emerge more into awareness as forms and objects of perception in their own right, removed from other more functional motives of perception. Works of art focalize ways of seeing the world in everyday conduct with particular accents and emphases, arising first in deep ongoing entanglement with practical needs and ends of life, then gradually solidifying into more bounded figurations in their own name—as “ends in themselves,” or objects “in their own right.” In this sense, Simmel writes, all more or less special ways of reporting, articulating, or depicting experience are to be seen as “fore-forms” of art. All more or less figurative acts of presentation of experience express artistic acts *in nuce*. Ordinary visualizers of the world are “embryonic painters”—just as all ordinary knowers of the world are at root scientists.⁴³

Simmel thus sees in Kant’s description of aesthetic objects as “purposive

without a purpose” the starting point for an understanding of processes of differentiation of aesthetic value from other contexts of value.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding Kant’s famously rather limited preoccupation with questions of the logical structure of judgments of taste and minimal concern with works of art as such, Simmel’s train of thought begins from a conviction of the importance of appearances of interior unity and “totality” in aesthetic objects. Even as Kant’s interest is largely in aesthetic objects only insofar as they express judgments of beauty in the natural world, his conception of autonomous purposiveness or “finality” in aesthetic objects stands for Simmel as the key stepping-stone toward a more thoroughgoing interrogation of the distinctive capacity of works of art to organize diffuse elements of experience into figurations of ideal necessity. Works of art, he considers, even as they originate from contexts of transitory purposes of life, essentially establish boundaries around themselves, borne of patterns of internally coherent sense and meaning. As special objectifications of ways of seeing, sensing, and feeling reality, they are “fragments of the world” and at the same time worlds of their own—or makers of their own worlds. A work, he writes, is “embedded in life’s full stream” and nevertheless “sequestered from life.”⁴⁵ It has an insular character within the sea of our daily purposes. It stands in this sense as “life’s Other, the deliverance from its praxis, its contingency, its temporal flow, its endless concatenation of ends and means.”⁴⁶

In one way, for Simmel, this steady emergence of art as a distinct field of value is a culturally specific phenomenon of European affairs from the early Enlightenment period onward. It stands as a historical fact, linked intricately to conditions of trade, travel, and growth in cultures of connoisseurship of prestige artifacts among members of the urban and landed gentry as patrons of the arts and visitors to museums, galleries, and sites of ancient ruin.⁴⁷ Yet in another way, it is also in principle the feature of a more universal dispensation of the mind, whereby certain perceptual forms and objects become their own ends, even as they may continue to serve various social functions, such as functions of display of class status and distinction or ritual symbolization of group bonds and identities. Even as works of art may advertise, glorify, or sanctify wealth, power, and authority for particular agents that patronize, purchase, or flaunt them, they retain an ideal value and meaning of their own in the manner in which they revisit and recode reality on a plane of sensuous form.⁴⁸ Through line and color, through light and shade, rhythm and rhyme, cadence and melody, metaphor and narrative, and so on, works of art resolve, reorder, and re-present seemingly fragmentary, futile, empty, or fortuitous occurrences into structures of inner wholeness and harmony.

In this sense, he writes, in strands of life that seem to “run on indifferently, incidentally, and inimically to one another,” works of art disclose something in truth “deeply interconnected and mutually harmonious,” and in so doing proffer a “redemptive, felicitous gift to us . . . a presentiment and surety that life’s elements at their deepest level do not perhaps drift apart from one another with such desperate indifference and contrariety.”⁴⁹

But while bounded from contingent temporal events, art, Simmel underlines, is not removed from contexts of definite historicity. Works of art emerge within a continuum of historical developments, and the meanings they impart to the present are the products of sensuous contents of mind in generational reception over the ages. All felt meanings and values of art belong, that is, within an accumulation of expressions of “objective mind” (*objektiver Geist*), in the historicist sense of the term evoked for Simmel by Wilhelm Dilthey’s relativistic reworking of Hegel’s vision of the elements of “absolute mind,” set down in art, religion, and philosophy.⁵⁰ In different “styles of the epoch” (in Dilthey’s phrase), works of art draw on the distinctive sensory properties of their media to illuminate different contours of the “world-mind” in its journey to self-knowledge through history—from classical antiquity to the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to the nineteenth-century industrial age.

Like Dilthey and other voices of the era, Simmel here clarifies that no overarching scheme of integration exists for all of life’s disparate expressions in art, on the model of Hegel’s grand system of philosophy.⁵¹ Art enacts a quest of mind for self-knowledge in sensuous form, but it does so discontinuously and in no fashion that finally assimilates lived experience to pure contents of ideas. Although some patterns and progressions can be discerned in evolving artistic codes, no overall system exists in the sense of Hegel’s historical metaphysics of mind. Ongoing vital flux in art implies no pattern of final subsumption of art in philosophy in the manner of Hegel’s postulate of the “end of art.”⁵²

Similarly, Simmel underscores that art resists interpretation in terms of some pure act or state of contemplation of eternal “ideas” in aesthetic experience, in the sense of Schopenhauer’s vision in *The World as Will and Representation*. Although Schopenhauer, Simmel argues, is right to highlight one deep vital continuum of affect and impulse subtending all fixed individuating concepts of the intellect—which Schopenhauer calls “will” and Simmel calls “life”—he is wrong to suggest that in the momentary event of experience of art, life’s condition of endless illusory willing and striving is absolutely suspended.⁵³ Although each authentic event of perception of art involves an act of breaking with everyday practices, no such event of rupture occurs in a way that absolutely removes ideal

being of the cosmos from supposedly merely fleeting appearances of the world in subjective space-time perception. Schopenhauer, Simmel warns, reposes meaning and value in art “exclusively on the idea expressed in it” and thereby makes art little more than “an indifferent tool of the Idea.”⁵⁴

Closer in his sympathies to strands of thought in Germany after Goethe and the early romantic movement after Friedrich Schlegel and others, Simmel urges that art fundamentally has meaning and value for spectators insofar as it is sensuously *perceived* by them, in “intuition,” or *Anschauung*—a key term in Simmel’s lexicon. Art brings into form a particular lived view, perception, or *Anschauung* of the world and is itself an object of *Anschauung* in the world. Thus all content in art exists only in sensuous appearance (*Erscheinung*), rather than “behind” or “beyond” appearance.⁵⁵ Art conveys no ideal reality or being behind appearances and comes into existence only in physical space-time extension as the artist’s organic process of “forming” or “shaping” materials into a “figuration,” or *Gestalt* or *Gebilde*—not through relay by the artist of any preformed mental “idea.” Art arises from a work of shaping urges, feelings, and sensations of the self into form, and is to be thought of less as objectivated mind, or *Geist*, than as expressed feeling, or “soul,” or *Seele*—Simmel’s most frequently used term in these essays, in preference to the word *Geist*.⁵⁶

Most importantly, art expresses “soul” or “psyche” by embodying meanings of experience in inner “movement,” or *Bewegung*—by which Simmel means a decisive way in which inner feelings take on shape in art as the “animation,” or *Beseelung*, of existence.⁵⁷ Motion in art appears not as a contingent emotional state of the artist or viewer, reader or listener, but as the objective ensemble of sensory signs in a work that express flows of meaning as such. Movement need involve no direct representation of physical action, of moving limbs or whirring wheels, and so on. Works seemingly static in character, such as many landscape paintings, portraits, sculptures, and religious images, can be replete with motion in this special sense of interior psychic feeling. In Michelangelo’s flying Creator, in the Sistine Chapel, or Grünewald’s Mary, sinking back in grief at the sight of Christ on the cross, Simmel writes, movement appears as an immanent quality of the pictorial surface, void of any sense of definite “before” or “after” in the life depicted.⁵⁸ Movement in art thus articulates qualities of duration and interconnectedness of things in lived experience, beyond atomized quantities of representation. Embodied in art are contexts of essential “flow” and “development” in form, which spectators constantly reenact as they move from one sensory feature of a work to another and set each in relation to the next.

But psychic meanings and motion in art, Simmel emphasizes, also

vary with shifts in historical styles, codes, and conventions. Over the ages, movement shaped by form points to diverse symbolic idioms through which animate life reacts to a surrounding world of material existence and strives to find meaning and direction in it.⁵⁹ Natural physical regularities, on the one hand, and moral-legal norms and institutions of society, on the other, stand over against soul in the individual as a constraining, downward-pulling force of “gravity,” or *Schwere*, leading artists to present visions of unending conflict and struggle as well as potential play or concord between feelings of freedom and necessity, of will and fate, of self and world, as opposing poles of life. In different epochs and atmospheres of culture, movement as soul, form, and gravity in art describes “the condition of our life’s accession to visible expression” and “decides the style of individual phenomena, in life as much as in art.”⁶⁰

Further, at decisive moments in history, Simmel continues, form in art and consciousness may deteriorate into conventionalized formulae of presentation, alien to life’s creative freshness and spontaneity.⁶¹ At such moments, form may cease to orient soul in its dialogue with outward worldhood and materiality and become instead a hardened thinglike feature of the world itself, standing over against soul and sapping its energies. Life may then rebel not only against old cultural forms but “against form itself, against the very principle of form,” felt as something hostile to life’s powers of origination or liable to fragment into diffuse shards of obligation without inner connection or purpose. At times of rapid industrial social change, in particular, form may exert such a mechanizing effect over life as to be mistaken in some way for life itself, triggering a quest for some kind of escape from form within form. This, for Simmel, is the chimera of things believed graspable in their unformed rawness—in naturalistic verisimilitude.⁶² In such cases, a real underlying process of segmentation of perception has occurred, as a result of regimented systems of labor that compartmentalize life and tend to substitute static signifiers of things for polyvalent qualities of meaning in flow.

As Simmel writes in his influential essays of the 1910s on the “crisis,” “conflict,” and “tragedy” of culture, modern consciousness attests increasingly to a need to renew conditions of life susceptible to routinization by dogmatized forms; and it witnesses equally to problems of reaction against form, driven by longings for authentic certainties of life, purged of complexity and ambivalence.⁶³ As Simmel underlines in the introduction to *Philosophical Culture*, his influential volume of essays of 1911, modern consciousness faces an ever-wider array of rival claims to ultimate values, ideas, and worldviews of life and is no longer in a position to define any substantial unity of eternal problems of existence, in the manner of the

past's "perennial philosophy."⁶⁴ Instead, thought must accept a character of essential flux, flow, and relativity of concepts and ideas and seek henceforth to cultivate a distinctive voice, style, or attitude of inquiry, with a view to addressing the conflict it encounters in the protest of life against closed, rigidified form. Philosophy moves thus more and more "from metaphysics as dogma to a kind of metaphysics as life," to a new panoptic habitus or "culture" of reflection—such as in the manner that runs like a leitmotif across all the diverse themes of Simmel's presentation in this volume, from fashion and adventure to courtship and sexuality, to ruins and the Alps, Michelangelo and Rodin, and modern religious mysticism.⁶⁵

It is in these latter connections in particular that Simmel's own style of writing has been seen as itself in certain ways "aesthetic."⁶⁶ An idea of philosophy as life's continuous critical "movement" of reflection in diverse media means of necessity that writing must engage in figure and figuration of concept—in metaphor, simile, analogy, synecdoche, and the like. Open, relational, and resistant to completion, inquiry seeks to illuminate qualities of experience that tend to elude fixed categories of the intellect. Much in the sense in which the German early romantic philosophers and poets thought of the task of criticism as one of unending fragmentary enlargement of the poetic object, so Simmel is drawn to an "essayistic" style of discourse.⁶⁷ Whether in his last *Fragments and Aphorisms*, his many short "excursuses" within chapters of books, or his early conceptual allegories, poems, and parables, headed *Momentbilder sub specie aeternitatis* ("Snapshots under the Gaze of Eternity"), his preferred mode of engagement is more often the *essay* than the scientific treatise.⁶⁸ Exploratory in form, essayism allows Simmel to address a topic creatively, typically by entering a theme obliquely, then perusing it from multiple angles and perspectives—perhaps in something of the manner of the Cubist painters. In a spirit again akin to the German early romantic thinkers after Kant, Simmel seeks each time in a part or particular of something a significance of the whole and general. As with Kant's understanding of the disclosive, "reflective" character of aesthetic judgment, in contradistinction to scientific judgments under determinate concepts, essayism reveals a generality of the whole *in* the particular, rather than any whole that subsumes particulars under general types, concepts, or classes of phenomena.⁶⁹ In this sense it presents an aesthetic "reflection" of things in the uniqueness of their being, and at the same time in the wholeness and interconnectedness of their being. Constant exhibition of "analogy" and "affinity" between things shows them at the same time to relate to one another as signs of an otherwise concealed totality of life. Every apparent "disparate," "diffuse," or "fragmentary" character of things is not per se the antithesis of totality but, on the contrary, potentially and perhaps secretly their essen-

tial interrelation. Surface appearances in phenomena are not inherently illusory but, in principle, their very presence of life; and therefore such surfaces must be traversed and tapped for the depths they may reveal—or “plumbed,” as with a plumb line.⁷⁰

As many scholars note, Simmel assumes frequently a persona of the ambulant observer of affairs, in a manner reminiscent of Charles Baudelaire’s figure of Constantin Guys, as metropolitan *flâneur*, in “The Painter of Modern Life.”⁷¹ In the apparently incidental, fleeting, or fortuitous, Simmel seeks clues to a panorama of events. The sociologist as critic collects images, vignettes, and “exemplary instances” of society that capture a totality of occurrences in momentary instants of eternity—in the “snapshot,” or *Momentbild*. In many ways, Simmel writes and observes like an impressionist painter, and in this sense can be viewed as the quintessential “impressionist of sociology”—as Lukács first influentially remarked in his 1918 obituary for the author.⁷² But Lukács’s dictum can on occasion be misread by commentators. To speak of an “aesthetic,” “essayistic,” or “impressionistic” quality of Simmel’s writing is not to suggest that it need be seen as in some sense “eclectic” or unscientific in approach. It need only mean that any systematic and “objective” account of things for Simmel arises first through engagement with affairs in their disparately lived character; and the corollary is that whenever such affairs become essentially fragmented, as they do in an age of rapid social change, a practice of criticism must be espoused that engages with this fragmentary character of life in its own medium of reflection—so as not to presuppose a unitary order of things that may not in fact exist or, rather, may not exist in the way it might first be thought to exist. Thus Simmel’s inclination is not, as Lukács went on to charge, to proceed like a kind of “Monet of philosophy who has not yet been followed by a Cézanne.” Simmel is not appropriately thought of as a thinker who, in Lukács’s words, fails to find in “the plurality of philosophical approaches . . . a means for finding a complexly organized and yet unified system.”⁷³ Rather, Simmel’s proposition is that the very idea of a “unified system” must be approached with care. The very concept of philosophical-historical unity in culture must be treated in a way that respects flux, contingency, and disparity of life—and it is this that underpins in particular Simmel’s protean writings on developments in European art history from the Middle Ages to the modern period, to which we can turn now.

§3. Vitalism and art history

In his main statements on Western cultural and intellectual change since classical antiquity, Simmel writes of a succession of ultimate governing

ideas of life.⁷⁴ Oneness of being in ancient Greek thought gives way in the Christian Middle Ages to an idea of ascent of the soul to God, in division or “diremption” from bodily life. In the early modern era, oneness of being reemerges as the vision of indivisible unity of body and soul in Renaissance ideas of nature and the individual. In Greek art, eternal being appears as calm stasis, poise, and balance of the enduring natural body, whereas in Christian medieval art, diremption appears as the soul’s passionate upward striving toward God, with a new quality of movement in art that breaks apart the ancient world’s immobile unity of body and soul. Renaissance culture rediscovers this ancient unity in Neoplatonic doctrines of immortality of the soul in individual embodiment. With the steady shift toward industrial conditions of life by the later eighteenth century, however, Renaissance humanist legacies disintegrate, and soul once more feels itself estranged from bodily materiality. Amid accelerating technological and economic change and dwindling tissues of community, soul in art confronts an increasingly alien world of mass mechanization and longs to escape into a higher spiritual order, even as its most pressing challenge is in some way to find beauty, meaning, and direction in modern life as constant material flux. Nineteenth-century naturalistic, economic, and social-evolutionary theories after Darwin, Marx, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche bring Renaissance Christian-Platonist legacies to a close and appear to signify a crisis of faith—and yet these theories themselves, Simmel urges, dissolve in the very idea of *life* as the thought of redemptive striving for unity through transience, difference, and relativity.

These conjunctures Simmel explores through an array of considerations on personalities in European art history, concentrating largely on the two early modern figures of Michelangelo and Rembrandt. These masters Simmel interprets as visionaries of epochal “axial shift” in religious consciousness, from a medieval cosmos of objectively ordained, ideal contents of salvation under the auspices of the church to a more prototypically modern universe of subjectively lived relations to the absolute on this earth.⁷⁵ Both artists, for Simmel, present at once complementary and contrasting visions of the “fate” of human lives in this-worldly spiritual situations, mirroring in different ways the turn in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century astronomy after Copernicus and Galileo toward more “decentered” understandings of human relationships on this earth to God and the heavens.⁷⁶

Also interspersed in Simmel’s narrative are multiple shorter observations on other figures and milieus of painting and sculpture, and alongside these sit other substantial writings by Simmel on poets and playwrights of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Goethe, George,

Maeterlinck, and Gerhart Hauptmann, as well as essays on Rodin, Arnold Böcklin, and the mid-nineteenth-century Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier.

The following discussion turns first of all to Simmel's view of Michelangelo and Rembrandt as heirs to a Christian medieval world-picture in art.

In Christian medieval iconography, Simmel writes, many visual motifs seem as if designed for unification of the image as outward symbol of the soul in spiritual union with God.⁷⁷ Figures tend to stand in relations of essential being-with-one-another as members of one single community in Christ, in a way that contrasts with a more external or anecdotal character of interrelations of gods and mortals in classical art. As John the Baptist and Mary and the disciples point to Christ, so Christ exists for all human beings, and the church and saints embrace the godly "like an organism of interacting parts."⁷⁸ Motifs of prayer, humility, and rapture draw the figure both visually and spiritually together. Hands joined in prayer lend cohesion to the image, or when spread out suggest ideal receding lines in infinite convergence. In pictures of the Nativity, Christ's diminutive body, with little capacity for vivid independent expression, becomes visually the center of the picture and spiritual secret of the whole. The Virgin and Child appear with a centripetal harmony that incorporates in a single figuration all unity and difference of mother and child.

Similarly, Simmel observes, Christian iconography resolves in visual form otherwise contradictory experiences of the possible and impossible in creaturely life and lends positive value to otherwise negative states of pain and privation.⁷⁹ In scenes of the Crucifixion, the sinking corpse of Christ still gestures upward to God, and even as Christ on the cross appears at odds with the clothed, moved, and living figures gathered around him, himself again naked and motionless, gravity and death are defied and transcended. Suffering, sorrow, and anguish of life are here no mere "debit on life's balance sheet."⁸⁰ Renunciation of earthly goods denotes growth and openness of the soul on life's path, and death appears not so much as liberation from life's burden as its climactic heightening in the hereafter. Paradoxically, Simmel comments, Christian art realizes visually the seemingly impossible demand for perfection and transcendence in imperfect souls on this earth.

But union and wholeness of man in medieval art, Simmel maintains, is belied by a more basic fact of diremption of body and soul in Christian doctrine.⁸¹ Constitutive of the Middle Ages is a transcendent order of cosmic facts, closed unto itself and indifferent to the individual. In Byzantine art, as instanced in the mosaics of Ravenna, the figures, saints, and symbols of the Christian mysteries exist in their "objective sublimity" and

“metacosmic solemnity.”⁸² Here there can be no definite relation to mortal souls in transient time. Christianity teaches that individuals are most fully themselves in loving bondedness to others; yet because soul is here transcendent, and because only earthly embodiment fully individuates a self in finite time, individuality of the self cannot ultimately exist in medieval art. Gothic form looks upon nature and bodily life as an indifferent realm of the flesh, inimical to the spirit. Though it introduces a new dynamic of inner motion in art, this motion consists exclusively in ascent of the soul to God, and thus corporeal being remains little more than a bearer of movement rather than an expressive medium in its own name. Stone in Gothic sculpture and architecture tends only to exist to support soul’s ascending impulse, even as its inherent drive is downward to earth. Gothic arching, vaulting, stretching, and elongation, Simmel writes, enact plastically a contradiction in medieval consciousness that has its counterpart in monastic asceticism, whereby bodily mass is required to perform what it cannot perform, namely “to become the bearer of soul striving upward to the transcendent.”⁸³

In later medieval Italian art, the scale shifts somewhat as the ecclesiastical order of grace moves in a more downward direction to the pious soul—although here too piety resembles a generalized content that hovers above individuals and infuses or inspires them.⁸⁴ By the quattrocento, Simmel continues, soul is no longer subtracted from earthly corporeality. It returns from its release into otherworldly being and rejoins with sensuous life as the immediate unity of spirit and nature, of enduring form and dynamic gesture. This, for Simmel, is to be seen in the architectural topography of the city of Florence, as well as in the Renaissance form of the portrait, in which every antithesis of body and soul is overcome in the idea of individuality as psychophysical oneness and uniqueness of the indivisible person.⁸⁵ In High Renaissance painters from Signorelli to Raphael and Leonardo, individuality in biblical characters and saints is accomplished naturalistically as the personhood of the figure acting from its own center of laws, albeit with a marked upward orientation to heavenly existence. And yet still in some painters, Simmel observes, a vestige of the Middle Ages’ rupturing of body and soul appears to persist. Notably in Botticelli, soul only seems to return to the body in a kind of introspective realm of nowhere. Here soul appears homeless—frozen elegiacally in a kind of pathless melancholic distance from earthly substantiality.⁸⁶

By contrast, such distance is not evident in Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, of 1498. For here, Simmel writes, a Renaissance idea of the individual appears in dramatic reconciliation with medieval images of the sociable community of man in Christ.⁸⁷ In this work, we see for the first time

how “that full inner freedom of personality with which the Renaissance overcame the particularism of medieval man and lent its stamp to the modern age is achieved in a group painting.” The twelve disciples commune with one another as members of one fellowship, no figure more in the foreground than any other; and yet all react independently to Christ’s prophecy at fractionally different instants of time. Intimated in Leonardo’s fresco, Simmel comments, is “the problem of life in a modern society,” namely that of “how, from absolutely diverse and at the same time equally justified individual personalities, some kind of organic corporate unity can come to exist.”⁸⁸

But the signal personality of the Italian Renaissance for Simmel is uniquely Michelangelo; for in Michelangelo’s sculptures and Sistine Chapel frescos, body and soul coalesce in an unprecedented inner unity.⁸⁹ Notwithstanding earlier accomplishments in sculpture by figures from Ghiberti to Donatello, only with Michelangelo do we see a “given corporeal form breaking into this particular current gesture as its visibly logical consequence, for which only this particular body can be the substrate.” No longer do we see a “merely contingent relationship of anatomical structure and corporeal movements.” Into his works Michelangelo injects a tensile feeling of “being . . . dragged into becoming; form into endless dissolution of form.” Mood and passion in his figures are “immediately their form and movement: the very mass of their bodies.”⁹⁰

The common element of Michelangelo’s art, Simmel writes, is that “the fate of the world and life in general build the core and meaning of any personal destiny,” for in all his figures “a most intensely personal existence” is woven “into the most universal lot of humanity.”⁹¹ Life in Michelangelo’s figures in this way is a “generalized fate” that “press[es] upon them and shak[es] them to the core.” Life is “one force,” for which individual human forms are the vessels, symbols, or channels through which life’s destiny runs—and this differs, Simmel holds, from a more affected character of individuality to be found Renaissance portraits of the quattrocento.⁹²

But unity of form and motion in Michelangelo, Simmel underlines, is a state of struggle, not of bliss. Cast into solitude, his figures battle with a force of “gravity” that bears down on them, such that “gravity, on the one hand, and ascendant psychic energies, on the other, face off at one another with hostile obstinacy, like two irreconcilable parties.” Characters sink into a “nameless obscurity,” even as they long passionately for freedom. The result is an unending antagonism of powers that “interpenetrate” and “hold each other in check.”⁹³ Michelangelo’s unfinished sculptures emerging from the block of marble differ in this way from Greek images of fertile Aphrodite rising joyfully from the sea.⁹⁴ Unity is here a condition

of eternal attrition, of “battle without prospect of victory.” Michelangelo’s creative principle is one of Heraclitean conflict and defiance, of opposites drawn together only in “strife.”⁹⁵

Tragic struggle in Michelangelo, Simmel argues, expresses a limiting boundary in the Renaissance’s turn toward this-worldly situations of religious longing.⁹⁶ His protagonists yearn for salvation on a plane of earthly life, not of otherworldly being, in the sense pictured in Dante’s vision of ascending strata to Paradise. They long for things absolute and infinite on a level of “the intrinsically experienceable, even if never experienced.”⁹⁷ But here this “axial rotation” of the religious mind is not ultimately resolved, for a contradiction appears between the artist’s quest for redemption in sensuous existence and the persistence within this quest of a still largely intact cosmos of transcendent church authority. Michelangelo displaces to the earthly all infinity of the old religious yearning—only to find fulfillment of this yearning still further beyond reach. Even in their titanic perfection, his figures “betray a yearning whose fulfillment is not included in that rounded unity of being.” Their quandary, and Michelangelo’s own torment as creator, is that, whereas medieval religiosity “shows man a desired infinity on a finite scale . . . here a desired finitude recedes on an infinite scale.”⁹⁸

With Rembrandt, and generally with northern European art, on the other hand, the shift to earthly arenas of redemption is more fully accomplished.⁹⁹ As Simmel writes in his 1916 monograph on the Dutch painter, Rembrandt’s characters are simple, earthy, and gruff—in keeping with new, more egalitarian norms of life among merchant burgher families of the Protestant north. Peasants, laborers, and ordinary townfolk from lowly stations of life, they are not mighty, monumental, or promethean in gesture but, rather, more inwardly humble. These, for Simmel, are not Renaissance men of pride or grandeur who need to be confronted, leveled, or arrested by a spellbinding event, such as Christ’s words in Leonardo’s *Last Supper*.¹⁰⁰

In Rembrandt, Simmel considers, European images of freedom of the individual cease to stand merely as a matter of abstract principle within a higher scheme of things as “fate,” as with Michelangelo. Instead, “fate” becomes here the structure of a wholly immanent, concrete course of life for each person on this earth. Individuality is an interior process and rhythm of development of the self, and individuals express a nobility and majesty of being founded in the weaving of a continuous finite thread of existence in time.¹⁰¹ In Rembrandt, the move toward more modern forms of subjectivity occurs with a turn to inner flows of feeling in the person. Religion becomes a state of piety of the self—a way of life of the person in

relation to God.¹⁰² Religiosity is a “function” rather than “substance” of the mode and movement of life. Visible in Rembrandt’s paintings are therefore not so much objects, contents, or symbols of higher spiritual realities but qualities of motion of the soul in states of intimate groundedness and familiarity with death.¹⁰³

In some similarity to Max Weber’s comments on Protestantism and art, Simmel dwells on aspects of Rembrandt’s divergence of style from the Catholic world of Rubens.¹⁰⁴ Rembrandt’s figures, he notes, lack a “statuesque” quality, such as is felt in Rubens’s *Ildefonso Altar of 1632*, where the Virgin appears in the hierarchically organized space of the panel like a holy “princess” or “empress” over the secular order of man.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, Simmel reflects on Rembrandt’s distance from the Dutch organized Calvinist churches, as criticized by the fellowship of the Collegiants, with whom the painter is known to have held links.¹⁰⁶ Rembrandt’s visual language, Simmel comments, suggests no preponderance of institutionalized church forms over the individual, and thus no religion of divine law that announces the truth as absolute. Rembrandt’s painterly world is not a strictly Calvinist one, in the sense of any teaching of an objective order of duty on this earth, to which the godly belong and serve as members within a transpersonal community of saintliness.

Rembrandt in these respects, for Simmel, is the prototypically vitalist painter of modern fragile individuality. In contrast to a classical principle of timeless self-sufficient form of the individual in Renaissance culture, the self for Rembrandt is a processual “coming into being” of the person in time.¹⁰⁷ Unitary form of the self is no higher telos of life, as it tends to be in Renaissance painting, but instead, at most, a means or medium of life’s continuous self-articulation in time. Rembrandt’s figures, therefore, do not so much seek redemption from life in form as accept an inherent “antagonism of form and life.”¹⁰⁸ In particular, with echoes of Bergson and Bergsonian ideas of time as inner duration of the ego, Simmel writes of Rembrandt’s vision of life as the sense of one continuous dynamic process, not limited to spatialized units of time as discrete instants.¹⁰⁹ His figures are more intuitively familiar to us not only because they are more humble in station but also because life appears in them as an organic flow of feeling from within. In them, we glimpse life as a stream of aging, acting, and suffering of the person through time. We see not so much the form of a figure in its current state as the whole of a life flooding into the present from the past: neither “a self-contained cross-section of its temporal course” nor “a mechanical summation of singular moments,” but a “continuously form-changing flowing.”¹¹⁰ With a minimum of strokes of the paint brush, Rembrandt conveys that “a represented moment of

movement really is the whole movement or, better, is movement itself.” He leads us to understand that “life *is* immediately nothing other than the past becoming present.”¹¹¹

Further, Simmel comments that just as the past flows into the present, so the future in Rembrandt is expressed in the present as life’s bounding horizon in death.¹¹² His portraits announce death as life’s “inner ever-present reality of each moment,” coloring and shaping life from the outset.¹¹³ Unlike most Italian portraits, which tend to impart a sense of death arriving extraneously to life, at some fearful point in the future, Rembrandt’s convey death as “the steady further development” of a “flowing totality of life.” Thus, in Rembrandt’s often frail and mute-seeming figures, death is not essentially “less life.” In particular, in his Carstenjen self-portrait of 1666–1669, mirth and laughter in the artist’s elderly face are to be seen as youthful joy resurfacing in the aging man as death-in-life and life-in-death.¹¹⁴

Correlatively, Simmel notes, in Rembrandt’s Munich Resurrection of 1639, the pale and diminutive head of Christ in the distance must be understood as soul in life’s universal relationship to infinity in death and mortality.¹¹⁵ Here and elsewhere in Rembrandt’s works, Christ appears simply as inner piety of human life realized in its most exemplary savior on earth. Jesus, in Rembrandt’s etching of the Samaritan Woman of 1658, appears at first faint and recessive beside the central figure of the woman and yet is visually and spiritually the saving anchor of the picture.¹¹⁶ All of Rembrandt’s figures and scenes stand in this way beyond mechanical antitheses of the worldly and otherworldly. Earthly life is not raised to the absolute but immersed in the absolute as finitude and fallibility of the self in time and mortality—in something of the same sense in which Simmel writes of meanings of the concept of soul in the mystical medieval theology of Meister Eckhart.¹¹⁷

Religiosity in Rembrandt, Simmel underscores, appears less as any object or subject of representation than as a mood, idiom, or medium of representation.¹¹⁸ Even when Rembrandt’s scenes are not obviously religious or biblical, his painterly style is religious in tone or “air.” In particular, light and shade for Rembrandt express divinity as painterly light and lighting—as religious “atmosphere.”¹¹⁹ Light originates immanently from the surface of his paintings, rather than from an implied outer site or source of depiction. Figures exist in the space of the composition as animate interrelationships of form in light and shade—in a temporal coming and going away of life from clarity to obscurity. Light is therefore not a remote cosmic radiance of the divine in the world, like the sun shining over the earth, but the very being of the world in spiritual illumination.

In Rembrandt's *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* (1647), light in the night fire at the center of the painting does not so much illustrate a scene from the story of the Nativity as instantiate light in the story as the illuminating event of Christ's birth on this earth.¹²⁰

Different, Simmel argues, is the character of light in Baroque painting. As with qualities of drama and affect in Baroque style, light appears here for the most part only as an instrument of heightening and intensifying of contour, outline, and detail.¹²¹ Light, line, gesture, and movement in general in Baroque culture tend to hinge on a performance of dramatization and exaggeration. Light is a highlighting or climactic outcome of motion rather than any wholeness of motion in life's irregular real flow from darkness to form and visibility. Consequently, Baroque style tends to present only a theatrical artifice of movement. In later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian painting and sculpture, Simmel writes, soul and gravity of the world shift toward a feeling of unstable oscillation between "earthy material weightiness" and "a passion of will and force torn free of all natural laws of bodies and things."¹²² Relations of body and soul are consistent with a more mechanical and dualistic character of European thought and psychology in the age of Descartes.

In eighteenth-century painting from the Rococo style to neoclassicism and early romanticism, Simmel continues, different valences of "grace" and "dignity" pervade art in different tones of poise, posture, and gesture of the human figure.¹²³ "Grace" is here the semblance of effortless free motion of soul in space, while "dignity" is resolute moral struggle of soul with burdensome constraining forces of the world. Largely implied in Simmel's commentary is the broad contrast of idiom between the milieu of Catholic Europe in the age of reason and a more northern Protestant, protoromantic world of inner moral toil, instanced in part, for Simmel, by the music of Beethoven.¹²⁴ In its pathos of struggle of the will, Simmel avers, Beethoven's music echoes elements of the vision of cosmic fate of life in Michelangelo.

By the mid-nineteenth century, naturalist and realist currents of art respond to an experience of release of artistic values from stratified orders of authority in society.¹²⁵ Creative life diverges increasingly from moral and religious exemplars and in particular from long-standing ideal canons of beauty in the teaching of the academies of art. Art now moves in a fundamental sense "beyond beauty."¹²⁶ Naturalistic painters, writers, and playwrights seek new material truths of experience at a time of widening industrial conflict, poverty, and social inequality. Artists seek a new veracity of aesthetic perception, unprejudiced by time-honored ideas of essential being behind appearances. Artists shatter idols, taboos, and

hypocrisies of European bourgeois society and in a literal sense denude and demystify the human figure in art.¹²⁷

But new challenges arise, Simmel writes, as artists assert claims to aesthetic value in conflict with conventional moral and religious teachings. Incipient in the period are patterns of deep structural contention between rival “worlds of value,” in the sense in which Max Weber also writes of tensions between faith, intellect, economy, politics, eros, and aesthetics as ultimate spheres of redemptive “calling” in life.¹²⁸ Only gradually, in the imaginations of figures from Goethe to Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Rodin, is consciousness in a position to recover meanings of eternal beauty and goodness of the cosmos in finite fleeting appearances of the world. The search that eluded Michelangelo, the search, namely, for a “third realm” of things, able in some way to impart “redeeming completion of life within life itself,” is now, for Simmel, the quest for “a state of redemption coming from no God and not capable of coming from any God but rather from the powers of life itself.”¹²⁹

In late nineteenth-century symbolist literature and painting, Simmel considers, art responds to these challenges in one significant way. In Stefan George’s poetry in particular, beauty becomes the transposed cipher or symbol of divinity on this earth.¹³⁰ In George’s monumental style and motif of the “angel” guiding life from on high is to be felt a modern pathos of objectivating distance in poetry that elevates momentary contents of feeling of the self into forms of enduring lyric epic. In prose writing and criticism by Maurice Maeterlinck, on the other hand, subjectivity in poetry and theater takes the form of the ordinary average soul caught up in situations of the “tragic everyday.” In Maeterlinck’s essayistic text *Wisdom and Destiny* (1898), Simmel observes, all high Renaissance pathos of strife and struggle in Michelangelo, which still finds its way into Nietzsche’s worldview as sovereign “aristocracy of mind,” finally comes to a halt.¹³¹ Maeterlinck’s motto is now instead that “life’s highest values lie in all aspects of ordinary daily existence and have no need for heroic or outstanding acts and experiences in the face of catastrophic adversity.” Just as socialism and democracy in nineteenth-century political movements attach highest meaning to all that human agents essentially share in common with one another, so Maeterlinck’s ideas restore dignity to all “our silent, nameless, steady hours of life.”¹³²

All of these themes are likely to have been central to Simmel’s conversations at the turn of the century in Berlin with Rilke, whom Simmel first met on 14 November 1897 at a poetry reading by George at the home of Simmel’s friends Reinhold and Sabine Lepsius.¹³³ In a section of his book on Rembrandt, based on a lecture he gave in Berlin on 4 January 1915 on

the subject of “death in art,” attended by Rilke, Simmel quotes from a stanza in Rilke’s poem cycle of 1905, *The Book of Hours*.¹³⁴ Here he cites Rilke’s words: “Oh Lord, give each a death of his own / The dying that emerges out of that life / In which he had love, meaning and need.”¹³⁵ From Rilke and Rembrandt, Simmel writes, we learn that the more individual a being is, the more absolute is its death. Conversely, the more uniform and replaceable a being is—that is, the more it approaches a reproducible type, role, or function of existence—the less absolute is death in its meaning for life.¹³⁶ Types, forms, or functions of subjects do not die as such; only individuals die. Unique and individual is therefore that which is temporal and mortal in existence, and hence finitude of life in time is that which creates individuality of life. In both Rilke and Rembrandt, in this sense, we understand that “life creates itself only in the form of individuals.”¹³⁷ Similarly, in 1908, Simmel writes to Rilke of a way in which, in his poetry, “divine being enters into the individual particular forms and qualities and finds in them its full and exhaustive life. The singular does not melt into God and thereby forfeit its tangible, individually significant form” but instead is “strengthened in its particularity of form.”¹³⁸

At the close of the nineteenth century, soul in art yearns not only to protect or preserve itself from absorption in mechanized structures of existence but in some way also to reclaim the new order as its own element—to “construct everything given after its own image.”¹³⁹ In multiplex “expressionist” and “futurist” tendencies of the age, Simmel writes, art witnesses to a “struggle of life . . . to express itself purely as itself” and not to be “contained in any form which is thrust upon it by some other reality.”¹⁴⁰ In a painter such as Van Gogh arises a “passionate vitality” that strains the limits of painting and only contingently finds in this medium “a way of channeling its surging flux.” In Van Gogh is to be felt a “tempestuous sense of restlessness” that nevertheless emerges uncannily from scenes of “peaceful stasis.” In Van Gogh and many other artists, the direction of the age is toward a “feeling that an insurmountable paradox is created when life acquires—no matter how blithely—a passion for direct, unveiled self-expression.”¹⁴¹

All of these currents, Simmel observes, remain impossible to understand other than against a background of profound material, economic, and societal transformations of the later nineteenth century. Prominent idioms of expressive inwardness and intimacy in art reveal not only longings for escape from a world of anonymous urban relations but also, frequently, a real public dependence of artists on new institutional means and media of expression.¹⁴² New commercial and industrial spaces and architectures of the expanding cities drive a quest for affective directness

in art and at the same time furnish artists with ever more spectacular vehicles of performance of this quest. Thus every quality of intensified “subjectivism” in modern culture, Simmel underlines, must be viewed as reflecting conditions of underlying industry and economy in the new machine age. Modern art, in short, comes into being only essentially against a backdrop of conditions of money, markets, and metropolitan forms of existence, as objective societal media of creative life.

§4. Art, commerce, and the metropolis

In *The Philosophy of Money* and other influential writings on modern culture, capital, and the economy, Simmel characterizes the transformed world of the nineteenth century as one stamped by ever greater tensions between chances for spiritual growth of the individual and expansion in systems of control over material resources of life.¹⁴³ Revisiting Karl Marx’s theorem of the fetishism of commodities, Simmel speaks of prospects of replacement of “cultures of people” by “cultures of things,” in which qualitatively distinct values and feelings of life take on ever more standardized form as items for sale within a marketplace of goods, services, and consumer quantities.¹⁴⁴ Social relations of expressive agents take on a guise as “social relations among things.”

Nevertheless, Simmel stresses, the new order of society is also one of unprecedented opportunities for artistic invention and in no way necessarily an environment of peril for creative life. Even as commerce negates, flattens, or subsumes sensuous qualities under quantifying relations of exchange, it generates continually a thirst for experiment and innovation in culture, visible in ever more variegated idioms of depiction and narration in art. In the cities as centers of generalized reciprocity of society, marked by myriad concentrations of skills and ways of life, a fertile sense of the fundamental relativity of worlds arises. Amid seemingly limitless economic expansion, mediating chains of links in means toward ends appear ever longer—generating a sense of the constant recession of ultimate ends of life and fears of loss of moorings and yearnings for immediacy and authenticity of experience. Yet these very anxieties, Simmel emphasizes, tend also in many cases to intensify awareness of contingency and fragility of existence of the individual and the group in the cosmos and to nurture outlooks of skepticism, irony, and self-distance in consciousness and the arts.

Guiding Simmel’s reflections in these connections are several intertwined areas of his discussion. First is a concentration on phenomena of urban sociability, involving pronounced divisions between public

and private sides of life and heightened attitudes of aesthetic *distance* to the world. Second are phenomena of urban leisure, travel, and tourism, bound up with practices of escape to places of natural beauty and sites of ancient ruin. Third are forms and forums of the exhibition of goods—including works of art—and fourth, instances of fashion, ornament, and generalized stylization of life in the metropolis. Other themes of Simmel's essays—to be treated shortly—bear on concepts of style and the individual in painting and literature in Europe after the Renaissance period (§5); autonomy in art (§6); and meanings of representation and expression in later nineteenth-century movements after realism, naturalism, and impressionism (§7, 8, 9).

In his main statements on modern market economy, Simmel observes that as a medium of exchange set apart from immediate qualities of things, money stimulates growth in stances of contemplative detachment from things, in ways favorable for the emergence of distinctively aesthetic attitudes to the world.¹⁴⁵ A distanced habitus of the spectator and connoisseur of artistic qualities is in part brought into being by flows of money in societies that make such qualities objects potentially of purchase and display—of discerning “taste.” In urban life most generally, social behavior itself assumes increasingly a distanced, more formalized, and, in an important sense, more aesthetic character. As Simmel writes influentially in “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), a cool, “blasé attitude” arises in the cities, manifest particularly in fashionable codes of dress, speech, and comportment of the self. Cities become the arenas of values of tact, reserve, and discretion in conduct, of cultivated good “form,” of polish and “distinction.”

“Sociability,” or *Geselligkeit*, in this context, as Simmel considers in his 1910 essay on the concept, gathers importance as a norm of graceful civility in conduct, stemming originally from the chivalric milieus of the royal courts and households of the nobility.¹⁴⁶ Most visible in contexts of leisure and sport, in the salon, the soirée, and coffeehouses, in dining and dance, sociability indicates a modus of social life in which interaction appears to occur for its own sake, as an “end in itself”—without apparent ulterior motive or purpose. Diffused in the spaces of high society as good humor in conversation, as wit and sophistication, sociability describes a kind of theatrical “free play” of society with itself. Suggestive of a “symbolically playing fullness of life” that follows its own “immanent laws,” sociability in this sense is “analogous” to art, as a play of form in social relations.¹⁴⁷

Yet the historic aristocratic roots of modern urban civility, Simmel underlines, become contested over time amid rising affluence in the cities, enabling wider sections of society to appropriate outward material

signs of esteem and regard. Distinction in the older, more Olympian spirit of Nietzsche's "pathos of distance" takes on new meanings as traditional markers of class status based on ownership of inherited wealth in land and rent become eroded by rising market relations of interaction.¹⁴⁸ Against a background of increasingly impersonal relations of transaction within centers of dense physical cohabitation, codes of traffic between social groups become more labile and more a matter of the dominant market trend. By means of money as wages and credit, middle-class, and increasingly lower-class, fractions of society acquire an ability to purchase access to symbols of prestige. As a consequence, cultures of fashion and distinction in social life, previously confined to circles of the gentry, become more a generic ethos of city-dwellers of average means.¹⁴⁹

Within these contexts, artists of the urban world typically explore unresolved anxieties of exposure of the individual on the stage of society.¹⁵⁰ Art responds to feelings of fracture between public and private faces of the self and to challenges of managing boundaries, masks, and personae of professional role and propriety. Conflicting relations of emotional closeness and distance to others, requiring at one moment honesty and openness, at another, coolness and reserve, tend to find release in moods of brooding and introspection. These, for Simmel, are the impulses underpinning the rise of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literatures of affective intimacy, expressed in cultures of letter writing and the modern novel of personal self-exploration. As printed material and higher rates of literacy begin to predominate over oral village cultures in the fashioning of identities of life, written media of communication enable acts of discrete sharing and imparting of felt secrets and sentiments of the self over distances.¹⁵¹ Most generally, trade, machinery, and contractual relations of interaction liberate individuals from bonds of dependence on figures of moral sanction or censure, such as family, kin, and elders, and at the same time relieve and remove them from points of contact with forces of the immediate natural-physical world. Money in urban culture, economy, and psychology, Simmel writes, becomes in this way a "gatekeeper of the most intimate sphere."¹⁵² Generalized commerce and artifice of society set the conditions under which individuals seek to "secure an island of subjectivity, a secret closed-off sphere of privacy."¹⁵³

In other ways, in Simmel's commentary, money marks and creates ambivalent symbolic boundaries in urban life between spaces of admission and display and spaces of exclusion, stigma, or secrecy.¹⁵⁴ Alongside the historic central city districts of high finance and administration emerge bohemian scenes in which a tolerance and excitement in regard to difference, deviance, and the unknown stimulates dissent, experiment, and

encounter among strangers. Anonymous monetary transactions provide release from conventional moral codes, enabling tacit acceptance of phenomena such as widespread prostitution, yet also calling into being new cultures of eros and seduction and changing relations of the sexes, including the emancipation of women and the rise to prominence of women writers and performers, such as the celebrity actresses in part at the forefront of Simmel's writings on theater and the variety of expressive practices he terms "female culture."¹⁵⁵ But as taboos recede and once restricted zones open up to a flow of clients and consumers in the purchase of commodities, other spaces of the city withdraw behind walls of enclosure. These are the shifts and contradictions at play for Simmel in effects of fluctuating light and shadow in representations of city street scenes, as well as in myriad urban thresholds of transit and obstruction marked by doors, gates, windows, and bridges. Metropolitan life discloses a topography of fears, curiosities, and enticements of the subject, of the gaze of the shopper and the voyeur, the police inspector and the rentier, of spectacle and speculation, of social-psychological calculation and investigation.¹⁵⁶

Equally, inward-turning mentalities in the city combine with more outward-turning attitudes of yearning for escape from claustrophobic interiors.¹⁵⁷ Forms of leisured travel, tourism, and adventure in urban lifestyles reflect a hunger for experiences of exotic remoteness and removal from the here-and-now. In this sense too, for Simmel, urban culture responds to a craving for forms of aesthetic distance and distantiation of life—for images of things "primitive," "pure," antique or primordial in origin. As Simmel remarks in two essays on the aesthetics of the Alps, it appears as little coincidence in this light that romantic landscape painting arises in the nineteenth century in tandem with the spread of new industries of health, leisure, and travel.¹⁵⁸ In Alpine landscape painting and travel alike, he suggests, a mood of intoxicating highness appears to offer prospects of absolution from wearisome everyday labor in the metropolis. Amid feelings of isolation and disconnection in the cities, travelers and convalescents find in the Alps a promise of "fairy-tale regions of the sensibility," a sense of "secret homeopathy, a reconciliation, a salving elevation."¹⁵⁹

Similarly, Simmel observes that cultures of microscopic inspection in the cities find a counterpart in discourses of the urban intelligentsia that long for a sense of the encompassing totality of things.¹⁶⁰ As science and technology draw the world ever closer to perception through inventions such as the telescope and the microscope, and through accelerated speed and ease of movement across space, phenomena also appear to recede from consciousness; and therefore a longing arises, Simmel writes, "for

that distance which commands an overview of all concrete details, for a bird's-eye view in which all the restlessness of the present is transcended." In this sense, *aisthesis* in the microcosm, in the revealing detail or fragment, becomes at the same time a demand for *aisthesis* in the macrocosm—in expansionary distance.¹⁶¹

Relatedly, Simmel writes of metropolitan life as spurring an interest in travel to cities of the preindustrial era, including notably to the Italian historic cities of Rome, Florence, and Venice.¹⁶² As prestige destinations for the affluent and mobile, these ancient sites promise an experience of the city as a delectable "unity of apperception." Viewed aesthetically, the three cities evoke different kinds of ideal figuration of diffusion and diversity in oneness over space. For the spectator gazing on them in a state of free play of the imagination, each offers an attractive image of resolved conflict of life over time. In physical extension over the ages, the cities conjure an idea of the organic wholeness of past affairs as inherited culture or "heritage." In Rome, in this way, is to be felt a quintessence of ruin in history, the city's mythic aura of eternity suggestive of a kind of dreamlike harmony of the past in the present, wherein manifold epochs melt or blur into one another in a feeling of focal radiance. In Florence, as center of the Renaissance, is to be sensed a great architectural topography of the mind in natural self-cultivation, its noble feats of accomplishment in art and science embodying reason and form in a perfect balance of life. In Venice, on the other hand, is to be felt something more akin to an unraveling of life in theatrical play. Unity in the city of canals and crepuscular light now assumes an atmosphere of trancelike monotony. Surface masks and appearances threaten to lose their moorings in existence, uncanny in their sense of a display of protean life.¹⁶³

In these essays, Simmel implies strongly that, as ciphers of an aesthetic unity of history, the Italian cities carry significance for the present only within a reality of conflict and discord as facts of life for the great mass of modern laboring society. Nevertheless, he considers, these and other settings retain meaning for the present as the deposits of ancient struggles of life that need to be recalled. As monuments to decay, the cities speak of ruin in the same sense in which Simmel dwells at more length on the concept of ruin in an essay in *Philosophical Culture*. Here he names ruin as the moment at which unity and balance of nature and mind in history break apart to reveal once more their "world-pervading original enmity."¹⁶⁴ Different from any damaged or partly destroyed manuscript or artifact, ruin in the crumbling building constitutes a new aesthetic entity in its own right—one in which nature has "transformed the work of art into material for her own expression, as she had previously served as material for

art.”¹⁶⁵ Aesthetically, ruin symbolizes and testifies to a fate of unending flux of achieved form in historical process.

As aesthetic experiences, ruin and landscape also, for Simmel, evoke features in common with phenomena of the exhibition of goods in metropolitan culture. As he observes in the essay “The Berlin Trade Exhibition,” exhibitions in modern commerce and society serve increasingly to accentuate a “shop-window quality of things” in the display of commodities.¹⁶⁶ In particular, world trade exhibitions allow a city to project itself as a species of cosmopolitan world-city, able to present “a copy and sample of the manufacturing forces of a world culture.” And physically in the space of display, exhibition halls built of glass and iron tend to advert to themselves as ostensibly temporary constructions with a style of worldly, airy lightness and impermanence.¹⁶⁷ Admittedly, Simmel implies, goods contemplated in exhibitions seem to differ from ruin and landscape insofar as the latter suggest phenomena of remoteness in time and space, as things experienced essentially *in situ*, rather than extracted from place of origin or site of manufacture. Yet all three contexts of experience share traits in common inasmuch as all involve phenomena perceived at once in distance and nearness, such that things are brought before the gaze of spectators and arranged socially for them as scenes of allure.¹⁶⁸ All three, in short, represent situations of framed, sociable comity with aesthetic qualities.

Similarly, art exhibitions, Simmel notes, enact striking relations of aesthetic distance in nearness of display. Art exhibitions, he writes—in one of his earliest essays, from 1890—enable images potentially of “the most discordant contents” to sit cheek by jowl with one another in the smallest of spaces. Born of disparate contexts of origin, pictures appear such that “within minutes, the excitement-hungry mind can travel pleurably from one pole to another of an entire world of artistic projects and sample the most distantly related varieties of sensibility.”¹⁶⁹ But Simmel also harbors a concern that art exhibitions may tend to draw painters into competitive situations, whereby multiplied differences of style increasingly blur in the consciousness of spectators and feed only a craving for yet further apparent difference, creating a potentially unending corrosive cycle.¹⁷⁰ Soon benumbed, blunted, or pacified in organs of sense, he worries, visitors to galleries may come to experience states of both “hyperaesthesia” and “anaesthesia”—lusting for things ever more outwardly novel, shocking, or extravagant in appearance.¹⁷¹

Nevertheless, Simmel resists a negative assessment of the function of exhibitions in metropolitan culture, sensing that the new institution reflects simply a more fundamentally collaborative and cooperative character of artistic work in an industrial age.¹⁷² Moreover, he underlines that

the very meeting and collision of diverse styles and codes in the bounded setting of the exhibition may itself be the lever of an awakening of sensibilities from numbness or stupor. Through exposure to multiple juxtaposed images and ideas of the world in difference and discord, viewers may find occasion to “stand back from any particular one-sidedness that might otherwise draw the mind uncritically under a work’s spell.”¹⁷³ They may discover that rather than loss or erosion of value, an apparent absence of outstanding personalities in contemporary art indicates simply a “greater wealth of undertakings, challenges, styles, and genres borne by groups as a whole.”¹⁷⁴

Collaborative production as a feature of modern art points in turn, for Simmel, to a basic salience of style and stylization as essentially *social* principles of modern creative activity.¹⁷⁵ Style, Simmel proposes, relays facts of societal generality in culture that select and transform elements of behavior into typical common formulae of conduct and communication. Style raises qualitatively singular facets of life into generalized conventions, norms, or codes of presentation. In modern money economies and cultures, relations of symbolic difference and distinction in style can become largely commodity relations of self-advertisement of the object or person in market exchange, in ways that flatten depth, complexity, and peculiarity of expressive life. But style in principle remains the facilitator of artistry and ingenuity in form. Although it cannot by itself accomplish qualities of inner spiritual uniqueness of the object, in the sense in which Simmel sees this value realized in works of autonomous fine art, it represents a first stage in a process of the lifting, conserving, and instituting of transitory elements of sensuous life into patterns of distinctive artistic form. In this way, stylized objects constitute items of perception raised into figurations of ideal inner regularity and necessity, with an at least outward charm and character of individuality. Thus a stylized rose in an article of design is the simplified form of a rose, whose aesthetic function is “not to make the rose perceptible” but rather its “law of formation.”¹⁷⁶ In general, style transforms vital accident and fortuity of experience into orders of polished consistency and conformity to the rule—in ways that project sociable appeal and attraction.

In these connections, style, for Simmel, is linked also inherently to *fashion* as a social phenomenon, insofar as both concepts denote principles of the societal generality of form in social interaction, but where fashion in particular describes mutations of style over time as facets of shifting social accentuation of the object or person.¹⁷⁷ Fashion confers on actors and objects a semblance of vibrant individuality, even as it at the same time requires an actor’s or object’s obeisance to the group—in

distinction from other groups. Codes of fashion in leisure and consumption enable actors and objects in society to mark both differences from others and belonging with others as bearers of one special status or type of attraction. In distance and detachment from, and simultaneously in repetition and imitation of, the habits of others, social agents seek admission to groups—and elevation from groups.

Similarly, Simmel reflects on how articles of adornment in fashion bestow glamour on the bearer only to the extent that they at the same time remain visible as objects potentially of exchange.¹⁷⁸ A ring or necklace, that is, must appear regular, even, and perfect—free in this sense from any sign of contingent fallible life of the wearer as a unique person. Decorative items accentuate a bearer's prestige on the stage of society, but do so impersonally—by hiding or attenuating accidental real selfhood. Ornament exists for the gaze of others, even as it also protects, masks, or veils from others. Fragile human selves tend to retreat in this way behind expedient faces and facades of interaction, enabling a controlled management of impressions and sustaining an appearance of formal parity and dignity of the parties concerned.¹⁷⁹

Ornament, fashion, and style in general, for Simmel, articulate a generalized logic of exchange in society—of “commerce” in the widest sense.¹⁸⁰ As phases in the supply of symbolic repertoires of conduct over time, vogues, images, and identities assume increasingly a character of the fleeting and ephemeral, in ways that valorize newness and novelty as emblems of desire. In the more Marxian register of this analysis developed in the 1920s by students of Simmel such as Benjamin and Kracauer, fashion reveals the tendency of advanced capitalist economies to announce the ever-same and recurring as different and unusual.¹⁸¹ Style becomes in large part the style of life of commodities themselves, in competitive self-advertisement, submitting inwardly felt peculiarities of things and experiences to fungible instances of the generic type. Marx's “commodity fetishism” signifies, in this sense, that leisure, spectacle, and amusement in culture become sensuous figments of the circulation of capital itself in society, whereby workers in the factories, offices, and retail halls of the expanding cities place themselves at the disposal of one another as ornaments of their own reified powers of labor—as disposable functions of relations among things.¹⁸² As Simmel himself writes, in interconnected spaces of the city that enable leisure and consumption to take place as the obverse of work, the topography of the metropolis resembles a kind of “total work of art” in the service of money. As a seemingly perfectly integrated system of subservient parts and functions, the metropolis mirrors elements of the purposive surface beauty of the machine or factory—

or in other ways calls to mind ideas of the perfect, rationally organized state, in the sense of the imagination of the nineteenth-century utopian socialists.¹⁸³

Yet while style and self-presentation indicate largely phenomena of life's surface in society, they also, Simmel argues, stand as inalienable media of the very self-understanding of individuals toward one another.¹⁸⁴ Even in its liability to absorption in commodity forms, style furnishes individuals with vital tools of orientation to others in an increasingly complex and seemingly limitless modern world. Style affords relief from scenes of potentially overburdening exposure in public life, and, in the same manner as the cool, blasé exterior of the metropolitan personality, it allows for a detached, abstracted stance in some facets of life to stand back before warmer, more intimate conduct in other facets of life. Thus style, form, manner, and typicality in behavior, Simmel argues, are not to be seen inherently as features of shallowness of life but rather as frequently necessary "ways of creating a distance, in which the exaggerated subjectivism of the times finds a counterweight and concealment."¹⁸⁵ Even as form may at times conflict with, or erase or assimilate, expressive uniqueness of life, it gives rise historically to manifold systems of ethical incorporation of the individual in society—and such systems, Simmel considers, appear especially clearly in aesthetic images of the self in painting and literature in Europe since the Renaissance period. It is to this focus of his writings that the next section turns.

§5. Style and the individual

In a cluster of essays, Simmel writes of patterns of divergence in European art history between a generally southern Latinate, or "classical Romanic," style of presentation of the individual in society and a generally northern, "Germanic" style.¹⁸⁶ Observers of differences between northern and southern traditions of painting, he writes, are bound to recognize not only a qualitative difference of style but also certain quantitative differences of style and stylization. Some visual styles appear more style-conscious than others, and such seems to be the case with painting and literature of the classical Romanic world as compared with the more northern regions. Style in Italianate painting, Simmel observes, tends to reveal a lawlike principle of form, in which we sense an "overarching schema" that "prescribes the outline of the subject matter."¹⁸⁷ Form and style are here the general and atemporal in human appearances. Pictorial composition is clear, rational, and architectonic. Figures are finely detailed and delineated, and individuality tends to stand forth as a social phenomenon of

outwardly accentuated selfhood, visibly displayed to others on a public stage. Models are raised and stylized into general types of human being. Individuals tend to appear as representatives on earth of immutable essences of the person, and beauty itself has a value of the universally well-proportioned, of timeless being, of metaphysically fixed form.

By contrast, individuals in Germanic art tend to appear as themselves the general, and generality and universality here exist only in particularity. In painters from Grünewald and Dürer to Brueghel and Rembrandt, generality of the person is an accumulation of unique moments of life, rather than an abstraction or typification. Individuals appear and live in time and temporality, in motion and becoming. Phenomena of life gain meaning from the life process, rather than from any logic of closed form. Character is not a sum of details or attributes of the person, and composition in figure scenes is nothing abstracted from contents of the painting. Composition is an immanent organic union of inner forces of life that break out of each figure, or an inner unity that grows out of objects alongside one another, as with Dutch still life painting.

Simmel's theme of the difference and divergence of northern and southern European ideas of the individual is a familiar one in German thought, with many influential variants after Goethe and Herder through to Burckhardt, Nietzsche, Thomas Mann, and others—but Simmel lends to it his own distinctive slant. Aligned with the division is, for him, a further dichotomy between, on the one hand, generally “quantitative” understandings of the place of individuals in society, associated with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalist currents of thought, and, on the other hand, more “qualitative” understandings, arising in the romantic period largely in Germany.¹⁸⁸ Related to classical Romanic style in culture and ideas, the quantitative conceptions tend to view ethical values of equality of members of society as consisting in formal identity of individuals to one another under one common rule or norm of humanity. By contrast, the qualitative conceptions tend to posit human beings as equal to one another essentially in uniqueness and difference from one another. Where the former play their part in the rise of liberal-democratic political movements from the later eighteenth century onward under the banner of natural rights and rights of the citizen, the latter emerge more in reaction to fears of effacement of expressive wholeness of the individual at a time of rising industrial transformation. In the thought of Goethe and later Carlyle, Nietzsche, and others, Simmel writes, an unequivocally qualitative outlook comes to the fore in a conviction that “human beings . . . are only truly and fully individuals when they are not merely points in the world but themselves worlds.” Individuals in

this vision are sovereign coproducers of relations to others, rather than a “mere vessel of social influences.”¹⁸⁹

To a degree, these overlapping sets of distinctions in Simmel’s writings can at times give an impression of partisanship in his thinking—a suggestion of something like the German wartime nationalist discourse of *Kultur* as the struggle for authentic German community over against a supposedly deracinated Western European condition of egoistic *Zivilisation*—as voiced repeatedly after 1914 by figures from Thomas Mann to Oswald Spengler and others.¹⁹⁰ Yet these are not ultimately Simmel’s motives in these texts. Frequently, Simmel is at pains to disavow any view of Italianate art as inherently superficial or in any sense less “genuine” than Germanic culture and keen to emphasize that the differences he pinpoints are at most matters of degree rather than categorical essences of the two regions.¹⁹¹ Much more important to him is that revealed in his comparisons are tendencies toward excessively typifying concepts of generality and universality in European consciousness, arising, in his judgment, not only as effects of monied equivalence in modern market relations but more particularly as a result of certain deep cognitive legacies in the ancient classical Mediterranean world. In some respects in alignment with Max Weber’s interest in factors of cultural and religious “rationality” and “rationalization” involved in the moral facilitation of market relations but not themselves necessarily products of those relations, Simmel’s concern is with forms of individuality stemming originally from influences of those regions of Europe most directly shaped by ancient Mediterranean law, politics, and philosophy—in particular, by classical Greek Platonic teachings of the invariant form, or “idea,” or *eidos* of things.¹⁹² In Italian Renaissance culture, in this sense, a world of trade and scientific and artistic innovation sets down law and form as principles of generalized impartiality, enabling relations of objective inquiry and civic order; yet this world is also one that, over time, sees such principles converging with phenomena of state power, empire, and bureaucracy, with effects that increasingly create rigidified orders of society, alien to expressive difference of the self.

Driving this thinking is a key normative precept of Simmel’s vitalistic philosophy, concerning values of unique ethical accountability of the individual in modern times, which Simmel expounds in his late writings under the title of “individual law”—*das individuelle Gesetz*.¹⁹³ In large part a refocusing of Kantian moral theory through Nietzschean ideas of the sovereign personality, or *Übermensch*, Simmel’s theme of individual law imparts the thought that in a modern age, against a background of ever more complex ethical situations created by increases in societal divi-

sions of labor, moral injunctions become not only more generalized but also at the same time more particularized in character: more responsive to inner redemptive meanings of experience in the unique life-trajectory of the person over time. Increasingly, Simmel comments, modern morality articulates a “unity of purely personal self-fashioning . . . free from all mere formulaic generality.”¹⁹⁴ Kant’s deontological moral philosophy, so often associated with a decidedly Prussian northern ethos, may in fact be seen as pointing to more ancient classical Romanic impulses in Kant’s thought, stemming in part from Rousseau.¹⁹⁵ As against this, Germanic cultural and intellectual style asserts a quest for qualitative individuality of experience, in protest against rising petrification of life by received typifying forms and conventions. Visionaries from Goethe to Nietzsche, George, Rilke, and Maeterlinck, and above all Rembrandt, thus stand, Simmel argues, as guiding resources of this protest against dogmatized structures of conduct, including academicism in art and rising positivism and technicization in philosophy and science. The Dutch artist here represents not a simple nationalist totem (as with the image of Rembrandt evoked by Julius Langbehn in an influential popular book from 1890), but rather an exemplary modern painter of expressive individuality in culture.¹⁹⁶ From Rembrandt, we learn that individuality takes form not from idealized norms or types of being of the self but from life in finite flow, process, and becoming over time. In Rembrandt, we encounter in visual figuration the very thought of individuality as concrete universality, as “individual law,” in contrast to a pure abstract concept of universality that subsumes particularity under itself indifferently.

These concerns, Simmel emphasizes, contrast markedly with a persistence of Platonic norms of life in Italianate art of the Renaissance and post-Renaissance periods.¹⁹⁷ Even in an unmistakably accentuated character of the individual in such art, individuality remains largely a function of Platonic understandings of the preexisting essence, or *eidōs*, of the person, in which a real person merely participates. In Renaissance portraits in particular, form hinges on solidified life as it articulates itself outwardly in timeless, self-sufficient being. Form is abstracted from life in a way that enables repetition and regularity and makes invisible life’s inner current of development and mutability.¹⁹⁸

In portraits in general, Simmel considers, a contradiction tends to exist between a subject’s real mortality in time and history and a more atemporal character of painterly form and frame.¹⁹⁹ Form and frame stand out from transient life in the subject portrayed, and so remind spectators of their own essential mortality. But in Italian Renaissance portraits in particular, Simmel contends, style and stylization tend to erase this

contradiction and to assimilate life to the same atemporal level as form and frame—to the enduring idea or type of a person. A static, frozen, and paradoxically “dead” quality is the result, because soul in the subject has been rendered immortal. As famously with Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*, a characteristically mysterious, reticent, shrouded, or enigmatic aspect arises, in a way that suggests “a being . . . relieved of its temporal vitality.”²⁰⁰

Related is a prominence of line, detail, and clarity of design in Italianate art.²⁰¹ Composition tends to rest on a containing geometric scheme of elements that could be replaced by others. Pictorial space resembles the solidly built theatrical stage, on which diverse people move about. Analogous, Simmel considers, is the fixed form of the sonnet in Latin verse.²⁰² A quality of evenness, balance, and consistency of treatment is established, where line predominates over color and tone, and any psychological ambivalence of color is thereby eschewed—even where color is more prevalent, as with Venetian painting. In general, beauty in classical Romanic style is the ideal symbol or allegory of eternity, founded in symmetry, roundedness, and perfection of character.²⁰³

Sociologically, Simmel argues, these features highlight a sense of latent theater and spectatorship in Mediterranean society, where Platonic cognitive legacies find expression in cultures of moral outward display.²⁰⁴ Figures seek to represent themselves to others as bearers of generalized attributes and to surround or adorn themselves with a circle of interlocutors, to whom they direct or adjust their behavior, as before a more universal eye. This suggests a distinctive “social way of being-for-others,” visible in a feeling of the noble gathering of peers in civic assembly. In the many crowded figure scenes to be found in Renaissance art, Simmel writes, individuals seem to “possess a certain ideal spectator of their own, to whom they display their importance and attractions,” with the result often that when “a figure presents itself, it also presents some thing or quality, such as strength and beauty, spirituality and energy, dignity and depth: a general quality, of which the figure is a, or the, representative.”²⁰⁵

In contrast, Simmel observes, Germanic images of the individual appear less publicly inflected in character. Figures do not “present themselves” so much as “curve back in themselves.”²⁰⁶ Bonds between figures depend less on a consciousness of being seen than on a more intimate interrelationship; and when characters are aware of a viewer, as with portraits and group portraits by Frans Hals, the viewer is more tacitly involved with the characters in an associated scene of life.²⁰⁷ Facial features and physique are less definite in outline and have meaning largely only in relation to the figure as a whole. Individualization is not achieved by means of intricate detailing and does not rest on any precise specification

of characteristics within an implied ideal taxonomy that moves downward from the general to the particular. Life is captured inherently in values of the irregular and fortuitous, and above all in a sense of fragility and possible failure.

Throughout this discussion, Simmel is keen to acknowledge that as a phenomenon of socially produced, socially typical, and generic style, the formulaic manner in Italianate art is to be understood as describing only generally lesser known artists working from within set rules.²⁰⁸ It pertains less saliently to masters whose reputations rest largely on having flouted or risen above norms and conventions in their time. Classical Romanic style, moreover, ossifies only gradually as Renaissance ideas of the union of sensuous life and eternal idea in nature become more stringently fixed in the teachings of the academies and form becomes more secreted from the vital impulse that first affirmed itself in it in painters of the quattrocento.²⁰⁹ Later, romanticism and other nineteenth-century movements protest ardently against this hardening of life into form in classical style. Yet frequently, Simmel cautions, this protest of “life against form,” particularly as it unfolds in Germany, carries difficulties of its own, relapsing in some cases into amorphous kinds of national-cultural emotionalism and obscurantism.²¹⁰ Repeatedly in his statements on culture and politics during World War I, Simmel inveighs against ideologies of communal “roots” and rootedness of peoples in discourses of the age, urging emphatically that every quest for authenticity in Germanic style take points of guidance from its “other,” its “counterpart” or “supplement” in Latinate civilization.²¹¹

Very much in this spirit, Simmel urges at length in relation to Goethe that literature in Germany discovers its truest vocation not in rejection of classical Romanic ideas but in “reciprocity,” or *Wechselwirkung*, with them.²¹² Goethe in Italy, Simmel writes, comes to an understanding of beauty, nature, and classical antiquity in Renaissance culture as not extraneous or antithetical to Germanic style but as realizing values of inner spontaneity life in reason and lawfulness. Truth and value for Goethe, in this instance, are not only that which serves and “fits” with life as constant fructifying process but that which impels the poetic soul to reach beyond itself to a world of challenges and opposition to itself. Unity of the self exists only in unity and dialogue with others—and in cultivation of a “literature of the world,” as Goethe famously puts it in his late work.²¹³

In his monograph on the writer from 1913, Simmel interprets Goethe’s vitalist poetics as the exemplary late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century voice of resistance to an age of mechanized life and labor.²¹⁴ Correlative in significance to themes of noncalculative free “play” in Schiller’s

Letters on Aesthetic Education, Goethe's vision presents creative acts not as instrumental means to projected goals but as their own expressive ends of life. Life is the growing organism unfolding from itself through mutation and development in unending oneness of form, or *Gestalt*—and individual human life becomes or resembles art in this process to the extent that, like Goethe's exemplary life, it realizes its own "individual law" in continual self-objectivation of the ego in the world, in education, or *Bildung*.

Different from Kant's epistemology of limits and boundaries of reason, Goethe's worldview is a holistic metaphysics of the unity of "value and reality"—of consciousness and being, as well as of art and science, and of beauty and truth.²¹⁵ The world's existence inheres already in all organs of sense of the creature, like the sun that shines in the eye of the creature that gazes on the sunlit world.²¹⁶ Knowledge is a work of the entire being of the knower as a willing, striving, and suffering agent. Form and forms of experience are not fixed structures of mind but fluidly created products of acts of shaping experience into "figuration," or *Gestalt*. Knowledge is a metabolic process of continuous reception and articulation of experience in perception or "vision"—*Anschauung*—wherein things are glimpsed in appearances as their inherent sensuous "idea." Things are not subsumed or classified under categories external to them but intuited in their unique being—in the "primal phenomenon," or *Urphänomen*.²¹⁷

Simmel stresses, however, that after *The Italian Journey*, nature for Goethe is no longer merely material for creative formation, as it is with the sense of supreme inner lyrical "feeling" of the ego in *The Sufferings of Young Werther*.²¹⁸ In maturity, Goethe's realization is that any creative urge that seeks only to augment itself in a feeling of overpowering intensity tends to consume and exhaust itself unless it is able to open out to things of greater objective existence in the world. Though life struggles constantly with form and objectivity and ceaselessly dissolves form into its own infinite flow of becoming, it cannot flourish without form, and therefore Goethe's ultimate question becomes that of how form is to be accomplished in life without rigidity or narrowness. Romanticism, in Goethe's understanding, reacts to this question with a will to assert values of infinite yearning. Yet such yearning, for Goethe, can only ever be toward definite contents of this world, and therefore romanticism ends only by drawing yearning into the very style of its language, as formless affect.²¹⁹ Paradoxically, Simmel writes, it finds satisfaction in yearning as its enduring state. It craves an infinite relation to the infinite, sensing the world as both means for itself and pure antithesis to itself. Living permanently in a state of resultant "irony," romanticism longs for the absolute, without ever reaching absoluteness or seeking to fuse with it in any articulate way.

In old age, Simmel continues, Goethe proffers a different solution to

the challenges that led some romantics later to find answers in mysticism or Catholicism.²²⁰ In Goethe's late worldview, art no longer competes with nature in the disclosure of order and beauty in being. Art is instead at peace with nature and free once more to drift into its own element. Poetry and science, appearance and idea, mind and world, subject and object: each opposing moment in these dualities reemerges in Goethe's late thinking in heightened contrast to its counterpart. Absoluteness is contemplated only in mediating form; but now form appears as something essentially fragmentary. Form becomes at most the symbol, allegory, or *Gleichnis* of eternity in being. As with the sense of Goethe's famous final verse in *Faust Part II*, finite transient phenomena only intimate infinity as metaphor or allegory.²²¹ Wholeness of the cosmos is revealed at most indirectly in the fragment—in a way that creates a hope of redemption for earthly life, even if not the assurance of it.

In other parts of his work, Simmel writes of affinities between Rembrandt's late portraits and Goethe's evocation of old age as "step-by-step withdrawal from appearance."²²² Goethe's understanding, he notes, is that as experiences and memories accumulate with age, they fade in specificity as the ego that carries them steps back from worldly affairs and simultaneously forward in intensity as these affairs' unifying substrate of soul. The subtending ego that synthesizes things in appearances reemerges from abstracted details of experience over time in full inward absorption of the world as fate. Thus in old age, artists rediscover a creative freedom of the ego—a freedom analogous to, though different from, that of youthful defiance or insouciance toward the world. In Rembrandt, Simmel remarks, we see this in the "aspatial gaze" of the aging painter as subject and self-portraitist, seemingly looking through or beyond all finite firm details of appearances.²²³ Similarly, in Goethe's confessional works of old age, nothing inhibits or embarrasses the writer because subjectivity has now ascended to a level of the most reflectively formed mind. Poetic voice has become deeply a work of disclosure of the world's cosmic objectivity of being. As with the last great musical compositions of Beethoven, form is here personal, fragmentary, and disjointed, and nonetheless thoroughly a facet of the world's objective order of creation.²²⁴

Also notable is one wider matter of kinship to Latinate motifs in Goethe's worldview, for Simmel. In Goethe's vision of oneness of nature in creation, Simmel observes, the artist as creator stands as quasi-divine presence over the created world, in something of the same sense in which Michelangelo and Dante stand behind their own cosmic scenes of creation in the Sistine Chapel and *The Divine Comedy*.²²⁵ Despite his characters' status as self-subsistent makers of their own worlds, Goethe's authorial involvement in his protagonists is felt continuously as the form-giving voice

of a higher creator. His personae, Simmel writes, strike us as “members of one great metaphysical organism,” as “fruit of one tree,” such that “even when all characters stand as autonomous beings and all sense of composition has been torn up, as in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, the poet behind them remains a ‘unity of apperception.’”²²⁶ In contrast, Simmel notes, in the plays of Shakespeare, characters express and inhabit their worlds in absolute severance from the author as creator. Even in the dark formless atmosphere that suffuses Shakespeare’s figures, nature is something “completely absorbed in individuality,” rather than emanating from the creating mind of the author—as with Goethe.²²⁷ Here, in this aspect, Shakespeare’s characters resemble Rembrandt’s figures, in contrast to Michelangelo’s figures; and therefore between Shakespeare and Rembrandt, on the one hand, and Goethe, on the other, a difference exists—*within* Germanic style—between the vision of multiple individual natures of individual characters and worlds and the vision in Goethe of one single nature as cosmic “mother” of all being.

Very clear in all these statements is that Simmel’s preoccupations are nearly exclusively with European cultural sources. However, it must be noted that at least in a few passages of his essays, Simmel dwells on stylistic features of images of the individual in wider, non-European contexts of civilization—if admittedly rather schematically. In particular, in a short text translated in this volume as “Note on Japanese Art,” comprising the second half of an article published, at first anonymously, in the Viennese magazine *Die Zeit* in March 1896, Simmel turns to a discussion of visual forms of the individual in Japanese art, referring to a recent exhibition of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Japanese woodcuts at the Berlin Nationalgalerie.²²⁸ Himself an admirer and collector of Japanese art objects, Simmel comments that Western spectators may notice in these prints a certain “simultaneous dispersal and gatheredness of form,” in which earthy weightiness and nervous impulses “combine . . . in a manner quite different from anything known to us, and . . . in rhythms, dynamics, and pliable regions quite foreign to us.”²²⁹ Striking, he continues, is a “sense of serene self-closure and self-containment” of the individual. Qualities of the temporal passing of life tend to appear in Asian representation as “generally negative or evil principles, to be avoided in favor of steady composure and persistent being.” As with images of the Buddha, figures here appear “entirely centripetal.” The human form tends not to “push or strive beyond the moment. . . . At one with itself, its conservative feeling for life makes every artistic expression a self-contained microcosm.”²³⁰

Although these remarks of Simmel are cursory, they have an important place in his discussion that bears on problems of exoticizing mentalities in European attitudes to things distant in time and space. His reflections

on the Japanese woodcuts follow after a first page of his text criticizing the conservative curatorial policies of the Berlin Nationalgalerie prior to the appointment of its new director, Hugo von Tschudi. In two further paragraphs, Simmel turns briefly to another exhibition of portraits at the gallery, by Gustav Graef, father of Simmel's friend Sabine Lepsius, whose husband's unorthodox portrait of his father, the Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius, the gallery had rejected some while previously.²³¹ Simmel's abrupt switch of topic to the Japanese woodcuts seems motivated by a sense of implied connection between Graef's failure, in Simmel's view, to convey a distinctively modern character of the reality of life and the new vogue in European cities for Japanese art of largely recent provenance but typically misapprehended by spectators as a generically archaic Oriental form. In both cases, Simmel implies, an important sense of the difference of past and present, of precedent and pastiche, of originality and imitation, has been obscured. Both cases highlight problems of superficial images of the remote or primitive-seeming in European consciousness at the *fin de siècle* and bring to the fore a typical desire of gallery visitors for a patina of beauty in things gleaned not from their raw and haphazard existence in contingent history but superimposed on them from idealized formulae of appeal. Graef's portraits, Simmel contends, tend to gratify a wish of spectators for the "soft, silky, and rounded off," or for a kind of art that "softens, flatters, and reconciles" and proffers feelings of "satisfaction with the sunlit surface of things."²³²

These matters flow in turn, for Simmel, from a predominance of increasingly distractive ways of life in the cities, wearing away at potentially deeper, more discerning sensory capabilities of the individual in an age of mass production and consumption. A growing tendency of galleries, theaters, dance halls, and other sites of popular spectacle, Simmel worries, is to promote nothing but "splendor for the eyes" and "titillation of the senses and intoxication of the nerves."²³³ Increasingly, inhabitants of the metropolis are left sated with experiences and poor in sensibility—so that they "have everything but possess nothing."²³⁴ But in conflict with these conditions, and challenging them in important ways, Simmel argues, are the demands of *autonomy* in art as the figuration in aesthetic form of a more authentic wholeness and freedom of the individual in sensuous life. It is to this key thematic in his essays to which we turn now.

§6. Autonomy in art

Art and works of art, Simmel affirms, bear an essential character of autonomy. Works of art, in their autonomy, stand apart from spectators and distantiate them from the world, and in doing so bring them finally

closer to the world. As autonomous entities, works of art disrupt ordinary habitual perception and in doing so reorient perception more truly to the world. In estranging ordinary life, they illuminate life. In common with religion and religious belief, art and works of art share a capacity to “transport their object to a distance far beyond any immediate reality in order to bring this object very close to us, closer than immediate reality could ever bring it to us.”²³⁵ As Simmel formulates this in a key passage of *The Philosophy of Money*:

All art changes the field of vision in which we originally and naturally place ourselves in relation to reality; it places us in a more immediate relationship to its distinctive and innermost meaning; behind the cold strangeness of the external world it reveals to us the spirituality of existence through which it is related and made intelligible to us. In addition, however, all art brings about a distancing from the immediacy of things; it allows the concreteness of stimuli to recede and stretches a veil between us and them just like the fine bluish haze that envelops distant mountains.²³⁶

Although in rhetoric and phrase, these and other formulations can seem to strike a debatably “romantic” tone, fundamentally Simmel’s interest is here in capturing certain core phenomenal characteristics of works of art as objects of aesthetic experience. Admittedly, Simmel can at times seem to imply a rather austere pathos of elevation of works of autonomous fine art from everyday life and labor, suggestive perhaps of the late nineteenth-century doctrine known in France, after Théophile Gautier, as *l’art pour l’art*, or “art for art’s sake.” Nevertheless, driving and underpinning his account is an eminently materialist interest in problems of routine habit in modern life that deform or distort capacities for appreciation of intrinsic perceptual qualities of aesthetic objects.²³⁷ Alongside questions of the flattening effects of dominant commodity relations in market economies is Simmel’s central conviction that autonomy in art gives expression in ideal form to a deeper, more authentic kind of sensuous self-fulfillment of the individual in modern societies. Pivotal to his assessment is that in disrupting everyday purposive frames, works of art shatter superficial forms of consumer contentment with life and bring individuals to a richer and deeper relationship to themselves and their world. It is in these respects that Simmel’s thinking can be seen as largely consistent, rather than at odds, with the more emphatically materialist positions taken up on similar themes by Marxist critics of his work, including Lukács, Bloch, Benjamin, and Adorno.

In several passages, Simmel emphasizes that to describe a work as in some way secreted from everyday purposes of life is not, *ipso facto*, to hypostasize such a work; it is simply to recognize a work's perceptual character for spectators as something inherently *causa sui*, or "purposive without a purpose."²³⁸ Though works of art come into contact with spectators only at contingent moments in time, they form their own ends as self-subsistent objects and, above all, are *experienced* as forming their own ends. Works originate in history and from life's flux over time, yet nevertheless are their own origin. They are works of "genius" to the extent that they are the "progeny" of artists as progenitors of independently vital, mentally significant entities. And like any "procreated," autonomously living and speaking human subject, of which a work is the cipher or symbol, works of art raise claims to value or *validity* in the meanings, feelings, and visions they convey to us—claims that remain separable in principle from contingent historical, sociological, or psychological circumstances of their conditions of genesis.²³⁹ Works, therefore, are not reducible in aesthetic meaning or value to their means, contexts, or conditions of production; they are not in principle the mere reflex of their time and source of realization—whether of their model or visual subject (be it a live model, or a historical, mythical, or biblical subject or personage), or of any psychological peculiarity of their makers, or of any mercantile, institutional, or political-historical fact attending their production.

In an essay of 1914, consciously titled "Art for Art's Sake," Simmel pays tribute to the French nineteenth-century discourse, while at the same time clarifying that a determinable concept of autonomy can and should be discriminated from wider, more ideological constructions of the concept.²⁴⁰ Works, he stresses, exhibit autonomy even and precisely in every awareness on our part of art's entanglement in practical relations of life. Material purposes are no contradiction of autonomy in art but, on the contrary, the sole basis on which such autonomy can be meaningfully understood and defined. Every sense of finality in a work arises first by way of the "detour" of the wider totalities of life in which art sits. Art's boundedness from life has meaning only by way of its boundedness by matters larger than itself. And conversely, all imbrication of art in purposive relations occurs only by way of art's ultimate freedom from those relations. Autonomy and material relations therefore depend on one another and imply one another as concepts. Works can be experienced as ends in themselves *and* at the same time understood as produced and "consumed" within definite practical social conditions. The doctrine of art for art's sake remains open to challenge to the extent that it responds to just one side of this antinomy and ignores the other; but by the same

token, any deterministic “sociologism” or purely mechanical “science of art” (*Kunstwissenschaft*) likewise remains questionable to the degree that it concerns itself only with social-institutional facts of art and ignores questions of aesthetic value.²⁴¹ Art for art’s sake and *Kunstwissenschaft* both rest on valid concepts, but both can lapse into dogmatized forms of themselves—the former by abstracting art from social-historical conditions of genesis, the latter by collapsing art into those conditions.

In the essay “Autonomy in the Work of Art” (1917), Simmel elucidates further this sense in which works exist in two orders of “lawfulness,” or *Gesetzmäßigkeit*: on the one hand, a conditioning lawfulness of social-material determinants, and on the other, an unconditioned lawfulness of intrinsic aesthetic forms.²⁴² The latter is the “lawfulness that each part [of a work] demands of another,” such that “when one part is as it is, another must also be as it is and not otherwise.” Such interior necessity explains a work’s “feeling of having escaped from all contingency of life into a realm of lawfulness . . . [that] is now also one of freedom.” A work appears to create a unique idea or problem for itself that it proceeds at once to resolve or to illuminate, and the quality of this resolution or illumination is the degree of a work’s merit or greatness for us. Accomplished works thus belong to that “rare type of phenomena that satisfy a need they themselves awaken in the very moment their existence satisfies it.” In an analogous manner to the ontological argument for the existence of God in medieval theology, Simmel writes, a perfect work affords us a sense that “its own concept requires that it exists, just as the concept of God requires that God exist.” A work exudes a feeling of gratuitous being, akin to the feeling of God as gift to the person of faith; for even as it originates historically from relations of contingent purpose, it claims for itself a character of self-sufficiency, which befalls the spectator like a gift.²⁴³

As Simmel comments in relation to the function of picture frames in paintings, autonomous works enclosed in frames differ from pieces of furniture in a home that exist largely “for us” rather than essentially only “for themselves.”²⁴⁴ A chair “intervenes in our life” continually insofar as we have constant traffic with it, and therefore a chair differs from works of art in their character of detachment from functions derivable from them. Like chairs and other domestic furnishings, picture frames reside at a boundary between objects of aesthetic interest existing largely for our purposes and objects present largely or purely “for themselves.” Indeed picture frames not only reside at this boundary; they mark and embody it physically. They at once symbolize and realize the threshold that exists between a picture’s autonomous being and its practical social life-world. Together with institutions of framing such as galleries and exhibitions

and nascent art markets that remove artistic objects from patrimonial and ecclesiastical settings and transform them into portable goods, picture frames play a part in the formation of an autonomous field of artistic values and thereby help perform materially a work's sense of inward self-reference—its “antithesis to us and synthesis within itself,” its “distance and unity” and “self-sufficient closure.”²⁴⁵

Similarly, Simmel reflects on the feature of the handle in pots, pans, urns, vases, and the like as an example of phenomena of aesthetic presence on a sliding scale between contexts of purposive activity and disinterested contemplation.²⁴⁶ To the extent that a handle evinces qualities of grace and elegance, it intercedes expressively in life's continuum of manual practices, and the character of this intercession describes the meaning of its aesthetic appeal for us. But for the most part, like picture frames or furniture, the handle of a jug or pitcher forms a segment of practical reality: as something “held in the hand and drawn into the movement of practical life,” it is “not intended to be insulated and untouchable,” and therefore it differs from a painting's ideal surface, which “can no more come in contact with actual space than tones can touch smells.”²⁴⁷

These cases interest Simmel for the light they throw on general structural processes of differentiation of autonomous “fine art” from “applied art” or “design” in modern culture. They illuminate, in particular, a way in which this differentiation becomes the precondition for emergent higher cultural values of the inwardly unique, nongeneric object—by which, however, Simmel does not mean that any given, intended autonomous art object always automatically surpasses an applied art artifact in aesthetic value.²⁴⁸ A poorly conceived painting or poem or novel, he acknowledges, can be inferior in aesthetic value to a beautifully designed chair or candlestick, costume, town hall, or railway bridge. Nevertheless, he underlines, autonomy remains for the most part a necessary condition for deep, expressive value-heightening in cultural objects. For in most cases of the largely minimally autonomous, applied art artifact, value-heightening occurs only to a degree, because the object remains beholden to formulae of style, fashion, and exchangeability, in a way that precludes any turning inward of the object to a unique ideal norm or “individual law” of itself. Aesthetically designed objects and instruments of our practical purposive relations that, like picture frames, flow around instances of autonomous fine art are not themselves fine art—however much they may materially aid such art in coming into being as features of a space, institution, or occasion of display.

Yet, problematically, in Simmel's assessment, rising commercial cultures of style, fashion, and ornament in the metropolis increasingly

obscure this differentiation and tend to promote the generic functional object as if possessed of some special charm of uniqueness, on a par with autonomous works.²⁴⁹ Articles produced according to formulae of exchange value come to be desired and supplied increasingly as signs of an individually distinguished ethos of life—with the result that inherent differences between means and ends of value in culture start to blur or fade in the consciousness of citizens, and intrinsic capacities of art to illuminate life through distance and detachment from life are harmed.

It is these nuances of Simmel's writing that Theodor Adorno arguably rather inaccurately characterizes in an essay of 1965 on Simmel's essay on the handle, charging the elder writer with an uncritical approach.²⁵⁰ Compared with a similar series of reflections by Ernst Bloch on the aesthetics of jugs and jars in the everyday domestic lives of working men and women, Adorno contends, Simmel occludes some important material underpinnings of the construction of artistic autonomy in capitalist societies. Yet Simmel is very far from wanting to sequester autonomous fine art from materially enabling conditions. Repeatedly, he speaks of fine art objects as never more than processual "fragments" of ongoing practices that only contingently become autonomous under circumstances of social organization.²⁵¹ Though ideal in validity, such objects always remain social and material in conditions of production, and while a tendency to self-subsistence of the object grows universally in modern societies, it does so in pronounced form only in modern eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe against a background of conditions of advanced industrial development and heightened class stratification.²⁵² Furthermore, Simmel underscores—and here his comments by no means differ greatly from formulations championed later by Adorno—objects that acquire a fully autonomous character as works of art always embody at least latently some critical content of awareness of the social world from which they stem.²⁵³ Autonomy in art has a capacity to illuminate critically the circumstances of modern economy from which it emerges. In particular, in an age of advanced market exchange, fine art not only breaks ideally with purposive relations; it also protests implicitly against any false pretense of autonomous uniqueness in the commercially produced, functional art artifact. This is the sense in which, in his essay on the picture frame, Simmel criticizes notions of furniture as laying claim to art— notions he describes as signaling "a hypertrophy of the modern sense of individuality."²⁵⁴ Precisely in enjoining distance from appearances of wholeness in life, autonomy in art holds out the prospect of, and demand for, a deeper, less superficial wholeness, uniqueness, and freedom of the personality,

released from facts of divided life and labor under dominant market relations of existence.²⁵⁵

Simmel's early 1890 essay "On Art Exhibitions" sets out this thinking in one especially striking way. From one angle, Simmel considers, pictures viewed at an exhibition seem to project ideal ciphers of our lives harmonized and unified—in glossy removal from material disunity in viewers' real working lives at the factories and offices.²⁵⁶ In the *mêlée* of a spectator's impressions of the images on show, exhibitions trigger a sense of plenitude of life that compensates fantastically for occupational limitation and specialism of the self in daily toil. Exhibitions seem in this respect little different from the shop window display as sites of promise of contentment. Yet from a deeper angle, each exhibited work refers in principle beyond this potentially illusory condition to the idea of a higher redemptive state of the self in society, set free from pure purposive relations of association.

Important in these connections are several more specific affinities between Simmel's writing and Walter Benjamin's later influential considerations on phenomena of "aura" in art—as laid out famously in his essay of 1936, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Both Benjamin and Simmel thematize relations of simultaneous distance and nearness in art and aesthetic experience; both speak of these relations as exemplified in the sight of mountains glimpsed from afar and yet with a feeling of closeness (an image of aura for Benjamin, directly echoing Simmel's image in the above-quoted passage from *The Philosophy of Money*).²⁵⁷ Both write of modern art as increasingly taking up functions of exhibitable display for widened audiences and as forfeiting, as a consequence, qualities of sacred charm ("aura") flowing from physical attachment to socially restricted spaces such as the cathedral vaults or palace interiors.²⁵⁸ But both also think of modern art objects and artifacts as acquiring new kinds of quasi-religious status within market relations and as thus readopting aura in certain ways while shattering it in other ways. And finally, both respond critically to this process, viewing artistic autonomy as necessarily repudiating any form of recoupling with religious or quasi-religious functions, inasmuch as both see values of autonomy in one value-domain as necessarily refusing service to any other domain—meaning that for both, the distancing of reality by virtue of which a work of art brings reality closer to the spectator cannot be a distancing that only leaves spectators still further removed from reality, as in the fairytale manner of so many popular aesthetic forms. As Simmel underlines, though religion and art both bring life closer-in-distance, modern art

stands essentially apart from and in conflict with religion and therefore cannot form its own quasi-religion or “religion of art” (*Kunstreligion*). It cannot masquerade as religion, in the manner of Richard Wagner’s vision of opera as dispenser of life’s transcendence in art.²⁵⁹

No less crucial for Simmel in these matters is, further, that those elements of thematic *content* that steadily gain prominence in autonomous art are no longer elements of a largely spiritual or metaphysical character; they are no longer contents abstracted from materially felt conditions of life but are, rather, increasingly, those very conditions themselves.²⁶⁰ The contents that typically find visibility are scenes, figures, and narratives deriving more and more from ordinary social life as this life appears materially to ordinary sense perception—and thus those works that most earn a title of autonomous are those that most truthfully seek to capture this material appearance of things in everyday life, namely “realist” or “naturalist” works. As movements, realism and naturalism in art are therefore to be seen as registering a claim to autonomy that is not mystifying but, on the contrary, directed consciously to facts of a materially felt world of things in an industrial age; and hence no contradiction need exist between these movements and autonomy in art, for now autonomy can only mean a claim and capacity of art to “represent” modern life truthfully in the character of its age.

Thus the concept of autonomy and the concept of realism, or naturalism, point alike, for Simmel, to core questions of the meaning of *representation* in modern art.

§7. Naturalism and representation

In his Berlin lectures of 1913–1914 and other writings, Simmel urges that naturalism expresses autonomy in art to the extent that it speaks of art as properly concerned only with being-in-appearance—rather than with any kind of being-behind-appearance (the proper concern of science, theology, and metaphysics), or with any normative, moral or political mode of communication.²⁶¹ Art achieves itself in naturalism to the extent that it finds in this movement its own authentically modern relationship to being-in-appearance, free from the influence of cosmological worldviews borne by institutions of hieratic authority in society, encompassing the church and the papacy, monarchy, patronage, and the nobility.

Yet this notwithstanding, Simmel argues, certain theories or programs of representation invoked in naturalism’s name remain open to criticism. To be rejected is an assumption of some naturalist commentators—if seldom of practicing artists themselves—that in seeking to capture reality

without prejudice or preconception, artists must in some way renounce their position as autonomous fashioners of experience and align themselves essentially with the very different value-worlds of natural science and socialism, or the politics of social reform.²⁶²

In a cluster of essays, Simmel expounds this understanding with a focus on different concepts of representation in naturalist currents of the nineteenth century, covering impressionist painting, graphic caricature, social-realist theater and sculpture, symbolist landscape painting by Arnold Böcklin, and—if rather cursorily—photography. In each case, his precept is that implied in representation is necessarily some work of “shaping contents of the world”; all representation involves a creative, interpretive act of framing, accenting, and valuing experience from different perspectives. As situated emotive agents, artists are more than “mere points of passage” from nature to the mind.²⁶³ Every naturalistic sense of “truth,” “honesty,” or “fidelity to reality” expresses a particular code, idiom, or affect of connectedness to reality in artists’ subjective sense of their world, rather than any literal task of reproduction of affairs. Often motivated by “a desperate attempt to overcome distance, to catch the closeness and immediacy of things,” naturalistic theory sometimes forgets in these connections that “nature” and “reality” rest fundamentally on a work of creative artistic vision of experience.²⁶⁴

In the essay “On the Third Dimension in Art” (1906), Simmel stresses that depth, perspective, and “tangibility” in painting and sculpture are not the “sum” or mutual “supplement” of the first, second, and third dimensions, any more than the sense of motion in art is the sum of points of location of a body in space-time. Depth is not an “illusion” in the sense of something deducible from the picture or constructed by it, but, rather, a particular “tone,” “nuance,” or “immanent quality” of the surface that optically enriches the image.²⁶⁵ The sense of perspective that gains ascendancy in European painting in the Renaissance period is not the import into art of something like a structure of reality discovered first in science, geometry, or mathematics, but rather the articulation in painting of a new language of representation that appears in art and science at one and the same time.²⁶⁶ Similarly and more widely in the essay “On Realism in Art” (1908), Simmel underlines that any sense of the depicted reality of things in visual art must be understood as a particular “accent” or “tone” of “specifically artistic devices.” Realist works do not so much reproduce reality as offer pleasure in things depicted *as* real. In them, we experience not reality itself but a “feeling of reality,” or a feeling of the “felicitousness of reality without reality itself.”²⁶⁷

Likewise in a section of his book on Rembrandt, Simmel reflects on

the question of the sense in which, in Rembrandt's 1628 etching of his mother, we *see* the fur in a fur collar she wears and recognize its "reality" from the drawing.²⁶⁸ Rembrandt, Simmel notes, conveys the fur with at most two dozen strokes of the pen. The fur's reality is not an inference of our perception—a supplement to the image, "reconstructed" from these fragmentary marks; rather, we see the fur immediately. Rembrandt's etching, that is, is not "a surface picture of that which his mother really wore" but an entity in itself. Though we would not recognize his etched lines as a fur collar had we not in some sense seen a fur collar in reality, this does not establish that Rembrandt's image is nothing but a copy of its object. We recognize reality in art, but how we do so is itself shaped for us by art. "In each epoch," Simmel underlines, "people see nature in the way their artists have taught them to see it."²⁶⁹

These themes bear on the few passing remarks Simmel offers on French impressionist painting in his essays. Such painting, he avers, is not to be interpreted in terms of some mechanical metaphor of the soaking up of impressions of the world on the canvas, like paper over an inkblot.²⁷⁰ Impressionism differs from the more situational realism of painters such as Courbet and Millet in responding to feelings of the fleeting instant of experience. In so doing, it exploits a "tension between absolute transience of the pictorial content and permanence of the work of art," and this it accomplishes as "one of the most consummate and consistent principles of art," focusing solely on "the colors, sounds, texture, or taste of things" as "representations" of the perceiving subject.²⁷¹ But every sense of vivid immediacy in impressionism remains here always a stylistic "affect" of reality—even if sometimes a psychologically highly intense affect, as with that felt in Manet's *Execution of Maximilian*, of 1867.²⁷²

Repeatedly, Simmel comments that even as artists invariably construct experience in the image of their imagination, they remain convinced frequently that the things they perceive really are as they perceive them to be. On more than one occasion, he recounts an episode of his encounter with Rodin in April 1905, in which Rodin spoke of himself as an artist devoted to "nature," and indeed as a "naturalist."²⁷³ Simmel reports seeing a head of a horse modeled by Rodin, as well as an Egyptian image of a sparrow hawk shown to him by the sculptor. Simmel describes both as "highly stylized," yet writes of Rodin as having referred to them excitedly as "Nature" *tout court*. "Nature" in this instance, he comments, simply *is* art for Rodin—just as art for the sculptor is "nature."

In an essay of 1917, "On Caricature," Simmel takes up a question of the sense in which values of objectivity of representation can be accomplished in art in a manner that seems sometimes the reverse of realistic in any sense

of “fidelity to the subject.” For in caricature, he considers, we find instead a self-consciously unfaithful, irreverent attitude. In paintings and drawings by Goya, Daumier, and others, a truth of the subject’s life and psychology is conveyed typically through a deliberate use of exaggeration, distortion, and truncation—through elongation of line and scale and so on.²⁷⁴ Facets and features of figures are stretched and distended in a way that “meets with no equal or countervailing quantity of other elements” and instead “congeals confidently into something permanent . . . as the rigidity and finality of an extreme, as the unresolved fixity of a relationship of part and whole.”²⁷⁵ Yet precisely this “unresolved fixity” of the image strikes us as pertinent in relation to its subject. Even as caricature bends, warps, or corrupts shape, outline, and balance, it plumbs a figure’s inner character. Satire and sarcasm in caricature strike us as right and just rather than capricious, because in the typical foibles of character it reveals, a real state of excess exists that perhaps only a visual style of excess can lay bare. Exaggeration occurs in caricature because exaggeration occurs in reality—in life.

Illuminating for other reasons, for Simmel, are the achievements of the novelist and playwright Gerhart Hauptmann and the mid-nineteenth-century Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier. In a short article on Hauptmann’s iconoclastic play *The Weavers*, first performed in Berlin in 1893 to a restricted audience under police supervision, Simmel dwells on how poverty and social class here gain prominence for the first time in German theater.²⁷⁶ Hauptmann presents class inequality as a new type of “real tragedy” for society, and at the same time breaks with long-standing tendencies to heroism of moral character in theater. His protagonists are not “sublime or noble”; they are not “at the mercy of diabolical oppressors” but “limited, uncouth, weak people, as low and stunted as the punishing atmosphere under which they toil.”²⁷⁷ Similarly, Meunier gives form in sculpture to mundane, unexceptional working life as content for art.²⁷⁸ His bronze sculptures of laborers engaged in manual tasks, “lifting, pulling, rolling, and rowing” industrial objects or tools, capture a “pure sensory meaning of work” in art. They show us for the first time that work is “not something extraneous to us but our *deed*”—and do so in a way that shatters centuries-old norms requiring men and women to appear in sculpture “so often . . . as restful, even somnolent, or as thoughtful or passionate or at play, but never at *work*.”²⁷⁹ In the fullest of senses, Simmel remarks, Meunier gives form to working bodily movement as movement for art. That is, labor in art for Meunier means not only physical working movement but also the new organized, social and political movement of the age called socialism.

Notable for Simmel in Hauptmann and Meunier is not so much a content of social criticism to be found in their work but the fact rather that such a content here appears *at all* as content for art. Significant is less social reality itself than social reality mediated aesthetically in their work. Naturalist theory, Simmel underlines, is here at times misled into a habit of equating artistic values with values of practical and intellectual enlightenment on the stage of society.²⁸⁰ As a program of representation, naturalism can tend to fix on a conviction that in art, reality must be captured somehow in detachment from aesthetic vision of the artist. Its difficulty lies frequently in a failure to appreciate that any pristine nature or reality behind or “beneath the surface of appearances is just as much a Beyond for art as Ideas above appearances are a Beyond for art.” As a result, naturalist discourse becomes “just as unfaithful to art as it accuses ‘idealizing’ art of being.”²⁸¹ To the extent that it promulgates a type of didactic art, or *Tendenzkunst*, it becomes only another kind of metaphysics of society—in somewhat the same unacknowledged manner as Auguste Comte’s and Herbert Spencer’s positivistic social philosophies.²⁸²

In other essays, Simmel turns to questions of abstract mood in art in scenes of nature in landscape painting. Here, he notes, natural phenomena frequently tend to elude successful realist depiction, even first at a level of facts of size and scale of the features depicted.²⁸³ In much the same way that architectural scale models invariably lack anything of the aesthetic power of buildings themselves, so mountain scenes in landscape painting leave viewers often with a feeling of the tritely diminutive.²⁸⁴ Notably in paintings of the Alps, Simmel writes, the colossal relationlessness of the mountain peaks, themselves visible only at great distance from the valley floor, seems to throw into question any possibility of delimited, focused representation within the space of the canvas.²⁸⁵ Mountainous landscape scenes seem to impel a feeling of the breaking of limits of definite individuating representation—a feeling, that is, of the “sublime.”

In “The Philosophy of Landscape” (1912), Simmel considers that nature is intuited in landscape painting as a framed “field of apperception.”²⁸⁶ In landscape, soul finds and expresses itself creatively in a physical scene of its own being as cultivated life. Infinite boundlessness of nature is glimpsed in finite boundedness as wholeness of existence; but such bounding can occur only in release from definite individuation, as mood and atmosphere.²⁸⁷ In landscape painting, art becomes abstract and “absolute” to the extent that, as with music, all mimetic relatedness to an outside world withdraws to a more interior realm of relations of soul in spatial enclosure.

In an essay of 1895 on symbolist landscape painting by Arnold Böcklin, Simmel affirms a more explicit connection between abstraction in

landscape and tendencies to abstraction in late nineteenth-century European art more generally.²⁸⁸ Characteristic of many of Böcklin's pictures, he notes, is a sense of "the delight of a summer noon hour," a "feeling of a world of slumber and tranquility reposing within us and rocking us gently." Soul lives here in "inner kinship with natural being, with plant life and animals, with earth and light" and yet also released from nature into a "freedom of its own," as if in "secret antithesis to nature."²⁸⁹ Symbolist imagery in Böcklin escalates toward a feeling of escape from objective sense and reference. Soul as arcadian calm, in the sense of the seventeenth-century mythological paintings of Poussin, becomes for Böcklin the most abstract condition of aesthetic life as such—for Simmel in something of the sense of art's retreat from mimetic coupling with the world in Mallarmé's poem *L'après-midi d'un faune*, famously set to music by Debussy (although Simmel mentions neither of these names explicitly). Notable in Böcklin, Simmel writes, is a feeling of suspension of "historical transitivity," of the "ceasing of temporal relations." Trees and ruins appear at the moment of their eternity, as if immune to the passing of time—not recalling "what they were before their collapse or decay." Böcklin's motifs radiate a "fabulous unreality and supra-temporality." Opposites are not unified; contradictions are not resolved. Reality seems to move "beyond 'true' and 'untrue.'"²⁹⁰

Böcklin's idiom for Simmel suggests a leaning of art at the turn of the century toward more elliptical, fractal, and ambiguous qualities of form: toward evocations, in Simmel's words, that "avoid the direct characterization of objects" and foreground instead a "vividly felt charm of the fragment, the mere allusion, the aphorism, the symbol, the undeveloped artistic style."²⁹¹ All of these developments imply an expanding sovereignty of aesthetic surfaces in relation to reality; and many turn, in particular, around a preoccupation with singular instants of experience—with the momentary "snapshot," or *Momentbild sub specie aeternitatis*, as Simmel calls this. However, in contrast to Böcklin and to the impressionists and other painters, Simmel contends, the literal snapshot of *photography* does not and cannot educe qualities of *art* in its medium because photography has solely a function of documenting and identifying things under the category of reality.²⁹² Photography's sole capacity, Simmel maintains, is to lead beyond the surface of the image "to the real image of its original" and thereby to "remind us of the original." Photography is no more than a means, a tool—rather than an end—of representation, and therefore it cannot be art.²⁹³

In passages of his discussion of the concept of movement in Rembrandt, Simmel asserts that photography can capture the world only in

static sections of time, rather than in any inner expressive stream of experience. By its nature a piece of mechanical apparatus, it conveys at most an outward simulacrum of motion, and when it appears to suggest motion most vividly, as with the so-called moving image of cinema, it only approaches movement without authentically realizing it.²⁹⁴ Motion in photography and film remains an illusion, comparable to Zeno's paradox of the arrow that steadily nears its target in diminishing fractions without ever reaching it. We are mistaken, Simmel insists, to think either of an arrow or of an art content as holding still at any one point in space-time, when life's movement in truth can only ever be one continuous flowing whole, not localizable at punctual moments.

Undoubtedly, these claims will appear contentious to some readers. Apparently unwilling to view the camera as much more than an extension of the biological eye, Simmel seems closed to ways in which photography can release expressive qualities in its medium—and manifestly can be described as having done so by the time of his death in its early history. Yet Simmel's most pressing claims and concerns should not be misread in this discussion. Largely his interests are not in photography as a specific device or genre of representation but only more generally in what might be called problems of photo-literalistic ways of thinking about representation in an industrial age. Most in focus for him are matters of a growing tendency in society to equate artistic values and meanings in images with capacities to convey likenesses of things—a tendency he sees as spurred by habits of efficient techno-mechanical mind and behavior in an era of advanced industrial production, on the one hand, and mass consumer distraction, on the other.²⁹⁵ Certainly Simmel's younger early readers from the interwar years—Kracauer, Benjamin, Balázs, and others—could see more subtly than him that even in an age of mass visual commerce and commodification, photography and film retain in principle an ability to enlarge and enlighten perception and to elicit expressive movement of life—in both Simmel's and Bergson's senses of this term—and in these respects to survive and indeed flourish as bona fide art forms. Yet these theorists too share Simmel's broader conviction that as a consequence of patterns of machinelike regimentation of life, modern citizenries become more liable to mistake complex polyvalence in sense and representation for static symbolic fixity, and so to revert to more passive kinds of perceptual behaviors, void of inner active imagination. In both Simmel's and his students' understandings, the concern becomes that perceptual acts and reactions slide all too literalistically from image to object—from form to content, from fiction to fact, from representation to reality. Form lapses potentially into little more than the reified artifice of movement, per-

forming movement *in* the spectator *for* the spectator, in seeming erasure of every substantial disparity between medium, self, and world.

Very similar concerns inform Simmel's thinking about *expression* in art.

§8. Expression in art

Just as representation is no simple matter of reproduction of objects, so expression in art, Simmel urges, involves more than mere acts of relay of inner states of the self. Mental and emotive contents are not dissociable from outward forms of these contents in shared symbolic systems of expression, and no soul or subject of communication preexists mutually understood codes of signs, materialized in sounds, gestures, actions, and surfaces of meaning.²⁹⁶

Referring here again more to unhelpful theories of expression than to actual expressive practices of particular artists, Simmel declares his sympathy for new idioms of emotive directness in European art of the *fin de siècle*. In buildings of the Jugendstil, he observes, ornament incorporates a new latency of mood and affect in architecture, while in popular dance, including in particular the new vogue for tango, erotic energy seems to yearn for release from convention “in a more unfettered way than before.” Similarly in piano music, he writes—alluding perhaps to early forms of jazz or ragtime—tendencies to free improvisation affirm a new “objectless passion of excitement” that “runs through the fingers with a certain pathos of immediacy.”²⁹⁷ Yet these and similar impulses in other art forms, Simmel insists, need to be understood in a way that avoids any misconception of expressive signs as simple instruments of imitation of inner states of the artist—as if fingers moving on piano keys or brushstrokes on the canvas indicated some immediate continuation of emotion in the performer or painter. To conceive of expression in this psychologistic manner is a fallacy that takes its place alongside naturalist theorizing as one further symptom of a widespread “mechanistic” habit of mind in modern consciousness.²⁹⁸

In two essays on portraiture and parts of his monograph on Rembrandt, as well as in the essay “The Aesthetic Significance of the Face,” Simmel emphasizes that portraits seek “the meaning of a person's *appearance*—not a meaning behind this appearance.”²⁹⁹ Portraits aim to “bring a subject's pure phenomenal character of appearance to a complete fullness of clarity, visual appeal and feeling of immanent necessity for us.” Features of a face in portraits are not the “carriers or tools” of “ulterior mental contents transmitted to us by them.”³⁰⁰ Animate life is released in surface facial contours in vital articulation with one another. Psychological depth or

liveliness of character is an accomplishment of the portraitist in shaping optical evidence into a pure unity of form. Inner life is expressed in and *as* visual presence and is in no way the copy of some pre-given state of the model or subject. In portraits, individuals acquire an ideal “wholeness of image” that differs from the more practical type of wholeness they exude to others in everyday purposive interaction.³⁰¹

A circular relationship therefore exists, Simmel underlines, between body and soul in portraiture, and it is a mistake of modern dualistic habits of mind to prise apart these two facets into discrete thinglike realms or “substances,” in the sense of Descartes.³⁰² In a fashion that only art can fully convey to us, we learn from portraiture that soul or subjectivity of the person exists only in corporeal appearance, and that soul in appearance simply *is* unity of expressive form of the person. Soul in portraiture is unity of the face, Simmel writes; for soul is here nothing but a quality with which eyes, jaws, nose, skin, hair, and so on cohere in line, plane, tone, and light as the visual presentation of inner, individual continuity of life.

Admittedly, Simmel notes, some forms of figural unity may express animate life only minimally or primitively. Simple diagrammatic forms and symbols, such as stick figures or dots-and-circle faces, indicate psychic life only in generic feature. Here animate cohesion consists in little more than a rudimentary scheme of unity, rather than in any more differentiated quality susceptible to feelings of the presence of a unique sentient being.³⁰³ But in the sense of the developmental difference evoked by the terms “abstraction” and “empathy,” as expounded under Simmel’s influence by Wilhelm Worringer (and likely further mooted by the two men in an exchange of letters after 1908), stylistic change in art suggests a pattern of widened incorporation of moments of irregularity and asymmetry of the face.³⁰⁴ In the psychologically advanced idioms that emerge among portraitists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, animate unity comes to revolve around signs of fragility and fallibility of the subject, in thrall to accident, age, and fate; and in the still more complex idioms of the late nineteenth century, as with “certain portrait busts of Rodin,” Simmel writes, “symmetry in the two halves of a face” has become “a last vestige of schematism to be destroyed.”³⁰⁵ Figural unity here expresses animate life increasingly in transitory *disunity* of the self, in ways perhaps implicitly parallel, for Simmel, to patterns of rising dissonance and chromaticism in Western music, as theorized famously in the early century by Schoenberg.³⁰⁶

Correlatively, in two essays on the poetry of Stefan George, Simmel writes that soul in lyric expression is to be understood as nothing but a unity of flow, rhythm, and formal eloquence in verse. Inner feeling in

poetry accumulates from articulately arranged sound and sense, and precisely such articulacy explains why George's poems, "even in their great distance from subjectivity and pure fidelity to laws of art, nevertheless can appear so wholly intimate, so wholly revelatory of last depths of the soul and personal life."³⁰⁷ George's lyric symbolism here crystallizes only a more pervasive kinship of poetry to music and emotive abstraction in art. His achievement is that even and precisely by means of a highly mannered style that consciously abjures any tone of confession, a feeling of disclosure prevails, as of "a soul sharing its most secret life with us." George's monumentalist idiom rejects any "naturalistic gushing out of unfiltered experience," in the fashion audible in poems by Paul Heyse, which speak rawly of the poet's grief at the death of his child.³⁰⁸

In his essays on theater and the dramatic actor, Simmel argues similarly for a need to understand acting on stage as an art form *sui generis*, irreducible in aesthetic status either to an actor's off-stage communicative talents as a private personality or to a playwright's artistry as author of the dramatic script.³⁰⁹ Acting represents a third medium of expression in its own right, and the task of actors is to bring to spontaneous life the fixed construct of theatrical texts in one singular, yet ordered and rehearsed, event of performance. Acting is thus an art of sensuous enactment of scripted roles. Not puppets of their roles but creative coproducers of them, actors perform freely within limits set down for them by the dramatist. Good, convincing, or "true" performances consist not in "realization," or replication of reality, but in consonance between a script and an actor's creative subjectivity—which explains for Simmel why there can be many, equally valid interpretations of a role, just as there can of a musical score or ballet part.³¹⁰ In learning and co-creating their parts on stage, actors discover characters growing organically within themselves, in much the same way that writers discover characters evolving in their imagination. Actors are not bare imitators of reality, or impersonators, because acting does not seek to duplicate reality, which is why theater differs from any category of pretense, fraud, or deception.³¹¹

In this last connection, Simmel refers in passing to a theme in Bergson's essay "On Laughter," of 1900: actors unable to do much more than imitate or impersonate others, Simmel writes, strike us as inadvertently comic, for the reason that copying in Bergson's sense is "mechanical" and thus comically clumsy or wooden, as distinct from fluent and spontaneous.³¹² But, as Simmel also underlines in "On Caricature" (1917), even deliberate comic impersonation in theater by no means involves any simple imitative act, for comic imitation is always creatively subversive, just as caricature is as a graphic art form.³¹³ Reflecting more widely on comedy in his essay

on caricature, Simmel observes that in satire, a broken, bent, or corrupted part of a character is led by the actor to drift free from the persona like some excrescence of its being, in a way that contrasts with the sense in which, in dramatic tragedy, the flaw of a hero is nobly reincorporated into the hero's totality of being as his or her redemptive dénouement.³¹⁴ Comic and tragic characters alike experience a stretching, breaking, or overshooting of limits of their existence, but comic figures are not vindicated in the same way in their downfall. Molière's miser in *L'avare* is more clearly a figure of caricature in this sense than Shakespeare's Richard III.³¹⁵ Comedy and tragedy reveal human beings to be "by nature breakers of boundaries," but comedy and caricature illuminate above all moments of smallness of human endeavor on the stage of society.³¹⁶

In other passages of his essays on theater, Simmel considers that actors may at times be tempted to perform too directly to their audience and so to neglect their art's ideal boundedness from real space-time events in the arena of the playhouse.³¹⁷ Classical seventeenth-century French theater is so rigidly stylized, he speculates, because it stems from a time in which members of the royal courts often took up parts on stage beside the players, in ways that had to be "countered by an impregnable self-composure and radical abstractness of the contents performed."³¹⁸ These challenges reappear in the present day to the extent that theater encourages increasingly high levels of direct audience identification with events on stage, due to theater's distinctive ability to engage multiple senses at once, through speech, action, music, lighting, and dance. As an "art form of total sensuality," Simmel writes, theater is prone to deteriorate into something little distinguishable from spectacle, in which actors face their audience, no longer as performers of ideal personae, but as more or less real personalities in their own name, as cynosures of society—as "stars."³¹⁹ However, he notes, an equal and opposite difficulty can arise when actors and dramatists claim too great a distance from live events and deny much outlet for spontaneous performing artistry.³²⁰ Here the mistake is to think of events on stage as composing a discrete parallel universe of their own, such that theater becomes no more than a "slave of the affect of reality." A play is then assumed to duplicate reality on an invariant plane of its own. In such naturalistic theater, an illusory "state of complete closure and indifference to the audience is sought on behalf of the theatrical image, as if no audience existed and dramatic events occurred of their own accord, . . . like real events unaffected by the presence of an observer."³²¹

In general, Simmel concludes, every quest for "naturalness" or "truthfulness" of delivery in theater must be understood as a distinct affect,

posture, or art of performance.³²² Theater demonstrates once again that art extends and enlarges experience only because experience is itself shot through with creative and artistic forms, frames, and constructs at every moment. Oscar Wilde, Simmel writes, is correct to say that “life imitates art”: we see life as art brings us to see it—but this is not, or not only, because finished works of art shape perception but because all perception is itself already, in its very process, artistic. Art describes the very character of our “world-picturing categories.”³²³

§9. Sculpture and modernity

Finally, this introduction turns now to a topic of special concern to Simmel, namely, to the art of *sculpture*. As a medium in many ways encapsulating questions of body and soul in art, sculpture, Simmel considers, expresses animate motion of life in especially tangible fashion.³²⁴ In different materials, sculpture examines relations of vital expressive flow to the resistant, corporeal “gravity” of the world, in diverse actions and afflictions of the human figure, in different tonal values of clothing and nakedness, and in shifting period conventions.³²⁵

Ranging widely over aspects of sculpture from classical antiquity to the early twentieth century, Simmel’s essays on sculpture center mainly on Rodin, while also setting out the more general themes of his vision of epochal cultural change from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to nineteenth-century naturalism after Meunier. Only ultimately with Rodin, Simmel argues, does sculpture show soul fully emerging into modern embodied being as free movement and flux of life. Only with Rodin is motion in sculpture fully affirmed and redeemed as vital societal materiality of existence—and not only as *content*, as with Meunier, but also as *form*.

Between September 1902 and November 1917, Simmel published four essays on Rodin. Of these, the longest is a statement he first published in 1909 and enlarged in 1911, with a short prefatory note on Meunier, for the volume *Philosophical Culture*, which also contained a reprint of his essay of 1910 on Michelangelo, as well as “The Ruin,” “The Alps,” and “The Handle.”³²⁶ In May 1902, Simmel traveled with his friend and student Margarete Bendemann to the major Prague exhibition of Rodin’s works (the largest showing of the sculptor’s works outside France in his lifetime), publishing his first essay on Rodin in September of that year.³²⁷ Simmel sent Rodin a copy of the essay in French translation, for which Rodin thanked him, inviting him to visit him in Paris. Then, two and a half years later, in mid-April 1905, Simmel wrote to Rilke in Paris, asking

the poet to remind Rodin of the invitation, and visited Rodin later that month, speaking with him again alone about a week later at his studio in Meudon, near Paris.³²⁸

Significantly, many of Simmel's ideas in these pieces resonate with themes in Rilke's two celebrated essays on Rodin, of 1903 and 1907.³²⁹ After first encountering one another in Berlin in November 1897, Simmel and Rilke remained intermittently in contact for the following two decades, and likely at one stage exchanged substantial letters. In late June and July 1905, Rilke returned briefly to Berlin from Paris with the intention of studying with Simmel, and it is likely that conversation took place between them regarding Rodin at this time, and perhaps again when they met in Berlin ten years later, in January 1915, after a lecture by Simmel titled "On Death in Art" (as discussed above, §3).³³⁰

Almost certainly influenced by one another at some level, Simmel and Rilke both speak of Rodin as bringing objective plastic form into dialogue with inner psychic impulse in sculpture and as releasing sculpture in this way from long-dominant norms of anatomical transparency and fixity. Both dwell on a seemingly paradoxical relationship between hard impenetrable material and dynamic flow in Rodin. Notably in this vein, Simmel writes of Rodin's figures emerging often seemingly unfinished from the block of stone or marble in a way that "heightens to the utmost a tension between the material's unyielding burdensome mass and the animated form it must release."³³¹ Likewise, echoing comments of Rilke on Rodin's unbaring of the sculptural body after centuries of tradition marked by its clothing and concealment, Simmel writes of how, in the planes, bends, and torsions of Rodin's figures, all throbbing with feeling and sensation in a play of vital musculature, soul "seems to vibrate on the stone's surface, effortlessly molding it to its own intentions." In Rodin, we see "a new suppleness of joints, a new autonomy and vibrancy of surfaces, a new tactility of contact points between two bodies or of one body with itself, a new use of light, and a new way of letting planes meet, battle, or converge with one another."³³²

Simmel and Rilke also speak of a paradigmatically solitary and self-enclosed quality of the modern sculptural object in Rodin—latent already in Michelangelo, for Simmel.³³³ In something of the same manner in which he interprets paintings by Böcklin and poems by George, Simmel writes of a feeling in Michelangelo of the work of art's "infinite loneliness," as if bereft of all mimetic relationship to an outside world. Michelangelo's works attest to a way in which, in modern times, "sculpture lives in a world and ideal space whose limits are no greater and no different than the limits of its bodily being." Abstractly self-contained and, like music, absolute,

this is not the “solitude of a represented subject,” for Michelangelo’s figures “tell of nothing outside themselves like a portrait or history painting. . . . They *are* what they *represent*.”³³⁴ Similarly, Rilke writes of Rodin’s sculptures as primordial and thinglike, suggestive of inward-turning entities unmoored from architectural situation, as once integral elements of some spiritual scene of creation, gathered around the precincts of a cathedral, temple, or shrine. Rodin’s creations exude a homelessness of being, abandoned to themselves and without place of rest—ciphers perhaps of that yearning of the self for deathlike peace in fleeting time, in something of the sense Rilke conveys more fully in his late *Sonnets to Orpheus*.³³⁵

But while Michelangelo is the great Renaissance sculptor of individual corporeal motion, only Rodin, for Simmel and Rilke, fully dissolves and liberates sculptural bodily mass into movement *tout court*.³³⁶ Where Michelangelo’s sculptures still cleave to a plastic structure and only “translate” static anatomical substance into a “language of movement,” Rodin makes movement the driving primary element, able to “co-opt plastic structure to some extent as its material substrate.”³³⁷ Rodin inaugurates a new “monumentality of becoming and movement” that discloses “artistic timelessness in pure motion as such.” Frequently in midflow or flight, his figures are, in each action and gesture, “really movements of the fleeting moment.” They witness to a uniquely modern flux of the soul, in which solid relations of life, “purged of all substance,” dissolve into “pure forms of movement”—a world in which “all that is solid melts into air,” in Karl Marx’s famous apothegm.³³⁸ Through and through, Rodin’s works express life suffused by feelings of “unrest of becoming, indeterminacy of transition from one form to another, movement as continuous shattering of the well-wrought figuration.”³³⁹ They are creations in which actions, events, and lives are “are nothing but oscillations in a Heraclitean world.”³⁴⁰ Rodin’s epochal significance lies in his work’s way of inviting us to seek redemption not *from* a world of ceaseless flux, motion, and modernity, but *in* and *by virtue of* this very world. For his sculptures indicate that in modern times “not only does art mirror a more mobile world; art’s mirror has itself become more mobile.”³⁴¹

In particular, Rodin allows us to sense animate life in the entire dynamic surface of a sculptural body. His faces and heads are for the most part impassive or sparsely defined because soul appears ubiquitously in motion of the figure as a whole—“in a turning and stretching, a trembling and shivering of the whole body’s planes and surfaces, in reverberations of a psychic center diffused over an entire body’s bending or leaping, crouching or darting.”³⁴² In his preparatory sketches, he first draws limbs separately from heads and torsos because only bodies in motion and

gesture are his ultimate concern. Thus bodies for Rodin are functions of movement—not movements functions of bodies. In his sculptures, “each particular gesture generates the body to which it belongs and grows into, unconsciously. Movement builds a body for itself; life its form.”³⁴³

Simmel remarks that classicism and classical atemporal form have dissolved in Rodin, as they have in Rembrandt, but that whereas individuality of the self persists in Rembrandt, this individuality disappears in Rodin—and does so for the reason that *time* disappears, and time disappears for the reason that unified individual life ceases to manifest itself for Rodin as a temporal phenomenon.³⁴⁴ Rodin’s figures and their gestures no longer express any coming-into-being of the moment, and therefore also no coming-into-being of the individual, through life’s past flowing into the present. Instead they dissolve in a constant “fate” and “rhythm of the cosmic process.” Their “quivering and struggling, tumbling and flying bodies” are pulled into a movement of becoming that negates time as any definite experience of formation of the individual. Always midway between becoming and demise, they stand as at most “symbols of souls that feel themselves dragged into an infinity of emergence and destruction.”³⁴⁵

In a similar mode to Rilke, Simmel speaks of Rodin’s figures as “uprooted and impersonalized,” as lacking in any character of “ultimate inner security,” such as is found in those of Rembrandt.³⁴⁶ In one passage, he compares them to Paul Verlaine’s fallen leaves blown hither and thither by the autumn wind, from the poem “Chanson d’automne” in Verlaine’s *Poèmes saturniens*.³⁴⁷ Yet less wistfully than Rilke, Simmel also writes of Rodin’s works as ciphers of one majestic “cosmic process” on a plane of the “trans-individual.”³⁴⁸ Alluding perhaps to Einstein’s and Max Planck’s revolutionary physical theories, he writes of elemental forces in Rodin that pulsate, percolate, or radiate through the body like vibrating atomic particles. These figures “are wracked from within by something as little external to them as wind to atoms of air swept up by such wind—for moving atoms of air simply are what ‘wind’ is.” In them, we see how “in restless transformations, a quantum of energy flows through the material world, or, rather, *is* this world.”³⁴⁹ “Analogous,” Simmel writes, “are certain modern ideas about substance and energy. What was once recorded in a phenomenon as rigid and stable is today dissolved into oscillations, into ever more pervasive kinds of movement”:

It is not enough that an entity be pure autonomous movement, as if perfectly self-contained. Its ontological boundary must itself blur or dissolve for its own inner movement to be immediately a wave of life’s cosmic stream. Here, and only here, has movement become absolute, namely,

where individuality as form no longer resembles a membrane circumscribing a movement unfolding exclusively inside this membrane but where, rather, this last refuge of enclosure has crumbled away to reveal a content, itself already movement, at one with infinite movement of the world, of life, of fate.³⁵⁰

In speaking of an incipient “trans-individual” condition of the self in Rodin, Simmel appears to bid farewell to elements of his earlier pre-1900 thinking about the individual. Writing not only in 1902, 1909, and 1911 but also (in passages of his book on Rembrandt) during World War I, as well as again after Rodin’s death in November 1917, he seems conscious that something in the concept of individuality must be rethought—including in those iterations that strike him as most critically adapted to modern living in the teachings of Goethe, Meunier, Maeterlinck, and others. While a precept of “individual law” unquestionably persists in Simmel’s thinking down to his dying days, as thematized in his final work *The View of Life*, completed days before his death, he seems mindful that no concept of individuality can appropriately be thought of any longer with a discernibly humanistic metaphysical valence.³⁵¹ Driving this appears to be less a premonition of impending human extinction in a world of machines and bureaucracy than a conviction that in this age of advanced technoscientific development, concepts of freedom, action, soul, mind, and motion of the self need to be deployed in a way that dispenses with any essential or exclusive reference to specifically human life. In the sense of his theme of life’s “transcendence” or self-overcoming in chapter 1 of *The View of Life*, Simmel’s proposition is that as modern culture passes continuously beyond its own limits of inherited self-understanding and accumulates ever more power and capacity for itself, as “more life” or *Mehr-Leben*, it also confronts itself in changed concepts and changed languages of analysis that strike it as ever higher, wider, and more challenging than itself, and in this sense as “more *than* life,” or *Mehr-als-Leben*.³⁵² In an age of advanced, generalized means, tools, and technologies of mind, the very discourse of living actors and agencies necessarily takes on new fields of meaning and reference—in creative and artistic life as much as in scientific theory and philosophy.

In many ways, therefore, it is appropriate to suggest that what Simmel sees in Rodin is something like a “posthumanist” vision of modern existence and society—quite substantially in the sense of this term made familiar some four or five decades later by interpreters of Martin Heidegger’s later philosophy, as well as by philosophers influenced by Heidegger in France in the 1960s, including Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and

Gilles Deleuze. Perhaps in particular, Simmel's conception of some transpersonal pulse of the cosmos in Rodin can be connected most closely to Deleuze's neo-Spinozist, quasi-pantheist philosophy—drawing directly on Bergson and largely reviving Bergson's thought in France after World War II.³⁵³ While there can be little doubt that other motifs also guide Simmel's outlook, in ways Deleuze would have abjured, it seems striking that in regard to meanings of life, matter, time, and creation in art and modernity, a stylistic affinity can be observed between these two demonstrably vitalist thinkers. In the sense of Rodin's cosmic flux of occurrences, for Simmel, or Francis Bacon's jarring planes of bodily affect and libido, for Deleuze, both authors envision one immanent creative process of life, cutting across centers of neat individual human personhood. Simmel's "Heraclitean world" in Rodin's bodies of "absolute becoming" prefigures in certain ways Deleuze's imagery of "bodies without organs" in "lines of flight." Indeed, in a whole number of respects, Simmel's essays on art and aesthetics at the outset of the twentieth century can be seen as pointing forward to conjunctures of art and society in criticism and theory today.

§10. Simmel's aesthetics, past and present

Although Simmel's vision of art history is one that many readers today might describe as strongly "Eurocentric" in outlook, arguably many of its insights carry over directly to more globalized conditions of the arts in the present day; and without doubt, Simmel has remained influential, with a wide array of thinkers responding critically to his ideas over the past hundred years. This introduction has touched on interconnections between his thought and that of seminal mid-twentieth-century theorists writing largely within a Marxian tradition. His influence on figures from Lukács and Bloch to Mannheim, Kracauer, Balázs, Adorno, and Horkheimer has been well documented, and much has been written about his relevance for Walter Benjamin's celebrated ideas on film and photography, Dada and surrealism, mass culture, consumerism, and material life in nineteenth-century Paris.³⁵⁴ But no less important is Simmel's bearing on other schools, authors, and debates of the past century, ranging from European phenomenological and existential philosophy to postwar Anglo-American cultural sociology, as well as more recent controversies concerning themes of postmodernity and globalization in relation to trends of culture, economy, and aesthetics. A few of these filigreed strands can be reviewed here in conclusion.

Notable lines of elaboration begin among writers prominent already in Simmel's lifetime. Already mentioned has been the art historian Wilhelm

Worringer, close to painters in the Blaue Reiter group at Munich in the early century. In an autobiographical note to the second edition of *Abstraction and Empathy* from 1948, Worringer recalls a formative chance encounter with Simmel at the Trocadéro Museum in Paris in 1905, in all likelihood around the time Simmel visited Rodin in April of that year, and he writes also of a close relationship and exchange of letters with Simmel following publication of his book in 1908. Unquestionably, Worringer's ideas on abstraction and spirituality in art, as well as Gothic form and the peculiarities of northern "Germanic" art, owe something to Simmel's teaching.³⁵⁵

Significant equally is the philosopher and historian of ideas Ernst Cassirer, who taught alongside Simmel in Berlin from 1906 and at one stage was a candidate for the professorship awarded to Simmel at Strasbourg.³⁵⁶ Allied initially to neo-Kantian philosophy in the Marburg school led by Hermann Cohen, Cassirer returned repeatedly to Simmel in his works, writing of evolving orders of "symbolic form" in art, language, science, myth, and religion, in ways that echoed Simmel's vision of life's articulation over time into different categorical "worlds of value." For both authors, "functional" relations of communication replace "substantial" referents of things and in Cassirer's formulations eventuate in different operative systems of meaning and symbolism in poetry, logic, mathematics, belief, and philosophy, distinct from presumed mimetic identities between signs and objects.

Stemming originally from the protopositivist philosophy of Ernst Mach in Vienna in the 1880s, Simmel's and Cassirer's terminological distinction between "substance" and "function" reappears in further variants among writers in the 1910s and 1920s with affinities to Simmel's reflections on money, urbanism, and modern relativity of life.³⁵⁷ As a doctoral student in Berlin working on a thesis on Mach between 1903 and 1908, the Austrian writer Robert Musil may have attended lectures by Simmel and certainly in his diaries cites works by Simmel, dwelling in his essays prior to *The Man without Qualities* on interrelationships of the ideas of "soul," "intellect," and "form" in a technological age.³⁵⁸ Well established is that Hugo von Hofmannsthal, a guest of Simmel and his wife in Berlin, closely studied *The Philosophy of Money* and in 1906 deployed the text directly as a basis for his drama *Dominic Heintls letzte Nacht* ("Dominic Heintl's Last Night").³⁵⁹ The art historian Carl Einstein, an early theorist of cubism and writer on African sculpture, attended lectures by Simmel after 1903 and likely drew inspiration in his writing from Simmel's concept of autonomy in the work of art.³⁶⁰ Notable also is that Ernst Robert Curtius, professor of Romance languages at Heidelberg in the 1920s, knew Simmel at an

early age via the circle around Stefan George (alongside the critic and close disciple of George, Friedrich Gundolf) and later drew intricately on aspects of Simmel's vision of "reciprocity" in northern and southern European styles in his writings of the interwar period on French avant-garde literature after Proust, Valéry, and Gide and on European Latinate poetry since the Middle Ages.³⁶¹ Through Curtius and other Heidelberg figures, including Lukács, Karl Jaspers, Ernst Troeltsch, Mannheim, Max Weber, and Alfred Weber, Simmel's ideas percolated widely in German academic life of the Weimar years, including in the work of Norbert Elias on the "civilizing process."³⁶²

These and other strands of Simmel's writings also fertilize developments of the interwar period linked to the phenomenological movement in philosophy, inaugurated at the turn of the century by Edmund Husserl. Professor at Göttingen since 1901, Husserl had met Simmel and Dilthey in Berlin in March 1905, and Simmel subsequently visited Husserl in Göttingen in 1908 and 1913.³⁶³ Though clear differences of method prevailed between them, Simmel maintained warm personal relations with Husserl and frequently sent him copies of his writings. Both men sat on the editorial board of the journal *LOGOS*, which Simmel helped found, and at least in a generalized sense it is correct to say that Simmel's work expounds a "phenomenology of culture."³⁶⁴ In his essays on portraiture, Simmel's considerations on artistically pure "seeing" suggest similarities with phenomenological concepts of the "bracketing," or *epoché*, of assumptions of prior metaphysical ground or cause in meaning and expression.³⁶⁵ His conception of autonomy of aesthetic perception has largely the same heuristic extension as phenomenological precepts of things treated as real in givenness-to-perception, and in general it is appropriate to describe as "phenomenological" Simmel's maxim that meaning in art and aesthetic experience is not content inferred in any mechanistic way from sense-data but form given immediately to the viewer in feeling and sensation. "Soul" or "mind" in art and life has meaning for consciousness only in total bodily appearance of the other being, making "soul" always a matter of the holistic hermeneutic "circle of understanding"—much in the fuller sense of this theme explicated later by Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer.³⁶⁶

Notably in the thought of writers influenced by Husserl and well acquainted with Simmel's ideas, such as Max Scheler, Alfred Schütz, and Helmuth Plessner, dualistic distinctions of mind and body are rejected as misleading "Cartesian" reifications.³⁶⁷ Much in Simmel's manner, firm differentiations of subject and object come to be seen as stemming from an abstraction of concepts, secondary to inner flow in the ego, and artis-

tic expression is viewed as vitally reorienting modern rational-analytic categories toward deeper qualities of experience in the “lived body.” In the sense of both Simmel’s thinking and Husserl’s writings on effects of objectification of the “lifeworld” by techno-scientific culture, these authors criticize notions of discrete realities of things behind intuitively felt appearances of the world. Modern organized systems of society are seen as signaling a prospect of consciousness governed exclusively by efficient technical categories of representation, with results hostile to the sensory subtleties of understanding kept alive by poets, writers, painters, and musicians. Of note are Plessner’s writings on theater, on “anthropology of the senses,” and on embodied meaning in social interaction, all of which borrow from Simmel’s reflections on distance, tact, and discretion of conduct in play, ritual, ceremony, and style.³⁶⁸

Noteworthy similarly are the many parallels between Simmel’s and Heidegger’s considerations on art. It is well documented that Heidegger’s chapter on “being-toward-death” in *Being and Time* drew in part on Simmel’s meditation in *The View of Life* on the “presence of death in life,” mirroring Simmel’s thoughts on Rembrandt’s painterly worldview.³⁶⁹ Both thinkers urge that death asserts itself less as any definite point of cessation of life than as life’s ever-present horizon of individual self-projection over time; and beyond this, both speak of art as revealing structures of meaningful worldhood of things in being and time. Light and shade in the becoming of form, for Simmel, have a meaning strikingly comparable in style of formulation to Heidegger’s account of art’s capacity to “clear” or to “light up” Being in relations of things, events, earth, and world—such as in the manner accomplished for Heidegger by Van Gogh’s painting of the pair of peasant’s boots.³⁷⁰ For both philosophers, art illuminates life in fragmentary incompleteness, in transitory movement of experience from darkness to light—distinct from any pretense of a complete rational “telling” of things in atemporal representation. Artists capture situations of fragile placement of the self in mundane being and, in another dimension, also *displacement* of the self by still more elemental forces of the cosmos—such as in the manner signified for Simmel by Rodin’s Heraclitean sculptures of flux or, for Heidegger, by ancient Greek mythopoetic speech and song.

In the United States, it is true that before about 1960, Simmel’s reputation persisted largely as an author of important sociological writings, and not of major works of philosophy and cultural criticism. Nevertheless, his ideas impinge at an early stage on developments in US academic life in areas bearing on matters of culture and aesthetics, due in the main to the translation of his early essays in sociology by Albion Small for the *American*

Journal of Sociology and the emergence after 1900 of a distinctive school of sociology at the University of Chicago, discernibly influenced by his work.³⁷¹ Adapting Simmel's analyses to studies of group relations and dynamics in micro contexts of interaction, particularly in urban settings, authors from Robert Park to Nicholas Spykman and Louis Wirth engage intensively with Simmel's theorems on group conflict and behavior; and their work in "symbolic interactionism," defined in these terms by Herbert Blumer, encourages an interest in more broadly communicative and aesthetic aspects of codes, rules, roles, and institutions of social order.

Everett Hughes, who translated Simmel's essay on sociability in 1949, can be seen as the first of the Chicago sociologists to expound his distinctions between "form" and "content" in regard to dimensions of image, ritual, style, and grace in social behavior.³⁷² Against the background of World War II and the cold war, Hughes championed Simmel's thinking about distance and self-distance of the person as virtues of conduct in relations with others and other nations as "strangers"—in much the same spirit as the positive sense of the term *Zivilisation* for Simmel and other European cosmopolitan voices during and after World War I.

Similarly, Erving Goffman took inspiration from Simmel in his influential studies of frames, scripts, and tacit codes, sharing with the latter a feeling for the apparently minor or trivial in daily life as clues to more deep-seated structures of power in society.³⁷³ As Simmel wrote of the glance, the mask, and the cool blasé exterior, so Goffman would write of "face-work" and façades, of "face-to-face" encounters, and front- and back-stage personae of life. Social life is theater on the stage of this world for Goffman, in much the same Shakespearean sense as Simmel's earlier essays on theater—although it is unclear whether Goffman in fact read these essays.

Later, Howard Becker, a student of Hughes, would echo Simmel in his studies of "art worlds" and other small-group settings with interior codes and conventions of membership and esteem, understood as bounded networks of intersection between skilled producers, gatekeepers, facilitators, and consumers of creative acts.³⁷⁴

By the 1980s and early 1990s, with the gathering of Simmel's myriad writings and the appearance of the first completed volumes of the *Gesamtausgabe* in Germany, a larger picture of his ideas emerges, and from this point onward, considerable interest centers on concepts in his writings relevant to changes in the class structures of Western societies following decline of manufacturing-based economies and the emergence of leisure, media, information, and financial services sectors as key domains of capital accumulation.³⁷⁵ Against a background of crises and conflicts

of industrial relations in the 1970s and a growing shift of Western states toward policies of neoliberal fiscal deregulation, attention turns to the pivotal role of culture, consumption, and private debt in sustaining commerce in countries riven by market turbulence and escalating wealth and income disparities, as first highlighted by Simmel in his pioneering work on money, credit, and the “style of life,” some eight decades earlier. Pertinent for numerous commentators becomes an emphasis in Simmel’s work less on control of labor and production in the sense originally important to Marx than on abundantly available money, in combination with prestige images of life as stimulants of market desire. Research since this time has drawn extensively on Simmel’s thinking about fashion, design, and statuses of culture in relation to growth in leisure, media, tourism, and education, in architecture and real estate, in retail branding and marketing, and generally in “economies of signs” and postmaterial quantities of life. Simmel’s writings on urbanism and material culture have found new relevance to phenomena of “aestheticization of the lifeworld” and to contexts of regeneration of the late twentieth-century postindustrial city. For many commentators, urban life in zones of gentrification and the “creative economy” reveals ever shifting faces of the commodity in ceaseless circulation—testifying again to Simmel’s concept of the recurring “flat surface of everyday life” in commerce and display.³⁷⁶

Preoccupations since the 1980s with culture, style, and economy have brought enlarged salience to questions in Simmel’s analysis of the deep shape and direction of modernity between reason and unreason.³⁷⁷ Themes of relativity and relativism in his writings join with conditions of so-called postmodernity in late twentieth-century culture and thought, signaled by a new skepticism of writers toward foundational last grounds in philosophy and theory and “grand narratives” of normative struggle in political change. Philosophy in Simmel as metaphoric “vision of life” aligns in this sense with a feeling of multiple incommensurable frames and standpoints of writing and rhetoric in tense “difference.”

In something of the same spirit as Simmel’s world of *fin de siècle* Berlin and Vienna, commentaries on postmodernism have foregrounded currents of the arts that celebrate ornament, irony, pastiche, and eclecticism of style and form.³⁷⁸ For some critics, the period of the early new millennium is prefigured in Simmel’s portrait of a time of ambiguous possibility, marked by diffuse sites of creative shift, without central directive steering in the manner of mid-twentieth-century high modernism. Changing ethnocultural landscapes of Western societies under conditions of heightened global interdependence and weakened national boundaries create scenes of migrant flux and flow of ideas, information, capital, and labor

around “liquid” conjunctures of events.³⁷⁹ The sense of a “cultural turn” in social science toward bisections of class politics by multiplex transnational identities of peoples in gender, race, ethnicity, and religion reiterates an importance in Simmel’s thinking—mirrored in Max Weber’s—of diverse “world-images” in the shaping of sites of societal voice, struggle, and contention.³⁸⁰

In particular, Simmel’s motif of the “adventure” of modernity has been seen as hinting not only at a role of dominant lifestyle economies in late-modern consumer culture, but also more abstractly at a consciousness of essential “ambivalence” in modernist utopian projects of social organization.³⁸¹ Whether as the project of limitless colonial-imperial conquest, as the governmental and architectural project of total rational urban planning, as the totalitarian project of politics as mythic redemption of the people in the state, or more recently as the entrepreneurial project of “creative capitalism” in the new digital economy—in all these respects, Simmel’s thematic highlights a character of the seductively aesthetic in modern societal imaginaries.³⁸² In these and many other connections, modernity in the widest sense for Simmel and Simmelian thinking is the uncertain search for wholeness and renewal from ruin and failure—for creative pathways to unity through fragmentation and complexity, in which outcomes of paradox and tragedy seem never far away.

Turning now from matters of general societal diagnosis to the more circumscribed field of art theory, it can be said that while no consciously Simmelian school or trend of scholarship can be defined, a number of points of resonance of his ideas here come into view. Though his presence in art criticism today exists largely as an indirect effect of the work of his early twentieth-century followers, some comments can be made about ways in which his essays both complement mid-twentieth-century modernist idioms of art criticism and, in other respects, diverge from these idioms and presage a more pluralistic style of commentary typical of more recent years.

In some aspects it is possible to say that, rather in the manner of Clement Greenberg’s criticism in the 1940s, Simmel’s tendency is to ascribe definite aesthetic capabilities to particular art mediums, each with fairly clearly delimited formal logics of development.³⁸³ In these terms, he speaks of the formal contours and propensities of landscape painting, of portraiture, of sculpture, and of theater, and of movements such as naturalism and expressionism, as the historically determinate forms of realization of artistic autonomy in their time. This approach might be compared with the manner in which Greenberg writes of painters after Cézanne and Matisse as tending progressively toward release of auton-

omous two-dimensional abstraction on the surface of the canvas, and in so doing as necessarily driving painting in a different direction from mediums with different inherent properties—Greenberg here famously invoking G. E. Lessing's classic distinction in *Laocoon* (1766) between painting as an inherently spatial medium of representation and drama and poetry as intrinsically temporal media.

In other respects, however, much of Simmel's concentration falls unmistakably on features of flow and ambiguity of creative forms and on exchange and dissolution of boundaries between forms. Though his writings pinpoint divisions between autonomous and non-autonomous artistic practices, his concerns gravitate no less typically to signs of instability of these divisions, where artists become the agents of play and bricolage across diverse registers of perception, and where likewise spectators encounter art across both institutionally framed and institutionally unframed spaces of experience. This in particular might be said to describe the thrust of his remarks on slippage between ruin and landscape as phenomena of art, on the one hand, and phenomena of aesthetic nature, on the other.³⁸⁴ To this extent, therefore, his vision remains arguably more consistent with later twentieth-century directions of theory that speak of blurred differences between high and low statuses of the arts, after Pop art, together with challenges to institutional site-specificity of works and performances in land art, outsider art, and Happenings.³⁸⁵

Important in these connections is that Simmel's thinking stands generally opposed to any kind of crypto-Hegelian narrative of evolving "sublation" of art into philosophy, in the manner of the claims of some theorists of minimalism and conceptualism in art, seen as movements bringing to a logical conclusion the early twentieth-century modernist innovations of Marcel Duchamp's Dadaist "ready-mades."³⁸⁶ Simmel's is not a strongly "historicist" aesthetics that conceives of works of art as little more than intellectual intentions on behalf of material objects that have gained institutional status as art from relevant authorities, such as gallery directors, and that therefore only exist as art as matters of social-historical fact or fiat—in the sense of the "institutional theory of art" prominent among some writers in the 1970s.³⁸⁷

Likewise and for related reasons, Simmel's ideas must be seen as diverging from the kinds of more explicitly political positions in modernist theorizing taken up by Hegelian-Marxist writers in the orbit of the Frankfurt School, viewing works of art as special carriers of insight into the class struggle in world history. Generally, his writings resist any precept that in seeking integrity for itself in an age of advanced capitalism, art must in some way "dialectically negate" all elements of sensory fullness and

immediacy in aesthetic experience, on pain of co-option by the “culture industry”—in the sense of the demands of Theodor Adorno.³⁸⁸ Even as Simmel warns repeatedly against ideologies of direct feeling and emotion in art, this counsel is secondary in his thinking to the one value he sees as most constitutive of aesthetic life, namely “lived experience”—*Erlebnis*. Such experience, he reiterates, remains “indissoluble and primary” in art, from which it follows that “the essential task of philosophy” as regards art should be “to lower a plumb line through the immediate singular, the simply given, into the depths of ultimate intellectual meanings,” and in this process to reject any “monistic prejudice” that attempts to stretch contingent historical life in art “into a philosophical system.”³⁸⁹ Thus any schematism of political-historical development in art in this sense would be just as anathema to art, for Simmel, as any older kind of metaphysical, moral, or religious schematism.³⁹⁰

Further, while admittedly Simmel tends to share with Adorno a propensity to link philosophically significant change in art to decidedly European-centered actors, Simmel’s language of concepts allows arguably for a much clearer sense of contemporary *global* situations of artistic acts under conditions of advanced market economy. In the sense of the already noted commonality between Simmel’s and Deleuze’s vitalist conceptual styles, much of the vocabulary of creative flux in Simmel’s writings can be said to illuminate a space of the global in art as a theater of incessant struggle between emancipatory creative agency in world politics and society and monetary objectification. If, for some commentators writing in this idiom, a power of generative “immanence” exists in global social affairs that, while chronically recuperated by capital, is never entirely stifled by it, something similar can be said to hold for Simmel’s vision.³⁹¹ For to the extent that money, for Simmel, not only enables creativity in social life but also feeds and depends on this creativity for its survival, money is not ultimately art’s master, and therefore cannot ultimately force art to submit to pure mercantile relations of existence. Rather, life’s creative impulses constantly retain a power to push beyond their own hardening into restrictive, rigidifying orders of economy and society.

In these and countless other ways, Simmel’s essays present studies of discrete topics in themselves and, at the same time, windows onto the totality of his ideas in philosophy, sociology, and cultural theory. In these writings, we encounter Simmel’s central theme of modernity as the experience of the melting of solid forms of culture into fluid movement of life, together with the quest, within this experience, for new horizons of unity, forged from ineluctable conflict and division. Art, and modern art in particular, symbolizes a search of individuals for wholeness and uniqueness of

experience in sensuous fulfilment, open always to risks of the strange and unfamiliar as dimensions of greater potential self-knowledge. In tandem and in tension with science, religion, and philosophy, art redeems life from disorderly circumstances and guides individuals in society to higher planes of comprehension of life in freedom and grace.

Notes

In citations to works by Simmel, name is abbreviated GS, followed by the year (e.g., GS 1918d). Georg-Simmel-Gesamtausgabe is abbreviated GSG. Where reference list includes an English translation, pages in original are given first, with pages in translation after a stroke (e.g., Lukács 1911: 171–94/79–90).

1. *GSG* 22:384, 413, 512.

2. GS 1918d; Rammstedt 2012: 305–9; *GSG* 21:1015–18; *GSG* 22:1024–27; *GSG* 23:1107–16.

3. This collection, like its close companion *Simmel on Culture* (1997), edited by David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, groups Simmel's texts into titled chapters. Essays within chapters appear in chronological order, with slight exceptions in chapters 7 and 8. In view of Simmel's habit of returning to topics, with enlarged or revised statements appearing under similar titles, some pieces are here designated "Part I," "Part II," etc. A few essays have been slightly abridged, for reasons explained in the short prefatory notes at the start of each chapter, which also provide brief factual details on contexts of first publication. Original paragraphing has been preserved in all items freshly translated for this volume. Summarized at some length in this introduction but not included in the collection are Simmel's monograph on Rembrandt (GS 1916b; English trans., 2005), as well as several shorter texts, previously published in English as "Psychological and Ethnological Studies on Music" (GS 1882); "Beyond Beauty" (GS 1897); "Rome" (GS 1898b); "Florence" (GS 1906b); "Venice" (GS 1907c); "The Problem of Style" (GS 1908b); "The Ruin" (GS 1911c); "Christianity and Art" (GS 1907b); and "The Metaphysics of Art," chapter 5 of Simmel's 1907 series of lectures on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (GS 1907a). Also omitted are seven extracts from the Rembrandt monograph, published separately by Simmel and included in *GSG* 13 as "Rembrandtstudie," "Rembrandts religiöse Kunst," "Rembrandt und die Schönheit," "Studien zur Philosophie der Kunst, besonders der Rembrandtschen," "Vom Tode in der Kunst: Nach einem Vortrag," "Bruchstücke aus einer Philosophie der Kunst," and "Gestalter und Schöpfer." Two extracts from Simmel's monograph on Goethe (GS 1913a; *GSG* 15:7–270) are included in chapter 8. Omitted are the multiple short titles on Goethe appearing in *GSG* 12 and 13, the majority of which Simmel published as preparatory studies for the 1913 monograph.

4. Editorial reports by Klaus-Christian Köhnke and Otthein Rammstedt (*GSG* 22:1024–27; *GSG* 23:1107–16) explain the extent of Simmel's missing letters and reasons for their loss, arising in the main from the tragic circumstances of Simmel's Jewish relatives and friends as trustees and recipients of his letters and papers.

5. Scholarly titles addressed relatively specifically to Simmel's life in the arts and ideas on aesthetics include Meyer 2008, 2011, 2017; Symons 2017; Mičko 2010; Schwerdt 2011; Faath 1998; Dörr 1993; Thomas 2013; Frisby 1981, 1985, 1992, 2002, 2005; Rammstedt 1991; Böhringer 1984; Böhringer and Gründer 1976; Hübner-Funk 1976, 1982, 1984; Dahme and Rammstedt 1984; Green 1988; Davis 1973.

6. Köhnke and Rammstedt index references and provide extensive editorial commentary on extant correspondence in *GSG* 22 and *GSG* 23. And see, below, §§3, 8, 9, 10.

7. Frisby 2000; Rammstedt 1991; Landmann 1984; *GSG* 12:501–2; *GSG* 22:268–71, 360–65, 445–49.

8. *GSG* 22:445–52.

9. *GSG* 22:270–71.

10. *GSG* 22:758, 773.

11. *GSG* 23:38–40; Worringer (1908) 1948.

12. *GSG* 22:753–58; *GSG* 23:60–61, 720.

13. *GSG* 22:717–19, 906, 944; *GSG* 23:67, 171, 177; Lukács 1911: 171–94/79–90.

14. Frisby 1985: 187–265; Frisby 1992: 91; Symons 2017; Mičko 2010.

15. Kracauer 1919, 1920; Gilloch 2015; *GSG* 23:344–45, 529–30, 706, 880–86.

16. Loewy 2003: 21–38; *GSG* 22:906; *GSG* 23:66–68.

17. Mannheim 1917, 1918; *GSG* 22:693–94, 939; *GSG* 23:79–85.

18. Significant monographic studies of Simmel's work as a whole include Frisby 1981, 1985, 1992, 2005; Köhnke 1996; Geßner 2003; Pyyhtinen 2010, 2018; Goodstein 2017; Kemple 2018; Fitz 2018; Amat 2018; Cantó-Milà 2005; Papilloud 2003; Helle 2014; Leck 2000; Dahme and Rammstedt 1984; Böhringer and Gründer 1976; Hübner-Funk 1976, 1982; Poggi 1993; Lichtblau 1996; Levine 1995; Weingartner 1960. See also further titles in following notes.

19. GS 1908a (chap. 6, “The Intersection of Social Circles”; chap. 10, “The Expansion of the Group and the Development of Individuality”).

20. GS 1900 (chap. 1, “Value and Money”).

21. GS 1900 (chaps. 4–6, “Individual Freedom,” “The Money Equivalent of Personal Values,” and “The Style of Life”).

22. GS 1911a; GS 1916a; GS 1918a.

23. GS 1910a; GS 1918d.

24. GS 1914a; *GSG* 22:666–67, 705–6, 776, 828, 919–20; *GSG* 23:100; see also Fitz 2002.

25. Horkheimer and Adorno 1947.

26. Lukács 1918: 171/145.

27. Excepting Rilke as poet, Gerhart Hauptmann as playwright, and Maeterlinck as essayist, pre-1900, and one citation to Oscar Wilde; further below, §§3, 7, 8, 9.

28. GS 1908a; Meyer 2011; Tyrell 2011; Rammstedt et al. 2011.

29. GS 1882: 99–106, 105–9, 114–16, 126–27.

30. GS 1896a (this volume, chap. 1).

31. Meyer 2011: 302; Meyer 2017: 184–202.

32. GS 1896a: 201–2, 209–10; GS 1900: 681–83/488–89; Worringer (1908) 1948: 7–10/16–17 (further, §10).

33. GS 1908a (chap. 1, “The Problem of Sociology”; chap. 3 “Domination and Subordination”).
34. GS 1908a: 21/24; GS 1917a: 88–102.
35. GS 1908a: 325/259, chap. 9 (“Excursus on the Social Boundary”), chap. 10 (“Excursus on the Nobility”); Meyer 2011.
36. GS 1908f; GS 1910b; further below, §4.
37. GS 1898a; Krech 1998.
38. GS 1906d; Krech 1998: 81–83; Harrington 2011.
39. GS 1903a (“Kant and Modern Aesthetics,” this volume, chap. 1); GS 1913a. Also GS 1914c; GS 1918d: 267–86/41–53.
40. GS 1914c: 143–53 (this item is a fifty-page transcribed “handbook” or *Kollegheft* of Simmel’s lectures, not verifiably directly by Simmel but recognizable in style and quality of finish of prose as most likely substantially edited by him; see further *GSG* 21:1015–18).
41. GS 1908a: 13–61 (“The Problem of Sociology”; originally published 1894).
42. Dilthey 1910. On Simmel’s relationship to Dilthey as chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin down to his death in 1911, see further Köhnke 1989.
43. GS 1918d: 270/43, 275/46.
44. GS 1903a: 268; *Critique of Judgement*, Introduction VI, VII, §11, §58.
45. GS 1914b: 13.
46. GS 1918d: 284/52.
47. GS 1900: 667–70/479–81; GS 1903b; GS 1910b; GS 1911c; further below, §4.
48. GS 1914b: 10; GS 1914c: 160–61; GS 1917c: 392–94.
49. GS 1905a: 306; GS 1918c: 381.
50. Dilthey 1910: 177–85.
51. GS 1910a: 66–79; GS 1911g; Christian 1978.
52. Hegel 1828: 23–24/9–11.
53. GS 1906a (text modified slightly one year later by Simmel as 1907a: 269–307/75–104).
54. GS 1907a: 282–83/85.
55. GS 1916b: 313–51/5–32, 492–501/142–51.
56. GS 1916b: 377–87/51–59, 476–78/130–32. On occasion Simmel also uses the term *Kunstwollen* (“will to art”), canonically introduced into the vocabulary of art history in the 1890s by the Viennese scholar Alois Riegl, whose work Simmel almost certainly knew and appreciated, but never cites; cf. GS 1913a: 163; Schwartz 1996: 226; Utitz 1919: 9.
57. GS 1916b: 313–17/5–8, 359–64/38–42, 334–39/20–24.
58. GS 1916b: 359/38.
59. GS 1901a (“Aesthetics of Gravity,” this volume, chap. 2); GS 1910c: 314–16 (“Michelangelo,” this volume, chap. 7).
60. GS 1910c: 314.
61. GS 1911a: 401–16/67–75; GS 1916a: 37–40/91–92; GS 1918a: 189/80.
62. GS 1918a: 183/77; GS 1914c: 181–83; further below, §7.
63. GS 1911a; GS 1916a; GS 1918a: 185–89/77–80.

64. GS 1911f.
65. GS 1911f: 165/35.
66. Frisby 1981; Frisby 1985: 38–108; Hübner-Funk 1976, 1982; Dahme and Rammstedt 1984; Davis 1973; Faath 1998; Böhringer 1984; Böhringer and Gründer 1976; Blumenberg 1976; Meyer 2017; Goodstein 2017; Kemple 2018.
67. Cf. Rohner 1966; Szondi 1974; Lützel 1998: 24–32; also Lukács 1911; Kra-cauer 1920; Adorno 1958.
68. GS 1897; GS 1900–1903; GS 1923; Kemple 2012.
69. *Critique of Judgement*, Introduction VII, VIII.
70. GS 1903b: 120/177; GS 1916b: 309/3.
71. Frisby 1985: 95–101; Frisby 1992: 70–71, 126; Symons 2017; Pyyhtinen 2018: 51–60; Mičko 2010; Weinstein and Weinstein 1991; cf. Benjamin 1940.
72. Lukács 1918: 172/146; Frisby 1981.
73. Lukács 1918: 173/147.
74. GS 1910a; GS 1910c (“Michelangelo,” this volume, chap. 7); GS 1911c (“Rodi-n: Part II,” this volume, chap. 7); GS 1918a: 185–86/78–79.
75. GS 1910c: 319–20; GS 1918d: 234/17.
76. GS 1908d: 404.
77. GS 1907b.
78. GS 1907b: 268/70.
79. GS 1907b: 270/72.
80. GS 1907b: 273/75.
81. GS 1911e: 334–35.
82. GS 1916b: 452/112.
83. GS 1911e: 335.
84. GS 1916b: 456/115.
85. GS 1910c: 305–6; GS 1906b.
86. GS 1910c: 306–7.
87. GS 1905a (“Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*,” this volume, chap. 5).
88. GS 1905a: 305, 307.
89. GS 1910c (“Michelangelo,” this volume, chap. 7).
90. GS 1910c: 309; GS 1911e: 336.
91. GS 1910c: 308.
92. GS 1916b: 441/102, 443/104.
93. GS 1910c: 314.
94. GS 1910c: 317.
95. GS 1910c: 315, 317–18.
96. GS 1910c: 319–20.
97. GS 1910c: 319.
98. GS 1910c: 320, 321.
99. GS 1916b: 421–27/87–91, 440–43/101–4, 461–66/118–22
100. GS 1916b: 467/123.
101. GS 1916b: 484/136.
102. GS 1916b: 451–61/111–18.

103. GS 1916b: 443/103.
104. GS 1916b: 454/113; Weber 1910: 180/80; Weber 1920a: 185/169, 273.
105. GS 1916b: 454/113.
106. GS 1916b: 468–76/124–30.
107. GS 1916b: 363/41, 371–87/47–59.
108. GS 1916b: 419–20/85–86. On Simmel’s understanding of differences between northern “Germanic” art in Rembrandt and Renaissance Italianate or “classical Romanic” art, see also further below, §5.
109. GS 1916b: 313–23/5–13, 351–59/32–38.
110. GS 1916b: 315/7.
111. GS 1916b: 314–15/6–7, 353/34.
112. GS 1916b: 400–410/70–79.
113. GS 1916b: 401/71.
114. GS 1916b: 405/74. Simmel first presented this section of his book on Rembrandt on 4 January 1915 as a public lecture in Berlin, which was attended by Rilke (further below, and §9); on the same theme, famously also in Heidegger, below §10.
115. GS 1916b: 478/131.
116. GS 1916b: 469/125.
117. GS 1916b: 454/114; GS 1906d: 53–54/148–49.
118. GS 1916b: 479–82/132–35.
119. GS 1916b: 482–92/135–42.
120. GS 1916b: 483/136.
121. GS 1916b: 325–26/14–15, 358–59/37–38, 490/140.
122. GS 1910c: 315–16.
123. GS 1901a: 47–48 (“Aesthetics of Gravity,” this volume, chap. 2). These two terms also allude to Friedrich Schiller’s essay “Anmut und Würde,” of 1793.
124. GS 1916b: 449/108; GS 1918a: 194/82.
125. GS 1908d; 1914c: 177–85.
126. GS 1897; GS 1916b: 413–21/81–87.
127. GS 1914c: 178, 180–82. Further below, §7.
128. GS 1918a; Weber 1920b: 542–67/331–57.
129. GS 1910c: 328.
130. GS 1901d; GS 1909c (“Stefan George: Part I” and “Part II,” this volume, chap. 8). On Simmel and George, see also below, §8.
131. GS 1899 (“Maurice Maeterlinck: Wisdom and Destiny,” this volume, chap. 8); Maeterlinck 1898.
132. GS 1899: 420–21; GS 1907a: 370–72/154–55.
133. We know that shortly before meeting him in person, Simmel learned of Rilke through Lou Andreas-Salomé, Rilke’s lover at that time (as well as famously a friend of Nietzsche, and later of Freud, with whom she trained as a psychoanalyst). In the spring of 1897, Simmel read a publication of Andreas-Salomé’s, a study of Christ, entitled “Jesus der Jude,” published in April 1896 in the *Neue Deutsche Rundschau*, writing to her on the subject in May 1897 (GSG 22:203–4). Then on 12 November 1897, shortly after another exchange with her, Simmel wrote to George,

urging that Rilke be invited to the 14 November reading, to which Andreas-Salomé and Simmel had already been invited (*GSG* 22:270–71). On Simmel, Rilke, and Rodin, see also below, §9.

134. GS 1916b: 410/78; *GSG* 13:131 (*Frankfurter Zeitung*, 2 April 1915); see also *GSG* 23:477–80.

135. Rilke 1905: 273 (*O Herr, gib jedem seinen eignen Tod. / Das Sterben, das aus jenem Leben geht, / darin er Liebe hatte, Sinn und Not*) (Book Three, “The Book of Poverty and of Death”).

136. GS 1916b: 406–10/76–79.

137. GS 1916b: 409/78.

138. *GSG* 22:642–43 (letter to Rilke, 9 August 1908; this volume, chap. 8).

139. GS 1902b: 96; GS 1916a: 41–42/93–94.

140. GS 1914c: 185–88; GS 1918a: 192–93/80–81 (no specific Italian or German personalities are named in this passage).

141. GS 1911e: 337–38; GS 1918a: 193–94/82, 194–95/83.

142. GS 1900: 628/–50/453–67; GS 1903b: 127/182–85.

143. GS 1900: 591–616/429–46, 626–67/452–79; GS 1903b.

144. GS 1900: 620–26/448–52, 670–76/481–85.

145. GS 1900: 655–70/470–81; GS 1903b: 121/178

146. GS 1910b.

147. GS 1910b: 104–5/121–22, 118/128.

148. GS 1900: 602–9/437–41, 633–43/457–63.

149. GS 1903b; GS 1905b.

150. GS 1900: 643–63/463–76; GS 1903b: 128–31/183–85; GS 1908a: 383–455/307–62 (chap. 5, “The Secret and the Secret Society”).

151. GS 1908a: 429–33/342–45 (chap. 5, “Excursus on Written Communication”).

152. GS 1900: 653/470.

153. GS 1900: 652/469.

154. GS 1900: 655–76/470–85; GS 1903b: 122–23/79–82; GS 1908a: 687–98/543–51; GS 1909a; cf. Wirth 1938.

155. GS 1911h; 1908e: 424 (“Theater and the Dramatic Actor: Part I,” this volume, chap. 6), notably referring to the actresses Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse.

156. GS 1903b: 119–20/177–78; cf. Kracauer 1925; Frisby 1985, 2002.

157. GS 1900: 660–67/474–79, 675–76/484–85; Frisby 1992: 71–96.

158. GS 1895a; GS 1911b (“On the Aesthetics of the Alps,” this volume, chap. 4).

159. GS 1895a: 93/220.

160. GS 1900: 655–67/470–79.

161. GS 1900: 662/475.

162. GS 1898b; GS 1906b; GS 1907c; cf. Harrington 2016: 202–5.

163. Thomas Mann almost certainly did not read Simmel’s essay before writing *Death in Venice* (published in late 1912) but may have done so shortly thereafter. A letter to Ernst Bertram from November 1912 thanks Bertram for drawing his attention to it, and a letter to Erika and Klaus Mann from May 1932 refers to it again appreciatively (Podoksik 2012: 17).

164. GS 1911c.
165. GS 1911c: 288/260, 290/262.
166. GS 1896b: 36/257.
167. GS 1896b: 35–36/256–57.
168. GS 1896a: 209–14; GS 1900: 655–67/470–79, 675–76/484.
169. GS 1890: 244 (“On Art Exhibitions,” this volume, chap. 2).
170. GS 1900: 360–71/272–80, 676–96/485–98; 1903b: 121/178.
171. GS 1890: 246.
172. GS 1890: 249–50.
173. GS 1890: 244–45.
174. GS 1890: 250.
175. GS 1896a: 209–11; GS 1902a; GS 1908b; GS 1918b.
176. GS 1908b: 375/212.
177. GS 1905b.
178. GS 1908c.
179. GS 1910b: 118–19/128.
180. GS 1900: 686–704/491–503; Frisby 1992: 97–123.
181. Frisby 1985: 210; Kracauer 1927.
182. Kracauer 1927.
183. GS 1896a: 204/74; GS 1900: 688/493.
184. GS 1896a: 202–7/72–75; GS 1900: 658–59/473–74, 690–91/494–95;
1903b: 128–30/183–84.
185. GS 1908b: 382/216.
186. GS 1916b: 388–427/61–91; GS 1917b; GS 1918b (“Germanic and Classical Romanic Style,” “Individualism in Art,” this volume, chap. 3).
187. GS 1918b: 314–15.
188. GS 1901b; GS 1917a: 122–49; Levine 1972.
189. GS 1913c: 153, 169.
190. Harrington 2016: 144–52, 194–205.
191. GS 1916b: 392–93/64–65; GS 1917b: 303; GS 1918b: 319.
192. GS 1916b: 393/65, 404/73, 427–28/92; Weber 1920a.
193. GS 1918d: 346–425/99–154.
194. GS 1902b: 93–94.
195. GS 1918b: 303–4.
196. Langbeyn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher: von einem Deutschen*, reviewed by Simmel in 1890; *GSG* 1:232–42. Cf. Harrington 2016: 181–82, 198–202; Stern 1961: 97–181.
197. GS 1916b: 388–408/61–74.
198. GS 1916b: 318/9
199. GS 1916b: 323–27/13–15, 406–7/76–77.
200. GS 1916b: 327/15.
201. GS 1916b: 364–77/42–51.
202. GS 1916b: 365/43.
203. GS 1916b: 413–21/81–87.
204. GS 1916b: 388–93/61–66, 421/87.

205. GS 1916b: 389–90/62–63; GS 1918b: 318.
206. GS 1916b: 421–27/87–91; GS 1918b: 317.
207. GS 1916b: 391–92/63–64.
208. GS 1908b: 383/216–17; GS 1916b: 364–65/42–43; GS 1918b: 319–20.
209. GS 1918a: 199–200/85–86.
210. GS 1908d; GS 1914c: 177–88; GS 1916a: 40–43/93–94.
211. GS 1916c: 224/65; Harrington 2016: 141–227.
212. GS 1913a; extracted as 1913b and 1913c (“Goethe and the Creative Life,” “Individuality and Character in Goethe and Shakespeare,” this volume, chap. 8).
213. GS 1913a: 48, 32–60.
214. GS 1913a: 91–92; 183–84; GS 1913b: 17–18.
215. GS 1913a: 61–106.
216. GS 1913a: 53.
217. GS 1913a: 67–68.
218. GS 1913a: 218–70.
219. GS 1913a: 193–96, 245–50.
220. GS 1913a: 125–29, 256–70.
221. *Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis* (“All things transitory are but symbols”), *Faust II*, Act 5, Chorus mysticus.
222. GS 1913a: 186; GS 1916b: 433–36/96–98 (*stufenweises Zurücktreten aus der Erscheinung*); *Goethes Werke*, Weimar Edition, vol. 48: *Schriften zur Kunst 1800–1816: Maximen und Reflexionen über Kunst: Aus dem Nachlaß*, § “Schönheit der Jugend aus Obrigen anzuleiten.”
223. GS 1916b: 436–39/98–100.
224. GS 1913a: 231–32, 257–61; GS 1918a: 193–94/82–83.
225. GS 1913a: 160–61, 151–78; GS 1916b: 449/108.
226. GS 1913c: 162, 164, 165.
227. GS 1913c (“Individuality and Character in Goethe and Shakespeare,” this volume, chap. 8); GS 1916b: 406–7/74–75, 423/89.
228. GS 1896c (“A Note on Japanese Art,” this volume, chap. 3); also GS 1901a: 44–45 (“Aesthetics of Gravity,” this volume, chap. 2).
229. GS 1901a: 44–45.
230. GS 1896c: 314, 315.
231. *GSG* 17:500.
232. GS 1896c: 313–14; cf. Frisby 1992: 93, 107, 118.
233. GS 1893a: 293/259.
234. GS 1911a: 413/73. The phrase is an inversion of 2 Corinthians 6:10: “as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”
235. GS 1907b: 264/65.
236. GS 1900: 658–59/473; the same passage also in “Sociological Aesthetics” (this volume, chap. 1), GS 1896a: 209.
237. GS 1900: 620–43/448–63, 670–76/481–85, 690–91/494–95.
238. GS 1914c: 188–95; GS 1918d: 267–86/41–53.
239. GS 1916b: 354–51/27–32, 497–98/147–48.

240. GS 1914b (“Art for Art’s Sake,” this volume, chap. 1).
241. GS 1914b: 9, 11.
242. GS 1917c (“Autonomy in the Work of Art,” this volume, chap. 1).
243. GS 1917c: 382, 384, 391–92, 393.
244. GS 1902a (“The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study,” this volume, chap. 2).
245. GS 1902a: 102/12, 104–5/114.
246. GS 1905c (“The Handle,” this volume, chap. 2).
247. GS 1905c: 345–46/267–68.
248. GS 1908b: 376–82/212–16; GS 1918d: 267–75/41–46.
249. GS 1902a: 105/15.
250. Adorno 1965: 559–61/213–15.
251. GS 1914c: 189–91, 193.
252. GS 1918d: 273/45.
253. GS 1902b: 92–96; GS 1911d; GS 1911e: 334–36; GS 1914c: 177–83; Adorno 1969.
254. GS 1902a: 105/15.
255. As Frisby notes, Simmel’s comment on furniture is likely to have been aimed at claims of the Jugendstil in Vienna to design furnishings and domestic interiors like “total works of art” (Frisby 1992: 107). Simmel’s understanding seems comparable in this connection to Adolf Loos’s famous criticisms of superfluous decorativism in Viennese architecture and design after the turn of the century, as set out in his influential lecture of 1910, “Ornament and Crime” (Loos 1997). The same thinking also appears trenchantly in Karl Kraus’s polemical apothegm concerning the difference between an urn (as work of art) and an ornamented chamber pot for nighttime urination: the chamber pot is as little to be considered a work of art as the urn is something to be urinated upon. In Kraus’s words: “Adolf Loos and I—he, literally, and I, grammatically—have done nothing more than show that there is a distinction between an urn and a chamber pot, and that it is this distinction above all that provides culture with elbow room. The others, those who fail to make this distinction, are divided into those who use the urn as a chamber pot and those who use the chamber pot as an urn” (Kraus, in *Die Fackel*, December 1913, cited in Janik and Toulmin 1973: 89).
256. GS 1890: 243–44.
257. Benjamin 1936, §3.
258. Benjamin 1936, §§2–5.
259. GS 1907b: 266/67.
260. GS 1914c: 179–80.
261. GS 1914c: 177–96; 1908d (“On Realism in Art,” this volume, chap. 3).
262. GS 1902b: 95; 1908d: 408–9.
263. GS 1914c: 196.
264. GS 1896a: 211; GS 1900: 659/473.
265. GS 1906c: 9/86, 14/90 (“On the Third Dimension in Art,” this volume, chap. 3).
266. GS 1916b: 361/39–40.

267. GS 1908d: 407–8 (“On Realism in Art,” this volume, chap. 3).
268. GS 1916b: 491–501/142–51.
269. GS 1916b: 498/148, 499/150.
270. GS 1914c: 183–84, 193–94.
271. GS 1903a: 258 (“representations” is here denoted by the German word *Vorstellungen*, as used by Kant).
272. GS 1914c: 194.
273. GS 1914c: 182–83; GS 1917e: 309.
274. GS 1917d (“On Caricature,” this volume, chap. 3).
275. GS 1917d: 247.
276. GS 1893b (“Gerhart Hauptmann’s *The Weavers*,” this volume, chap. 6).
277. GS 1893b: 27.
278. GS 1911d (“On Constantin Meunier,” this volume, chap. 7).
279. GS 1911d: 331.
280. GS 1914c: 177–83.
281. GS 1908d: 411.
282. GS 1893b: 26; GS 1896a: 212.
283. GS 1903c (“On Aesthetic Quantities,” this volume, chap. 2).
284. GS 1903c: 184–85/81–82; GS 1911b: 302.
285. GS 1911b (“On the Aesthetics of the Alps,” this volume chap. 4).
286. GS 1913d (“The Philosophy of Landscape,” this volume, chap. 4).
287. GS 1913d: 472.
288. GS 1895b (“Arnold Böcklin’s Landscapes,” this volume, chap. 4).
289. GS 1895b: 96, 100.
290. GS 1895b: 97, 98, 101.
291. GS 1900: 641–42/462, 660/474; cf. GS 1902b: 99 (“Rodin: Part I,” this volume, chap. 7).
292. GS 1914c: 145; GS 1916b: 357–61/37–40.
293. GS 1916b: 335–36/21–22.
294. GS 1916b: 351–58/37.
295. GS 1893a; GS 1900: 594–616/432–46; GS 1903b: 116–20/174–76.
296. GS 1901d; GS 1913b; GS 1914c: 186–88.
297. GS 1914c: 187, 188; GS 1918a: 190–93/80–82; *GSG* 23:282.
298. GS 1914c: 186
299. GS 1905d: 321; GS 1918c: 370; GS 1901c (“Aesthetics of the Portrait: Part I” and “Part II”; “The Aesthetic Significance of the Face,” this volume, chap. 5).
300. GS 1905d: 322, 324.
301. GS 1914c: 145, 150, 195.
302. GS 1916b: 326/15.
303. GS 1905d: 326–27; GS 1918c: 374–77.
304. On Simmel and Worringer, further below, §10.
305. GS 1918c: 376, 379.
306. Cf. Schönberg 1911.
307. GS 1901d: 33–34; GS 1909c (“Stefan George: Part I” and “Part II,” this

volume, chap. 8). Simmel's essay of 1901 is a revised and enlarged version of an earlier statement of 1898, "Stefan George: Eine kunstphilosophische Betrachtung" (*GSG* 5:287–300), which led George to dedicate to Simmel his poem cycle of 1899, *Der Teppich des Lebens und die Lieder von Traum und Tod, mit einem Vorspiel* (*The Tapestry of Life and Songs of Dream and Death, with a Prelude*). Simmel appears to have met George first at some point in the early spring of 1897 (*GSG* 12:501–2; *GSG* 22:268–71, 360–65, 445–49).

308. GS 1901d: 30, 34; GS 1909c: 53.

309. GS 1908e; GS 1909b; GS 1912 ("Theater and the Dramatic Actor: Part I," "Part II," and "Part III," this volume, chap. 6); also GS 1914c: 159–77. Very little can be established about Simmel's sources in these three short texts on theater. Simmel cites few previous critics or philosophers of theater in the history of ideas, either here or elsewhere in his writings, including in available letters. See, however, at length, Thomas 2013.

310. GS 1914c: 170, 174–76.

311. GS 1914c: 170.

312. GS 1914c: 162; Bergson 1900.

313. GS 1917d: 247–49 ("On Caricature," this volume, chap. 3).

314. GS 1917d: 248.

315. GS 1917d: 247–48; cf. GS 1900: 308–21/238–47 (on the figure of the miser).

316. GS 1917d: 244; cf. GS 1918d: 212–35/1–17.

317. GS 1909b: 24–25.

318. GS 1909b: 25.

319. GS 1909b: 26–27; GS 1912: 308–9/91–92.

320. GS 1909b: 25–26.

321. GS 1909b: 26; GS 1914c: 163.

322. GS 1914c: 165–67.

323. GS 1914c: 168; also GS 1918d: 275/46.

324. GS 1902b; GS 1910c; GS 1911d; GS 1911e; GS 1917e ("Michelangelo," "On Constantin Meunier," and "Rodin: Part I," "Part II," and "Part III," all in this volume, chap. 7).

325. GS 1901a: 45–48 ("Aesthetics of Gravity," this volume, chap. 2).

326. GS 1911e ("Rodin: Part II").

327. GS 1902b ("Rodin: Part I"); *GSG* 7:358–59.

328. Rilke by this time was in close personal contact with Rodin and from September of that year would serve as his private secretary. Simmel's account of their meeting appears in his last tribute to Rodin, published shortly after the sculptor's death on 17 November 1917: GS 1917e ("Rodin: Part III," this volume). On the known details of Simmel's correspondence with Rodin, only a part of which survives, see *GSG* 22:511, 531–32, 559, 697–99, 844; see also editor's note preceding chap. 7, this volume.

329. Rilke 1902–1907; see Braungart 1995; Potts 2000: 72–101; Schings 2002; Faath 2000; Cronan 2009.

330. In addition to three documented encounters in 1897, 1905, and 1915, it is likely that Simmel and Rilke met on other occasions (see *GSG* 22:269–71, 279–80, 321–24, 642–43, 646–48; *GSG* 23:477–80, 489, 495–501). Four brief postcard invitations from Simmel suggest that meetings may have taken place on 22 January 1898 and again in late February 1899 (*GSG* 22:279–80, 321–23; *GSG* 23:479). On 15 July 1905, shortly before returning to Paris, Rilke wrote to his wife Clara Westhoff of having spoken with Simmel on the subject of Rodin’s idea of “nature” (*GSG* 22:648; *GSG* 23:479–80)—a conversation that almost certainly must have referred to Simmel’s exchange with Rodin in April of that year on nature and “naturalism” in the sculptor’s work, of which Simmel writes in his last essay on Rodin from 1917 (GS 1917e: 309; see also above, §6); and in the same letter Rilke speaks of another expected meeting with Simmel on the following day. We know too from a letter of Rilke to Lou Andreas-Salomé from December 1913 that Rilke appreciated Simmel’s book on Goethe of 1913, and we know that Rilke met privately with Simmel in Berlin on 4 January 1915 after Simmel’s lecture in the evening of that day, titled “On Death in Art” (further above, §3) (*GSG* 23:477–78). In a letter of 15 January 1915 to Marianne Mitford, Rilke wrote of having conversed with Simmel on that occasion on Egyptian art and sculpture as well as on Michelangelo, whose poetry Rilke had been translating from the Italian in the first half of the previous year and on whom Rilke had touched in his story “Von einem, der die Steine belauscht” (in the collection *Vom lieben Gott und Anderes: An Große für Kinder erzählt* [1900]) (*GSG* 23:478). A letter of Rilke’s from 6 March 1915 thanks Simmel for offprints of Simmel’s essays on Venice and Michelangelo and speaks of his continuing thoughts on Egyptian sculpture and on Michelangelo’s unfinished last work of sculpture, the Rondanini Pietà, which Simmel discusses at length in his essay in a paragraph shortly after a few remarks of his own on Egyptian art (GS 1910c: 316, 321–22; *GSG* 23:477–78, 495–96). Of the Rondanini Pietà, Rilke wrote to Simmel: “To think that to renounce one’s own work might still belong in the realm of its fulfillment: this perhaps is nevertheless that dark victory, that inner descent into oneself, that first makes an artistically created world complete unto itself and that, as such, places it among the things of pure being that are touched by fate no longer” (*Dass die Absage ans eigene Werk doch noch in den Bereich seiner Verwirklichung fele, das ist doch wohl jener dunkle Sieg, jener innere Untergang in sich selbst, der eine kunstgeschaffene Welt erst zum Ganzen zusammen nimmt und sie, als vollzählige, unter die nicht mehr vom Schicksal erreichten Dinge des reinen Daseins stellt*) (*GSG* 23:496).

331. GS 1902b: 99; GS 1911e: 340–45.

332. GS 1902b: 97; GS 1911e: 337.

333. GS 1910c: 311–13.

334. GS 1910c: 312, 313; cf. Blanchot 1955:11–52/19–56, 103–209/120–76 (“essential solitude of the work of art”; in Rilke and Mallarmé).

335. Rilke 1902–1907: 9–21/1–12, 69–84/60–75; Potts 2000: 77–102.

336. GS 1902b: 94–95; GS 1911e: 336–37.

337. GS 1911e: 335, 336.

338. GS 1911e: 338, 339, 340. 346; Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, chap. 1.

339. GS 1911e: 334.

- 340.** GS 1900: 686-716/491-512; GS 1916b: 447-48/106-7.
- 341.** GS 1911e: 347.
- 342.** GS 1911e: 337, 347.
- 343.** GS 1911e: 339.
- 344.** GS 1916b: 445-48/104-7.
- 345.** GS 1916b: 446/105, 447/106, 448/107.
- 346.** GS 1916b: 448/107.
- 347.** GS 1916b: 446/106; cited by Simmel; Verlaine (1866), *Oeuvres complètes*, 1 (Et je m'en vais / Au vent mauvais / Qui m'emporte / Deçà, delà / Pareil à la / Feuille morte).
- 348.** GS 1911e: 343.
- 349.** GS 1911e: 344-45.
- 350.** GS 1911e: 344-45.
- 351.** GS 1911e: 341-45; GS 1918d: 346-425/99-154.
- 352.** GS 1918d: 231-32/15-16, 285/53; Symons 2017; Pyyhtinen 2015; Faath 1998.
- 353.** Deleuze 1966, 1968, 1981, 2001; Deleuze and Guattari 1980.
- 354.** Frisby 1985; Mičko 2010; Symons 2017; Jameson 1999.
- 355.** Worringer (1908) 1948: 7-10/16-17; *GSG* 23:38-40, 51-52. Simmel cites Worringer on one occasion in "On the Aesthetics of the Alps"; GS 1911b: 166; this volume, chap. 4). Also of note is Arnold Hauser, author of *The Social History of Art* (1951), whose thesis of correlation, on the one hand, between schematic form and hieratic social structures and, on the other, between naturalistic form and more individualized structures bears some comparison with the work of both Worringer and Simmel. As a student friend of Karl Mannheim in Budapest after 1910 and member of Lukács's Sunday Circle in Budapest after 1916 with Balázs and others, Hauser appreciated Simmel's teaching at an early stage, though he may not have encountered him personally in Berlin before 1914. Cf. Gelfert 2012.
- 356.** *GSG* 22:753-58; *GSG* 23:720; Skidelsky 2003, 2010; Geßner 1996; Thouard 2012.
- 357.** Skidelsky 2003; Geßner 1996.
- 358.** Köhnke 1996: 239-40, 469-70; Frisby 2005: 29; Harrington 2002.
- 359.** Frisby 2005: 29-32; Jäger 1991; Faath 2001; *GSG* 22:351.
- 360.** Meyer 2017: 277-80; see also, extensively in English, Einstein 2019.
- 361.** *GSG* 13:402, 408; Harrington 2016: 205-9, 281-88; Hoeges 1994: 14-24.
- 362.** Harrington 2016: 252-65; see also the collection of notes on Simmel's lectures on topics in culture and the arts compiled by figures including Curtius, Margarete Susman, Herman Schmalenbach, Kurt Gassen, Adolf Löwe, and others in *GSG* 21. Also important to connect to Simmel in some of these respects are Susanne Langer, via the significant influence of Cassirer in her work in philosophical aesthetics (cf. Langer 1942, 1953), and Hans Blumenberg, whose filigreed studies on metaphor and "metaphorology" in philosophy and literature cite Simmel repeatedly (see esp. Blumenberg 1976).
- 363.** *GSG* 22:562-67, 570-71, 940-41, 950-51; *GSG* 23:169, 471, 630; Pyyhtinen 2018: 106-II.
- 364.** Goodstein 2002, 2017.

365. GS 1916b: 492–501/142–51; GS 1914c: 145–46, 179–80.
366. GS 1916b: 327–34/16–20; Gadamer 1960: 270–76/235–41.
367. Scheler 1925; Schütz 1932; Plessner 1923.
368. Plessner 1923, 1924, 1948; Fischer 2016.
369. GS 1916b: 400–410/70–79; GS 1918d: 297–345/63–97; Heidegger 1927: 235–67/279–311; Großheim 1991; Theunissen 1991: 205; Pyhtinen 2018: 138–43.
370. GS 1916b: 482–92/135–42; Heidegger 1935.
371. Jaworski 1995, 1997; Levine et al. 1976; Frisby 1992: 110–15; Bulmer 1984.
372. Jaworski 1995: 407–10.
373. Davis 1997.
374. Becker 1982.
375. Frisby 1992, 2005; *TCS* 8 (1991); *TCS* 11 (1994); *TCS* 24, nos. 7–8 (2007); *TCS* 29, nos. 7–8 (2012); cf. Harvey 1990; Jameson 1991; Featherstone 1991; Bell 1976.
376. Frisby 1992: 97; Frisby 2002; cf. Florida 2002; Baudrillard 1981.
377. Cf. Lyotard 1979; Habermas 1985.
378. Cf. Jameson 1991; Huyssen 1986.
379. Cf. Bauman 2000.
380. Cf. Lamont and Fournier 1992; Appadurai 1996; Fuente 2008; Alexander 2004.
381. GS 1911i; Bauman 1989, 1991; Kemple 2018: 153–69.
382. Cf. Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994; Boltanski and Chiapello 1999.
383. Cf. Greenberg 1940; Osborne 2013: 71–98.
384. GS 1906b; GS 1911b; GS 1911c; GS 1913d.
385. Krauss 1979; Osborne 2013: 99–116.
386. Cf. Danto 1997; Osborne 2002.
387. Danto 1964; Dickie 1974; Wollheim 1980.
388. Adorno 1969.
389. GS 1916b: 309/3.
390. Cf. Jauß 1982; Seel 1985. These authors drawing in part on John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934).
391. Cf. Alliez and Osborne 2013; Lash 2005, 2010; Magatti 2017; Martinelli 2017.

CHAPTER ONE

Aesthetics

This first cluster of essays includes pieces by Simmel on general problems of aesthetics. "Sociological Aesthetics" (Soziologische Ästhetik) first appeared in 1896 in the journal *Die Zukunft*, edited by Maximilian Harden (English translation 1968). "Kant and Modern Aesthetics" (Kant und die moderne Ästhetik) appeared in October 1903 in the newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt*. The essay also formed Lecture 15 in Simmel's "Sixteen Lectures on Kant" (Kant: Sechzehn Vorlesungen) at the University of Berlin, published in February 1904 (GSG 9:199–214). "Art for Art's Sake" (L'art pour l'art) appeared in January 1914 in the Berlin newspaper *Der Tag*. "Autonomy in the Work of Art" (Gesetzmäßigkeit im Kunstwerk) appeared shortly after Simmel's death, in the autumn 1918 issue of *LOGOS: Internationale Jahresschrift für Philosophie der Kultur*, following submission by Simmel in June of that year.

Sociological Aesthetics

The observation of human actions owes its continuously renewed challenge to the infinitely varied mixture between the steady return of a few basic elements and the fullness of their individual variations. The trends, developments, and contrasts of human history can be reduced to a surprisingly small number of original themes. What has been said about poetry—that lyric and dramatic writing consists in changing formulations of a narrowly limited number of possibilities of fate—is valid for every other area of human activity. The more broadly we conceptualize these areas, the smaller becomes the number of basic themes. Finally, when life is viewed in the most general way, they will almost always end in a dialectic whose struggles, compromises, or combinations generate all of the continuously novel forms of life. Every epoch of human history seems to derive its unlimited number of manifestations from this dualism between movements of thought and life, in which the basic streams of humanity find their most simple expression. This deep, living antithesis in human affairs can be conceptualized only through symbols and examples. During each major historical period a different shape of this contrast appears as its basic type and original form.

Thus, in the beginning of Greek philosophy there appeared the important contrast between Heraclitus and the Eleatic School. To Heraclitus, all being was in continuous flux; the processes of this world were given form in the variety of unlimited contrasts which continuously transformed themselves from one into the other. For the Eleatic School, however, there was only a single static essence which transcended the deceiving appearance of the senses. It was all-inclusive and undivided, and it incorporated the absolute undifferentiated unity of all things. This was the basic form which the division of all human essence took in Greek thought, and provided the theme for its whole development. With Christianity there appeared a different elaboration: the contrast between the sacred and the secular

principles. For all specifically Christian life, this appeared as a final and absolute antithesis between essential orientations, from which all differences between willing and thinking had to be derived. By itself, however, it did not lead to any deeper distinction. More recent perspectives of life developed these elements into the fundamental contrasts between nature and spirit. Finally, the present has found for this dualism the formulae of social versus individual, which draws its line through mankind and even through the individual man. A typical difference between the characters of men and institutions appears to be expressed by this dichotomy as if it were a watershed from which they separate in different directions only to flow together again and influence reality according to their degree of participation. The line seems to extend through all questions of life, to the most remote concerns; it appears in the most varied subjects. In sociopolitical life it is expressed by the contrast between socialistic and individualistic tendencies. It determines not only the depths of purely materialistic interest in life, but also the heights of aesthetic value.

The essence of aesthetic contemplation and interpretation for us consists in the following: What is unique emphasizes what is typical, what is accidental appears as normal, and the superficial and fleeting stands for what is essential and basic. It seems to be impossible for any phenomenon to avoid being reduced to what is important and of eternal value. Even the lowest, intrinsically ugly phenomenon can be dissolved into contexts of color and form, of feeling and experience, which provide it with exciting significance. To involve ourselves deeply and lovingly with even the most common product, which would be banal and repulsive in its isolated appearance, enables us to conceive of it, too, as a ray and image of the final unity of all things from which beauty and meaning flow. Every philosophical system, every religion, every moment of our heightened emotional experience, searches for symbols which are appropriate for their expression. If we pursue this possibility of aesthetic appreciation to its final point, we find that there are no essential differences among things. Our worldview turns into aesthetic pantheism. Every point contains within itself the potential of being redeemed to absolute aesthetic importance. To the adequately trained eye the totality of beauty, the complete meaning of the world as a whole, radiates from every single point.

Thereby, however, the individual object loses the significance it possesses precisely as an individual and in contrast with everything else. For it is impossible to conserve individuality by saying that aesthetic formulations and the deepening of the things are equally possible everywhere and provide full freedom for the expression of different qualities and contents of beauty. Nor can it be preserved by saying that there exists only

aesthetic comparability and not equality of value, or that only differences of rank were canceled out in this area but not the colors and color values, the meanings and thoughts, or the allegro and adagio. This conception, which wishes to reconcile the stimuli of universal aesthetic equivalence [*Allgleichheit*] and uniqueness [*Alleinheit*] with those of aesthetic individualism, does not fully satisfy the demands of the latter. The hierarchy of values, the rise of the significant over the run-of-the-mill product, the organic growth and development which permit the molding of the inspired out of the dull and the refined out of the raw, provide a background, height, and power of light, which under conditions of equal aesthetic value of objects could not be reached by any other one among them. From them comes forth an equally sublime radiance over all things, which raises the lowest to that of the highest but also brings the highest to equal rank with the lowest.

Our sensations are tied to differences, those of value no less than the sensations of touch or temperature. We are not always able to proceed at a constant level, at least not on the highest level which is accessible to us during our best moments. Therefore we have to pay for raising the lowest level to aesthetic heights by denying ourselves those upswings which can occur only rarely and sporadically, and can rise only above the level of a lower undifferentiated and darker world. It is not only this conditioning of all our sensations by differences, which we may conceive of as undesirable restraints and shortcomings of our being, that ties the values of things to their relative distances from one another: these very distances, too, represent bases of aesthetic value. One of the highest aesthetic stimuli and values of this world is based on the division of the world into light and darkness, so that its elements do not flow into one another formlessly, but instead each individual has its place in a hierarchy of values between a higher and lower one, and the raw and lower forms derive their existential meaning from their being the support and background for the refined, bright, and exalted. Thus, irreconcilable approaches are divided. One finds rewards in a thousand undistinguished abysses for the sake of one height, and deduces the value of things from this highest perfection, which reflects the value and meaning of all lower things. Someone who values things this way will never understand another who hears the voice of God in a worm and feels complete justice in the claim of each thing to be valued equally with any other. Moreover, he who does not wish to deny himself the drama of structuring, grading, and forming the world's image according to the amount of its beauty will never be able to share the world intimately with another person who sees the harmony of things in their equality, so that charm and ugliness of appearance, ridiculous chaos and

meaningful form, represent only covering veils behind which he will always see identical beauty and the soul of being for which his mind thirsts.

If we were to search for a reconciliation here, for a conceptual perspective which could demonstrate these value schemes to be compatible and resolved on a higher level on the ground that both, even though under divided jurisdictions, rule many individuals—this would indeed be like trying to prove that there is no contrast between day and night because of the existence of dusk. Here we stand at the springs of all human life. Depending on the areas of human experience through which they flow, they will nourish the immense contrasts between political socialism and individualism, or pantheistic and atomistic forms of knowledge, or aesthetic equalization and differentiation. These sources themselves, these final bases of essence, cannot be described adequately with words. They can only be recognized in those individual phenomena in which they are mixed. If they cannot be conceptualized, at least one can point them out as those unknown forces which give form to the matter of our existence. They are never reconciled, yet each provides to the other fresh stimulation, which gives the life of our species its restlessness, struggle, and vacillation between contrasts, so that the appeasement of either one calls forth the strongest stimulation for the other. In this process only lies what we might call their reconciliation: not in the dull proof by which they might be conceptually reduced to unity, but in the demonstration that they continuously confront and even fight one another within a single species of being, even in each single soul. This is precisely the height and grandeur of the human soul: its very liveliness, its ungrasped unity, permit during each moment the expression of forces which flow from completely irreconcilable sources toward completely different goals.

The origin of all aesthetic themes is found in symmetry. Before man can bring an idea, meaning, harmony into things, he must first form them symmetrically. The various parts of the whole must be balanced against one another, and arranged evenly around a center. In this fashion man's form-giving power, in contrast to the contingent and confused character of mere nature, becomes most quickly, visibly, and immediately clear. Thus, the first aesthetic step leads beyond a mere acceptance of the meaninglessness of things to a will to transform them symmetrically. As aesthetic values are refined and deepened, however, man returns to the irregular and asymmetrical. It is in symmetrical formations that rationalism first emerges. So long as life is still instinctive, affective, and irrational, aesthetic redemption from it takes on such a rationalistic form. Once intelligence, reckoning, balance have penetrated it, the aesthetic need once

again changes into its opposite, seeking the irrational and its external form, the asymmetrical.

The lower level of the aesthetic drive finds expression in the building of systems which arrange objects into symmetric pictures. Thus, for example, the penance of the sixth century arranged sins and punishments in systems of mathematical precision and balanced structure. Hence the first attempt to master intellectually the totality of moral errors was cast in the form of a scheme which was as mechanical, rational, and symmetric as possible. Once these errors were brought under the yoke of the system, the mind could grasp them the most quickly and with the least resistance. The system breaks down as soon as man has intellectually mastered the proper meaning of the object and need no longer derive it only from its relations with others; at this point, therefore, there is a weakening of the aesthetic will to symmetry, with which the elements were previously arranged.

It is possible to discover through an analysis of the role of symmetry in social life how apparently purely aesthetic interests are called forth by materialistic purposes, and how, on the other hand, aesthetic motives affect forms which seem to obey only functional purposes. For example, in a variety of older cultures we find the coordination of ten members of groups into special social units—for military, taxable, juridical, and other purposes—which in turn frequently form a higher unit, the hundred, by the combination of ten such groups. The reason for this symmetrical construction of groups was certainly the advantage of easier survey, demarcation, and control. The peculiarly stylized society which grew from this type of organization developed on account of its mere utility. But the meaning of “the hundred” extended beyond its utility. Thus “hundreds” frequently contained more or less than one hundred individuals. During the Middle Ages, for example, the Senate of Barcelona was called the “one hundred” even though it numbered approximately two hundred members. This deviation from the original organizational rationality demonstrates a transition from use value to aesthetic value, to the charm of symmetry and architectural forms in social life, while the fiction of technical rationality is still being maintained.

This tendency to organize all of society symmetrically and equally according to general principles is shared by all despotic forms of social organization. Justus Moeser wrote in 1772:

The gentlemen of the Central Administrative Department would like to reduce everything to simple rules. In this fashion we remove ourselves from the true plan of nature, which shows its wealth in variety, and we

clear the way for despotism, which will coerce everything under a few rules.

Symmetrical organizations facilitate the ruling of many from a single point. Norms can be imposed from above with less resistance and greater effectiveness in a symmetrical organization than in a system whose inner structure is irregular and fluctuating. For this reason Charles V (1519–1556) intended to level out all unequal and peculiar political structures and privileges in the Netherlands and to restructure them into an organization which would be comparable in all parts. A historian of the epoch writes “that he hated the old licenses and stubborn privileges, which disturbed his ideas of symmetry.” Egyptian pyramids have correctly been designated as symbols of the political organization of great Oriental despots. They represent the completely symmetrical structure of a society whose elements in the upward direction rapidly decline in number while their amounts of power increase until they meet in the pinnacle which rules equally over the whole.

Even though this form of organization derived its rationality from the needs of despotism, it generates a formal, purely aesthetic meaning. This charm of symmetry, with its internal equilibration, its external unity, and its harmonic relationship of all parts to its unified center, is one of the purely aesthetic forces which attracts many intelligent people to autocracy, with its unlimited expression of the unified will of the state. This is why genuinely liberal forms of the state tend toward asymmetry. Macaulay, the inspired liberal, points directly to this feature as the proper strength of British constitutional life.

We do not think about its symmetry but a great deal about its utility. We never remove an anomaly only because it is an anomaly. We never set our norms for a wider area than is demanded by the special case with which we are dealing at the moment. These are the rules which taken as a whole have governed the proceedings of our 250 parliaments from King John to Queen Victoria.

Here the ideal of symmetry and logical closure, which gives meaning to everything from one single point, is rejected in favor of another ideal, which permits each element to develop independently according to its own conditions. The whole, of course, thus looks disorganized and irregular. Nevertheless, in addition to all concrete motives, there is an aesthetic charm even in this lack of symmetry, in this liberation of the individual. This overtone can easily be heard in the words of Macaulay. It derives from

the feeling that this form of organization brings the inner life of the state to its most typical expression and its most harmonic form.

The influence of aesthetic forces upon social facts is most vivid in modern conflicts between socialistic and individualistic tendencies. Without any doubt, certain ideas of socialism are based on aesthetic values. That society as a whole should become a work of art in which every single element attains its meaning by virtue of its contribution to the whole; that a unified plan should rationally determine all of production, instead of the present rhapsodic haphazardness by which the efforts of individuals benefit or harm society; that the wasteful competition and the fight of individuals against individuals should be replaced by the absolute harmony of work—all these ideas of socialism no doubt meet aesthetic interests. Whatever else one may have against it, these ideas at any rate refute the popular opinion that socialism both begins and ends exclusively in the needs of the stomach. The social question therefore is not only an ethical question, but also an aesthetic one.*

Quite apart from its consequences for the individual, the rational organization of society has a high aesthetic attraction. It aims to make the totality of lives in the whole organization into a work of art, which at present can hardly be accomplished for the life of an individual. The more we learn to appreciate composite forms, the more readily we will extend aesthetic categories to forms of society as a whole. Consider, for example, the aesthetic appeal of machines: the absolute purposiveness and reliability of motions, the extreme reduction of resistance and friction, the harmonic integration of the most minute and the largest parts, provides machines with a peculiar beauty. The organization of a factory and the plan of the socialistic state only repeats this beauty on larger scales. This peculiar interest in harmony and symmetry by which socialism demonstrates its rationalistic character, and by which it aims to stylize social life, is expressed purely externally by the fact that socialistic utopias are always set up according to principles of symmetry. Towns or buildings are arranged either in circular or quadratic form. The layout of the capital is mathematically constructed in the Sun-State of Campanella, as are the work assignments for the citizens and the gradations of their rights and

* [GS] It is an aesthetic question also because of the meaning of the immediate sensation of pleasure and displeasure, and not only on account of the beauty of forms. It would seem harder for a typically "educated" person to overcome the aesthetic discomforts which he experiences during physical contacts with people of the lower class, to whom the honorable sweat of work still clings, than to overcome his attachment to crabmeat, lawn tennis, and easy chairs.

duties. This general trait of socialistic plans attests to the deep power of attraction in the idea of a harmonic, internally balanced organization of human activity overcoming all resistance of irrational individuality. This interest, a purely aesthetic one, independent of all material consequences, has probably always been important in determining the social forms of life.

The attractiveness of beauty is sometimes described as a saving of thought, an unraveling of a maximum number of images with minimum effort. If this is so, then the symmetrical construction of social groups, as it is desired by socialism, will fulfill these postulates. On the other hand, an individuated society, characterized by heterogeneous interests and irreconcilable tendencies, embracing many series of development which have been commenced and interrupted innumerable times (since they were only carried on by individuals), presents to the mind a restless, uneven image, which continuously requires new nervous exertion and effort for its understanding. But a socialistic and balanced society through its organic unity, its symmetrical arrangement and mutual coordination of movements in common centers, provides for the observing mind a maximum of insight. To understand the social picture here requires a minimum of intellectual effort. This fact in its aesthetic significance would seem to figure decisively in the intellectual appeal of socialism.

In aesthetics, symmetry means the dependence of individual elements on their mutual interdependence with all others, but also self-containment within the designated circle. Asymmetrical arrangements permit broader individual rights, more latitude for the free and far-reaching relations of each element. The internal organization of socialism takes this into consideration; thus it is no accident that all historical approximations to socialism occurred only within strictly closed groups which declined all relations to outside powers. This containment, which is appropriate for the aesthetic character of symmetry as well as for the political character of the socialistic state, suggests the general argument that because of continuous international intercourse socialism could never come to power in a single country but only uniformly in the whole civilized world.

The power of aesthetic valuation is demonstrated by the fact that it can also be applied equally well in support of the opposite social ideal. Beauty, as it is actually felt today, has an almost exclusively individualistic character. Essentially it is based on individual traits, in contrast to the general characteristics and conditions of life. Truly romantic beauty is based to a large extent on the opposition and isolation of the individual from what is common and valid for everybody. This is true even if we disavow individualism on ethical grounds. It is aesthetically attractive to think of

the individual not only as a member of a larger whole, but as a whole in its own right, which as such no longer fits into any symmetric organization. Even the most perfect social mechanism is only a mechanism, and so lacks the freedom which, regardless of one's philosophical interpretations, is the *sine qua non* of beauty. Thus, of the worldviews which have become prominent during recent times, those of Rembrandt and Nietzsche are most decidedly individualistic, and are supported by distinctly aesthetic motives. Indeed, the individualism of this contemporary view of beauty extends so far that even flowers, and especially modern garden flowers, are no longer bound into bundles. On the contrary, they are arranged individually, or several of them at most are bound together rather loosely. Thus every single garden flower is seen as an individual in itself; they are all aesthetic individualities, which cannot be coordinated into symmetrical unity. By contrast, wild flowers, which are less developed and somehow arrested in their evolution, form delightful bunches.

This combination of similar stimuli with irreconcilable contrasts points to the peculiar origin of aesthetic feelings. Even though we know very little about it with certainty, we sense that the utility of objects for the preservation and enhancement of the species also forms the starting point for their aesthetic value. Perhaps something appears to us as beautiful which the species has found useful; perhaps it provides us with enjoyment because we are part of the species, even though as individuals we no longer enjoy the real utility of the object. This immediate utility has been cleared away in the course of historical development and inheritance; the materialistic motives on which our aesthetic sensibilities are based have been effaced in time. Hence they gave to beauty the character of "pure form," and a certain otherworldliness and nonreality not unlike the purifying spirit which hovers over one's own experiences of past times.

Utility, however, can take many forms. What is useful may frequently be of sharply contrasting content during various adaptive periods, or in different regions during the same period of time. Major alternatives of historical life gain prominence through widely varying historical conditions. For social organization, for example, the individual is only a member and an element. Likewise, from the perspective of individuals, society is only a base point. At any given moment these emphases are mixed in changing proportions. On this basis the preconditions are given toward which the aesthetic interests of a certain social form of life may turn as strongly toward one or another. We are led to an apparent contradiction: the aesthetic charm of a totality in which the individual disappears seems to grow with the prominence of the individual. But this can be resolved without further ado if we see all feeling for beauty as the distillation, the

idealization, the mature form, of the adaptations and feelings of utility of the species in an individual member, who has inherited its consciousness, but in a spiritualized and formalistic way. The great variety and contradiction of historical developments are thus reflected in the breadth of our aesthetic sensitivity. Hence we can connect an equally strong stimulus to the most opposite poles of social interest.

The intrinsic significance of artistic styles can be interpreted as a result of different distances which they produce between us and phenomena. All art forms change the field of vision by which we originally and naturally react to reality. On the one hand, art brings us closer to reality, bringing us into a more immediate relationship with its proper and innermost meaning by revealing to us behind the cold strangeness of the world the animated quality of being [*Sein*] through which it becomes familiar and intelligible for us. On the other hand, every artistic medium introduces abstractions from the immediacy of material things. It weakens concrete stimuli and introduces a veil between them and us, analogous to the blue hue which surrounds distant mountains. Equally strong stimuli are connected with both ends of this antithesis. Tensions and different emphases between them express in each style its unique form. In "naturalistic" art, in its opposition to all proper "stylization," closeness to the natural object seems to be dominant. Naturalistic art intends to find in each little element of this world its inner significance. Formalistic art, on the contrary, places between us and the objects a preconceived postulate concerning beauty and significance.

All art forms are nourished by immediate impressions of reality, even though they become art only when they grow beyond this level. In order to convince us of its truth and importance, art demands an unconscious process of reduction. This reduction is short and easy in naturalistic art forms. For this reason naturalistic art does not require determined and far-reaching intellectual activities for its enjoyment; its approaches are quite direct. Thus there may often be a relationship between naturalistic art and sensual lust, though this is not at all necessary. In any case, man can be most quickly and most directly excited by naturalistic art, because the object and the subjective reactions to it are here in closest proximity.

Nevertheless, naturalism uses the refined charm of remote effects. We note the careful search for its objects and motives in daily life, in undeveloped forms, and in banal expressions. For a very sensitive beholder, the peculiar distance between works of art and the immediacy of experience becomes especially clear when the object is very close. For less delicate perception, a greater distance from the object itself is required for the enjoyment of this charm of distance, as for example in stylized Italian land-

scapes or paintings of historical dramas. The less cultivated (and childlike) aesthetic feelings are the more fantastic, the farther removed from reality the object must be by which the artistic work achieves its impact. A more sensitive viewer does not require such a materialistic prop. The artistic form of the object in itself provides him with the secret charm of distance from things, liberates him from their dull pressure, carries him from the realm of nature to that of spirit. He will experience this even more intensely when art deals with proximate, low, and relatively secular material.

It is interesting that contemporary aesthetics strongly emphasizes the distance between subject and object, rather than the intimacy. This special interest in items from a distance seems to be a distinctive sign of modern times, which is common to many phenomena. The preference for cultures and styles removed in space and time belongs here. Things from a distance best stimulate many vividly changing imaginations, and thus fulfill our multifarious need for excitement. But these strange and distant things have relatively weak effects on our imagination, because they have no direct relationship to our personal interests. Thus they impose on our weakened nerves only comfortable excitement. This is the impact of all the fragments, suggestions, aphorisms, symbols, and primitive art forms which are evoking such vivid responses now. All of these forms of expression, which are at home in all the arts, separate us from the completeness and fullness of the things themselves. They speak to us as if they were at a distance. They represent reality not with direct certainty, but with a kind of retracted acuity. The literary style of the late nineteenth century, most fully developed in Paris and Vienna, avoids the direct designation of things, describes only minor points, and covers verbally only one of the sides; here mode of expression and subject matter coincide only in the most isolated details. The pathological symptom of *Berührungsangst*, the fear of getting into too close contact with objects, is spread endemically in a mild degree nowadays. It grows out of a kind of hyperaesthetics, for which every live and immediate contact produces pain. For this reason, the aestheticism of the majority of modern men is expressed through negative taste. Illustrations are the easy vulnerability to disagreeable items, the determined exclusion of the unpleasant, the repulsion of many if not most varieties of stimuli. On the other hand, lack of balance comes about from expressing positive taste, from energetically saying "yes," from the happy and unrestrained acceptance of what is liked, in short, from all actively appropriating energies.

Naturalism in its cruder forms was a desperate attempt to overcome distance, to catch the closeness and immediacy of things. But as soon as men got close, their sensitive nerves were unable even to tolerate the

contact, and they shied away as if they had touched hot coals. This happened not only in painting, as represented by the Scottish school, or literature, which turned from Zolaism to symbolism; it happened in science as well. For example, materialism, which seeks to grasp reality immediately, has been swamped by neo-Kantian or subjectivistic worldviews, according to which things must be broken down or distilled through the medium of the soul before they become true knowledge. Again, in all scientific disciplines, a call has risen for coordination and generalization which can attain a distance capable of viewing all concrete individual facts. In ethics, too, concrete utility has to step behind more abstract, "spiritualized" principles, which are frequently religious and always far from sensual immediacy.

The tendency of our culture toward distance is observable in more than one dominant way. (I am using the quantitative dimension of distance only as a symbol, an approximation, since there is no other more direct expression for what is going on.) The dissolution of the family is connected with this development. So is the feeling of unbearable narrowness which is frequently awakened in modern man by his circle of close relatives, which frequently involves him in very tragic forms of conflict. This fear of contact is reinforced by the ease of travel over longer distances. The wealth of intimate relations which are now possible with spatially and temporally remote parties seems to make us more and more sensitive to the shocks and disturbances which come to us from the immediate proximity and contact between man and things.

This fear of contact seems to me to stem largely from the steadily deeper penetration of a money economy, which more and more destroys the natural economic relationships of earlier times (though this work of destruction has not been fully completed). Money is placed between man and man, between man and product, as a mediator, as a general denominator into which every other value must be translated, so that it can be further translated into other values. Since the beginning of a money economy, the objects of economic relationships are no longer immediate to us. Our interest in them is expressed not in their individual and functional meaning, but only through the medium of money. What is their worth, as measured by this intermediary value, meets the eye of economic man. Time after time his rational consciousness will stop him at this intermediary step, the center of his interests, his one resting place, while all concrete objects drift by in restless flight. These objects are burdened with a profound contradiction: they alone are able to provide definite satisfactions, yet they obtain their degree of value and interest only after having been evaluated by this yardstick without character and quality. Money, by the

enlargement of its role, has placed us at a wider and more basic distance from the object. Immediacy of impression and active interests in things become weakened. Our contact with them becomes interrupted, and we sense them only through intermediaries, which can never fully express their genuine, unique, and immediate being.

Thus the most diverse features of modern art and culture seem to have in common a deep psychological trait. In abstract terms it may be defined as a tendency to increase the distance between man and his objects, which find its most distinct form in the area of aesthetics. Radical breaks in this tendency, such as naturalism, which seeks conformism with things and absorption in their unbroken reality, must not lead us astray. Oscillations between both extremes in particular prove the existence of the same malaise from which each of them independently derives. A time which simultaneously idolizes Böcklin and impressionism, naturalism and symbolism, socialism and Nietzsche—such a time apparently discovers the most developed stimuli of its life in oscillations between the extreme poles of universal human existence. Exhausted nerves which are drifting between hypersensitivity and lack of sensitivity can be excited only by the most opaque forms and rudely accurate details, or else by the most tender and starkest stimuli.

Kant and Modern Aesthetics

Among the great directive minds of world history, perhaps none resisted the accolade of genius more energetically than Kant. His near-pedantic exactitude of manner and scrupulously schooled rigors of thought led him to consider attributes of genius such as brisk daring and freedom to be completely incompatible with the spirit of science, prompting him deliberately to withdraw the title from Newton—not despite but precisely *because* of the fact that he considered Newton the greatest scientist of all time. Behind this lies not merely a difference of semantics hiding possibly some more basic agreement in the matter at hand, but a fundamental contrast between Kant's value for us and the value he ascribed to himself. The peculiar orderliness of his nature, punctiliously slotting the most courageous energies of a completely radical, indeed revolutionary, thinking into the most pedestrian kind of procedural systematics, finds its *ne plus ultra* in the fact that Kant's most long-winded and overwrought work, *The Critique of Judgement*, which can drive readers almost to despair with its baroque constructions and endless repetitions of similar sentences and phrases, nevertheless bears perhaps the most luminous traces of genius. For it may well be that the essence of genius is to know things it has not itself experienced, and to enunciate things whose significance it cannot itself quantify; and in just such a sense, this work by Kant contains reflections on ultimate questions of aesthetic pleasure that anticipate the best of modern aesthetic consciousness, yet whose bases of experience in his own life are almost nowhere to be found. Spending his entire life in a small eighteenth-century town as spartan as Königsberg, in which he can never once have been privy to any great work of art, he was able nevertheless to formulate some of the profoundest insights into the nature of beauty and to laud, as a paragon of poetic perfection, a verse of such unfathomable tastelessness as the following: "The sun rose forth, like serenity from virtue." In the history of philosophy, where flaws and flawlessness of

mind intertwine like nowhere else known to man, perhaps no more egregious instance exists of a genius's infallible instinct nevertheless finding itself misled by ignorance of realities and stubborn addiction to convoluted systematics.

We sense straightaway Kant's incomparable sharpness of thought in the opening proposition of this work, which in all its breadth of scope is nevertheless unified in the most unique way. Pleasure in an object that we call aesthetic is entirely independent of this object's *existence*. And this is so for the following reasons. Analytical intellect [*Verstand*] distinguishes the sum of qualities that make an object what it is from the bare fact that the object so qualified exists in reality. For we are free completely to ignore the latter fact and to imagine countless items purely in regard to their qualitative contents, without asking in the slightest whether any such object of our representation also in fact exists. When we do ask this question, when interest and enjoyment of an object depend on the object's being tangible and experienceable, we quit the realm of the aesthetic. To live in a house, to embrace someone, to join the shade of a tree, and to be glad of any one or the other of these things, we must in each case be able to feel them to exist. But whenever our pure perception of this house, person, or tree delights us regardless of any assurance of its existence, and this delight persists unchanged even if the appearance turns out to be a mirage bearing only the sensory image, the pure content of our perception, now the truly aesthetic mode of enjoyment of the world stands out from among all the many others. For this alone explains the full freedom and purity proper to the realm of the beautiful, where pleasurable relations to things rely genuinely on our perception of them and on the distance in which we enjoy them without touching them. Beauty dwells in things' aspect of pure appearance, and is unaffected by any other reality contained or not contained in appearances. A poem has lyrical meaning quite regardless of whether its content corresponds to reality or not; and music, for similar reasons, is the most complete type of aesthetic form insofar as in it, our freedom from every kind of practical interest is intensified to the point that any question of such interest becomes meaningless. In this, Kant discerns a basic difference of the beautiful from everything purely sensuously gratifying. For anything merely gratifying to our senses requires a tangible reality of things affecting us immediately and causing us to react with sensations of pleasure. Everything we can sensuously enjoy in this case must be real and present before us, whereas what is beautiful can survive in our consciousness even long after disappearing from material reality. For however far back in the past this reality may lie, the aesthetic pleasure could never in the first place have consisted solely in a thing's immediate

impression on our sensibilities but only in a much more deep-seated reaction of our soul to the pure picture of this thing for us. The sensuously attractive is valuable for us because we enjoy it, whereas the beautiful is enjoyable for us because it is valuable. And this last step is possible only if the pleasure of a thing does not depend on the thing's material existence but on those of its qualities or forms that we must judge to be valuable, whether present and existent for us at precisely this moment or not.

Admittedly Kant underscores this indifference of our aesthetic attitude to the real being of things only in order to illuminate beauty's difference from bare sensory pleasure. But this indifference also serves to bring beauty into relief from another contrasting side. Artistic contemplation has no interest in the reality of things beyond perceptible qualities because such reality is something metaphysical. In the sense highlighted by Kant, such reality may be open to perception, but in another sense it is precisely that which is not open to perception. For we perceive directly only the colors, sounds, texture, or taste of things, and these are but representations of ours, determined by the organization of our organs of sense and consciousness and manifest in our dreams, hallucinations, and sensory illusions in just the same relationships as in our reliable experience. We do not perceive in the same way that something indescribable lies behind them, called the reality of things. This reality is, so to speak, an idea by dint of which we accord to given contents of the world an inner firmness, substantiality, and significance. It is absolutely imperceptible, never experienceable. Being is the truly metaphysical dimension of the world: an ultimate or primary concept we can grasp only as if by leaping over everything immediate and determinate. Art has nothing to do with it, because art's concern is only with *appearances* of reality. From this standpoint, impressionism — as narrow and one-sided as its achievements may be to date — is in fact one of the most consummate and consistent principles of art. While art's sensuous imagery may reveal a thousand depths and dimensions unknown to ordinary experience and give life to things mystically inexpressible in our soul, objectively its forms adhere strictly to a domain of that which is given in perception, from which it cannot depart or take flight without ceasing to be art. One could say that art in this sense is more purely empirical than the world of ordinary experience, which itself is always mediated by metaphysical suppositions and validating ideas of various kinds. Anything like a great metaphysical being of things, accessible only to an incommunicable feeling for the world and not to any particular organ of sense, is thus unknown to art. And perhaps now it is possible to extend this understanding of art to beauty in general. As soon as beauty has a meaning (even if still in some degree a sensuous

meaning) reaching beyond, so to speak, the side of things visibly facing us, its values—whether religious or ethical, intellectual or mystical—become ones of foreign provenance. Certainly some of the deepest and most spiritual things can have a significance for us that is suffused by qualities of beauty. But such beauty accrues only to matters relatively superficial in these things, to their “form” in the broadest sense. Beauty’s interest has no bearing on these things’ *being*, beyond their form and sum of qualities. For their being is something absolutely general and formless, everywhere the same and lacking in peculiarities capable of exhibiting beauty.

If we ask now about the psychological grounding of Kant’s understanding of the feeling of beauty as pleasure without interest in reality, it seems to me to return with him and his followers to the fact that, traditionally, beauty has been viewed as attaching only to the sense of sight and sound but not touch. Psychologically speaking, the latter is indeed the sense of reality, inasmuch as only what we can or could touch with our hands seems to us to possess full reality. To be sure, canvas and marble are touchable too, but in their case what is touched is just as little the work of art as the page of a book that displays the poem. The work of art inheres solely in forms accessible to sense organs of the face and no others. It is through this uncoupling of visibility and audibility from the tangibility otherwise always bound up with these forms and typically by itself guaranteeing empirical reality for us that the purely aesthetically present acquires its character of distance from reality, for within the aesthetic we have no interest in asking about such reality, since the aesthetic excludes from the outset the tactile sense that founds our sole bridge to the real.

Why no truly aesthetic sensations exist for the bare sense of touch is not easy to say. My supposition is that it is because tactile sensations are much more punctual, momentary, and easily extinguished in nature and consequently produce no larger patterns of impressions capable of sustaining a *form*. Any impression on its own is mere unformed material. Only when many impressions join together in relations of height and depth, time and space, tension and resolution, and form a psychic unity do they engender a form or formation of some kind—without which there can be no beauty and no art but only material for them. The peculiarity of the tactile sense, from whose multitude of ingressions no quickly discernible and immediately effective unity can arise, seems to debar it from developing aesthetic values capable of excluding reality, whose psychological substrate this sense tends to be.

The indifference of our aesthetic judgments to the empirically palpable being or nonbeing of their objects is at first something merely negative. Kant turns this into something positive by inferring that only things’ *form*

bears beauty. He says that the appeal of such matters as colors or individual sounds accrues to the *contents* of sensation and therefore depends on the real existence of their objects, and hence may well be pleasant and sensuously delightful but cannot enter into a judgment of taste without tarnishing its purity. That is why draftsmanship is decisive in all visual art, in contrast to color, which can make an object appealing to sensation but not aesthetically beautiful. And just as this restriction to form distinguishes aesthetic judgment from mere appeal of sensation, so it also separates it from any role of *thought*. Certainly, something perceptually beautiful may forfeit its aesthetic value for us when it is inserted in purposive relations that contradict its form: some intrinsically beautiful ornaments may be wholly inappropriate in a sacred object; a facial form beautiful in a figure of Narcissus we would reject in one of Mars; and architectonic elements may show quite beautiful forms but be out of place in a building if they fulfill no dynamic function. Yet these kinds of judgments, Kant argues, do not affect the pure form of things but turn rather on the meaning and purposes with which such things are bound up in their real existence. They concern not our taste but our knowledge of the things' contexts, our moral interests, and our thoughtful reflection. Consequently, a pure judgment of taste rejects all such criteria as lie beyond things' immediate impression for us. A judgment of taste *judges* things, in contrast to all sensuous life that only enjoys things materially. However, it judges only the things themselves rather than their relevance to purposes or values—no matter how lofty—to which they relate only in sacrifice of their purely formal character of being perceived.

It is remarkable that so many misunderstandings can arise here from a narrow way of applying what is essentially a true, deep, and sharply defined principle. One need only lend it the breadth Kant himself denied it to recover its legitimacy completely. Certainly Kant never disputed that a color can earn the predicate of beauty. But in order to rescue his principle of pure form, he avers that colors, like sounds, are vibrations of the ether and that as such, even if unconsciously, they afford us a play of impressions whose regular *forms* satisfy our aesthetic feeling. Yet even if this rather tortuous hypothesis were to be substantiated a little more—which is very doubtful—it is completely erroneous to derive the truly aesthetic value in painting exclusively from draftsmanship as sole carrier of form. For colors in painting, quite apart from their linearity as bounded patches with edges, possess formal relationships to one another capable of provoking a pure aesthetic judgment. All the ways in which colors are distributed on a surface in relations of affinity, contrast, and complementarity, in which local colors fit with the tone of the whole, in which dabs

of the same color imitate others elsewhere and create a force of cohesion, and in which the relative dominance of one color over others organizes the surface in its entirety—all these things are most essential components of the work of art as such, quite irrespective of our immediate sympathy or antipathy for any individual color-impression, and therefore are proper to the form of the picture in the same sense as its draftsmanship. The entirely correct meaning of Kant's proposition, on the other hand, is that a work of art in essence is a unity of multiple interacting parts. In each part's way of relating to another part, in each element's being shaped and clarified by the whole and the whole by each element, a fact of inner self-sufficiency arises that makes the work a world of its own. By all accounts, this means that a work of art is form, for form is the manner in which elements refer to and join with one another in a unity of some kind. Everything merely simple and undifferentiated or incoherent is lacking in form. A work of art comes into being when life's fragmentary contents find meaningful and necessary connections to one another, illuminating a unity and inner harmony in them never supplied by ordinary reality. Art is thus the greatest and most complete presentation of what can be called the shaping of things into form, which itself is nothing other than the unity of the manifold. And perhaps herein lies the justification for a relationship of principle between the beautiful and art, which Kant—and all popular ideas of aesthetics—innocently takes for granted, but which on closer inspection is by no means self-evident. That release of immediate pleasure, that joyful delight of our whole being that is proper to beauty, is in no way produced by every work of art, or even by every perfect one. Conversely, a work of art's ability to give meaning to appearances, to clarify the confusion of everyday life, and to express values of perception and feeling in the deepest and yet simplest way possible—all of this has nothing to do with beauty as such, which could be but one of many possible qualities and traits of a work of art and its objects. But form in the sense explicated above perhaps now suggests some commonality between art and beauty. Perhaps it is equally the essence of beauty, no less than it is of art, to disclose unity in life's disparate contingent elements. Perhaps pleasure in the beautiful consists in a fluent harmonic succession of representations occurring in the greatest number in the shortest space of time; and perhaps in this sense it means concentrated life, free of its ordinary gaps, obstacles, and contradictions—our ability to sense inner movements coming together as unity, instead of pushing apart from one another in all directions. This form, into which the sight of beauty allows subjective life to flow, is repeated by art in the objective shaping of things. Art organizes our existence to the point that it shows the same

composure, inner necessity, and freedom from happenstance that we experience in beauty at the purely subjective level, and insofar as a work of art allows this form to continue to resonate in our subjective feelings, it too has beauty. But one must first comprehend art and beauty's independence of one another—more sharply so than Kant attempted, or was able to attempt, given his completely inadequate connoisseurship—in order to appreciate the genius of his idea of form in its way of bringing them together again at a higher level.

Clearer to pinpoint is another of Kant's arguments, now concerning beauty's subtle distinctness from demands of the intellect and morality—but amplifying this distinctness in ways not as compelling as they may at first appear. Kant's contention was that beauty depends on no concept of anything that can be expected of an object by way of natural, historical, or moral norms. Beauty was to be the free play of our soul and as such completely sovereign. An object pleases us or does not please us quite independently of what this object is or should be beyond its fact of pleasing or not pleasing. In consequence, Kant could and can only strictly recognize flowers, ornaments, and wordless music as authentic cases of beauty—in short, only forms sustaining no determinate meaning.

For as soon as any extra capacity is expected of an object, beyond its pure perceptible image, and as soon as aesthetic judgment is made to depend on such a capacity, something is imported that is alien to pure aesthetic feeling. This, Kant held, occurs most often in judgments of images of human figures, such as when what is seen as beautiful in a Venus is seen as not sufficiently beautiful for an Athena, or in general when certain expectations of strength and visibility of moral character become preconditions for recognizing a figure as beautiful. Here Kant is quite right to argue that all general and particular human qualities not directly open to perception have nothing in and of themselves to do with our aesthetic response to a person's appearance. But insofar as such qualities strike us as woven into a person's total image, this in no way prevents these qualities from yielding forms of pure aesthetic beauty or nonbeauty in conjunction with all other elements of the person. What is irrelevant is only these qualities' inner meaning—just as what is irrelevant to, say, the beauty of a nose is that noses in general support the function of breathing. If a trait that delights us in a Venus seems inappropriate and rebarbative in an Athena, this is not because it contradicts the concept of Athena but because it sustains no harmony or unity of sensuous form in conjunction with all of the other features on display in the Athena. If it happened somehow that this one trait did in fact harmonize with all of the other features, we would have a figure with which we are fully aesthetically content and

that we would call a Venus. To learn that it is in fact an Athena would strike us as something like a miracle or a mistake or misattribution, but it would not awaken any sense of an *aesthetic* contradiction—for in the latter regard we are indifferent as to whether it is identified correctly as an Athena or a Venus.

This intrinsic involvement of aspects of significant content and purpose in the aesthetic sphere is probably clearest in the case of theater. Occurring within theater are countless processes of a purely substantive and psychological nature that stem from experiences in ordinary life and that satisfy criteria unrelated to art—and yet must be judged right and fitting for a play if our response to the play is to be an aesthetic one. Here is a case not of things falling outside the sphere of aesthetics but of contexts originating from other domains and entering into the aesthetic sphere as material. A work of art, if it is to be fully formally unitary, must harmonize with the material's inner norms in the same way that a sculpture must accord with the marble or bronze from which it has been hewn. The relevant requirement is that these material or conceptual norms be realized not for their own sake but for the unity of the work of art in which they have value—just as what we are to appreciate in a sculpture's material medium is not this medium's physical or mineralogical properties but exclusively its aesthetic import. Here too, then, Kant defined the idea of form too narrowly when he believed the purity of the judgment of taste to be compromised by any kind of dependence on concepts or contents of no direct aesthetic significance. He failed to see that such elements can be elevated to aesthetic conditions or can be transposed into an aesthetic key and thereby brought to assist in the formal unity of the beautiful and of the work of art, in just as legitimate a manner as the originally purely aesthetic elements.

Yet while Kant did his principle a disservice by foreshortening it in this way, he anticipated the fundamental outlook of modern conceptions of pure art, whereby a work of art is seen as never borrowing its meaning from anything that is not art. As important and urgent as its content may be from an ethical, historical, religious, sensory, patriotic, or personal viewpoint, art should not rely on such content insofar as we are to appraise art aesthetically. Our judgment refers exclusively to ways in which such material has been *shaped* into art, for a work consists solely in its aspect of optical, acoustic, or dramatic appearance, not in recourse to anything outside of this order of appearances. Kant categorizes this sovereignty of both art and beauty under a more general type of human valuations, without jeopardizing either in any way. As we have seen, pleasure in the beautiful stems for him not from any purposiveness of the object for our

ends of will, and also not for any objective occurrence of the world, but some purposiveness must nonetheless be in play, for in aesthetic pleasure we feel ourselves strengthened and stirred in our process of life, and we wish to hold on to this pleasure and linger with its object, even as we feel ourselves to be free. The same satisfaction that the purely purposive offers us we now glimpse in the beautiful: a feeling of everything contingent in appearances coming to be mastered by one single sense, of disparate items suffused by a meaning of the whole, of everything fragmentary or diffuse in our existence finding here a sense of unity of soul. Since the beautiful rejects every relation to a determinate end that draws it out of the purely aesthetic sphere, Kant characterizes its nature as “purposive without purpose”—as having the form of finality without being determined by any nameable individual purpose. Pure perception of the beautiful brings our diverse psychic energies into relations of tension and resolution, of harmony and order, that otherwise arise only at the sight and pleasure of purposive objects, of purposively fulfilled life. Human beings have rightly been described as purposeful beings, in contrast to nonhuman animals. Our life gains meaning and coherence, success and contentment, in the extent to which its contents connect to one another as means and ends. What is called beautiful is that which creates in us a subjective reflex of purposiveness, without our being able to describe any end to which it tends and when. Beauty furnishes us with a feeling of the typical delight of our existence in its complete purity and release. We feel the beautiful form and nature of our existence to be purposive, without being purposive for anything specific. Illustrative of this (to the extent that anything here can be merely “illustrative”) is, say, a piece of music or a turn of fortune in our lives that stirs in us feelings of inner solemnity and excitement—feelings, that is, suggestive of a state of religious piety, even if not of any piety directed to a transcendent being.

If we experience in beauty and art a lightness and freedom of *play* in contrast to a reality of existence exhausted in concrete particulars, this is now explained. For play means that the functions normally bearing life’s content and imprint of reality we now exercise without this fulfillment, purely formally. In play, all the gambling and chasing, struggling and plotting, building and destroying, that life’s real goals demand occur in purely ideal contents and for purely ideal goals—or rather, not even for these goals but only from pleasure in the function, in the subjective doing, unencumbered by any content extraneous to this doing. This is the true meaning of Schiller’s dictum that human beings are fully human only when they play. Only in play, when all that we do revolves around this doing, and satisfies itself only in this doing, are we absolutely ourselves

and wholly human, as a function of soul—not reaching for any kind of concrete content. This is Kant’s “purposiveness without a purpose.” For beauty is nothing in things’ objective being but rather a subjective reaction aroused in us by this being, or as Kant puts it, “It is we who receive nature with favour, and not nature that does us a favour.”* Beauty is the activity or “goal” of our psychic capacities, which normally we exercise in order to master reality practically and theoretically but which now unfold of their own accord, in a flow and vibrancy of their own and hence with a pure harmony and freedom that excludes perturbation by concrete ends and representations.

What Kant meant and means by “genius,” in its intuitive capacity to realize aesthetic feeling, or—perhaps more precisely—to perfect such feeling ideally, is thoroughly consistent with modern evolutionary-historical theories of aesthetics. The altitude to which aesthetic values rise above ordinary needs and purposes of life is no reason not to think of these values having evolved historically from such needs and purposes, just as little as it is to think of our mental nobility of soul as impugned by our having descended from a lower species of animal. It has long been noted that what is called beautiful is the form assumed by things useful on practical grounds. Schopenhauer suggested that female human forms appear more aesthetically perfect to the degree in which they are unconsciously judged fit for purposes of reproduction. Beautiful in a face are perhaps features associated from age-old experience with ethical and socially adaptive attributes—however often these features float free of the latter by contingencies of heredity. Indeed, the aesthetic appeal of every striking physical appearance of inner character in a person may derive from a fact of the high utility of such a quality for a person’s social environment—even if not always for the person him- or herself. With nonhuman forms, the situation is similar. Architectonic beauty seems to consist in balanced proportions of burdens and bearing powers, of pressures and tensions—in structures most conducive to the functions and functioning of construction. All spatial forms that articulate space lucidly—i.e., all forms most fitting for practical uses of space—strike us as beautiful, just as physical and psychic realities do when they accomplish a maximum of intended effect with a minimum of expended effort. But all these practical ends are forgotten when aesthetic value predominates. Lengthy evolutionary processes and innumerable experiences over time make us oblivious of such ends. Left behind is now only a general meaning that derived once from their concrete contents and has become simply a general feeling of

* [Trans.] *Critique of Judgement*, §58, trans. J. C. Meredith.

purposiveness. This is that sense of purposiveness from which all actual purposes have withered away—that purely inner sense of the resonance of long-submerged material pleasures and usages that Kant encapsulates in the formula “purposiveness without a purpose.” And this seems to me no insignificant origin of our aesthetic faculty. Evolving out of all of life’s diverse necessities and conditions of growth, these ends would remain shackled to life’s lower and less spiritual impulses if their appeal were to continue to be conditioned by definite tangible purposes. But when solely the pure form or typical meaning and spirit of them remain, we see in them the finest extract of life. The purposiveness into which those purposes have been sublimated is that “colorful reflection” of life that rises above life even as it originates from life.*

It is one of the most remarkable circumstances that Kant’s basic conviction stemmed not from a positive relationship to aesthetic objects on his part but largely only from an intellectual need to distinguish precisely the concept of the beautiful from that of the sensuously pleasant, the true, and the morally good. His thinking’s entire tendency was to assign domains of existence to the psychic energies that receive or produce them. The sharpness and rationality with which he organized all capabilities of the subject, and in this way also the objective world, and gave to each its due, is the great hallmark of his place in the history of ideas. The beautiful, which first appeared to him only in general fashion as a domain of its own law, had to be determined in its *boundaries*. These boundaries, in relation to the sensory and the moral, showed themselves in an indifference to all reality. All sensory interest is tied either to the sensible in reality or to the reality we wish for, while all moral interest is bound to that which *ought* to be, even if realized only imperfectly over time. By contrast, aesthetic judgment relates to the pure image of things, to their appearance and form, regardless of whether that image is underpinned by tangible reality; and the boundaries of aesthetic judgments with judgments of knowledge lie in the character with which everything aesthetic is felt. The apex toward which our psychic movements here converge, and which draws the elements of the beautiful object or work of art into a unity, is not communicable with concepts, whereas all knowledge rests on the subsumption of particulars under higher concepts, consciously formulated. Philosophy’s outer limits are those metaphysical concepts to which nothing in perception corresponds, whereas aesthetic feeling refers to perceptions to which no concept corresponds. This, he points out, is not to describe aesthetic

* [Trans.] “Colorful reflection” (*farbige Abglanz*); an allusion to Goethe, *Faust*, part II, act I, scene 1: “Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben.”

judgments as arbitrary or baseless but only to speak of their grounds as lying not in determinate concepts formed by our soul but in a generalized inner harmony or tensile state of attunement of the soul's energies to its purposes. This is a condition of the soul uninvolved in any determinate specification because it consists solely in a state of pure functioning, uncoupled from specific contents of representation. It is this constellation of affairs that explains, for Kant, the unique feature of the judgment of taste, namely that while no one can convince anyone of the rightness of their judgment in the way that they can of a theoretical proposition, they do nevertheless, in judging this or that object to be beautiful, lay claim to something that everyone in principle must recognize as such—in a way that they do not with mere sensory gratifications, where all individuals simply remain content with their feelings' pure subjectivity. Indeed, no one can argue seriously about whether oysters taste good or whether musk is a pleasant or unpleasant smell, whereas whether a work of art is beautiful or not can sustain the most passionate controversies. In the latter case, it is as if proofs and rational convictions existed on the matter, even when time and again such things have been found to be illusory. What draws modern people repeatedly and so forcefully to aesthetic values is this unique play between subjective and objective standpoints, between our individuality of taste and a feeling that such values must grow from something supra-individual and general. This is the conflict Kant resolves with his precept that while aesthetic judgments depend on concepts and finalities, they do so not on *determinate* concepts but only on a general form or condition of the soul, which it acquires in accumulating knowledge and purposes without focusing on such matters and remaining instead enclosed within itself and announcing itself solely as *feeling*. This obscure consciousness that the mind's underlying functions here act for themselves in ways common to all individual souls leads us to believe that in these judgments we might not after all stand each alone and that in fact everyone would have to form the same judgments if only each were to succeed in bringing the other to see the object in the same way. Here is a wholly subjective feeling of pleasure or displeasure, which, by virtue of rising above all contingencies of sensory enjoyment, appears to return to the universally human in us. This feeling raises a claim to validity beyond the subject—to a validity otherwise only attainable in the domain of knowledge. All differences of aesthetic judgment that prevail among people with similar levels of cultural education are then to be seen as stemming from cases where some feel this pure formal play of our psychic powers to be already complete when in fact it is not—that is, where aesthetic feeling is aroused for some by impressions that others see as inadequate for it.

Whatever one thinks of this Kantian hypothesis, it is by any account the first attempt—and one of the deepest of its kind—to reconcile, within the realm of aesthetics, the inalienable individual subjectivity of modern man with the—no less inalienable—supra-individual commonality of everyone. Kant's insight that in matters as unarguable as aesthetic taste, moments of universal validity exist that derive from the wholly supra-individual harmony of our psychic powers, even if a harmony only set in play by some particular or wayward event—this is the modern mind's first intervention on the plane of aesthetics. For the modern mind's essential problems may well be seen as revolving principally around this one basic question: that of how there can be freedom and diversity of individuals without lawlessness and isolation. In recognizing matters of aesthetic judgment as one manifestation of this problem, and solving these issues in a way that sensitizes us most acutely to a tension between that which is individual and that which is universal in us, Kant guides us toward a task of perhaps greater contemporary urgency than the purely technical merit of his solution—a task it has taken nearly a century to see clearly: the need, namely, to embed aesthetic problems in life's ultimate questions. In so doing, Kant reinforces a conviction that precisely in the new difficulties contained therein lies reason to see the portent of new solutions.

Art for Art's Sake

It is impossible not to notice a mechanistic and mathematicizing tendency in art criticism of recent decades. All reconstruction of a painting's so-called design by reference to precise "planes," to horizontal and vertical structures, to triangles and quadrangles, contrapposto, golden sections, "ordering of space," or complementary colors—all this amounts to a way of breaking down a work of art into individual components and seeking to reassemble and "explain" it from putative internal laws and requirements. At issue here are constituents of a work of art considered as separate units exterior to its total ensemble—rather as if one were to think of an organism in terms of the physical and chemical formulae its elements satisfy independently of its mobile living form. Undoubtedly, art criticism [*Kunstwissenschaft*] here finds itself at a stage of development analogous to the natural sciences in their mechanistic phase. Just as these latter at first made tremendous progress by freeing our conception of nature from medieval metaphysics and theology, which had sought to deduce nature from notions remote from it, so this mechanistic conception of art has meant a release of art from literary-based or didactic and anecdotal directions dominant previously. But just as the mechanistic epoch now seems, at least for the life sciences, to be a thing of the past and to have ceded to an understanding of organisms from their aspect of wholeness, so something similar seems likely to result today for the study of art. For any analysis of geometrical relations concerns only forms abstracted from the work of art. A concentration on spatially discrete images as provinces of the picture surface, each with separate rules of existence, is prejudicial to all meaning and impact accruing to a work of art from within its unitary core and continuously fluent life. What the natural sciences gradually achieved—namely recognition of autonomy of naturalistic explanation, of natural phenomena grasped in natural ways—has an important counterpart for the study of art.

But the stipulation that art be practiced, appreciated, and understood on its own terms and in its essential roots means in no way its definitive sequestration from life's totality of other powers and provinces of existence. Rather, it highlights the basis on which art can first be reliably ordered into life and recognized for what it is in its relatedness to everything, so to speak, above and beneath its own threshold. Art as a whole, and any individual work of art, behave typically in ways we can compare to a "primal phenomenon" [*Urphänomen*] of mental life in general, where any member, element, or part of a unitary whole is, or lays claim to be, itself a unitary self-subsistent whole. In many cases, form here reflects the organism as a whole made of parts that retain an independence of function and existence, such as in social organizations where roundedness of individual personal development sees itself under threat from patterns of division of labor; or in ecclesiastical structures where individuals are but waves of the onrush of total life toward God and nevertheless crave each for themselves an immediate relation to the absolute; or in cases of psychic life itself, where particular interests and gifts want to monopolize all of an individual's powers for themselves despite life's total stream seeking to subsume everything particular into itself. On the one hand, unity of the whole is woven together from functions and interactions of its parts; on the other hand, each part's life is nourished and shaped by this whole. In all situations analogous to these, we find something that can be called the detour of the whole, where something's completion, as perfect and self-contained as it may already be, cannot be achieved by means of a development absolutely internal to itself but only by a heightened valuing of the larger whole in which this something lives as one part alongside others, and by this whole's being able to flow into the part and thereby raise it to a state of perfection that the part could not have accomplished by its own powers alone. This is the reason individuals who cultivate only a very specialized skill or talent without regard to other facets, interests, and capacities and who neglect those other sides of their lives will never reach the highest degree of perfection—unless perhaps the skill in question is a purely physical one. They will attain this perfection only when the talent's inner domain is opened up everywhere to the wider space of the soul that supplies and nourishes them with powers, movements, and significant feelings in general. Any perfection we can achieve in particular competences at the price of impoverishing our roundedness of life as a whole is strictly limited. Excellence in an accomplishment is reachable only by way of the detour of attaining excellence in our surrounding life as a whole. Here we can see formulated life's wholeness in its relation to specific crystallized values. A person ethically engaged but not

also intellectual or religious or in any way rich in wider traits of character may perhaps bring his or her life to a high ethical level but certainly not to the very highest level. Likewise and all the more so with questions of intellectuality: often, as prodigious as they may be, the accomplishments of the purely clever person will lag behind those of the more rounded individual, even as *intellectual* accomplishments, and even if the broader person's intellectual capacities may, in themselves, be inferior. A person *only* clever is not *genuinely* clever.

Now it should be clear that unless pure mechanical skills of reproduction are the issue, only artists guided by broader capabilities will win the very highest prize, even in purely technical aspects of their competence. Mere technicians, as brilliant as they may be, will not do so. Even among the most gifted artists, not even technique itself will be complete where technique is the be-all and end-all. History demonstrably confirms this: truly great artists have always been more than "great artists." Even where all their life's energies are so absolutely concentrated and absorbed into their art that, at least for our gaze, everything else in their existence seems to vanish behind it—as, for instance, with Rembrandt—in them we nevertheless sense an incredible radiance and intensity of life's plenitude. As much as this fullness appears in the art form or work, we still feel it in a way to be independent of this appearance, as if there by accident. That characteristic way in mental life in which one part of a larger whole becomes a whole for itself and thereby creates a highly variable relationship between its self-sufficient existence, on the one hand, and its subordinate position, on the other, is here resolved harmoniously. True artistic accomplishment is not realized in its own element unless suffused by a wholeness of personality that is itself more than artistic. If great artists have often been thought to suggest a unique height of perfection in human life, we may say that this is for the reason any specialized side, part, or function of a personality needs to refrain from competing with the total life of which it is a part, and conversely for the reason that this total life's unity needs not to suffer from the part's special unity and autonomy. Whatever tensions or disturbances can arise in this relationship at lower levels of artistic activity, or indeed at higher levels, artists' completeness purely as artists seems to be tied to their being more than artists and to their works' gaining unique independent power and strength only in nourishment by the entire cosmos of their lives.

This way in which art and individual works of art form both a whole and at the same time elements of a larger whole, like waves on the surface of the sea—this image also describes our situation as spectators of art. Redemptive in art for us is that a work of art forms something completely

self-contained and sovereign, indifferent to the rest of the world and to ourselves as viewers. A work draws us into a framed space that banishes all surrounding reality of the world from itself and thus also ourselves insofar as we are a part of this reality. Stepping into another world that is heedless of both us and all daily reality, we are freed from ourselves and our daily business. But at the same time, our experience of the work is contained and enveloped by our life. Everything extraneous in our life, from which the work redeems us, is still a form of our life. All appreciation of this something that frees and is freed from life still remains a part of life, continually fusing with life's wholeness, each time before and each time after.

As paradoxical or contradictory as this double expression may be, a work of art is something hermetically sealed and sequestered from life and simultaneously embedded in life's stream, while life's stream for its part is absorbed into the work by the artist and left behind by the work for the spectator. Our being at once released from life's flow and contained within it, exterior to it and interior to it; our sense of something complete in itself and nevertheless the heartbeat of a more encompassing whole—this perhaps is simply one wholly unitary state of affairs, only subsequently mentally analyzed by us into two different sides. In these two sides' apparent irreconcilability, works of art show themselves to be phenomena we can articulate into various elements but cannot then reconstitute from those elements. For once the elements have been removed from their original oneness in each another, they now differ essentially—just as chemical substances extracted from living bodies differ in the retort from their context in the organism, and therefore resist any attempt to rebuild the organism from them. This is the contradiction that Art for Art's Sake failed to resolve—a slogan I take here not in its original historical meaning but in the extended sense of its fundamental exclusion of everything not purely interior to art's sphere as irrelevant to a work of art's essence and value. In one way, this exclusion was and remains unarguably right. Its effect has been to purify art, in the way I wrote at the outset of effects of recent "specializing" tendencies in our understandings of painting. It has reversed art's murky confusion with literary, ethical, religious, and sensory values. But while we must be entirely thankful for this development, we must also say that Art for Art's Sake remains trapped in a certain rationalism (in keeping with its French origin). It does not advance beyond that contradiction of the whole and the part retaining a right to be a whole—beyond that perhaps logically insuperable difficulty that life nevertheless constantly overcomes by itself. Art for Art's Sake remains an aesthetic rigorism parallel to Kantian moral rigorism, which secluded moral value from life's total ensemble and placed it on a pedestal,

high above any other of life's rich and diverse motives. Kant's imperishable insight lapsed into rigidity for lack of any return path to life, not wanting to see that acts within life's flowing whole can have values other than those ascribed to them from the strictly moral viewpoint. Just as art is more than art, so morality is more than morality, insofar as it is permeated by ideals of human wholeness of life. This belongs with the realization, today dawning all around us, that in organic total contexts of life and the world in general, elements have an existence and meaning different from their atomization by mechanistic thinking, and that mechanistic notions need to rediscover the whole flowing stream of life bearing these elements and presupposed by them if these elements are to be truly and authentically understood. Only a new concept of life's relationship to its elements and contents will teach us in this way what rationalism failed to establish: on the one hand, the importance of art's purity, self-containment, and freedom from everything that falsifies its essence and, on the other hand, our need to think of art as one wave in a stream of life that develops also as something historical and religious, psychical and metaphysical. Borne along by this stream and bearing it, art remains a world unto itself, just as Art for Art's Sake describes it—even and precisely as this slogan reveals art's deeper meaning to be Life for Art and Art for Life.

Autonomy in the Work of Art

Human beings are not capable of living from the simple reality of their nature alone, from their instinctual forces, for they feel the basis of their existence to be too slender, their relationship to the world too dark and accidental, the elements of their inner life too shot through with contradictions. They cannot live without the support offered to them by laws, visible above and within this reality. Laws in this double sense: first, laws of nature that determine the behavior of reality, signifying an inner framing of elements, a guarantee for intelligibility and calculability, and an ineluctable schema of processes; and second, laws that stand over against these processes as norms, as a realm of the “ought,” even if perhaps never purely realized. In one sense, laws express real necessity, in the other, ideal necessity. Every work of art, viewed as a product of natural forces, remains subject to natural laws governing everything real. But such natural lawfulness does not capture the distinctive feeling with which a work of art affects us—and neither entirely does the other, ideal kind of lawfulness. As simple as it may at first seem, before conceptual analysis, the feeling at issue comprises elements whose character, interwovenness, and relationship to other great performances of the human mind I should like to illuminate in the following.

Ideal necessity refers to what we like to think of as an artist’s idea or inner nascent vision, which a finished work appears to realize more or less perfectly for us. Or it also describes an immanently valid norm of a work, in this work’s way of existing independently of its creator’s intentions, and in relation to which we appraise its value or shortcomings and sense it to be or not to be as it should be according to a basic problem it sets for itself. Here can be seen something that uniquely distinguishes a work of art from almost all other cases of mental phenomena from which we expect the solution of a task, fulfillment of a norm, or realization of an ideal. In all such cases—with one important exception, to be addressed shortly—

a problem or claim enters in some sense from outside, as something general or at least more general that needs to be satisfied by this particular work or activity. The religiously devout person obeys, through personal ethical conduct or special religious action, a principled holy calling that hovers over and above this person from outside. Every technical task relates to a generally designated outcome achievable by various ways and means. Every piece of knowledge responds to a preexisting question significant for any number of individuals, however differently these individuals answer such a question, if they answer it at all. By contrast, a work of art poses its own problem: a problem only to be gleaned from a specific finished work itself—disregarding purely technical challenges that, while preexisting it, pertain only secondarily to its distinctive meaning. It is a great mistake of ordinary habits of thought to think of a work of art's problem in terms of some universal question or task it then more or less solves with all its various merits and demerits—as if Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* had sought to capture the ideal couple, or Giorgione in the Dresden Venus a beautiful woman, or Beethoven in the finale of the Ninth Symphony the abstract idea of joy. All that each of these great artists created, and sought to create, was precisely what uniquely stood before them and stands before us, and if any of these works had not been as their creators wished them to be, the aspect of unfulfilled expectation would not be any generalizable perfection but in each case a perfection, integrity, and profundity of their own incomparable composition that might have been greater. Subsequent reflection, of a much more discursive than artistic nature, superimposes universal concepts on a work and in this way dilutes each artistic vision's unique original existence as *causa sui*, whose gradual clarification, articulation, and refinement remains the only way in which an inner creative act develops, unfolding as it does in a fashion quite differently from any movement from general to particular. Similarly, this state of affairs differs from any path trodden by a scholar, technician, or other purposively oriented actor from a preexistent problem to its solution. And likewise, great philosophical visions—in this respect, not unlike works of art—grip their originators in a way that we only subsequently break down into any logical form of question and answer; and herein lies perhaps the deepest difference of the creative thinker and inquirer from the learned scholar.

Only with a work of art itself does the relevant problem come into existence. For the spectator, the problem emerges only from a work in its immediate apprehension. A work belongs in this way to that rare type of phenomena that satisfy a need they themselves awaken in the very moment their existence satisfies it. Reality within and around us makes us aware of the striving of such phenomena to redeem themselves as art

only at the point that this redemption is in some way accomplished. A perfect piece of music for the guitar or harp or other stringed instrument makes us perhaps think of nothing but love, and sometimes of love in its simultaneously most sensuous and spiritual expression. If this love is the fulfillment of a yearning, we feel this only in the moment of fulfillment itself—and only in those select cases of experiences we cannot sense arriving until the very instant we have experienced them. Here it is precisely the way in which an experience such as love, like the work of art, stands under the sign of a sated need, of an answered question, of a fulfilled demand, that lends it—and similarly the work of art—its feeling of perfection and bliss. Any simple gift of happiness that does not occupy an already ideally present framework of some kind is merely woven into the diversity of occurrences as something conditioned and conditioning, whereas a gift that is also suffused by a sense of the need and demand for it—a need and demand we feel to grow from the gift itself, releasing in us a sense of the necessity of its reality—completes its own circuit, free of any bond to anything outside itself. Only a gift of this nature arouses our thirst for it in the very act of quenching this thirst—and quenching it in the way that it, and it alone, can do.

This, as I have said, is a remarkable state of affairs. A composition stands before us “as if from heaven.” Its creator’s intentions are not vouchsafed to us, and we come to it with no prior idea or demand it might satisfy or not satisfy. We feel instead its simple reality, offering only itself to us and repulsing all extraneous criteria, and somehow, nevertheless, an ideal measure or claim arises from it that moves us to declare it a success or failure! No previously known and recognized values can ground our judgment. In a unique work, we may perhaps spot infractions of general rules of some sort, but these need in no way nullify a work’s greatness as a whole for us, even if they in some way vitiate it. Yet how often has a work not struck us as convincing and felicitous, even as it flouts all the most central and inescapable norms of its genre in the most flagrant manner? Our ideal evaluative response, borne both of the work’s reality and of our receptive sensibility, is nothing definitely prescriptive that stands alongside the work itself. If a work leaves us dissatisfied, we cannot say, and have no right to say, how it might have been better. Only a negative feeling that it is not quite right *like that* guides us toward some relevant criterion. But we sense this much more decisively in works completely pleasing and blissful to us. Here we feel that a debt to an idea has been fully paid, a promise redeemed, a law fulfilled. And yet this idea, promise, or law must be something distinct from the work’s actual presence before us, consonant with the work at this moment but always capable of

diverging from it if this consonance is to please us and to be in any way underpinned by and founded in this idea, promise, or law. Clearly, works of least value do not even manage to unfold such an ideal criterion for themselves, and consequently we describe them as “beneath criticism.” Here can be glimpsed the difficult truth of what is often said all too lightly, namely that a composition becomes “autonomous” — its own law, a law unto itself. Only considerations of ultimate significance can address this conundrum.

I believe a clue to the problem can be found in questions of ethical practice. Almost all moral doctrines, including preeminently Kantian teaching, posit a general law to be fulfilled by individuals as a precondition of their moral worth, regardless of their particular individuality. Individuality in this thinking is merely a given reality, from which no ideal demand or “ought,” indifferent to anything’s reality or nonreality, can be derived. Insofar as it stands above the real as its norm, this “ought” must be something supra-individual and general. But this aspect of general supra-individuality cancels all complexity, continuity, and fluidity of life’s organic interconnectedness, which for each individual can only be something uniquely distinctive. Only isolated *contents* of action can be identified by general concepts or laws indifferent to an individual’s particular life-course. Only by means of an abstract concept can a specific act be subsumed under a general law. As one wave of a unitary flowing totality of life, however, no act can draw its “ought,” its moral meaning, from any such law. If something is to be my duty, it must be *my* duty. As selfless or religious, as rational or social, as the contents of this duty may be, only when *my* individual life in its entirety develops these contents from my life, as an “ought” for *me*, can they assume a moral claim over me with ultimate inner meaning for me. But for this to be possible, the fateful assumption to which moral philosophy has clung — as has in many ways the philosophy of art, perhaps independently but not especially cogently — must be broken: namely, that all commandments directed to realizing values must be situated above everything individually distinctive in some generalized and generalizable law, since individual peculiarities amount to mere facts of no immediately apparent significance. This last assumption seems to me to be a fundamental mistake. For every particular human existence harbors, above or within itself, mapped out as if in invisible contours, an ideal for itself, a needing-to-be in such and such a way. The norm that lends ethical distinctiveness to an individual’s life when it is followed by this individual, and does so even when not followed, is exactly so constituted as this individual life is constituted. Only the unitary individual wholeness of my life can determine how I am to behave. Decisive

is that human beings contain within themselves, just as they are, the law for how they should be—that their life be accompanied and enjoined, all around itself, by an ideal image of themselves arising just as much from, and colored just as much by, the fibers of their existence as the reality of their life, even as this reality may perhaps depart from the image quite drastically. Any deeper moral understanding can only judge a deed insofar as a whole particular person is present in the deed—not the deed by itself as a general concept, indifferent to a particular human agent behind it. To think about someone is to know not only how he or she is but also how he or she essentially ought to be. Even if darkly, fragmentarily, and no doubt in some degree erroneously, we see this and are certain that if we possessed a god’s-eye view, we would see everything about how this person both is and ought to be. The fact that the moral lawfulness in question here signifies an *individual law* makes it no less strict and sovereign than a general and exterior law that remains superordinate to an individual subject’s reality and requires the subject’s virtues and vices to be measured by relation to itself.

I describe here a mental form of the greatest moment for human self-understanding at our present conjuncture in history. Arching above our reality of life, action, and work, an image of everything this reality ought to be rises up from the very same roots as this reality. Whether followed or not, a law emerges as a function of lived life itself and is not merely imposed on life or any phenomenon of life from outside, however ideal and spiritualized this outside may be. Now in this light, let us consider how a work of art that rejects all prior dogmatic rules and asserts a freedom from all claims exterior to itself nevertheless meets with an ideal demand to be of such and such a character and not otherwise. Our ethical analogy has perhaps not solved this puzzle, but it has at least shown it to belong to a constitutive type of our mental behavior: one that can be recognized as an ultimate fact, even if not one profoundly illuminated. A spectator does not judge a work of art purely for subjective pleasure or displeasure. Even if often subjectively imbued, our judgment has a quite different tone, stemming from an objective norm, from an ideal emanating from the work at hand as a law, however unstable, unconscious, or unprovable this norm or ideal may be. As with the contrast between all political-juridical laws and moral law—the former demanding from people something general and exterior to them, the latter enjoining a person, and only this person, to be as he or she ideally ought to be, over and above his or her reality—so all generally technical demands on a work of art differ from purely artistic ones. Any norm originating from outside a particular work is ultimately a technical or otherwise extra-artistic norm, typically literary, ethical, or

religious in character. The truly purely artistic criterion is an *individual law* emerging from the artistry itself, and one that exclusively furnishes a work's ideal horizon of judgment and necessity. Art's claim in general to be understood and judged only as art, and not as anything else or by reference to anything else, is here canalized into an individual work.

But in this necessity, a further problem arises. What exactly is meant by the proposition that a work should have been different in accord with its own artistic law from how it actually is—that it possesses another necessity different from the necessity of its reality? Use of language all too easily misleads us into thinking that we are dealing here simply with something “the same that might have been different.” If I replace an angle of a triangle with a side, I have, and see, a quadrilateral, not an altered triangle. But if I paint a white object black, although I have, and see, a black object, not an altered white one, still in this case one substance persists beneath the change of color and remains the same. The triangle/quadrilateral example reflects how things are with inorganic matter: something either is the same or is not the same in phases, and when it comprises many elements, change does not mean that a core perdures and nevertheless changes: it means rather the complete sameness of some elements and the complete nonsameness of others. With organic beings, however, matters are different. A living being is one that could be “otherwise” but one in which the “same” bearer, the same ego, continues to live. Consequently it is meaningless, from any ultimate ethical-metaphysical criterion, beyond the practical phenomenon, to ask morally of an act, considered on its own, that it occur “otherwise” than it did; for then it would be simply *another* act, not the same one that might have been different. Only when we no longer treat it as an isolated content in this mechanical manner and instead as the pulse-beat of a continuous unitary flow of life can we speak in this way. For then we mean that a whole person should be different, which this person, and only this person, can indeed be without ceasing to be the same as himself or herself, and then plainly we mean that this person might have performed not the first act but rather another act, making it now legitimate to say that “the act might have been different.” Here again an analogy with the essence of a living being helps us solve the difficulty of understanding how a work of art, by its own ideal law, can be expected to be otherwise than it is. We do not ask this of the utterly bad and lifeless work. We consider it out of the question that such an object can be helped by any alteration at all. But where a work, however many its faults, is animated by a real force of life, it releases, precisely like a real human being, a unique ideal image of itself from its unconscious being. This image is its individual law, its autonomy, allowing us, as soon as

accomplished, to speak of the work as having fully realized its idea, or as not quite become as it is meant to be. Here is the legitimate concept of being-otherwise and being-wanted-to-be-otherwise, exclusively recognizable in organic entities as the unity of sameness and nonsameness. In this sense, a work's idea sustains something identical and nevertheless variable. The simile of a living being here cancels the contradiction of something's being different and needing to be different and nevertheless staying the same. An organism's mysterious ability to endure through change here transfers to the works of man most completely in a work of art because a work of art preserves man's character of vitality more completely than anything and entitles and commits itself thereby to unfolding its own ideal autonomy and subsuming itself under its own norm.

How does this lawfulness now relate to that other lawfulness affecting a work of art as a material object of the real world, subject to natural laws? Earlier centuries used to characterize this aspect of necessity as the accidental [*das Zufällige*], for necessity here meant, and still means, a work's dependence on a given condition to which it is tied by some law of cause and effect. If this condition is absent, the outcome must be absent too, and therefore the outcome is not something unconditionally necessary, for it exists not from itself but from something else that can be either present or not present—and if not present, the outcome must be accidental. This is the natural, merely relative necessity of every segment of reality and of a work of art insofar as such a work is treated as a material object enmeshed in spatial and real physical dynamics of existence. As a work of *art*, however, its essential meaning remains unaffected. For this meaning, already simply as something sensuously perceived, is a *mental* figuration: it is that aspect of the marble statue or painted canvas that can linger in the memory of spectators even if or after its physical reality has long since disintegrated. It can be forgotten but it cannot itself be physically destroyed; and it proves that for as long as the physical reality persists, this aspect's intangibly and inviolably mental nature makes a work of art what it is as art, rather than that which can come and go in a work with time. Only the element of temporal transience in a work is subject to natural laws, not the work's essence as art. In previous ages, theological speculation sought in this ultimately accidental causal necessity another, absolute kind of necessary being, since at least the divine essence possessed such a being. This was the formulation that God's existence must be necessary because God's nonexistence would have meant a contradiction of the very concept of God. God was that than which nothing greater could be conceived, containing all being within Himself; and since anything existent had to be greater and more real than anything nonexistent, God had to exist

from logical conceptual necessity, just as a physical object cannot without contradiction be thought of as anything nonspatial. Leaving aside for now all questions of the theological plausibility of this “ontological argument” for God, it should at least be evident that we are reminded of the kind of noncausal necessity displayed by a work of art. Though a work’s bare existence is only as relatively necessary as that of any other physical thing under natural laws, a work’s qualitative way of being of such and such a character, in its native idea, problem, or norm, is, as we have seen, necessary not in any extraneously dependent sense, like a segment of causally determined physical matter, but in the sense of its own interior autonomy. Providing a work is complete, its own concept requires that it exists, just as the concept of God requires that God exist. And this feeling that a work depends on itself alone and on its self-imposed problem, or that from it a problem shines forth that is its *raison d’être*, its reason for being precisely as it is, able and needing, by its very existence, to solve precisely this problem in precisely this way—this is what we comprehend as a work’s necessity, its autonomy, its independence of everything not itself.

All of this holds of course only to the degree that a work really has solved the problem arising from it and challenging it. As soon as we sense a problem unique to it but not in all respects solved by it, with the result that the problem and the work in some way come apart, we feel a work to lack full necessity and to be accidental in these aspects. For these latter have not grown from the work as developments of the problem but from other roots or motives. Materially or psychologically, they remain necessary in a natural causal sense but not artistically because the work in these particular aspects is not *causa sui*.

Given that a work of art’s diverse parts or aspects can resolve its problem or idea in various and often quite divergent degrees, we must think of this problem or idea as a unity addressed by the work through a plurality of factors. A work’s filigreed reality of colors, tones, words, or forms must be organized in such a way as to express unity by making immediately sensuously manifest its way of flowing necessarily from an ideal interrelationship of its elements. In the diversity of parts that constitute a work, necessity emerges as the lawfulness that each part demands of another. We feel that when one part is as it is, another must also be as it is and not otherwise. Certain laws governing this relation are consequently necessary, such as equality and symmetry of the parts, complementarity and reciprocity, consistency of rhythm, suspense and resolution, intensity and diminution, unity of proportions, continuity and change of mood. In short, all kinds of psychological and substantive compositional norms making us expect one part to follow from another are here in play. Central

to this is our sense of an (in some way) achieved or anticipated totality; if we have this sense from a work, we cannot help but think of one part relating to another part in such a way that the second is necessarily as it is because the first is actually as it is. Essential in turn to this sense of totality is that this relationship is reciprocal, such that when the part that was first seen as necessary by derivation is seen as primary, the part that was first seen as primary is likewise seen as necessary by derivation. This holds not only for the visual arts. In poetry, a second rhyming word requires the first word, as the first the second, just as musical last notes in a melody require the opening notes, and opening notes the last ones, and so on. Since any given element of a work can be seen either as primary or as lawfully called into being by another, everything in it has the character of necessity. This is what one might call a work's inner framework. It is the other form of necessity to which a work can be subject, stemming not from any external law but solely from itself. In the mutual entanglement of these two kinds of necessity, a great work of art gives us a feeling of having escaped from all contingency of life into a realm of lawfulness. And this new realm of lawfulness is now also one of freedom. For if, as I have said, it is not in our nature to tread firmly over empty space but rather to bring forth our reality through that ideal necessity we call law by framing off this reality's elements and finding some assurance in these elements' restless flux that things must be as they are, then this necessity becomes freedom. And it does so to the extent that any law above us and any law within us cannot be alien to us but must be the very abiding meaning of our existence from the outset, where the problem of our existence and this problem's more or less complete solution resemble pictures of one and the same content painted from two different perspectives. Here finally we may venture the thought that our reality and the two forms of our law—ideal law and all physical interaction of our elements of life—amount to just two different expressions or dual articulations of a deeper unity we like to call our essence: two conscious manifestations of something profound within us but not immediately communicable, unaffected by the fracture between what we are and what we ought to be, or between the given sum of our elements of life and the unity into which they have been woven by the law of their interaction. More portentous than anything else in a work of art, perhaps, is that in it we have a symbol of this last secret of our being: an objective image whose reality is idea and law and whose idea and law are reality, and, because created by man himself, a pledge that these two aspects of our being—division and assurance against division—form nothing more than two different directions of growth of the wordless depths of our essence.

CHAPTER TWO

Materials, Functions, Institutions

The following essays show Simmel's interest in questions of material properties and institutional settings of art objects. "On Art Exhibitions" (Ueber Kunstausstellungen), the earliest of Simmel's published writings on art, appeared in 1890. "Aesthetics of Gravity" (Aesthetik der Schwere) first appeared in June 1901. "The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study" (Der Bildrahmen: Ein ästhetischer Versuch) appeared in November 1902 (English translation 1994). A diary entry from January 1903 by the Berlin chronicler Harry Graf Kessler suggests that a spur to the essay may have been conversations on the topic between Simmel and the painter Max Liebermann (GSG 7:359). "On Aesthetic Quantities" (Über ästhetische Quantitäten) appeared in January 1903 (English translation 1968). Simmel published a second, slightly altered version of this essay later that year in a supplement to the newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt* under the title "Über ästhetische Quantität" (On Aesthetic Quantity). This translation is from the first version. "The Handle" (Der Henkel: Ein ästhetischer Versuch) first appeared in August 1905. The text also reappeared in November 1911 in Simmel's influential anthology *Philosophische Kultur*, together with essays on Michelangelo, Rodin, and the Alps, as well as "The Ruin" and other writings on the concept of culture (English translation 1959).

On Art Exhibitions

The great crowd of people who live generally from optimism also have their pessimism. All is well and good today, they say, but bad, indeed nothing, beside what once was. Pessimism about the present shifting to optimism about the future, among the more freethinking, becomes for these people a kind of optimism of the past. Paradise lost, a golden age, the good old days: familiar, rosy depictions of a past spared the ills and discontents of the present. When Grandpa wedded Grandma the world was better and more moral—talk of decline seems as old as the hills. For many such people, a past glorified for its morals is also a past glorious for its art and beauty: the Greeks, shepherds and green pastures, wigs and stately courts—all this, we hear, was better and more beautiful, and ever since, art has lost its way.

One thing, at least, seems clear. Modern art differs in character from that of the past, and we must be unsure as to whether it can reach the same summits. And seen from one angle, the phenomenon of the art exhibition seems to reflect this transformation.

A modern art exhibition might be thought to confirm an oft-heard complaint about the modern world as lacking in great solitary deeds of the individual, in sharply developed sovereign personalities able to shape the world from their innermost powers, their place taken by the multitude and the collaboration of the many. And so it may seem: that encompassing capacity of an age to produce in the world of art a singular personality, like the masters of the Renaissance, has declined in the face of patterns of division of labor even in artistic activity, with the result that artistic life today can no longer be glimpsed through any one personality but only in diverse cooperative functions. All powers of artistic capability now seem dispersed over a plethora of individual persons, like one once-radiant celestial body shattered into errant starlets. No single great

work of art can be named that consummates and encapsulates all existing achievement and development, like the Sistine Madonna or the Medici tombstones of Michelangelo. The most heterogeneous imaginable masters must be gathered together if we are to know the art of our present day. In the drive to specialization, modern times have molded artistic activity, like everything else, in such a one-sided fashion that, to compensate, all works—most diverse and contrary to one another—must be beheld.

Who knows if we would be capable of depending exclusively or near-exclusively on one of our better living masters, as we might once have depended on Michelangelo? Who knows if it is not rather the truest character of our modern sense of art to see always, alongside each creative personality, any number of others able to answer this personality's one-sidedness with a one-sidedness of their own? Might it not be in the confluence of the multifarious that our defining sensibility lies?

An art exhibition is the inevitable extension and outcome of modern specialization in art.

One-sidedness of modern human beings in the things they produce is offset by multi-sidedness in the things they consume [*empfängt*]. The smaller the area an individual actively moves in, or the narrower the sphere of a person's daily thinking and volition, the livelier will be his or her need in moments of leisure and receptive interest to taste the greatest variety of ideas and sensations—like muscles yearning for movement after some unnatural phase of inertia. It is within the confines of his study that Faust begins to yearn to know the world's great wealth of antitheses, from one corner to the other. In our time, it is precisely specialization that creates a dashing from one impression to the next, an impatience of enjoyment, a fixation on cramming in, in the shortest possible time, as many excitements, interests, and pleasures as possible. The colorfulness of metropolitan life, in the streets and the salons, is as much cause as consequence of this restless temper, and art exhibitions are just one of its symbolic expressions. In them, the most discordant contents sit cheek by jowl in the smallest of spaces. Within minutes the excitement-hungry mind can travel pleurably from one pole to the other of an entire world of artistic projects, sampling the most distantly related varieties of sensibility. In the smallest of meeting points, the greatest stock of contemporary artistry is collected together and made to arouse in the spectator the greatest spectrum of feelings of which it is capable, and with just as much intensity. As the most varied of objects are brought together in one space, so too are the most conflicting of a visitor's judgments and reactions—from attraction to repulsion, awe to disdain, indifference to enthusiasm and back, in rapid succession—showing here again how the greatest miscellany of

things can be experienced and enjoyed in our day in the tiniest stretches of time and space.

And yet: that art exhibitions should preclude all quiet and sober appraisal of artworks in this way remains open to question. The more various the works apprehended, the freer and more distanced the mind can be to consider an individual work and to stand back from any particular one-sidedness that might otherwise draw the mind uncritically under a work's spell. Anything that fills our consciousness always in the same way strips us of any right judgment about it for lack of anything else by which to measure it and determine its worth or unworth. In contrast, multifacetedness, by making us check overhasty approval or disapproval of a work against ten or more others, lifts us to a cooler yet clearer vantage point and to a calmness of judgment unavailable where just one impression enthralles us. One picture's merits bring out the faults of another. As in life, so also in art, we need often to be intensely aware of a mistake in one place to be able to see it at all somewhere else.

Yet it is possible too that something outweighs all these gains and turns them into a net loss, namely two of the greatest evils of our modern feeling for art: superficiality and the blasé attitude. It is easy to look at things calmly and coolly when the brain is so benumbed as to be blank to warmth or enthusiasm. It is easy to guard against overestimation when nothing is esteemed at all any longer. It is not hard to criticize the bad when criticism is the only way to respond even to the good. A blasé attitude is both cause and consequence of this need for the most varied and discordant of impressions. For as the mind becomes duller with each satisfaction of its craving, it thirsts only for more and more violent and arousing excitements. A curious contradiction arises: as our sensibilities as modern people become finer, more tender, and more nervous, we cease to be able to live with strong contrasting colors and henceforth cope only with pale ones, with half-tones and tints, like modern parents with the healthy noise of their children. Our emotive and expressive powers taper down to such a degree that our feelings seem henceforth capable only of dancing at pinpoint, as at the tips of needles. The tiniest deviation from a style or the slightest tactlessness upsets us ever more easily. Certainly we learn to discriminate more and more sharply, where untrained eyes and thicker skinned spirits see nothing but a blur. Yet we also crave ever greater excitements and are ever less content with small daily pleasures and interests, ever less open to the idyllic life, with the consequence that nature can satisfy us only at the coast of the Baltic Sea or at the highest peaks of the Alps. Sophistication is always as much a sign of the blunting of sensibility as of its refinement, and modern man's impulses tend to

want just as much to find the sensuously rare, peculiar, and delicate as to expand the scope of sensibility as such—coming finally, through this process, to need only more and more violence and exhilaration. Thus it is that in our bodily life as a whole, nervous overstimulation leads, on the one hand, to hyperaesthesia and, on the other, to anaesthesia—to the twin sicknesses of too much sensitivity and too little sensitivity.

Still more significant in this coexistence of diverse artworks in the exhibition is the following. Our soul is not a slate from which anything written can be erased without trace to make completely fresh space for something else. Wherever at least some impact has been left on us by a work of art, it will resound long enough afterward not to leave a wholly open field for the next one that strikes us. If only unconsciously, enough of the old will linger for the new not to conquer as much from the soul as it might perhaps claim. Inevitably, there will be a mix of impressions, endangering any deeper understanding of an individual artwork. Simply any close spatial juxtaposition of images has this effect. Standing still, it is impossible to fill our field of vision entirely with one painting, unless it is many square meters in size, or to avoid at least parts of other adjacent pictures affecting our concentration and thereby diluting the main picture's impression on us. And apart from this interference, this disruptive simultaneity, how many pictures is it possible to look at consecutively with a fresh mind? Some might answer, half a dozen; others, several dozen; but none would want to deny that often even only one-tenth of the contents of an exhibition is enough to sate us and that exposure to the remaining nine-tenths would be bound to cause stomach ache to the mind if it were not that our mental stomach adapts to the situation by superficially gliding over the remaining nine-tenths and not truly absorbing them. Museums too, of course, suffer from this problem; but unless their visitors are the sort who spend no more than a day and a night in Rome, they at least have the advantage of allowing us to see their holdings often and repeatedly and getting to know them more deeply. Permanency of works in a museum affords the spectator more repose than the exhibition's fleeting character, whose eight-week cycle and breathless dispersal of all contents at its end leaves a spectator agitated and unsettled.

What might also seem to undermine a modern art exhibition's psychological appeal to the contrariety-seeking modern mind, through its stimulus of immediate multiple contrasts, is a frequently remarked poverty of painterly motives on display. This more than anything else is the source of that pessimism that speaks only of lost paradises in art today. Pessimism of this nature is indeed in some degree correct in noting the deficit of a capacity to lend visible sensuous form to an idea whose beauty at once

conceals and reveals an associated content of thought or to dramatize the moment of a situation in which multiple acting persons converge optically in a state of beautiful unity. Art today evinces comparatively more rarely the kind of imaginative riches and versatility required by such tasks. One often finds, in a run-of-the-mill exhibition, a few good landscapes and some decent portraits, but seldom independently composed paintings of any real distinction, even in better exhibitions. It is not rare to find a genre painting attractive for the good humor of the events it records or for the contact it establishes with a spectator's own circles of life and interest, but here, precisely, one notices a striking poverty of motives: a tireless desire to extract for the thousandth time the tiniest last drop of originality from the events and persons represented. In great projects, constantly renewed imitation of this kind is not bothersome, just as the Greeks could bear seeing their tragic poets dramatizing the same mythic proceedings over and over again. Likewise, Christian themes of the Madonna and Child, of Judgment Day, of the saints, each with a familiar significant character—all of these are deep and sufficiently capacious models to sustain any number of elaborations. Because no one image corresponds to them fully or exhausts their content, each painting hands on to the next a task as unfinished as it found it. By contrast, the more obvious a template is, or the less substantially a picture attempts to break beyond it, the less can we bear its repetition. A serious thought can be told a hundred times over; a joke, just once. Similarly, genre paintings may seek a certain originality, yet their frequent repetition of content can be irritating and bland.

But for all that has been said so far, for all the artistic poverty and, so to speak, colorful monotony we may see in modern art exhibitions, no shortage exists in them of stimulating diversity and mordant contrariety. A picture may lack originality or hover in a zone of form and content already familiar to us; but modern art as a whole is rich and multifarious enough in styles and exemplars to create the liveliest variability. We see here another deeper and different aspect and direction of art's relation to public life today. We glimpse another way of understanding a reality of the mass more and more taking the place of great personalities. The challenges of modern culture are addressed less by powerful singular personalities than by the cooperation of the many. Collective projects in place of original individual ones stamp the creative character of our time. Originality in general in culture has passed from the individual to the group as the source of particular characteristics of agency. Perhaps this is also true of art in particular. Poor in invention as individuals may be, in and of themselves, they are nevertheless collaboratively capable of generating unique, stylistically distinctive modes of representation and

sensibility. What they contribute to the formation of particular traits and what they add to, as distinct from taking from, a group to which they belong will often be hard to establish sharply. And so it is possible that no contradiction need exist between a paucity of purely individual creative powers, on the one hand, and a wealth of the most multifarious styles and artistic problems, on the other. A modern art exhibition, more than anything else, helps us understand this relation of the individual to the social whole. For it shows that an oft-lamented inventive poverty and dearth of strong individual personalities nevertheless stands alongside general heterogeneity, alongside a plenitude of endeavors, ideas, and expressive means borne by whole groups and imparted to the individual.

In all of these ways, the art exhibition numbers among those institutions of modern times that in themselves are perhaps unwelcome and of little benefit but that remain inexpungeable features of the modern mind. They are not, as often alleged, so much cause of today's superficiality and blasé mood of artistic judgment as consequence of certain conditions of the public mind that, as regrettable as these may be, remain so deeply interconnected as to be impossible to disentangle without alteration to the tone of modern sensory life as a whole. In few other phenomena that are in part also by-products of our culture do so many characteristics come together: specialization of competences, convergence of multiple powers in small spaces, speed, and the restless pursuit of stimuli. As a modern art exhibition indicates, loss of sharp-edged personalities, offset by a greater wealth of undertakings, challenges, styles, and genres borne by groups as a whole, turns out to form a picture in miniature of all our mental currents of the present—something resistant to both praise and reproach when seen in this wider context. For the art exhibition belongs to the symbols of our time of transition, and of this only the future can tell whether all the restless, uncertain, and fervent twilight in which we live is new dawn or mere dusk of the day gone by.

Aesthetics of Gravity

The things and circumstances from which we fashion our lives confront us with such overpowering reality, with such unrelenting stubbornness, that often we feel this entire stuff of life to be a burden that must be completely sloughed off before the soul can realize its full freedom. The pressure we experience from nature and from society can make us forget, in general and in particular situations, that without the hardness and resistance these things place in our way we would have no material with which to achieve and articulate our inner life. If the chisel met with no resistance in the marble, it would be unable to lend it form. Freedom of the soul manifests itself only amid an independent external world, by which this freedom is constricted but together with which it can first engender a real life. Even our ethical impulses need the raw material of sensate egoistic drives to demonstrate their power of constant overcoming and transformation of such drives. At any one moment, our inner life finds itself in a state of antagonism between, on the one hand, an ego surging forward to full authentic self-expression and, on the other, inhibiting powers which this ego's entire freedom is directed to destroying, but whose complete desuetude would rob the ego of all vital stuff and the possibility of shaping itself into firm forms.

In our everyday surroundings, this typical fate of the soul continues. The movements of our limbs constantly show the struggle between physical gravity, dragging us downward, and psychic-physiological impulses, canceling out and deflecting a body's weight. Indeed, our movements *are* this struggle. Voluntary energies govern our limbs according to norms and directions quite different from physical energies, and our lived body is incessantly a meeting point for both forces, each battling, parrying, and impelling the other to compromise. And while it may seem that material resistance prevents inner movement from revealing itself in any way, this resistance in fact conditions every self-revelation of the soul. Only

in this resistance and its overcoming can movement rise into being and assert its sensuous meaning. Now the typical ways in which human beings present themselves and feature in diverse styles of art are decided by the particular manner in which these opposing forces encounter, divert, and thwart or sometimes foster or cede to one another and jointly create a unity of appearances in manifold combinations. For example, if one compares a Greek statue with a Baroque sculpture, one immediately notices that Greek artists take the overcoming of gravity much less lightly than their Baroque counterparts. The latter feel no sense of natural gravity, either in human appearances or in marble. They play with their materials' physical properties like things absolutely responsive to every inner whim of the artist—like air blown anywhere we please, without our ever noticing any resistance. And yet Baroque art never seems as animated by inner spirit as classical art, which proves that material resistance is in no way an “evil principle” that might better not have existed but is rather the necessarily obdurate stuff in which alone a soul can visibly inscribe itself. Garments around a human body are, in their folds and their hang, their swish and swell, a revealing symbol of this contest of powers. In the figures of a Japanese woodcut, a peculiar sense of brokenness, of simultaneous dispersal and gatheredness of form—so hard for us Westerners to understand—indicates that, on the one hand, earthy weightiness and, on the other, nervous impulses combine in these bodies in a manner quite different from anything known to us, and that each opposing side can overcome the other in rhythms, dynamics, and pliable regions quite foreign to us. The defining degree and character of humankind's way of weaving psychic energies into nature's elementary structures and making each aspect vanquish, impede, or support another—all of this evidently occurs quite differently for Japanese people than for us. The unitary phenomenon a Japanese artist visibly creates from these essential qualities departs so greatly from our Western way of being because the elements of this unity—physical and psychophysiological—come together in entirely different proportions and permutations.

No less significant is an individual artist's personal style of portraying a human figure by means of particular formulations of this antagonism. In Michelangelo, we feel all bodies to be rubbing up against a pressure, against a tremendous gravity pulling them down, such that they seem to have to expend an extraordinary labor of passion and force to work against this. The soul's struggle to free itself from nature's elemental mass, which symbolizes a silent tragic drama of inner burdens—this struggle reaches a standstill only where both opposing directions unfold to their utmost extreme. As soon as we see subsequent Italian art starting to waver

from this incredible art of equilibrium attained by Michelangelo; as soon, that is, as an attempt is made to push psychic freedom and impulsivity to fuller expression by simple neglect of gravity—it is at this point that Michelangelo's style glides over into the Baroque.

A wholly original conception of the soul's striving to overcome weighty physicality characterizes the style of Constantin Meunier. Meunier's sculptures introduce art to a completely new problem: that of laboring man. This sculptor, that is, discovered the formal aesthetic value of laboring movement as such, and did so in a manner different from Millet and other painters of working people, who visualized this more in a feeling of the character of such people than in work's purely perceptual significance, distinct from its ethical or sentimental meaning. Meunier exhibited for the first time work's aesthetic dignity, just as townspeople of the Middle Ages exhibited its social dignity. As the latter achieved this first by detaching labor from the concept of bondage imposed on it since antiquity, so Meunier stripped work of all results and concomitant aspects indifferent or contrary to its purely aesthetic meaning and treated laboring movement for the first time as an aesthetic form of the human body, as previously the body at rest or play or the body in turmoil had been treated. In the acts of lifting, pulling, rolling, and rowing that Meunier represents in his figures, corporeal mass is directed outward into dead matter, where matter's overcoming by human soul poses tremendous and wholly unique challenges. The present social movement rests on recognition of the common interests of infinitely diverse types of labor, from that of the iron smelter to that of the tailor, the barber, and the miner. All of these are wage-laborers—a concept whose unity and uniformity earlier ages could not have grasped before the rise of these various types of work. Out of this conceptual identity of work Meunier created an aesthetic identity. Work may engage very different kinds of muscles and muscular power, but work always involves one and the same relationship of an animate body to challenges a body faces from material resistance to its purposes. Work is the infusion of soul into matter, and work thus repeats outside of the body this contest that colors all our movements: that of physical gravity over against countervailing impulses of the soul. Or more correctly expressed: work persists within the limits of a lived human body and is only a particular accentuation of physical resistances our psychic and physiological tendencies encounter in the hardness, heaviness, and stiffness of materials around us. Meunier's bronzes tell us for the first time what work is in the language of art, and do so by disclosing a universal character of the inter-relationship a working person creates between the forces of sheer matter and humankind's struggle to master these forces through powers of will.

In making us feel weight and counterweight in things, sculptures have the advantage of being made of materials weighty in themselves. Their burden we feel in the way we sense the gravity of beams held aloof by columns and in the way we empathically decide the appropriateness of these forces' mutual antagonism—the downward drag of the one, the upward push of the other—in an immediate fashion, as if directly from within ourselves. Marble has quite incomparable properties in this regard, its shimmering whiteness leavening and spiritualizing stone's heaviness. It has an objective quality, like space. It is, so to speak, pure corporeal space, allowing sculpture to find in it the most malleable material available, the most yielding of every interrelationship of forms and forces, for its work of fashioning space. This seems to contrast with wood, porcelain, and bronze as media with intrinsic properties that tend to limit the range of possibilities open to a sculptor. Life-size bronze figures are possible aesthetically only in exceptional circumstances because the tremendous sense of gravity we feel in this metal can only minimally be overcome by any kind of inner vital power; while porcelain figures, conversely, trigger very quickly an impression of the Baroque because their movements, with so little to overcome in the lightness of their material, almost always seem to exaggerate and to squander their powers into a void.

If I am not mistaken, the sensuous contrast of grace and dignity likewise derives from a divergence of ways in which psychic and nervous energies address material pressure. In both cases, material constraint is overcome by animate movement—but in different aspects. Grace is the appearance of the disarming of material resistance from the very outset: not by any increase of power over matter but by a decrease of claims over this power. Motion appears to occur effortlessly, as though all that existed were the soul's freedom, and all impediments from the outside world were mere play for the soul. Dignity, on the other hand, as a sensuous aspect, achieves the same equilibrium of psychophysiological potency and resistance by accepting the latter's full gravity but raising the former to a level that towers above such recalcitrance of matter. Here the enemy is not, as with grace, a faint, almost trifling intimation of resistance. Dignity leaves undiminished the appearance of burdensome, downward-pressing forces. Indeed, it emphasizes these forces in order to reach beyond them and to reveal soul triumphing in strength over the defeated opponent. In moral life, we recognize the duality that precisely corresponds to this. We attribute an action's highest moral "merit" to the temptations of sensual egoism the individual feels duty-bound to seek to overcome in the face of the will's greatest liability to sin. By contrast, we speak of the "beautiful soul" as moral in the different sense that its ethical

life flows from the self-evidence of a natural drive.* It has no temptations to surmount because it already enjoys virtue as such. Where the soul of “merit” must overcome temptation on pain of enjoying sin, the beautiful soul is moral by itself because it lacks opposing powers dragging it to evil. It belongs with moral grace, inasmuch as grace in appearances is nothing but that self-evidence of victory that the soul’s freedom wins over sheer dark materiality in us—or rather, does not need to win in the first place. The soul of merit and dignity, on the other hand, is that deeper and heavier soul that rescues its ego and freedom only through the bitterest work of overcoming itself and all obscurities of earthly temptation and fallibility, triumphing over the strength, not the weakness, of oppressive forces. Thus, this conflict of the two sets of polar forces adumbrated here is the aesthetic form of the great struggle of the human soul with pure natural powers—a conflict whose various intensities and stages, victories and compromises, tangents and climaxes, lend human history its color and values.

* [Trans.] Simmel is alluding to Goethe’s “Confessions of a Beautiful Soul” (*Bekanntnisse einer schönen Seele*) in book 6 of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796), also defined in Friedrich Schiller’s essay “On Grace and Dignity” (*Über Anmut und Würde*) of 1793.

The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study

The character of things depends ultimately upon whether they are wholes or parts. Whether an existence, sufficient within itself, closed within itself, is determined only by the law of its own nature or whether it stands as an element within the context of a whole, from which it receives power and meaning—this distinguishes the soul from everything material, the free person from the merely social creature, the moral personality from the person who is held dependent on everything external by sensuous desire. And it separates the work of art from every part of nature. For as a natural existence, each thing is a mere transitional point for continuously flowing energies and materials, comprehensible only from what has preceded it, significant only as an element of the entire natural process. The essence of the work of art, however, is to be a whole for itself, not requiring any relation to an exterior, spinning each of its threads back into its own center. Insofar as the work of art is that which otherwise only the world as a whole or the psyche can be, a unity of individualities, the work of art closes itself off against everything external to itself as a world of its own. Thus its boundaries mean something quite different from what one calls boundaries in a natural entity. In the case of the natural entity, boundaries are simply the site of continuing exosmosis and endosmosis with everything external; for the work of art they are that absolute ending which exercises indifference toward and defense against the exterior and a unifying integration with respect to the interior in a single act. What the frame achieves for the work of art is to symbolize and strengthen this double function of its boundary. It excludes all that surrounds it, and thus the viewer as well, from the work of art, and thereby helps to place it at that distance from which alone it is aesthetically enjoyable. The distance of a being from us signifies in everything psychological the unity of this being in itself. For only to the extent to which a being is self-enclosed does

it possess that sphere into which no one can penetrate, that existence for itself with which it can protect itself from every other sphere.

Distance and unity, antithesis to us and synthesis within itself, are reciprocal concepts; the two prime qualities of a work of art—its inner unity and the fact that it is in a sphere removed from all immediate life—are one and the same, only viewed from two different sides. And only if and because the work of art possesses this self-sufficiency does it have so much to give us; that existence for itself is the preparatory stepping back with which the work penetrates us that much more deeply and fully. The feeling of an undeserved gift with which it delights us originates from the pride of this self-sufficient closure, with which it now nevertheless becomes our own.

The qualities of the picture frame reveal themselves to be those of assisting and giving meaning to this inner unity of the picture. This commences with such an apparently fortuitous thing as the joints between its sides. The gaze glides inward on them; by extending them toward their ideal intersection, the eye emphasizes the relationship of the picture to its center from all sides. This unifying effect of the frame joints is visibly strengthened by raising the outer sides of the frame compared with the inner sides, so that the four sides form converging planes. From the same motivation, however, a now common form appears to me to be completely reprehensible, namely, the raising of the inner frame sides so that the frame slopes downward to the outside. Since the gaze, like bodily movement, moves more easily from higher to lower than vice versa, so in this way the gaze is unavoidably led outward away from the picture, and the coherence of the picture is subjected to a centrifugal dispersal.

The fact that the frame side is enclosed by two moldings serves the closing function more than it does the synthetic one. In this way, the entire ornamentation or profile of the frame runs like a stream between two banks. And it is precisely this which favors that islandlike position which the work of art requires vis-à-vis the outer world. It is therefore of the greatest importance that the design of the frame makes possible this continuous flowing of the gaze, as if it always flowed back into itself. That is why the frame, through its configuration, must never offer a gap or a bridge through which, as it were, the world could get in or from which the picture could get out—as occurs for instance when content extends into the frame, a fortunately rare mistake, which completely negates the work of art's autonomous being and thereby the significance of the frame.

The self-enclosing flow of the frame does not mean, however, that the frame's ornamentation itself must run parallel to its setting. On the con-

trary, precisely in order to emphasize clearly the flow of the frame, which makes the picture into an island, the lines of the ornamentation must deviate strongly, perhaps even perpendicularly, from this parallelism. All lines placed obliquely to the frame's side form blockages to that flow within it whose power and movement, felt by us aesthetically, are heightened and made clear by overcoming such barriers. The entire formation of the frame's ornamentation is controlled by the impression of flowing and closing in on itself, through which it emphasizes the separation of the picture from all that surrounds it, so that every separating line is justified to the extent to which it helps to raise that impression to its maximum. The same reason renders intelligible the long-proven practice of giving the smaller picture a broader and, at all events, a more dynamically effective frame. For the danger in this case is that the picture may blend into the simultaneously viewed surroundings; it may not stand out with sufficient independence and therefore must be countered with stronger means of demarcation than is the case with the very large picture, which fills out a considerable portion of the field of vision for itself. Since the latter need not fear any competition from its surroundings with regard to the independent significance of its impression, it can be content with a minimally framed boundary.

The ultimate purpose of the frame proves the unacceptability of the cloth frame, which turns up from time to time. A piece of material is felt to be part of a much more extensive material; there is no inner reason why the pattern is cut off at this particular point, and refers by itself to an unlimited prolongation—the cloth frame thus lacks the sense of boundary justified by the form and cannot therefore bound anything else. In the case of unpatterned materials, where this lack of closure and ability to serve as a boundary is less prominent, the mere softness of the boundary and of the entire material effect in general already suffices to produce the same deficiency. The material is lacking an organic structure of its own, which is why wood retains such an effective and yet modest closure within itself—something that is sorely missed in the case of imitation wood frames, whereas it becomes tangle in carved gilded frames, despite the coating. For the latter does not hide the slight irregularities of craftwork, which make its organic liveliness superior to all the exactness of the machine.

This principle, if properly understood, explains why, in more or less tasteful milieus, one no longer finds photographs from nature in frames. The frame is suited only to structures with a closed unity, which a piece of nature never possesses. Any excerpt from unmediated nature is connected by a thousand spatial, historical, conceptual, and emotional relationships with everything that surrounds it more or less closely, physically or men-

tally. Only artistic form severs these threads and, as it were, ties them inwardly back together. Around the piece of nature, which we instinctively feel to be a mere part in the context of the greater whole, the frame is therefore contradictory and violent for the same reason that the inner vital principle of the work of art tolerates and even promotes it.

Another fundamental misunderstanding from which the frame suffers is a derivative of modern sins in furniture. The principle that furniture is a work of art has disposed of a great deal of poor taste and dreary banality, but its rights are not as positive and unlimited as favorable prejudice for it would lead one to believe. The work of art is something for itself, whereas furniture is something for us. The work of art may be as individual as it wishes, as the sensualization of a spiritual unity: while hanging in our room, it does not disturb our acquaintances, since it has a frame, that is, since it is like an island in the world that waits until one approaches it and which one can as well pass by and overlook. In the case of the piece of furniture, we make contact with it constantly, it intervenes in our life and thus has no right to exist for itself. Many a modern piece of furniture appears degraded when one sits on it, since it is the direct expression of individual artistry; its form seems to cry out for a frame, and standing in a room without one it oppresses the human being, who, with his or her individuality, is after all supposed to be the main concern and furniture merely the background. When one hears the individuality of the piece of furniture being preached everywhere, this represents a hypertrophy of the modern sense of individuality. The same error in rank ordering occurs if one wishes to grant the frame an aesthetic value of its own by figurative ornamentation, by the independent appeal of the color, by design or symbolism, all of which make it into the expression of a self-sufficient artistic idea. All of this displaces the subordinate position of the frame with respect to the picture. Just as the frame for a soul can only be a body, but not itself a soul, so a work of art which exists for its own sake cannot emphasize and support the autonomous existence of another such work: the resignation required to this end rules out existing as art.

Like furniture, the frame should possess no individuality but rather a style. Style is an unburdening of the personality, the replacement of individual intensification by a broader general entity. Thus, whereas an object of the applied arts immediately places in the foreground of consciousness the issue as to its particular style, we tend to ask this question much less often in the presence of a work of art; indeed, in the case of the greatest works of art, their style is really of no significance to us. Here, the individual aspect completely outshines that general aspect which we call style, and which the individual object shares with countless others. The

subdued and calming quality that emanates from all strictly stylized objects resides in this supra-individual character. In the works of humanity, style takes a middle position between the uniqueness of the individual soul and the absolute universality of nature. This is why people surround themselves with stylized objects in their cultural milieu, which separates them from the merely natural world, and this is why style and not individualization is the proper principle of life for the frame of a work of art, which repeats the relationship of the psyche to the world in its relationship to the environment.

If, then, the aesthetic position of the frame is determined as much by a certain indifference as by those energies of its forms, whose uniform flow characterizes it as the mere border guard of the picture, then it is precisely very old frames which seem to contradict this. Here the sides are often constructed as pillars or columns which support a cornice or a gable, such that each part and the whole is more differentiated and significant than in the case of a modern frame, any of whose four sides can be substituted for one another. By virtue of this heavy architectonics, through the division of labor-like interdependence of its elements, the inner coherence of the frame is of course elevated in the extreme. In so doing, however, it takes on an organic life and a weightiness of its own, which enter into a degrading competition with its existence as a mere frame. This may have been justified as long as the inner artistic unity of the picture, which holds it together and closes it off against the external world, was still not experienced sufficiently strongly. Whenever a picture served the purposes of divine worship, whenever it was drawn into religious experience, whenever it addressed the intelligence of the viewer directly through banderoles or other such interpretations, then extra-artistic spheres were taking control of it and threatening to break through its formal artistic unity. This is counteracted by the dynamism of the architectonic frame, whose mutually referential components create an impenetrably strong connection—and thereby a boundary. The more the work of art rejects such relationships that transcend it, the more it can forgo the powers of the frame, which disavow their own subordinate function by their own organic liveliness.

The fact that, compared with the architectonic frame, the modern frame, with the much more mechanical and schematic character of its four equal sides, represents a progress, integrates the frame into a far-reaching principle of cultural development. The latter by no means always leads the individual element from a mechanistic-external form to an organically animated and autonomously more meaningful form. On the contrary, whenever the spirit organizes the material of existence into ever more extensive and ever higher designs, then innumerable objects, that had

previously led a self-enclosed life representing an idea of their own, are degraded to merely mechanically effective, specific elements of larger constellations; only the latter are now bearers of the idea, whereas the former have become mere means, whose autonomous existence is meaningless. This is the relationship of the medieval knight to the soldiers of a modern army, of the independent craftsman to the factory worker, of the enclosed community to the city in a modern state, of household self-sufficient production to labor within the financial and global economic organization of the market. From out of the coexisting, mutually independent, and self-sufficient entities there grows an all-embracing structure to which, as it were, each gives up their soul, their existence for themselves, in order to regain a meaning for their existence only as mechanically functioning elements of that structure. Thus the mechanical uniform design of the frame, meaningless in comparison with architectonic or other “organic” forms, indicates that the relationship between the picture and its surrounds has only now been understood and adequately expressed as a whole. The apparently higher spirituality of the intrinsically meaningful frame only proves the lesser degree of spirituality in the understanding of the whole to which it belongs.

The work of art is in the actually contradictory position of being supposed to form a unified whole with its surroundings, whereas it is itself already a whole. In this way, it repeats the general difficulty of life, that the elements of totalities nevertheless lay claim to being autonomous totalities themselves. It is evident what an infinitely delicate consideration of the advancing and retreating, of the energies and arrestments of the frame is necessary if it is to solve the problem in the visual sphere of mediating between the work of art and its milieu, separating and connecting—the task which has its analogy in the historical realm, in which the individual and society mutually wear one another down.

On Aesthetic Quantities

The assumption that the arts have no limits has led a variety of aesthetic movements into the identical error. Abstract idealism is at one with realism in its idea of the relation between art and existence: both believe that, in principle, art can include all subjects within the range of its forms and equip them with equal perfection. This is the extreme opposite of the theory which treats as valid only beautiful and characteristic objects.

The opinion that art can reflect every object accurately, as a mirror, fails to consider that art and artistic media have grown historically. (This artistic pantheism is a form of megalomania which denies relativity and the infinite developmental possibilities of all human affairs.) At different historical points art must have different relationships to the objective being. A characteristic illustration of this will be given here. I will consider the diversity of the aesthetic point of view in its dependence on the diverse and varying physical dimensions of works of art.

Let us consider a postulate which derives from the nature of physical objects: the physical objects demand certain proportions of size for their representation in a work of art. If this postulate and the purely artistic point of view now differ and now coincide, then this does prove that artistic formulations represent very special, accidental, and changing relationships to reality.

The most pronounced discrepancies exist with respect to inorganic nature. For example, paintings of the Alps cannot exhaustively represent their quantitative significance; they appear empty and inadequate. Even [Giovanni] Segantini, the only important painter of Alpine scenes who exists so far, always moved the mountains into the background or chose stylized forms. Moreover, he detracted fully from the demands of this sense impression, which is based primarily on quantitative dimensions, not only by his special treatment of air and of light, but by the quantities of those impressions which could be depicted.

In all organically grown phenomena we find that the circumference always reaches as far as the inner forces are able to develop it. Thus we may have a feeling, through complex, probably unconscious experiences, and through empathy, for the inner forces of growth. Usually, therefore, we are in agreement with their size. For the artist, too, the transformations of form which are required because of changes in quantities come about without effort.

In inorganic matters, however, the form does not express inner relationships. There, the forms are molded by exterior forces. The inner principles for the exterior forms, which might guide us in their transformation, are missing. Thus, we can only guide ourselves by the given facts of their spatial dimensions.

How can one explain, furthermore, that individuals without architectural training experience hardly any aesthetic impact from small-scale models of buildings, or at least only an impact which does not do justice to the dimensions of their realistic execution? Psychologically speaking, we are unable to reconstruct imaginatively from such small-scale models relationships of gravity, of weights and supports, of resting and elevating, in short, the dynamic processes. This imaginative intuition develops only with objects of a certain absolute minimum size. This size might be called the threshold of imaginative recall. Our historically given architecture apparently has those quantitative dimensions which permit our soul such an emphatic feeling. As soon as they become smaller or much larger, although we still can view and intellectually consider them, they are devoid of aesthetic effect.

In this context it becomes obvious why idealistic and intellectual aesthetics must necessarily be formalistic. For whenever importance is placed not on imaginative reconstruction, but on purely intellectual processes, then their conditioning by mere measures of size will be without significance. For pure reason form equals form, and equal forms always must have equal effects.

For some god whose senses were not circumscribed by thresholds of stimuli, size would be completely unimportant. He would not, as we must, connect the qualitative differences of reactions with quantitative differences.

This change of aesthetic values suggests new standards applicable to organic but nonhuman subject matter. The aesthetic resistance of particular objects is often directed not only against the diminution or enlargement of scale, but sometimes also against their representation in natural size. In a not-too-large painting, a horse will always look naturalistic, as if outside the sphere of the work of art. Moreover, certain objects are a priori

excluded from works of art. It seems that some objects are withheld from artistic reproduction in the same measure in which interest in their reality dominates the imagination associatively, as for example the concerns of routine daily life, extremely remarkable phenomena and accidents, and more of the like.

All these phenomena drive the category of being into consciousness as a question, a wish, or knowledge. Thereby, however, they remove themselves from the merely idealistic sphere of art.

This series of motives can also be augmented from another direction. A rider on horseback produces a contradiction if he is rendered in natural size, since his life-size representation will have realistic effects. The inner and justified relationship of these two appears directly reversed. A diminution, however, would shift the artistic relationship of the parts to favor the spiritually higher. This suggests that the individual parts of a work of art are effective not only through their mutual relationships, but that a certain absolute size of the whole work of art is required which alone will give the proper meaning to those relations. The accent may be placed on the form, but the potential of being able to decide is only reached once it appears in a certain scale.

The human figure presents an aesthetic miracle insofar as it maintains its aesthetic value through almost all possible enlargements and diminutions of scale. The reason for this is that its aesthetic proportions, with which we are in solidarity, take on such importance and concreteness for us, and have such immediate inner necessity, that they dominate everything else. Indeed, the human figure is perceived as a norm for the qualities and proportions of everything else; man is the measure of all things also in visual matters.

When we are dealing with relationships among human beings, however, the problem of quantities arises once again. For example, in paintings of Madonnas, the child in its bodily smallness contradicts his dominant central role. The childlike form, with its limited potential of differentiation, is hardly suited to express spiritually important matters. This problem has been completely overcome only in the Sistine Madonna.

There are no limits to the power of the artist. By saying this, however, it is not implied that the quantitative dependence is insignificant. It only means that size is one element which may be overcome by other elements, but which will not disappear. Each artistically usable element seems to be composed of two thresholds of size. There is a certain quantity for their representation through which aesthetic reactions in the final analysis are produced, and there is one through which they disappear again. Such

thresholds can also be found in other spheres of the higher mental life. as, for example, the threshold of becoming conscious of justice (*minima non curat praetor*) or of religion.*

These aesthetic thresholds of objects, which determine their utilization for aesthetic purposes, are moved together or apart in accordance with the artist's potential concerning form. With a growing refinement of aesthetic knowledge, however, the threshold values must approximate one another more and more. Finally, if we should ever attain complete knowledge concerning artistic composition, we will develop a definite scale for measuring the full artistic impression.

The one conclusion of all previous studies concerning these problems is that certain modifications of aesthetic response can be explained by merely quantitative changes. This, however, only formulates the problem. The psychological connections are still missing.

To this subject I shall now contribute two ideas. The first concerns not so much the size of a work of art as the amount of emotional excitement it evokes. To judge the importance of a work of art simply by the quantity of sensation it generates is extremely dilettantish. To provide a valid standard, the emotional force with which the audience is carried along must remain formally consistent with respect to rhythmical balance. Neither must the quantity of impressions be allowed to transgress a certain level, or else our emotional responses will drown out our artistic ones.

For example, when we read a novel, the tension which is often produced in us by an overdeveloped interest in its subject matter may destroy its artistic effect. A certain distance and reserve are necessary. We are dealing here with a question of quantity; even if we were already familiar with the content, its artistic form would nevertheless generate a tension and empathy in us, but it would compare with the previously mentioned realistic impressions only as a tender image. The arts, so to speak, seem to present us with the content of life without representing life itself.

Thus it seems to me that the strength of emotion also has an upper and a lower aesthetic threshold. Beyond the one, there is apathy; beyond the other there is realistic participation. This displacement of the quantitative aspect of sensations means not only that there is room for the aesthetic feeling, but that this more abstract emotional force, which is not short of the quality of realistic feelings, already by itself represents an aesthetic quality. Under whatever circumstances we otherwise recognize diminu-

* [Trans.] *Minima non curat praetor*; from Roman law: "the praetor does not concern himself with trifles."

tions in the intensity of feelings, we seem to perceive a lack of success, a failure. Only the arts seem to know how to conserve without gaps the complete cosmos of feelings.

Our second consideration concerns the value of quantities in the most external meaning of the term. We take for granted that subjects which have very important inner meanings will require a larger canvas, while less important subjects require a smaller one. Yet this relationship is in fact not at all self-evident. It seems to stem rather from the fact that the size of any given image requires a certain part of our visual field. If a picture does not completely fill the visual field or fills it almost fully, then inevitably many other objects will also be seen. A proper relationship between the sense of content and totality of the interests of the moment is needed. Further, complete sensuous awareness should be demanded only by an aesthetically important subject. A less important one should not be permitted to preempt the whole field of vision. This would violate all symbolism, which is the essence of art.

The final observation concerning perfection in art is that art knows how to obey the postulates of objects which develop independently of one another with equal justice and balance; thus what is real has the choice only of which one it should follow, as if there were only a single law which separates what is real into coincidence and apathetic alienation.

Thus we see that there are demands on the quantitative dimensions of a work of art which derive, on the one hand, from purely artistic conditions and, on the other, from our bodily and mental structures. From the intrinsic meanings of objects (associations—inner meanings) flow others which, however, coincide with the former although they are not restrained by any preestablished harmony.

Thus art shows us the unified context of its elements in the image of being, which reality seems to keep from us. This unity, however, cannot be foreign to our deepest understanding, since the image of being must finally also be a part of being.

The Handle

Modern theories of art strongly emphasize that the essential task of painting and sculpture is the depiction of the spatial organization of things. Assenting readily to this, one may then easily fail to recognize that space within a painting is a structure altogether different from the real space we experience. Within actual space an object can be touched, whereas in a painting it can only be looked at; each portion of real space is experienced as part of an infinite expanse, but the space of a picture is experienced as a self-enclosed world; the real object interacts with everything that surges past or hovers around it, but the content of a work of art cuts off these threads, fusing only its own elements into a self-sufficient unity. Hence, the work of art leads its life beyond reality. To be sure, the work of art draws its content from reality; but from visions of reality it builds a sovereign realm. While the canvas and the pigment on it are parts of reality, the work of art constructed out of them exists in an ideal space which can no more come in contact with actual space than tones can touch smells.

This holds for every utensil, for every vase, in so far as it is looked upon as having an aesthetic value. As a piece of metal which is tangible, weighable, and incorporated into both the ways and contexts of the surrounding world, a vase is a segment of reality. At the same time, its artistic form leads an existence completely detached and self-contained, for which the material reality of the metal is merely the vehicle. A vessel, however, unlike a painting or statue, is not intended to be insulated and untouchable but is meant to fulfill a purpose—if only symbolically. For it is held in the hand and drawn into the movement of practical life. Thus the vessel stands in two worlds at one and the same time: whereas reality is completely irrelevant to the “pure” work of art and, as it were, is consumed in it, reality does make claims upon the vase as an object that is handled, filled and emptied, proffered, and set down here and there.

This dual nature of the vase is most decisively expressed in its handle.

The handle is the part by which it is grasped, lifted, and tilted; in the handle the vase projects visibly into that real world which relates it to everything external, to an environment that does not exist for the work of art as such. But then the body of the vase is certainly not alone in being subjugated to the demands of art: for were this the case, the handles would be reduced to mere grips, unrelated to the aesthetic value of their form, like the hooks and eyes of a picture frame. Rather, the handles connecting the vase with the world outside art also become components of the art form: they must be justified purely as shapes and as constituting a *single* aesthetic vision with the body of the vase, irrespective of the fact that they have a practical purpose. By virtue of this double significance, and because of the clear and characteristic way in which this significance emerges, the handle as a phenomenon becomes one of the most absorbing aesthetic problems.

Our unconscious criterion for the aesthetic effect of the handle seems to be the manner in which its shape harmonizes these two worlds—the world on the outside which, with the handle, makes its claim on the vessel, and the world of art which, heedless of the other, demands the handle for itself. Moreover, not only must it be possible for the handle actually to perform its practical function, but the possibility must also be manifest in its appearance, and emphatically so in the case of apparently soldered handles, as opposed to those apparently shaped in one movement with the body of the vase. The first of these types indicates that the handle is attached by external forces and comes from an external order of things; it brings into prominence the meaning of the handle as something reaching outside the pure art form. This contrast between vase and handle is more sharply accentuated when, as frequently happens, the handle has the shape of a snake, lizard, or dragon. These forms suggest the special significance of the handle: it looks as though the animal had crawled onto the vase from the outside, to be incorporated into the complete form only, as it were, as an afterthought.

The fact that the handle belongs to the quite different realm in which it originated, and which now uses the handle to claim the vase for itself, becomes apparent through its visible aesthetic unity with the vase. In complete opposition to this, the strongest accent in some vases is on the tendency toward unity. They appear to have been whole forms first, the material extending to the periphery without a break; only afterward was enough material removed so that what remained constituted the handles. We find such modeling done to perfection in certain Chinese bowls, the handles of which are cut out of the cold metal. A similar incorporation of the handles into the aesthetic unity is more organically accented wherever

the handle seems to be driven out of the body of the vessel in an uninterrupted transition, and by the same forces that shaped the body itself. For this is like a man's arms which, having grown as part of the same organizational process as his torso, also mediate the relationship of the whole being to the world outside it.

Sometimes shallow bowls are shaped in such a way that, together with their handles, they produce an effect of leaf and stem. Very beautiful examples of such bowls from ancient Central American culture have been preserved—bowls in which the unity of organic growth palpably connects the two parts. The tool, as such, has been characterized as an extension of the hand or of human organs generally. In effect, just as the hand is a tool of the soul, so too the tool is a hand of the soul. Although the fact that it is a tool divorces the hand from the soul, it does not prevent the process of life from flowing through both in intimate unity; their being both apart and together constitutes the unanalyzable secret of life. But life reaches out beyond the immediate circumference of the body and assimilates the "tool" to itself; or better still, a foreign substance becomes a tool in that the soul pulls it into its life, into that zone around it which fulfills its impulses. The distinction between being external to the soul and being within it—simultaneously important for the body and of no significance—is, for the things beyond the body, both retained and resolved in a single act by the great motif of the tool in the stream of a life that is unified and transcends itself. The shallow bowl is nothing but an extension or augmentation of the creative hand bearing it. But the bowl is not simply held in the palm of the hand; it is grasped by the handle. Thus, a mediating bridge is formed, a pliable joining of hand with bowl, which, with a palpable continuity, transmits the impulse of the soul into the bowl, into its manipulation. But then, through the reflux of this energy, the bowl is drawn into the circumference of the life of the soul. This relationship cannot be symbolized more perfectly than by a bowl unfolding from its handle like a leaf from its stem. It is as if man were here utilizing the channels of the natural flow of sap between stem and leaf in order to pour his own impulses into an external object, thereby incorporating it into the order of his own life.

When, in the appearance of the handle, one of its two functions is completely neglected in favor of the other, the impression made strikes a discordant note. This often occurs, for example, when the handles form merely a kind of relief ornament, being fully attached to the body of the vase, leaving no space between vase and handle. Here, the form rules out the purpose of the handle (that with it the vase may be grasped and handled), evoking a painful feeling of ineptness and confinement, similar

to that produced by a man who has his arms bound to his body. In such cases, only rarely can the decorative beauty of its appearance compensate for the fact that the inner tendency of the vase toward unity has negated its relatedness to the outer world.

However, just as the aesthetic form must not become so self-willed as to make impossible perception of the handle's purposiveness (even when, as in the case of the ornamental vase, it is out of the question in practice), so a disagreeable picture results whenever the purposiveness works in so many different directions that the unity of the impression is broken up. There are Greek vases that have three handles: two on the body by which the vase can be grasped with both hands and inclined in one or the other direction, and one at the neck by which it can be tilted to one side only. The decidedly ugly impression of these pieces is not caused by a violation of standards appropriate to either visual form or practical utility. For why shouldn't a vessel be tilted in several directions? The ugliness, it seems to me, can rather be traced to the fact that the movements laid out in this system can take place only one after the other, whereas the handles present themselves simultaneously. Thus completely confused and contradictory feelings of motion are produced; for although the demands of clarity and of utility do not, so to speak, contradict each other on a primary level, the unity of the vision is broken up indirectly: the handles which are, as it were, potential movements are present simultaneously, whereas any actualizing of these movements in practice must deny this simultaneity.

This imbalance suggests the other aesthetic defect of the handle: its exaggerated separation from the unified impression of the vase. To understand this flaw requires a digression. The most extreme estrangement of the handle from the vessel as a whole—that is, the strongest indication of its practical purpose—is to be found when the handle is not rigidly connected with the body of the vessel at all but is movable. In the language of materials, this is often accentuated by having the substance of the handle different from that of the vessel. Such a design allows for a variety of combinations in appearance.

In some Greek vases and bowls, the handle, rigidly attached to the body of the vessel and made of the same substance, has the character of a broad band. If the handle of this kind of vase retains its unity of form with the vessel, the result can be a happy one. The material of a band which differs greatly in weight, consistency, and flexibility from that of the body of a vase is here symbolized; and, by hinting at these differences, the design sufficiently indicates that the handle belongs to another province of existence. At the same time, because the material is actually the same as that of the vase, the aesthetic coherence of the whole is still maintained.

The delicate and unstable balance of the two claims on the handle shifts most unfavorably, however, when the fixed handle is in fact of the same substance as the body of the vase but naturalistically imitates another substance in order to stress its special significance by this different appearance. Particularly among the Japanese, otherwise the greatest masters of the handle, the following abomination can be found: fixed porcelain handles that arch beyond the diameter of the vase and accurately imitate the movable straw handles of teapots. How much a foreign world obtrudes itself, by means of the handle, upon the independent significance of the vase becomes particularly obvious when the special purpose of the handle imparts a quite unnatural and masklike surface to the material of the vase. Just as the handle which merges with the body of the vase without any gap exaggerates one-sidedly the fact that it belongs to the vase (at the cost of not manifesting its purpose), so this latter type goes to the opposite extreme: the remoteness of the handle from the remainder of the vase cannot be stressed more ruthlessly than when the handle takes on the substance of that remainder but forces upon it the appearance of an entirely dissimilar hoop which seems merely to have been fastened on from the outside.

The principle of the handle—to mediate between the work of art and the world while it remains wholly incorporated in the art form—is finally confirmed by the fact that its counterpart, the opening or spout of the vessel, works according to an analogous principle. With the handle the world approaches the vessel; with the spout the vessel reaches out into the world. Only in receiving its current through the handle and in yielding it again through the opening is the vessel fully integrated into human teleology. Precisely because the spout is an opening of the vessel itself, it is easier to connect its form organically with that of the vessel. Accordingly, such unnatural and self-contradictory degenerations as are found in the case of handles occur only rarely. (The very expressions “snout” and “nozzle,” for which the handle offers no parallel, indicate the spout’s organic function as a part of the body.)

The fact that handle and spout correspond to each other visually as the extreme points of the vessel’s diameter and that they must maintain a certain balance reflects the roles they play: while, of course, they serve as the enclosing boundaries of the vessel, they still connect it with the practical world—one centripetally, the other centrifugally. It is like the relation of man as soul to existence outside him: by means of the sensitivity of the sense organs, the corporeal reaches to the soul; by means of willed innervations, the soul reaches out into the corporeal world. Both activities belong to the soul and to the closed sphere of its consciousness;

and although the soul's sphere is the opposite of the corporeal one, it is, nevertheless, intertwined with it through these two processes.

The handle belongs to the enclosed unity of the vase and at the same time designates the point of entrance for a teleology that is completely external to that form. It is of the most fundamental interest that the purely formal aesthetic demands on the handle are fulfilled when these two symbolic meanings of it are brought into harmony or equilibrium. Yet this is not an example of that curious dogma which makes utility a criterion of beauty. For the point at issue is precisely that utility and beauty come to the handle as two unrelated demands—the first from the world, and the second from the total form of the vase. And now, as it were, a beauty of a higher order transcends both of these claims and reveals that their dualism ultimately constitutes a unity that is not further describable. Because of the great span between its two components, the handle becomes a most significant cue to this higher beauty. Till now, art theory has hardly touched on the kind of beauty which contains beauty in the narrower sense merely as one of its elements. Formal beauty, together with all of the demands of idea and life, is incorporated by what one might call super-aesthetic beauty into a new synthetic form. Beauty of this ultimate kind is probably the decisive characteristic of all really great works of art; the fact that we give it recognition divorces our position sharply from any aestheticism.

Besides the approach we have been pursuing, it may perhaps be worthwhile to apply a second, equally far-reaching interpretation to so unpretentious a phenomenon: we are speaking of the breadth of symbolic relations which is revealed by its very validity for things in themselves insignificant. For we are concerned with nothing less than the great human and ideal synthesis and antithesis: a being belongs wholly to the unity of a sphere which encloses it and which at the same time is claimed by an entirely different order of things. The latter sphere imposes a purpose upon the former, thereby determining its form. Nevertheless, the form in no way loses its proper place in the first context but retains it as if the second did not exist at all. A remarkable number of spheres in which we find ourselves—political, professional, social, and familial—are enclosed by further spheres, just as the practical environment surrounds the vessel. This relationship is such that the individual, belonging to a more restricted and closed sphere, thereby projects into a larger one. Whenever the more comprehensive sphere must, as it were, manipulate the smaller one and draw it into its own teleology, the individual, too, is manipulated by the more inclusive sphere. Just as the handle must not destroy the unity of the vase's form for the sake of its readiness to perform its practical task,

so the art of living demands that the individual maintain his role in his immediate, organically closed sphere while at the same time serving the purposes of the larger unity. With this service he helps to place the smaller sphere into the order of the more inclusive one.

It is the same with our particular provinces of interest. Whenever we pursue knowledge or are subject to ethical demands or create structures that have objective norms, we enter, with the parts or faculties of ourselves that are involved, into ideal orders that are propelled by an inner logic, by a developmental impetus that is superpersonal. These orders always seize the totality of our energy by means of such particular faculties and enlist it into their own service. Everything now depends on our not permitting the integrity of our self-centered being to be destroyed. Every single ability, action, and obligation pertaining to that being must remain tied to the law of its unity, while at the same time we belong to that ideal external realm which makes us into points of transition for its teleology. Perhaps this duality formulates the richness of the life of men and things; for, after all, this wealth consists of the diversity of the ways in which men and things belong to each other, of the fact that they are simultaneously inside and outside one another, and that every involvement and fusion in one direction is also a dissolution since it is contrasted with an involvement and fusion in another direction. What is most remarkable in the way man understands and constructs the world is that a single element experiences the self-sufficiency of an organic whole, as if no aspect of it were left outside, while at the same time it can be a channel through which an entirely different life flows into the first, a grip by which the totality of one grasps the totality of the other without either of them being torn to pieces.

The handle is perhaps the most superficial symbol of this category, but precisely because of its superficiality, it reveals the range of the category to the fullest. Thus, that we are granted a plenitude of life both lived and shared is probably a reflection of the destiny of the soul, soul that has its home in two worlds. For the soul, too, can perfect itself only to the degree to which it belongs, as a necessary component, to the one world and reaches out into the entangled strands and into the meaning of the other—not in spite of, but by means of, the form which membership in the first world imposes on it. It is as if the soul were an arm which one of the worlds—whether the real or the ideal—stretches out so that it may seize the other and join it to itself and be grasped by and joined to it.

CHAPTER THREE

Style and Representation

This chapter presents essays by Simmel on phenomena of style in art and concepts of naturalism and representation. "A Note on Japanese Art" is the second part of Simmel's anonymously published "Berliner Kunstbrief" (Berlin Letter on Art), in the Viennese magazine *Die Zeit* in March 1896, a short four-page article first discussing portraits exhibited earlier that year at the Berlin Nationalgalerie by Gustav Graef, father of Simmel's friend Sabine Lepsius (see above, introduction, §5). "On the Third Dimension in Art" (Über die dritte Dimension in der Kunst) appeared in the spring of 1906 (English translation 1968). "On Realism in Art" (Vom Realismus in der Kunst) appeared in July 1908. "On Caricature" (Über die Karikatur) appeared in February 1917 in the Berlin newspaper *Der Tag*. "Individualism in Art" (Individualismus), from the summer of 1917, and "Germanic and Classical Romanic Style" (Germanischer und klassisch-romanischer Stil), from March 1918, both address themes of differences of style in representations of the individual in early modern European painting. The title "Individualismus" is rendered here with the addition of the words "in Art" by way of contrast to other more directly sociological statements on this topic by Simmel (see principally GS 1901b; GS 1917a: 122-49; and Levine, ed. 1972, chaps. 15, 18).

A Note on Japanese Art

An art dealer recently organized an exhibition of old Japanese woodcuts not seen before in the German capital. With its newfound taste for Japanese art, Berlin is starting to catch up with Paris. But unfortunately we are coming to this too late, for the market is now almost saturated with *modern* Japanese products, originating in part under European influence and in this respect representative of an impure and bastardized style. In these products, it is as if Japanese art has reached a point of overripeness at which it can no longer resist barbarian incursions into its midst. The appeal of Oriental art for us Westerners rests on the distinctive sense of serene self-closure and self-containment it announces to us. Whereas we in the West tend fundamentally to value movement and development, in the East these are generally negative or evil principles, to be avoided in favor of steady composure and persistent being, as ideals of inner and outer form. Oriental art is for this reason, so to speak, entirely centripetal: it does not push or strive beyond the moment, for no subsequent moment can offer it a different content. At one with itself, its conservative feeling for life makes every artistic expression a self-contained microcosm. Borne by tradition in a quite different way from our motile life, every item of Oriental culture, every Persian carpet, appears to us like the symbol of a distant, foreign, and entirely self-sufficient world—but now a world whose organic unity and cohesion has been broken through by European influences and, as a result, stripped of its essential appeal. All the more welcome, then, that this exhibition should opt to display colored woodcuts from the late seventeenth century and particularly from the great age of the late eighteenth century. In the period on display, it is as if many previous centuries of cultural labor have played their part in toning and polishing the colors to the point that no friction, no contradiction, no awkwardness exist in them any longer.

But if Japanese coloration, more than a hundred years ago, reached the

same level as our most modern ideas of color from very different premises, Japanese forms and human figures, with their curious brokenness and pointed angularity of line, still show their world's foreignness to us. One might say that whereas an inorganic body reveals at any given moment how completely its existence is determined by physical forces of pressure, mass, and momentum, a living organism opposes to these forces another principle of motion and agency based on impulse of will, stemming from another order of things different from purely physical affairs and making itself visible to us, unconstrained by these latter. Now in every real case of a living creature, we see conflict and cooperation of both these forces. Gravity and other physical forces dominate us but are deflected and often canceled out or driven to compromise by other impulses and energies ascending from within us. Human dress symbolizes constantly these forces' state of struggle or outcome of momentary unification. Every fold, turn, rustle, and billow of a garment discloses the particular contributions to its form made by earthy weight, on the one hand, and psychic impulse, on the other. But for Japanese people, these two sets of opposing powers are clearly structured and configured differently from anything known to us. In what are, for us, Japanese art's abstruse bends, its baroque stiffness as well as suppleness, we sense a relationship of elementary physical and psychic sources of form whose truth we find hard to feel for ourselves—because our own feelings of life articulate themselves in very different proportions of these basic elements of human motion and form.

On the Third Dimension in Art

The desire we find among recent painters to portray the third dimension in two-dimensional pictures is not natural or imperative to their art form. We can observe that both the finest nuances of sensual perception and the most extreme poles of emotional expression can be reached without it. Consider, for example, the women of the Japanese painters Harunobu and Utamaro, whose souls, like their bodies, appear as blossoms waving in the summer wind, or, in another vein, Aubrey Beardsley's degrading perversities and satanic expressions. Why then should some painters strive so avidly for a third dimension? It cannot be simply a more realistic reproduction of nature that they seek: nature must inevitably be distorted in being transformed into art. Moreover, the purposes of art are fulfilled through much simpler means than nature employs. Thus, realistic elements do not in themselves have artistic value; they must legitimize themselves by other means.

The very special meaning which the dimension of depth has stems from the fact that, in contrast to the other two dimensions, it is not optically evident. Only our tactile sense convinces us that bodies embody more than their two-dimensional surface. The full image of things, which results from their being visible and the possibility of their being touched, is reproduced by its visibility. Hence, it appears to us as if we immediately perceived the third dimension. In reality, things are being touched continuously, and the associative effects of our sense of touch on visual perception are, or in principle could be, continuously controlled. Thus, the third dimension in painting depends much more on visual images than the third dimension in reality, for in art there is absolutely no other point of reference besides purely optical processes. For this reason, the third dimension appears as a world separated in principle from the actually given visual impression. In order for the visual impression to convey the third dimension, it must appear to us with much greater power. It

acts like a mystic exorcism which attempts to dominate an object with which it is denied any direct contact. I see an essentially effective value in this complete exclusion of any direct participation by the tactile sense on which the imagination of the third dimension properly rests. And yet I see also its simultaneous inclusion in the visual impression.

A fact that is very simple yet fundamentally significant emerges from this. In principle any given art form affects only one human sense, while on the other hand every "real" object affects, or can affect, a plurality of senses. In this way "reality" is made. A body which we could not only see but penetrate without experiencing a tactile sensation could not be considered "real," but would be ghostlike. The same consideration applies to an object which we might touch but which would not produce a sound when it collides with another object, or similarly, a sound which radiated from a source that could not be seen or otherwise located. It is characteristic of reality that a plurality of sensual impressions meet in it, fix it, as if by a system of coordinates. Simultaneously, however, each sense gives an object a qualitatively unique world of its own which has no substantive contact with any other object. That it is one and the same object which I see and touch represents a synthesis of postulates or categories which are by themselves of an order different from sensual images. Within reality the object is created by the equal cooperation of completely independent and mutually alien conditions. The essence of a work of art, however, is determined by its very opposition to this process. Aesthetic contemplation has an integrity which can never be provided by perception of reality, because the work of art appears exclusively as the product of a single sense. This single sense takes over the autocratic leadership in the mixture of flowing reproductions, which consequently become ranked and organized beyond comparison. By this hierarchy the complete determination of the senses is prevented. Thus, where a multitude of sense impressions are fused in "real" man, who can be touched, heard, and smelled, a work of art is arrested in the sphere of nonreality by the fact that its impact derives exclusively from a single sense. Thus, in works of art the third dimension of the tactile sense, the domain of the proper "sense of reality," plays a role completely different from that in impressions of reality.

In the realm of plastic art these conditions are only apparently different. Marble, of course, can be touched, but it is not by itself a work of art—just as a canvas and its layers of paint, which can be touched, do not make of it a painting. For the inartistic observer a statue is a human figure made from marble, just as a living human being to him represents one made of flesh and bones. In this sense, of course, both are "real" since

they can be touched. However, a body which in truth becomes an object of art cannot be touched. Nor can the body in a painting be touched since it is only represented in the tactile, real material [of the canvas], just as the body in the painting is not contained in the touchable specks of paint. The third dimension is without relation to the work of art since here the tactile sense guarantees the realism of the object. It is only related to a work of art insofar as the eye is stimulated by the mere apprehension of a plastic work to the production or reproduction of the dimension of depth. The plastic work of art exists only to be viewed, and not in order to be touched. Since the third dimension can only be sensed by touch, by directly ascertaining that it is a piece of marble, it necessarily must belong in a completely different area from the artistic meaning of marble. The third dimension enters into this area of meaning only after it is, so to speak, reborn through its genuine tactile value as a product of visual impressions.

I do not mean to deny the role of what [Bernard] Berenson called tactile values. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to determine what gives the capacity to evoke sensations of resistance, and their modification, an aesthetic significance which increases the artistic value to a painting. Why, for example, is something added to the artistic stimulus of a painted column, which would seem to be exhausted by the visibility of its form and color, when its coldness and harshness is psychologically considered? Or, what is being added to painted silk when its sheen also reproduces the sensation of the material with its mixture of spryness and softness? I do not think that this addition of concurrent perceptions in itself has aesthetic significance. On the contrary, I believe, its aesthetic value comes from the transformation of tactile impressions by optical impressions. This is no different from music, which also calls forth in us innumerable reproductions from all spheres of life whose whole and unique charm and depth consist only in the fact that they are transformed into music. They accompany the movement of sounds, not as their mechanical equivalents, but through specific reformulations and recolorations. They have to undergo an allotropic modification in order to become the satellites of musical impressions from which they would otherwise stand estranged, belonging to a different order of things.

The memories of other senses would only be dragged along as a strange appendage by the visual impression, without enriching and deepening its meaning, if they were nothing but naturalistic repetitions of their former content. In order to enter the unity of works of art they must transform their original meaning, which has nothing to do with the present meaning, into perceptual values. Or they must transform their being, which is

originally quite differently structured, so that it will enter into an organic unity with the optical artistic impression. It is in the preliminary form of a mere postulate that we psychologically describe this expatriation of the tactile senses by their inclusion into art. At any rate, one is then able to describe this process as a change in quality of visual perception—or on a different level as a change of tactile perceptions. It is not possible to deduce the artistic meaning of tactile values from mere associations, insofar as the latter can only represent merely unorganic and unfruitful changes in the quantity of inner processes. When, for example, the sensations produced by one's touching silk influence one's perception of the painted material, this perception as such becomes deeper, more vivid, and more extensive. This transmutation of heterogeneous sensual impressions into optical values was known to Goethe: “. . . *und durchs Auge schleicht die Kühle sänftigend ins Herz hinein.*”^{*} The object thus offers more to the eye. This does not apply so much with respect to reality, where the diverse senses maintain their special values, since they all contribute equally to the reality of objects. It applies especially to works of art which reduce the content of perceived phenomena to the general denominator of a single sense. Similarly, it probably applies to the third dimension, which represents everything that tactile values have in common. The touched surfaces possess, in addition to harshness and softness, roughness and smoothness, pointedness and balanced shape, the general quality of resistance to touch, which adds to the very surface—which is also presented to the eye—the third dimension. If the latter is to enter into the pure visual work of art, it will not merely be as another dimension, a mere numerical addition to the already present quantum of dimensions. Instead, it will add a new note of quality to the already present [number] which the work of art cannot transcend.

In painting and plastic art, the third dimension provides, not a real extension in depth, but an enrichment and reinforcement of the two-dimensional pictorial content. This is so since something which is eternally invisible cannot have any place in the domain of sensual perception. Here it appears as a nuance of visibility which the organizing perception of the artist has transformed by the addition of experience and associations from the worlds of other senses. Finally, this transformation of the mere addition, which the third dimension can contribute to the other two dimensions, subordinates itself to the meaning of all art in its relation-

^{*} [Trans.] “Through the eye, coolness soothingly enters the heart”; from “Dämmerung senkte sich von oben” (1827), no. 8 in *Chinesisch-deutsche Jahres- und Tageszeiten*.

ship to natural science. While the latter attempts to reduce all qualities to quantitative expressions, that is, to portray them according to their meaning in quantitative terms, art, on the contrary, attempts to describe everything that exists only in quantitative dimensions in its appropriate meaning of quality.

On Realism in Art

The idea that a work of visual art has an “object” outside of itself, with forms and colors to which it can in some way correspond, prompts us frequently to think and speak of every such work in terms of its truth to nature, and to describe it in this sense as more or less “realistic” or “naturalistic.” Yet given how much is meant to be covered by a notion as sweeping and self-certain as this, it must immediately give pause for reflection that some art forms exist in which no question of truth to nature, in this sense, can possibly be raised. For if art’s deepest impulses—quite apart from particular questions of technique, subject matter, and perspective of the artist—are to be captured with this term “realism” or its opposite, it is at least highly remarkable that an art form such as music, whose language expresses all the world, or dance—an eminently visual art form—offers no way of affirming this principle of realism or even of denying it. And yet, hardly would there be any effort of tying the most important and general question of visual art to this concept if we did not feel ourselves to be touching here, at least intuitively, on a fundamental problem of art.

To define this realist postulate more precisely than speaking simply of “correspondence to external object,” let us consider first the great turn taken by philosophical epistemology since Kant. Kant himself famously wrote of Copernicus’s turning away from the contradictory notion of the sun and stars revolving around the spectator toward that of the revolving movement of the spectator and the stasis of the stars. Some structures of knowledge governing all experience are, in other words, to be derived not from the objects but from the forms and conditions of the knowing mind in which these experiences of objects are produced as the mind’s representations. To reflect on this Copernican turn to the subject may help us to fathom the concept of realism more deeply.

Whenever things confront us in the form of reality, whether as spatial shapes or colors, movements or events, or generally as exterior and inte-

rior states of life, certain impressions and emotional consequences are associated with them whose tenor tells us that *this* is reality, that these things are real, whatever their pure contents and qualities may be. Now it seems to me that works of art are “realistic” to just the degree in which the subjective impressions and reactions they elicit resemble those with which we respond to things’ reality—although, crucially, no *external* resemblance between things and the work of art is in any way necessary. A work can successfully resemble a thing by any number of means and with any number of contents that in no way need “copy” a thing. Though it might seem obvious to want to seek such an apparent identity of psychological effect through the most exact imitation of things in the real world, a sense of resemblance can be achieved by all manner of paths, by analogies, symbols, metonyms, and other indirect routes. Even music, for example, can strike us as realistic in the way it excites feelings and states of mind comparable to those we experience in immediate life. But it is quite erroneous to think of realism in music in terms of imitations of natural sounds or even to see this in the kinds of approximations to this principle that occasionally have been attempted by program music. Quite differently from anything so naïvely imagined in these terms, music can stir romantic-erotic and religious feeling and passion and general states of elation and melancholy with a specific force of psychological verisimilitude as strong as any event or experience of real life. A dance may very well mimic themes of romantic-erotic intimacy in a very explicit fashion, almost like a pure picture, while keeping any feeling of sexual arousal at bay. But a dance can also completely avoid such direct mimicry and still succeed in awakening in the spectator a sense of romantic-erotic excitement and thereby accomplish all the subjective effect of objective reality without recourse to imitation, simply through such matters as rhythm and mood or fluidity and plasticity of movements. A performance of this nature will still commonly be described as naturalistic or realistic, and innocent spirits are often astonished to learn that in such cases they have witnessed nothing “improper.” Realism is a far broader principle than the notion of direct imitation of reality suggests. Mimicry is but one device at realism’s disposal, and realism’s dogma tends to lie in this one mere means of representation being inflated into an end in itself. Naturalism in the grand style always shows its riches and importance in being able to create a subjective effect of nature’s impact by means other than the impact of nature itself. Indeed, it would appear that a work of art’s appeal and intensity increases in proportion as the contents it evokes retain a distance and autonomy in relation to the natural-real object and are nevertheless able to generate psychological outcomes entirely comparable to those of

the object. Some portraits, such as those of the great French naturalists, make us feel the full corporeal atmosphere of their models, to the point that we breathe virtually the very air of their reality. Yet this is not, and cannot ever be, a matter of these portraits' pure qualities of perceptuality. Never do we perceive the reality of the phenomenon our senses are made to picture for themselves. What happens is that alongside the colors and forms that sometimes seem to make the phenomenon indistinguishable from a hallucination or simulacrum of some kind, we have the additional thought or feeling—supervening like a new kind of toning—that this is not *only* a play of forms and colors but “reality.” This accent of reality is not yet given in the contents' pure visibility across the whole substance of the picture; only realism's specifically artistic devices trigger this accent. Or, more precisely expressed, what these devices trigger is not reality in its objective meaning (in the sense of the kind of reality evoked by, say, a waxworks figure or panorama) but rather certain extended inner reactions that accompany the visible qualities of things when the tone of reality rests upon them. One could even say this, that reality as such is something utterly metaphysical. Our senses cannot give us reality; rather, reality is what we give to our senses. Reality is a relationship of the mind to the unspeakable secret of existence. It is not a particular perceptual property of things but something with a significance greater than the sum of all properties of things. This is the deepest reason why art cannot create anything out of reality as such. For art is a matter of the senses, not of reality, and can operate and affect us only from things' sensory contents, not from anything arising from other categories that might be brought to art or thought to constitute it metaphysically. This is not because reality is too “base” or unworthy a subject for art but because it is an abstraction extraneous to the surface of things, and therefore foreign to art, which can only ever operate with *qualities* of reality, with pure forms and colors in ever-new patterns and arrangements.

Certainly to the extent that some realist works are truly works of art, it is not a concern of theirs to make us believe in the reality of the sense-impressions they present to us. Nevertheless, in, so to speak, leaping over reality itself, their aim is still to bring forth inner states, impulses, feelings, and associations in us that are tied secondarily to the real being of things and that are not touched by these things' pure qualities of substance or pure form of phenomenality. The appeal of, say, a color in the given world does not lie exclusively in the pure optical play of the coloristic impression: what we also experience in this—unconsciously or in some way diffusely—is a feeling of gladness simply for this play of color existing in the world at all. We are attracted not only to the content

of the phenomenon but to the fact that it is real and to the fact that we can experience it as a reality like our own. This is thus the feeling a naturalistic work imparts to us: it gives us not only the qualities of reality without reality itself but also the felicitousness of reality without reality itself. Similar is the appeal of romantic-erotic art. Non-artistic naturalism paints the details of a love scene as though we were transplanted to its reality. More refined naturalism, on the other hand, will spurn this and sound out all relevant reflexes of the soul's deeper recesses purely through moods of color and rhythms of line, such that while these reflexes will clearly be tied originally to the reality of erotic life, they now become, so to speak, free-floating items surrounding the picture's pure sensuous features without need for any additional idea of a substantial reality behind them. Matters are much the same in our way of reacting to human figures in art with feelings of sympathy or antipathy. The formal features of a face may please or displease us, but the specific feeling we call sympathy or antipathy is connected, not to this purely sensory picturelike aspect, but rather to our consciousness that this person is alive and real and, as such, really capable of influencing our reality. Higher forms of realism may refrain from representing the reality of their model after the fashion of a photograph or waxworks figure and may eschew any crude effect of "shocking truth" or contrivance of the picture "jumping out of its frame." But such overtones of sympathy and antipathy will still tend to accompany a realistic portrait's impression for us very decisively, even as their bases in reality are bracketed out. A Rembrandt portrait, on the other hand, as full of character as it may be, will seldom have this effect in us to any great degree. A Rembrandt portrait seems to make us see a whole edifice of psychophysical existence so seamlessly as to preclude any more subjective reaction to it like this on our part. By contrast, in a Renoir portrait, and even more so in one by [Max] Liebermann, we feel very strongly that the represented subject is sympathetic or unsympathetic—even as this is a very different matter from our directing one or other reaction to the picture as a work of art as such. Highly noteworthy is that an artistic tendency boasting the purest objectivity and most dispassionate sobriety makes us react much more frequently in this emotive way than the apparently much more subjective presentational idiom of Rembrandt. Thus, even when it in no way undertakes to compete with the reality-form of its contents through raw illusionism, the propensity of the realist work is to call forth *secondary psychological reactions* that originate only from its contents' basis in reality. That naturalist artists claim to be copying things "just as they are," when in fact they only notate that which their own subjective emotive life tends to summon forth, should not mislead at this

junction. We know that even many artists demonstrably given to stylizing and reshaping the given in the freest, most sovereign manner often believe themselves to be proceeding in a fashion absolutely faithful to reality. For this too should help elucidate that Copernican turn, so important to Kant, that derives the picture of an object from the subject's laws of perception. If artists create what they see, the deeper reason is that, from the outset, they see things in the aspect in which they can create these things as art. In artists' relationship to things, receptivity and activity are one and the same, whereas for all other people they are separate. Artists' visions are, in other words, immediately creative: the same bent in them to fashion their creations in particular ways also infuses their way of seeing the world. Notwithstanding all kinds of imperfections and interlacings of artistic with ordinary modes of perception, it is artists of the greatest force of individual character and talent who will see themselves as responding most faithfully to the image of appearances, while in fact following most decisively the call of their own individuality.

Thus, as little as it is to be denied that more advanced forms of realism do not seek simple representations of reality but instead certain deeper psychological consequences of the idea of reality, and in this pursuit are quite free in their choice of means, and, in drawing on highly diverse conceptions, approaches and techniques, exploit possibilities of achieving the same psychological effect with the most varied causes—*still*, even these realist idioms will generally prefer subject matter and syntheses manifest in the form of empirical reality. The most immediate impulse is to reach things' distinctive psychic effects through images of those patterns of things that show their reality for experience most obviously.

The truth therefore remains that even in all bracketing of immediate impressions of reality and in all sublimation of art's purposes into answers to existence at deeper levels of the soul, a naturalistic work draws its effective significance from matters that are not themselves art. Such a work's problem is that the particular states of mind, feeling, and will we associate with a phenomenon when we encounter or know it as something real relate quite incidentally to art's effects for us as art. Though art records things that exist, it puts to one side things' fact of existence, so far as both their immediate sensory presence for us and their metaphysical status is concerned. Therefore, whenever realism builds its own effects from effects corresponding to things' existence, instead of from effects pertaining to things' pure appearance, uncoupled from their reality-form, it becomes just as unfaithful to art as it accuses "idealizing" art of being. To be sure, to the extent that any such idealizing art is at issue, realism's objections to it are justified. A work with a central all-determining, all-validating mean-

ing taken from an “idea” stemming from somewhere beyond the work’s sensuous appearance, with a sense and value of its own, independent of the latter, is one that makes art a mere means for tapping feelings and impulses gravitating to somewhere exterior to art; and such a work in turn makes the “idea” a mere means of the work’s value and impact, amplifying it with an appeal it has not itself earned. In crude cases, this may occur in settings of historical commemoration; in more refined cases, with ideal religious, ethical, metaphysical, or emotive values. Both idealism and realism in this instance, each in a different dimension, step far wide of art’s specific independent sphere. Visual art simply has no other domain than appearances, as qualitative contents of the sensuous world. Being beneath the surface of appearances is just as much a Beyond for art as ideas above appearances are a Beyond for art. In both cases, art is made to live in debt. For art’s true home is neither things’ reality nor their ideality—neither their being nor their belonging to ideal orders of morality or knowledge, or social or religious values. It is instead a third place, a place, so to speak, of the things themselves in the purity, appeal, and significance of their appearance and in the complete independence of things’ existence and inclusion in structures conveyed to us only ever contingently and never quite adequately by appearances.

None of this amounts to the seductive proposition that a work’s “object” is completely inconsequential for a work and its significance as art. It does not imply that we should consider a cabbage as potentially as worthy and sublime an object for art as the Madonna, only that the specific cultic meaning of the Virgin as an object of religious veneration is as irrelevant to artistic presentation as a cabbage’s meaning as a source of nutrition. If a work’s object resides in orders having nothing to do with art as art, its placement in such orders and resultant significance can neither add to nor subtract from the artistic value of its presentation. An impure mix can occur here only through psychological associations that conflate matters unrelated in themselves. The Madonna’s actual priority over the cabbage as a painterly subject lies strictly in its being able to release deeper possibilities than the latter for *purely painterly* values—in the unique empirical fact that an image of the Madonna, a few chance exceptions notwithstanding, produces a stronger religious impression the more it is a purely painterly work of art. Now, since any religious end lies fully outside a work of art and cannot be considered responsible for a work’s perfection—for religious ends can be intensively at hand in bad artists too—the Madonna as a purely artistic problem must still, without overreaching its proper domain, include a relationship to the Madonna as an object of religious meaning. This relationship, however, can be understood only in terms of

appearances producing, purely from themselves, values of impact, mood, and contents of thought proper as well to other orders with very different demands. If our psychological reactions to an artistically accomplished image of the Madonna are akin to our reactions to the Madonna as a religious idea, this plainly is as little important for specifically artistic concerns as the direct likeness of a real live model for the artistic impact of a portrait. But inasmuch as there is now a possibility of, and also — for purely artistic ends — a *demand* for, developing depth and fullness of psychic meaning in the sensuous image of the Madonna, this endows her, as an artistic object, with a significance and wealth of painterly challenges and capacities that the cabbage does not possess. It is irrelevant that the figure we call the Madonna only acquires these perceptual capacities and demands as a consequence of religious history, for these now simply exist, and do so purely as facts of art. Though they must be carefully separated from evident historical associations and from current religious sensibilities, adding yet another layer of non-artistic potency and solemnity to the image, the fact that within the painterly domain a work can possess meanings analogous to religious meanings and can make these meanings, so to speak, depart from themselves in order to return to themselves, helps explain why the more artistically perfect Madonna image also serves religious-cultic purposes better than the less artistically perfect image. This does not by itself assure any artistic superiority over the cabbage painting, but it is the symbol and indication of the Madonna's ability, even for purely artistic proceedings, to unlock much richer, deeper, and more moving possibilities and effects than the cabbage. Here the non-artistic person's confusion will be always to tend to see a work's indwelling idea in this idea's meaning as an *idea*, as if it were equally capable of existing outside the work in question. Valuing the work in these terms and delegating it in this way to an order of values entirely heterogeneous to it, such a person bestows on the Madonna painting, simply *as* a Madonna painting, a dignity foreign to it as a work of art. Similarly, this person may take offense at an image of, say, an erotic scene purely for its content being indecent when experienced outside the work of art, in ordinary reality. Indeed, such a person may find a painting of a nude unseemly, even when its content is not indecent in reality, the thought having taken hold that reality might be betrayed to indiscreet gazes; the sheer unseemliness of this prospect, dragged wholly out of context, is then imported back into the work on display as its own unseemliness. To return to the Madonna: a work expresses the "idea" of the Virgin entirely in its own language; relevant here is strictly *this work's* idea, regardless of any meaning of the idea in

some other order of being. Yet a widespread assumption is still that a work only realizes its own idea's demands to the extent that it realizes demands from just such another order of being. And matters are the same with the reality-form of a picture's content. The *being* of a picture's content cannot be allowed to impinge on a picture, as and when such content still exists outside it—just as little as a picture's idea can be allowed to do so. Yet here too, in most if not all cases, we are right to think that the syntheses and agency a picture's contents possess within reality also suggest criteria of appraisal for their purely artistic treatments. For example, it is a portrait's function to persuade us of the unity and necessary coherence of the features of a face. Clearly a face already possesses a degree of coherence in its natural givenness, even if not always in as compelling a way, since in ordinary experience a person awakens in us countless associations from countless contexts that have nothing to do with the person's pure sensuous appearance but that continually influence this appearance. A portrait, then, to the extent that it does not lapse into naturalism's illusions and self-deceptions, abstracts thoroughly from the being of the subject presented and fashions exclusively that which is sensuous and presentable in this subject. Yet still, it does this in a way that is at least preshaped by the subject's ordinarily felt being. A portrait takes for granted that the form it lends—purely by reason of artistic requirements—to the raw sensuous contents still mirrors and elucidates the coherence and meaning the subject's appearance possesses in the form of, and by dint of, real being. This is why, a few special cases aside, the better portrait from the painterly point of view is also, in the deepest sense, the more lifelike portrait. But such real being, in its specificity as real being, cannot be allowed to interfere with the artistic effect, just as the picture's idea, in its specificity as idea, cannot be allowed to do so. To the degree that realism fails to relinquish this effect of real being, it becomes no less unfaithful to the truly artistic intention than idealism. When realist partisans indignantly reject any suggestion that art "ought to do" this or that, this self-evidently cannot apply to prerequisites and ideals intrinsic to art itself; for most assuredly there *is* one thing a work of art ought to be, namely, as perfect and true to itself as possible. Naturally, there is nothing that art ought to be so far as purposes imposed on it from outside are concerned, such as moral, patriotic, or religious purposes, or motives of entertainment. But when realism takes up arms against such alien impositions that reduce art to a mere means, it should remember that it commits exactly the same mistake when it allows reality as reality to shape a work, whether in crude immediacy or in more refined secondary reactions of the soul. Realism worships

an *idea* of reality just as much as these other orientations worship an idea of religion or morality or fatherland. It too reduces art to a mere means: specifically, to a means of the effect of reality—an effect that draws value not from the work of art itself but from orders of meaning beyond art's true estate.

On Caricature

Man is by nature a breaker of boundaries. A divine being, by contrast, cannot possibly break boundaries, for infinity has no boundaries; and correlatively, a pure animal, seemingly fixed forever in itself, also seems incapable of breaking boundaries. Only those boundaries to which human beings seem subject do we consider indefinitely extendable—indeed we think of them as prone to rupture at any moment. This is the peculiar constellation of our being: we know ourselves to be bounded in qualities and thought, in positive and negative worth, in will and capabilities, and nevertheless to be able and enjoined to look and move beyond these constraints. In innumerable instances, this innermost basic characteristic determines our way of fashioning images of people, things, and events around us. Theoretically, we are convinced that everything has firm contours in which every part retains equal reality and justification. Yet as soon as we come close to details, as concrete beings to concrete objects, and in some way make these objects our own, the inner equivalence of images dissipates. In each image, some elements seem important and others less so; we linger long over some and pass over others, and for all our knowledge of ourselves as spectators keeping some things in view and others in shadow, the image still seems completely to distort its elements' otherwise basic equality, with some comprising an essential center, others more or less vanishing appendages to this center. Neglect of so many parts suffices by itself to confer on those preserved and accentuated a value and import greater than in the objective order of things. Our life's inner disparities, organic strengths and weaknesses, impulses and sensations, which in the objective world of things follow a uniform law of necessity, now appear inevitably exaggerated, excessive, and one-sided. We turn the things themselves into breakers of boundaries like ourselves. The moment some shape of things has been found, life's course takes us beyond this and substitutes for objective equilibrium the preponderance of one or another feature,

side, or measure. An innermost law of our psychic constitution seems to make us destined to be creatures of exaggeration. Every trail blazed through feelings and desires and every thought guiding us through the chaos of things seems, left to itself, to want to drive on forever in its own direction. Man's longing for something absolute expresses precisely this general propensity of our drives, maxims, and passions to become absolute, indeed, to *be* things absolute. Yet these qualities expand only to a finite degree, and do so not only because intention may outstrip capacity but because intention and capacity can hinder one another. Insofar as our mind is itself susceptible to overreach, we seem to know that our most deep-rooted beliefs, impulses, and feelings run up against certain limits, in the nature of things. Yet as soon as one such dynamic takes charge of us, it wants to hurtle relentlessly forward by its own momentum, such that only its encounter with another reins it in—and often only after having overshot every reasonable limit. The less “educated” we are, or the narrower our range of motives, ideas, and interests, the more uninhibited will be some part of our being and the more we will tend to “exaggerate.” We see this plainly in the child, in native peoples, and primitive strata of all nations, as well as in our dreams—as when, for example, we feel a minor abrasion to the skin to be a gaping, burning wound or a falling book to be the firing of a gun.

But if a tendency to exaggeration is a naturally given trait of our psychic life, it is also in one instance exercised consciously and purposely, namely in caricature. Caricature, evidently, is not just any kind of exaggeration, for not all exaggeration is caricature. Caricature takes specifically some person or being with a balanced plurality of features brought into unity through mutual limitation and exaggerates a particular detail one-sidedly. In this respect, it is necessarily conditioned by the caricatured object's natural degree of reality still remaining detectable and the unity of the whole not dissipating, even as it is upset. Something exaggerated in every aspect would not be caricature. If all bodily features of a person were rendered on a gigantic and at the same time proportionate scale, caricature would be created only if a non-exaggerated degree of the subject's psychic personality remained visible in the background. In this case, all of a person's exterior appearance would form just one detail of the whole, whose one-sided disruption of the subject's still detectable normal proportionality and unity would produce an effect of comedy or bitterness that seems proper to caricature. Caricature thus still depends on a sense of what is called unity of personality and proportional balance of multiple characteristics, movements, and experiences. Any such balance is of course not fixed mathematically for all time but is continually

responsive to the many different ways in which one element's greater or lesser prominence can match another's and a unity of the whole is created and sustained through a harmonious evening out of quantities. Caricature arises when one in some way extreme quantity meets with no equal or countervailing quantity of other elements and congeals confidently into something permanent, and in so doing destroys a subject's overall ulterior or requisite unity. It consists not in excess or insufficiency of anything per se but in lack of that evening out that establishes a subject's coherence of life-process through continual recovery of coherence from its constant loss. Caricature emerges as the rigidity and finality of an extreme, as the unresolved fixity of a relationship of part and whole. This is what accounts for caricature as distortion, as destruction of life's form as such. Well-meant or good-humored caricature, in this sense, is not quite fully caricature, or only comes halfway to being caricature, inasmuch as it only momentarily thwarts the process of evening out and allows equilibrium to remain detectable as the promise of restorable unity behind a merely passing phase of disproportionality. By contrast, the really fearful element in true caricature, in Aristophanes and Cervantes, in Daumier or Goya, is precisely the obduracy and insolubility with which an excess of one feature punctures the unity of the ego, setting this distortion on a permanent footing as this ego's normal state or, rather, first creating the distortion through this very permanency.

The latter is also what distinguishes caricature from artistic intensification more generally. If dramatists or sculptors evoke a character trait or affect more intensely and absolutely than it is experienced in reality, they must portray a general greatness of existence of the protagonist within which any particular magnification appears as not disproportionate. The entire atmosphere of the work of art must show that "exaggeratedness" that Goethe describes as the *sine qua non* for almost any reality to be worth recounting as narrative. Herein lies something deeply significant in what is called stylization. A life narrated must, in its entirety, be rendered in dimensions such that "exaggeration" of some thematic trait can occur without threatening the harmonic unity and characterological power of the narrative as a whole. When, then, some rupture of this unity does take place, such as when, in Molière's *The Miser*, an outlying passion is interpolated into a life that is in all other respects small and ordinary, caricature is immediately the result. The enormity of Richard III's crimes, on the other hand, leaves no trace of caricature because this character is still a personality sufficiently great and capacious to absorb and accommodate a one-sided peculiarity. Indeed, it is plain that not all disfigured relations need suggest caricature. A good or evil excrescence of some kind or an

unnaturally titanic passion in an otherwise small and ordinary person is often enough a *tragic* phenomenon—though only so when some inflated one-sidedness breaks open, or seems likely to break open, a figure’s more restricted contours of life as a whole. When characters overreach themselves on one single matter but feel this to be a demand to stretch the boundaries of their entire being to the point of incorporating within them precisely this overreach, this now-too-much, and when this demand is then not fulfilled and the boundaries, though broken through, are not extended, and the excess in question relative to the personality as a whole remains something “exaggerated”—then the outcome is tragedy rather than caricature.

Here one can describe a scale of categories of humanity. Where one-sided breaking of typical human boundaries stems from a basic power of the individual that—at least theoretically, even if not in reality—expands all of the individual’s being and makes the process of continual bursting of his or her life’s parameters into the very motto of its harmony, we speak of the absolutely great human being. But true exaggeration is a given already, wherever a person seeks to adapt to the hypertrophy of one of his or her sides of life and founders on this undertaking, inasmuch as the person’s boundaries are too brittle to allow a harmonious expansion but not too hard to thwart it altogether. Here is the tragic as type. Then finally, wherever too much of something is juxtaposed to too little or to something of average extent, which then inevitably appears too slight and, in its slightness, is in some measure happily insistent on this juxtaposition—in this case a life has become caricature.

I have not separated caricature in this sense from intended graphic or literary caricature. For in truth these are both deeply the same. The intended meaning when someone is represented in such one-sided exaggeratedness is simply that this someone is in reality as he or she here appears in the desired unreality. Caricature “hits the mark” only where the caricaturist’s intent is not felt to be capricious and the nonform created, as unreal as it may be in external aspect, befits the inwardly glimpsed semblance of the subject in necessary symbolism. Artistic caricature is convincing to us only where the state of affairs is itself already caricature. How else could this be so?

Here can be seen something compensating for certain deficiencies of our knowledge, however partisan it may seem. Very often, insufficient sharpness of vision can conceal from us an aspect or quality of a phenomenon by not discriminating this aspect or quality from the whole or from another more dominant feature. We become aware of it only when it stands out in another related situation with increased contrast and inten-

sity. We are now so conscious of the whole nature and concept of what we had overlooked that we see it plainly even on a miniature scale. Sometimes we understand a person fully, for instance, only when something pronounced in a sibling makes us notice the same in this person on a smaller, less visible scale. So it is with intentional caricature, which like a magnifying glass reveals that which cannot usually be seen with the naked eye but which stands out once we have been shown that it exists and where to look for it. Deliberate caricature in this sense is caricature of the second degree: it exaggerates for a second time an existing exaggeration in its object and thereby makes the latter fully visible. This is what moderates that which is by definition immoderate: whether as a literary or a graphic image, it must not cross the line that inscribes the real exaggerated existence of the subject as caricature in a reader's or viewer's consciousness. Caricature is by nature extreme, but we can sometimes find it too extreme—not because of magnification as such but because the exaggeration goes too far and the sense of psychological proportion between the caricature's disproportionality and the disproportionality of the original as caricature is lost.

To recapitulate: any particular caricature pertains always to a particular subject, but caricature in general reflects caricature as a fundament of our nature as breakers of boundaries. Caricature is one form taken by our instinct for danger, on whose edges our spirit continuously breaks its continually imposed boundaries. Concrete caricature is the expression and impression of the original as caricature, but the element of exaggeration in the general category of caricature transcends any individual object in its way of making us feel a constant threat of falling into one-sided exaggeratedness. It shows us by way of contrast that the organic life, in its true secret, is [in Goethe's words] “minted form, vitally developing.”*

What does it mean to be “minted” if the thing minted does not perdure but continues “developing,” mutating ceaselessly? The answer is that this is in effect [Goethe's] “primal phenomenon,” whose highest human mental character I describe here as our perpetually boundary-breaking being. At every moment, a form or content seems to be imprinted in us but cedes to forces that break both inside and beyond itself and destroy what only a moment previously seemed decisive. Such forces upset and unsettle so profoundly that only continual, total growth and readjustment seem to offer the organic equilibrium necessary to solve the contradiction. As soon as equilibrium fails, statically or functionally, and this straying and stepping over boundaries occurs fixedly and in isolation, caricature comes

* [Trans.] *Geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt*; from Goethe's short poetry cycle *Urworte. Orphisch* (“Primal Words. Orphic”), of 1820; see GS 1913a: 91.

into existence. When caricature is deliberate, the danger of something excessive in the life-atmosphere of a person poised between development and firm form is drawn consciously into relief once more. Driving beyond all reality, caricature shows us, in life and in art, how deep-rooted is the principle of exaggeration in our metaphysical bases of nature.

Individualism in Art

An Italian chronicler of the early Renaissance tells us how Florence for several years knew no real fashions in male apparel, as every man chose to dress in his own unique manner. This is a significant statement for a time that had begun to release itself from the binding forms of the medieval community, for a time when individuals believed in no limits to the possibilities of presenting themselves to others with character, distinction, and independence. Yet when one looks at portraits from the period, displaying people largely as they wanted to be seen, and when one thinks about how they appear in literature of the period, one cannot fail to notice a certain uniformity of style. How their forms appear to us, their disposition and gestures, and the impression made by details within the whole—all of this announces a common ethos and attitude toward life, a general atmosphere that frames, shapes, and infuses each of their passionate accentuations of individuality. It is this element of commonality, despite all individualization, that in the end leads individuals to present themselves as bearers of a type, with a more or less generalized character or temperament. In Romanic ways of life—not unlike classical Greek life—there lies a basic striving for the general, for the type. Here the “general” does not mean a collectivity or any practical amalgamation into an encompassing figuration, or a merging of individuals into some greater totality; it means rather the generality of the concept, involving a determining form or a law for an indefinite number of individually led lives, of which each individual is more or less a representative, whether by nature or by willed effort. All individual freedom, distinction, and excellence are sought within these limits, and are in fact nothing other than particularly pure and strong manifestations of typical nameable attributes.

All that is called individuality, as a state of being, a sensibility, or an aspiration, expresses a quality of behavior irreducible to any more primordial instinct, one that is unknown among nonhuman beings. On the one

hand, it always means relating to a larger or smaller world in ways that can be either practical or ideal, negative or affirmative, ruling or subservient, indifferent or passionate; on the other hand, it also means that individuals comprise a world for themselves and are centered in themselves, as self-sufficient unitary beings. This double existence disrupts the earthly life of every recognizably “single” reflective being. For on the one hand, all individuals rest within themselves, whether formally or substantively, as unities with a certain intrinsic being, meaning, or purpose of their own; but on the other hand, they are parts of one or many wholes that exist outside of them as an encompassing totality towering above them. They are always at once member and body, part and whole, complete and incomplete. Individuality is what we call the form in which an attempt is made to unify these dual poles of human existence. This may occur in a great variety of ways and nuances: a person’s conscious life may take a completely rounded shape of its own and not “concern itself” in any way with “the world”; or it may see its individually meaningful being through a comparison with others, in a relation of superordination over or parity to, of inclusion within or service toward, a more transcendent whole. But however differently these two elements may relate to one another, whether one dominates the other, or the two maintain some equilibrium or harmony, or both are tragically destroyed, individuality always means, in an at once definite and indefinite sense, that a person experiences both an inner centeredness, self-sufficiency, and world of his or her own, *and* a relationship, positive or negative, to a totality in which he or she belongs, whether in adherence to it or detachment from it.

We may observe at this point that the concept of individuality prevalent among the Romanic peoples since the Renaissance stands in complete contrast to the concept that predominates in the Germanic world. The classical Romanic form has been an object of ardent attachment and faith for Nordic peoples too, but everything that has developed on our native soil differs from it in character, in different degrees and ways. Rembrandt’s depiction of the human figure, fusing soul to body and body to soul; Beethoven’s depths of musical yearning and formative impulse; Herder’s and Schleiermacher’s conceptions of the human essence; Walther von der Vogelweide’s pictures of existence, and those of the German romantics in general, and of Kierkegaard, Ibsen, and Selma Lagerlöf—none of these evinces any orientation to a law of form or style capable of permeating it in a general way, such that it becomes a mere example of this law. By contrast, in the youthful figures displayed in the friezes of the Parthenon, in the statue of Sophocles, in Leonardo’s figures in *The Last Supper*, in the characters of classical French drama, or of Titian or

Balzac, we see only different kinds of membership of definite genres of human being—even though language can describe these genres only with very rudimentary concepts, if at all. All these human figures or characters are suffused by a more general ideal sphere, which they themselves substantiate or crystallize at particular instants. The individualistic drive to separation, autarchy, and self-reliance here obtains, ultimately, not for the isolated individual but for the human type as such, which he or she represents or illustrates in some exemplary way. This vision and molding of the human being has consequently been able to grip much wider circles of humanity and to play a much larger part in the formation of the European ideal of civilization than Germanic individualism. For the latter seeks individuality only within the unique self and is deeply indifferent as to whether this implies a type of some kind or whether individuals can exist more than “just once” in the world in a numerical sense.

It is this indifference that distinguishes Germanic individualism from the Florentine type epitomized by the story told at the outset of these lines. The men of the Renaissance wanted to be completely singular, just as Bernini, two centuries later, wanted his portrait busts to elicit in all of his subjects “that which nature gave to each alone.” Yet Bernini was not conscious of the way his Italian world oriented every individual life to a thoroughly typical and general principle of form. Never could Rembrandt have had this as his goal. In his eyes, the Germanic individualism in which his art excels could have meant only that an individual life grows from its own roots, responsible to itself alone, unpreoccupied by whatever phenomena such roots might have pushed up among people of any comparable nature. As much as Romanic individualists assert their autarchy, sincerity, or otherworldliness, something general always seems to shine through them that gives us access to them. One feels a lucidity of formed, crafted rationality in the Romanic figure, whose reticence and uncanniness are always obvious *as* reticence and uncanniness, even if their content cannot be fathomed. In Germanic personalities, on the other hand, no such bridge is forthcoming: one has to approach them by their own path to themselves, or one loses them. Germanic characters feel the double character of individual life in such a way that, even as they obey fully a law of the whole and answer and adapt to an existence higher than their own, they become themselves exclusively through themselves. Their existence they owe perhaps to the cosmos, to society, to the divine order, but certainly not to an idea with the function of subsuming an indefinite number of individuals under its extension. Individualism in the Italian Renaissance was sociological in character: it consisted in looking and being different and distinctive; it involved an act of individual

self-comparison to others, and thus presupposed something general and norm-giving, exterior to individuals, in relation to which they could measure their particularity.

Naturally this dichotomy is not clear-cut: it denotes, and isolates purely conceptually, only certain extreme forms of individuality that never appear in reality in any unconditional way but only in innumerable gradations and combinations. The German spirit in particular has acquired a yearning from its relations with the classical and Italianate world to educate itself in this other form of individualism, which has as often enriched it as divided it against itself. One cannot think of a more deeply German person than Kant, who vested the absolute singular worth of man in the absolutely inner moral conscience of the personality, creating a figure of tremendous solitude uninfluenceable in the slightest way by either divine commandment or care for personal benefit, by either opinion or historical circumstances. Yet to the question of how this dutiful consciousness, this ethical auto-legislation of the individual, was to be shaped and decided, he answered: only act on that maxim that you can at the same time will to be a universal law—only on that maxim that you could reasonably wish everyone, without difference of personhood, to follow, in the same situation and in the same manner. Here can be seen that other idea of individuality that expresses itself in subordination to a universally valid norm, reflected in a suprapersonal type. To be sure, this law does not emanate from any extraneous power and does not deflect the personality from its course; it is a law of complete autonomy flowing from the last unadulterated sources of the worth of the ego. But still, the direction of this flow is not determined by the self's individual quality. "Law" and "universal law" here stand in solidarity with one another. What is excluded is the possibility that the particular languages in which all particular human beings express themselves might inform the character not only of their existence but also of their morality. Where the brave action for Plato derived its ultimate essence and value from the general idea of bravery and not from the singular life of the singular human being who beats with it, so for Kant the morally lawful action arises from the universally moral law, by which alone a human being comes to belong to the type of human being possessed of reason. What the Kantian moral theory cannot recognize is that persons might give an "individual law" to themselves, a law evolving exclusively from the individual's character, without this law forfeiting in any way its ideality and stringency or its possible agreement of content with the general law. In Kant's teaching, the classical Romanic general concept and supra-individual type have seduced the pure Germanic con-

cept of individuality away from what is Kant's actual ultimate fundament, namely, the insight that individual meaning and value ultimately grow from individual roots alone. Kant's teaching here affirms individualism only to the extent that it rejects all ethical norms that might address the individual from outside of itself; it leaves the inward side of individuality, however, once again prey to a generalizing idea, and only captures the value of individuality by dint of its dispersion into something general.

This is also, ultimately, the same predicament, the same never-quite-resolved fissure, to be found in Goethe's life picture, otherwise so different from Kant's. Goethe's youth saw an impetuous waxing of his ego and at the same time a passionate quest for this ego, wanting to become ever purer, ever more potent, and ever more filled with God. The raw forces of his autonomous individuality produced his character and creativity, his happiness and his torments. So radical was his individualism that at the age of eighteen, he became indignant at the thought that one day his children might resemble anyone other than himself. Yet this truly Germanic passion took a different turn after *The Italian Journey*. True, not all his individualism went this way: in his great old age he could still declare that just as every man had to live from within himself, so the artist had to "cultivate always his own individuality." But this vision changed after the encounter with classicism and Italian art: Goethe's later works' characters, as sharply delineated and "vitaly spontaneous" as they may be, become more and more like types, fashioned after a formal law that is unrestricted to any singularity. Each character stands for a universal; alongside this sit, admittedly, other universals, but it is only in this supra-individual general idea that each character finds its meaning and value. In his middle age Goethe resorted to this species of individualism because he could not shape that of his youth into a perspicuous form with firm laws. In the development of his deep German spirit, he had to expunge those features that make German existence difficult to understand and approach for others. But he did not pull this off smoothly. It was an immeasurably important achievement to fuse the German and classical genres of existence into a new configuration of culture, but something was irrevocably lost in the undertaking, something of the immediate power of the self, of the soul's unhindered dilation and movement. The gain in the loss was enormous—but the loss in the gain was not exiguous. Both Goethe's biographical individualism and that of his characters showed, at least here and there, a certain splintering after this point. To be sure, it continued to nourish itself from the inner life, but this interiority simultaneously had to bear something general, something permeating the interior, like a

law that fashions the individual form according to a type, however differentiated a type—and it is in this type alone, not in any singular point of existence, that the form finds its legitimacy.

It is a strange turn of fate for the German spirit that has made another form of individuality, one equal in standing to its own, gradually become its undoing. To live in the Germanic manner is indisputably more dangerous, dark, and burdened with responsibility than to live in the classical Romanic manner. When the will of the roots weakens and the inner voice fades, when contact is lost somehow with that hazy feeling of the cosmic value of this being-alone-with-oneself in the ground of the world—it is at just this moment that one becomes tempted by that other individualism that imbues particularity with the framework of a general style, that supports personal force with an at least ideal generality, for which the individual life becomes an example, illustration, or condensation. The Romanic form of individuality allows individuals to prove their *raison d'être*, so to speak, whereas in the Germanic form they can only ever refer to the *deed* (*die Tat*), to action, and are otherwise left to their own devices, in a solitary feeling and consciousness of self. If Romanic people cannot accomplish a distinctive deed, they can always make recourse to a supra-individual sphere that bears and encircles their existence and enables an inviting amiability and accessible cultivatedness, which we Germans often feel to be typical in languid substanceless characters of the south, who for us seem devoid of real personality. If Germans, on the other hand, cannot prove themselves through a distinctive deed—through a creative achievement, action, or exemplary conduct—they lack any such way of broadcasting the core of their individuality. Their nucleus remains as within a shell, which is hard for others, especially for the foreigner, to peel away. It is not that Germans are “more individualistic” in general than other nations—there can be no suggestion of this. It is only that European civilization has produced two different solutions to the concept of the individual as a mirroring of ego and world—a Romanic solution and a Germanic solution. Even when German individuals comply “selflessly” with laws, forms, and totalities and thereby manage to stay faithful to themselves, they ultimately orient themselves to a responsibility evolving from their own point of gravity—whereas responsibility for the classical Romanic ideal is more or less the focus for a universal style and for a shared and ideal formal law, the point at which the type and supra-individual idea of individuality light up with radiant meaning and majesty.

Germanic and Classical Romanic Style

In the people and things of our present time, and perhaps even more in the works and phenomena we know and picture to ourselves from the past, we notice something to do not only with their individually crafted character, with their individually distinctive mode, intention, and power of existence, but also with something more general in them, with a law that overlays the shaping of each individual thing. Everything belonging to a particular epoch of a civilization or to a particular national life evokes a common tone or character for us, suffusing the most different kinds of things in a uniform manner. This tone or character does not merely coexist with the individual object; more precisely, it is the very manner in which the object presents itself to us, as the rhythm and color of everything experienced and created in the particular context, as a form encompassing the most diverse contents, in which we recognize these contents as belonging to the same period, people, or mentality. We call this the style of the age, or the style of a people, or of any expressions of life within a particular section of space and time. Seldom can we describe this stylistic commonality in any exact way, but something seems to suggest an unmistakable family resemblance for us, making each slice of the history of humanity appear to us as one epoch of a civilization, as one region of life among others with a definite character of its own.

These variations of character rest not only on differences of appearance and impact, on different qualitative values, but also to a large extent on differences of degree, on how strongly and how visibly a region's character presents itself in its instances and exerts a style at all, with a distinctive meaning for the region as a whole, visible in each individual configuration according to the common law of form that we call style. There are some kinds of conduct, some ways of speaking, and some works of art that impress us in such a way that we are wont to call them stylized—while

others strike us as evincing no such consistency of form across greatly heterogeneous contents.

If we consider specifically the case of artistic expressions of life, there can be no doubt that works of art from classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance arouse this impression of “stylization” more than anything else—in contrast to Germanic art, at least from the Middle Ages to Rembrandt. It seems to belong in the nature of the style of the former to display a greater quantity of style as such. Germanic art, on the other hand, reveals individual works so distinctively peculiar that each one outweighs any visual factors that might point to a general law of form shared fundamentally with others, so that one cannot easily speak of Germanic art as stylized in nature. No feature is so common to all individual works of Germanic art that it can be felt to be dominant in them, even though all make up a single circle of culture, which is at least in some respects unitary. They do still possess a certain kind of style, but the question is how this style is to be qualitatively distinguished from that of those other regions whose works bear the stamp of style so much more insistently and visibly.

If Rembrandt’s art may be considered the highest embodiment of the Germanic side, the contrast with the Romanic could be summed up as follows: where classicism seeks to present form in the appearance of life, Rembrandt sought to present life through the appearance of form. The artistic personality of the classical world always sees a particular form based on a lawful interrelationship of the parts of a surface, which more or less prescribes the outline of the subject matter, often schematically, but certainly in a wonderfully poised, harmonious, and monumental manner; and this law predetermines the subject matter’s life to realize this form and to seek the meaning of its artistic becoming in this form. Sometimes the schema is expressed geometrically and is even detachable from the substantive artistic content of the work, but something meaningful still remains in this abstraction. Form here evidently holds a prerogative over the particular life that concretizes it, for it can fill itself with all manner of lived contents and endow them with something general that tends to predominate over that which is individually distinctive in appearance. At work here is the classical Romanic impulse toward lucid panorama and rational unity in the exterior realm of appearances. By contrast, in Rembrandt’s art, as in all typical Germanic art, no such overarching schema abstracts away from individuality: each picture retains its own form, in which no other content can be inserted, and only by inhering in this particular content can any form exist; a general form would be meaningless. It follows that it is life that here determines representation—the life always of the individual human being, which can proceed only through

this one canal. Individual life here so naturally rejects generalization that it does not even need to exhibit its difference from others. Wherever Italian art stresses the aspect of the individualized—most notably in the quattrocento—it does so always by means of an intentional accentuation, a deliberate foregrounding of the figure from the crowd, or through something like a principle of comparison, a yardstick or a common denominator of some kind, which stretches across even greatly heterogeneous objects. A highly revealing story has been told about Florence in this connection: it is reported that at one time Florence knew no fashions in male apparel, as every man saw fit to dress in his own peculiar way. Such incessant regard for others and for self-distinction from others only shows how much the Romanic sensibility clings to this principle of something general that must spurn any false appearance of particularity, anything too ephemeral and potentially grotesque, in order to create the condition for a strongly felt style. Never would Rembrandt have fallen for such an excess of self-distinction, which pertains ultimately only to exterior form, since his concern was, so to speak, with an individuality springing from life itself, in which life forms itself wholly from within.

Certainly the great classical portrait emanates from life too. But here, once life—as growth, inner movement, and fate—has reached a certain stage in the shaping of the individual subject, the process of shaping more or less comes to a halt. The subject is henceforth singled out and crafted into a self-sufficient image according to artistic norms that set the relationship of the visible parts to one another. A new lawfulness of the purely sensory now determines the outcome of the life process, an outcome that is made to stand out from the process itself. The form so obtained is withdrawn from all motion and mutability, such that while life can change and generate other forms, each form exists timelessly by itself. As singular and unique as it may be, the form has a validity beyond the life that first flowed into it; it has a kind of supra-individuality that provokes an impression of stylization, in a manner quite alien to the Rembrandtian way of depicting the human figure through the feeling of an unbroken moving tide of life.

Further attention to the significance of stylistic quality for stylistic quantity reveals an emphasis on public life, or on life for spectators, that again distinguishes Mediterranean peoples from the Germanic tendency. The human figure in the Greek statue takes pride in its beauty: for all its perfection and autarchy of existence, the Greek figure does not spurn regard and recognition from its peers. Among the Greeks, this sense of representative life went together with a way in which men bore the polis within themselves and felt themselves responsible for it. In the crowded figure scenes of Italian Renaissance pictures we cannot fail to notice how

all of the figures fulfill their function in the proceedings with a consciousness of wanting to be esteemed for their own sakes, how all possess a certain ideal spectator of their own, to whom they display their importance and attractions. When such a figure presents itself, it also presents something or quality, such as strength and beauty, spirituality and energy, dignity and depth: a general quality, of which the figure is a, or the, representative. Plato's conception that everything takes its essence from a general idea to which it is enfeigned, and only signifies anything by visually presenting this idea, is a metaphysical sublimation of this worldview. A deep connection here exists between the tendency to present oneself in the gaze of others, to fashion an image of oneself for the regard of others, and the shaping of existence by general forms, by preexisting general types. It is entirely evident that people who desire to present some side of themselves to others—not necessarily only from vanity, charlatanism, or duplicity—thereby quit the realm of their individual uniqueness and make themselves into bearers and embodiments of a capacity or an idea, adorning themselves with the typical character and value of something that generalizes from the pure personality. In less favorable circumstances, this is one of the reasons people exposed at length to life among large masses easily lapse into a certain characterlessness—whereas in the great ages of classicism a far-reaching stylistic power and monumentality arises, where something supra-individual predominates palpably in the individual phenomenon. But it is just this that seems to turn the phenomenon into something not immediately itself but rather something ruled and elevated by a style. The public character of life and of self-presentation for others here causes a particular kind of style to acquire an unmistakable intensity of style as such, based on a great common fact of form-generating laws.

In the Germanic world, this sociological moment of stylization comes to the fore only when its art is influenced by Italy. Otherwise the Romanic remains remote from Rembrandt's greatest figures, and in fact from all specifically German figures, which never think of the spectator; nor do they "present themselves" as such. Their being curves back into itself, not turning outward and merely displaying their personality and fate. They are consequently very difficult to characterize with general concepts. Whether clever or dull, proud or modest, strong or tender, this is not at the forefront of their impression on us, for in not presenting themselves, they present no thing or quality that has to be more general and transcendent of individuality. They live only from the center of their individuality and within this center, not by dint of any typical conduct. This is also why

the demand placed on artists by classicism to stylize their model into a “type” eludes this art. Certainly figures in Germanic art also reveal something more than the momentary and, to a certain extent, general. But this is not something they share in common with other figures; it is rather the generality of themselves alone, the totality of their lives, which dissolves every isolated moment in a constant stream, or in which each moment exists only as a wave within a greater flux that can be felt only at a particular instant in time. It evinces what could be called an inner universality, based not on an abstraction from individual instants of life but on the unity of all these instants, which can also be felt in each one of them. By contrast, the Romanic fashioning of characters by reference to something general that each individual shares with a limitless number of other individuals and that identifies an individual for every other—this is not the way in which Germanic art expresses the essence of its figures.

In this distance from the general, in the two senses of the abstract-typical and the social way of being-for-others, Germanic art expresses a problematic relationship to what is conventionally called beauty. Beauty clearly can have deep meanings reaching to the last grounds of the existence of the individual in the cosmos, in both an immediate and a symbolic sense. As such, beauty presents itself to us, at least at first, in terms of a lawfully ordered interrelationship of elements of a surface, or a radiant outward display of particular currents of life, distilled from the existence of the spectator (who can also be their bearer). This, however, lends beauty an immediate affinity to classical art, for, as we have seen, it is this type of art that develops through outwardly lived forms, which it weaves together into felicitous images according to an ideal logic. All manifest life is subsumed into it, and all of life’s restless individual flux is sublimated into its objective perfection. Real historical development confirms this impression that what is called beauty as such is, with only occasional exceptions, the aesthetic perfection reached by means of classical forms and norms. And this is also confirmed by its obverse: Rembrandt’s figures are almost never beautiful, in the generally recognized sense of the word. The structuring impulse of his vision is not timeless unity in life’s outcome, in any serene form of appearance. It is, rather, the progress of life itself, which constantly recreates itself from its own motive forces and dealings with fate. This is the last arbiter for Rembrandt’s picture of man. Whether this purely inwardly driven dynamic produces beauty or ugliness on the outward surface is quite incidental, for Rembrandt never sought any of his decisive values in beauty, as ancient and Renaissance art did—whether we see this in the delightful harmonies of Praxiteles or Giorgione, or in

Michelangelo's tragic mightiness. Immersed in Rembrandt for a while, one sometimes finds beauty to be almost like an outward appendage to life's development from its own innermost sources.

To the extent that this reveals especially graphically a more general trait of the Germanic character of life, it illuminates the difficulty faced by Romanic peoples in understanding and recognizing this Germanic life. Everything in Germanic style that strikes Romanic peoples as gauche, aesthetically defective, even aggressively formless, arises from this deep contrast of sensibility—albeit undoubtedly one with many shades of grey in between. Where life among the Romanic peoples finds its guiding idea in formal perfection, among the Germanic peoples it finds it in the laws of inner forces springing up from the reservoirs of the individual life, whose outwardly revealed face suggests no comparably effective norms. This is not to denigrate the former sensibility as “merely extraneous” in its choice of values, or to think of form as “merely formal.” Undoubtedly there lies in this sensibility too one of the great possibilities and realizations of humanity, over which we should not be establishing ourselves as objective judge, however much we may be subjectively predisposed to one of the two sides. The very general formulation I have inferred from this, that classical Romanic style is generally more stylish than Germanic style, also explains the Germanic mind's difficulty of access for other peoples. For because style always means something more universal, more determinately transcendent of the individual, something apparently closer to the universally human, it opens a relatively wider gate and admits an indefinite number of others to an understanding and appreciation of itself. All styles that embody style as such, that fulfill a certain abstract concept of style, are akin to one another, as different as they may be in their particular genres of style. Conversely, the more style gives way to the individuality of a particular expression of life, the more rarely and incidentally will the expression become accessible to others. Here again we see how artistic objects illuminate and symbolize most strikingly this contrast of national characteristics—for in no other case does stylization display for us its extent and significance so sensuously and clearly, so objectively and demonstrably.

CHAPTER FOUR

Landscape Painting

The following essays by Simmel center on themes of mood, nature, and abstraction in landscape painting and landscape experience. "Arnold Böcklin's Landscapes" (Böcklins Landschaften) first appeared in 1895 in the journal *Die Zukunft*, edited by Maximilian Harden. "On the Aesthetics of the Alps" (Zur Ästhetik der Alpen) appeared in January 1911 in the Berlin newspaper *Der Tag* and again in November of that year in the collection *Philosophische Kultur* under the shorter title "The Alps" (Die Alpen). It is known that Simmel spent regular summer vacations in the Alps with his wife, Gertrud, herself a painter (GSG 12:512-13). "The Philosophy of Landscape" (Die Philosophie der Landschaft) appeared in 1913.

Arnold Böcklin's Landscapes

*Um sie kein Ort, noch wen'ger eine Zeit**

The delight of a summer noon hour lies in the feeling of a world of slumber and tranquility reposing within us and rocking us gently. Nature within us shares in nature outside us and lives and rests at one with this outer world. Yet simultaneously, we feel our own liveliness, our throbbing pulsating heart, above all this natural restfulness. As the great Pan sleeps, we sleep too, with him and in him; and yet amid this, we remain an enjoying agent: a subject in everything objective around us. This is the mood aroused by Böcklin's landscapes. Weaving the soul into inner kinship with natural being, with plant life and animals, with earth and light, his landscapes at the same time release the soul from nature into the feeling of a personality with an entire soul and freedom of its own, unknown to the purely perceived world. They show a great vital energetic self, imbibing into its own unity everything that nature unfolds from itself in simple dispersion, and in this way disclosing its own secret antithesis to nature, with which previously it had seemed fused. But in fact, simultaneously, this self is still fused with nature—and yet not fused with it—and in this continual tension and interpenetration or oscillation between bondedness with and freedom from nature in the space of the picture, the emotive tone of Böcklin's landscapes is generated. It is as if, in them, a part of the original unity of things had been rescued in the world of appearances from the two opposing sides into which conscious mind, on the one hand, and unconscious nature, on the other, have constituted themselves, and as if

* [Trans.] "Göttinnen thronen hehr in Einsamkeit / Um sie kein Ort, noch wen'ger eine Zeit" (Goddesses, enthroned on high, and solitary / No space round them, not even time); from Goethe's vision of the "Mothers," *Faust*, part II, act I, scene 5.

the soul, pushed to and fro by these poles, had sought to return the two sides to their lost unity.

Spinoza enjoins philosophers to consider things *sub specie aeternitatis*: purely according to things' inner necessity and significance, freed from all contingencies of their here-and-now. We may say—if it is permissible to describe matters of feeling with words usually appropriate for objects of the intellect—that the content of Böcklin's images strikes us as if transplanted into precisely such a sphere of eternity. It is as if a pure ideal content of things stood before us, free of all historical transitivity, of every relation to a "before" and "after." Everything reposes as if at a summer day's noon hour. We sense nature holding her breath and all passage of time running awry. This is not eternity in the sense of immeasurable duration—or religious eternity—but simply a ceasing of temporal relations, just as we call a law of nature eternal not for persisting continually but for retaining a validity independent of questions of before and after, earlier and later. Böcklin's timeless images mean for us a complete freedom from past and future—like the timelessness we feel sometimes in southern Italian landscapes, created most probably by the only very slight annual variations to be found there in temperature and vegetation. In such landscapes we sense, as their co-resonant antipode, the landscapes of Germany, as summer to winter, and spring to autumn, in constant alternation and constant mutual desire, recollection, and attraction. Böcklin's trees do not resemble deciduous trees that acquire and shed leaves with the seasons. The moment in which he portrays them, whether their first budding, their noontime flowering or autumnal demise, is always their eternity. The ruins he paints never recall what they were before their collapse or decay. *Sint ut sunt aut non sint*.^{*} His subjects' fabulous unreality and supra-temporality, their opposition to everything in the broadest sense historical, finds expression only in the most instantaneous of moments.

Yet one temporal modality nonetheless remains in Böcklin's work, namely that of *youth*. Of all life's stages, youth comes closest in mood to timelessness because it does not yet know the meaning of time and does not yet reckon with time as a power and limit. This is why youth is so eminently unhistorical; it sees endless things before itself, free from constraining temporal realities. It alone knows that blurred haziness of days in which a sense of the past still seems something to be hoped for and all

* [Trans.] "Leave them as they are or not at all": attributed to Pope Clement VIII, concerning the Jesuits in eighteenth-century France, in support of an attempt by King Louis XV to delay execution of the final French parliamentary order of suppression of the Society of Jesus, issued in 1762.

future happiness seems already to be within sight and memory—and this is the mood of Böcklin's landscapes.

But if these landscapes are atemporal, they are equally, in another sense, aspatial. Usually space appears in landscape painting as the cohesive form of the whole, a schema delimiting and enclosing all content within itself. Articulated space and spatial form most often remain in place when substantive coloration retreats even to the point of disappearing altogether, and great landscape painters typically give pronounced expression to this logical authority and formative independence of space as a work's entire center of interest and structural foundation. In Böcklin's works, however, dominance of spatial form over content is completely absent. In his landscapes' sensibility, no spatial scheme plays any dynamic role. Kant says at one point that space in itself is nothing but the possibility of things standing alongside one another, and indeed this is how space appears with Böcklin. Here, in contrast to "classical" landscape painting, space is simply the outer manner in which things stand beside each other: a medium that by itself is nothing but the pure "possibility" within which things can make visible their essential inner relations to one another. In the same way that our feelings of love and hate, joy and pain, unfold in space but have no awareness of space as interior movements of the soul and relate to space, so to speak, only retrospectively, so Böcklin's landscapes, in their mood and effect on us, transcend the three spatial dimensions, just as they transcend the one dimension of time.

This sense of escape from mere relationality and conditionality, from all binding and boundedness by exteriority, is what underpins the feeling of freedom we enjoy in his pictures—the feeling we have of resurfacing from life's pressures and demands, near or far, made able to breathe life's air anew, unencumbered and unburdened. To be sure, a releasing, redeeming effect of this kind is proper, not to Böcklin alone, but to all advanced art. But I do not think it can be found with such intensity and purity in any other landscape painter. Certainly, matters are different with images of human figures. All artists of the human figure distance themselves more or less consciously from flux, immediacy, and the contingent individually given moment. Even the so-called realist painter does this; for it would be hard to know otherwise what interest there would be in having another reality on the canvas when enough of the first already exists for us. A process of elevation, catharsis, and abstraction operates with greater certainty and clarity in images of human figures because we know very well what it is that those images remove and redeem us from. We know too well our ordinary reality's raw transience and exteriority not to feel its idealization—if I may use this rather problematic term here simply

for brevity's sake—to be in this way a salving, uplifting, and liberating experience. By contrast, a need to elevate and abstract is not generally at hand in images of nonhuman nature. We do not want or need as much abstraction from nonhuman nature as we do from our human affairs, and in any case, nature is not greatly lacking already in aspects of abstraction of its own. Because we do not speak its language and have no comparable sense of how to interpret it, it strikes us as being neither as conducive to idealization nor as needful of redemption by art as human affairs. In its immediate reality, a landscape instead already contains an element of serene self-sufficiency akin to art: an effect of freeing us inwardly, of loosening tensions and saving us from entanglements of the moment—not unlike the way any nonhuman organism is, to a much higher degree than humanity, a general type of its species. This is why a landscape carries less demand for artistic representation and why landscape art does not free and uplift us to the same extent as representations of human figures and situations, which for their part must traverse a great distance from ordinary lived reality. But Böcklin's landscape paintings, unlike so many others of this genre, succeed in raising us, in precisely this way, to a place of the purest, most free, and redemptive ether, as if transported, sure of foot, above things' dull reality. They achieve a psychological effect known otherwise only to images of human affairs. To be sure, Poussin and Claude Lorrain also abstract and idealize in a way that expresses a kind of pure content of ideas and consciously turns away from real singularity and tangibility. But these painters purchase with a complete loss of painterly intimacy. Their landscapes lift us above reality, but only into a space void of air, whereas Böcklin's also stir us in our innermost hearts and depths of being. In his landscapes, redemption and release from dull narrow realities become for the first time a genuine emotive value.

If a prism could see, it would see not white light but the colors of the rainbow. At most, it might be able to guess at light's inner unity for other standpoints of perception such as ours. But to *know* this unity, a prism would perpetually have to recombine the elements of light into which it has necessarily dismantled this unity. That is also the lot of our mental eye, which cannot understand even our own actions and dispositions, our impressions and sensations, in any other way than as composed from diverse elements, even though our innermost experience of life is shot through with a sense of these elements' primordial unity. Frequently we describe with contradictory and mutually exclusive attributes things we experience at first hand as intrinsically unitary and coherent. And in the sense in which Nicholas of Cusa apostrophizes the highest divine unity of things as the *coincidentia oppositorum*, or conciliation of all opposites

and antitheses, so we are often incapable of describing unity in the works and agency of man other than by speaking of the meeting of mutually contradictory elements. Indeed I am at a loss to describe the completely unitary atmosphere of most of Böcklin's landscapes in any other way than as one of joyful melancholy—rather as the mood of Chopin's music seems to call to mind a kind of melancholic *joie de vivre*.

For us modern people, whose lives, feelings, desires, and senses of worth have fragmented in countless different directions, who hover constantly between a “yes” and a “no” and interpret our inner lives and outer surroundings in sharply differentiated categories: for us, all great art seems to need to unify antitheses and transcend every compulsion of the “either-or.” We are inclined to describe everyone we meet as either shrewd or foolish. Intellect is a category we chose either to apply or not to apply to any person of our acquaintance, and likewise in our perception of images of modern people in art, appearances of intellectuality play a part in our classification of the figure. By contrast, human figures in Greek sculpture, for example, elude such dichotomies. We do not think of them as either shrewd or foolish; in this we find them equidistant—even indifferent—to the “yes” and the “no.” Many female nudes in antiquity evade categorization as younger girls or elder women. Our modern distinctions of age seem irrelevant to them. In many ways, Michelangelo's female figures escape the duality of male/female and show simply a humanness not yet differentiated by gender. Böcklin's art shows a new kind of “beyond,” namely, a beyond “true” and “untrue.” Any question of correspondence to the real—always asked by us of objective representation—falls silent in his works. Present in them is no *conscious* rejection of truth or flight from all common reality of things. Certainly the appeal of opposition to the real is not denied, and certainly the signature of Schiller's writing in this sense is a comparable kind of glorification of that which has never been: a kind of shy idealism that wants only to look away from reality and knowingly to have nothing to do with it. But for Böcklin, this denial of reality is still a positive relationship to the real, just like realism's relationship to the real—albeit one pointing in reverse direction. And so ultimately for Böcklin, the dichotomy of realist and nonrealist is meaningless. On the question of whether his images subsist solely in a realm of the mind or have analogues in reality, they are as incapable of giving us an answer as our deciding whether a sound we hear has the color black or white. Countless instances of Böcklin's colors, forms, and entities have certainly never been found before in reality and have meaning for us not by dint of anything really perceived or recollected by us.

Part and parcel of Böcklin's landscapes' hermetic self-containment

and complete refusal of any exogenous emotive reference is that these pictures—more than any others I know—are works of solitude. Admittedly, here too there is no conscious intentional rejection of the outside, which would still be something presupposing a relation to the outside, negative as it may be. Still, in his images, absolutely no question arises of any people inhabiting meadows, ravines, forests, and shores other than those he himself projects into them. Each scene has and is a dimension of its own and therefore cannot be entered from any other dimension, however deep inside one wanders. These scenes' solitude, quite unlike that in other landscape paintings, is no incidental quality that might have been otherwise, but is something integral to them. The scenes are like those people whose natural, immovable fate is somehow to be "solitary." But in them, solitude sheds its merely negative exclusionary character and assumes a recognizable tonality to which we refer only for lack of a more directly intelligible expression.

This self-containment of Böcklin's art perhaps explains why we find his figures' strangeness and pictorial imperfections less vexing than we might in other painters. For these personages are simply "laws unto themselves." Each world they inhabit places everything beyond its frame at such a distance from itself that it cannot be glimpsed at one and the same time with any space outside itself, and therefore cannot be as easily checked and delimited by such space. In its complete suspension of all reference to an outside, Böcklin's art comes close to music, at least so far as our immediate feeling for it is concerned. For music, like Böcklin's painting, has its roots in tangible realities and direct sensations connected to them but wholly dissolves any mimetic relation to reality in order to rise to an emotive plane no longer linked by any intelligible bond to facts of perception and sensation, even though what music presents to us is the finest kind of sublimation of such facts. It is impossible to reconstruct the paths traveled by our emotive capacities from primitive sensory excitement to pleasure in advanced classical music, which seems to sever every last link to life's ordinary sensuous reality. So extraordinarily enigmatic for us is this autonomy of music that it seems understandable that Schopenhauer could want to deport it from the realm of anything explicable—even from all the other arts—to a position as immediate mirror and expression of the world's metaphysical essence as such. Perhaps no other painter or visual art before Böcklin approaches as closely this mysterious ability of music to glide through us like some entirely familiar yet eternally remote paradise, in the way Schopenhauer describes. Perhaps only in music is artistic material so consumed by mood. Other kinds of sensuous figuration in art can sustain a sense of abstract atmosphere while retaining

some concrete existence and meaning of their own, beyond any mood that emanates from them. But in music, and music alone, all such expressive independence of material substrate disappears; no trace of it remains. Music overcomes this dualism of expressive agency and expressed content and is instead through-and-through pure expression, pure meaning, pure mood. We can speak little of questions of truth in music—in the sense in which we can of other art forms—and no more can we speak of them in Böcklin's landscapes. For all his springs, rocks, groves, and meadows, animals and half-animals and human figures have no real existence other than as carriers of a mood, and are wholly consumed by this mood like wood burning in the flames. Like pictures in us of long-deceased loved ones, they live on like images that have shed every last shadow of reality and melted into the feeling with which they fill us.

On the Aesthetics of the Alps

Common assumptions of the aesthetic primacy of form in objects often conceal from us the importance of another factor, namely, objects' *magnitude*. As a species, we are not capable of taking aesthetic pleasure in forms purely as interrelated lines, surfaces, and colors in general but only in particular *quantities* of such forms. Forms in given quantities can vary in magnitude but often only within certain maximal and minimal limits, beyond which they may start to decline in aesthetic value. Much more than we realize, a form's aesthetic impact is inseparable from its scale and varies greatly in character and meaning with changes in its scale or size. Most evident in the depiction of nature in art, we tend to see a spectrum of forms, comprising, on the one hand, forms largely remaining constant in aesthetic value across different sizes and, on the other, forms retaining aesthetic value only in quite definite limits of size. At one end of the spectrum are forms of the human figure, where artists tend to understand meanings of a figure's life empathically from within and as a consequence can recognize relatively easily the necessary adjustments of accent and emphasis to preserve a figure in its right unity and character across changes in scale. This is why human beings—and only human beings, for no other beings do we know as well as ourselves—can appear in art as much on a scale of the colossal as in miniature. At the other end of the spectrum are those mountainous regions of Europe we call the Alps. Generally speaking in art, though we can by no means expect a work to reproduce an object's real effect naturalistically, since every work essentially reshapes its object, still an object's essential features must be in some way recognizable in a work for the object to be identifiable as something of a particular kind or character. In the Alps, however, we are denied this possibility. No picture has as yet captured these mountains' impression of overwhelming mass; and the greatest of Alpine painters, namely Segantini and Hodler, have tended, through sophisticated stylization and effects of accent and color,

more to evade than to address this challenge.* As forms, the Alps lack that type of aesthetic value that survives alterations of magnitude and instead have a value that seems tied to some definite natural extent of their existence. As rare as it may be, for other aesthetic objects too, not to be affected by size in some degree, it is this way in which no strong aesthetic effect emerges at all from the Alps beneath a certain quantitative threshold that makes us realize how closely and directly these two features, form and scale, belong together in perception—and are only consciously distinguished as factors by us secondarily.

Highly significant in the Alps are these mountains' physical massivity. Intrinsic to them is something restless, fortuitous, and disjointed in form—which explains why so many painters, including even painters with special interests in natural form, have found them difficult to handle. To be sure, in one way, the Alps' very character of tremendous material gravity attenuates this difficulty and helps make them something pleasurable for us. But in general, when forms cohere meaningfully with one another, they do so by reinforcing, echoing, and anticipating one other and building for themselves a unity in need of no kind of extraneous sustaining structure. The problem is that when, as with the Alps, forms seem to stand side by side incidentally, with no unifying outline, only our sense of the mountains' sheer physical bulk, giving unitary body to the peaks' otherwise meaningless distinctness, prevents one individual form from appearing awkwardly disconnected from any other. Undifferentiated, formless materiality down below must predominate to an unusual and otherwise disproportionate degree for the peaks above to find some kind of balance and congruence of profile and not to appear chaotically indifferent to one another. A sense of these forms' flickering unrest, on the one hand, and of their burdensome mass, on the other, creates for us feelings of both excitement and tranquility—in a unique tension and balance.

Questions of aesthetic form and limits of form in our experience of the Alps throw light on some aspects of our deepest categories of the soul. Because the Alps strike us in one aspect as a chaotic and disjointed mass, void of any inherent sense of form, shape, and outline of their own, we feel in them a secret silence of deep matter and materiality that allows us to understand visually more from them than from any other kind of landscape. In them we feel an awesome power of the earthy as such, still far removed from any independent life of form or meaning of form. But in another aspect, the gigantic rocks thrusting upward, the translucent shim-

* [Trans.] Giovanni Segantini (1858–1899), Austrian-born painter resident in Switzerland; Ferdinand Hodler (1853–1918), Swiss painter.

mering glaciers and snow caps without relation to lower-lying land—all of these features suggest symbols of transcendence for us, leading the psychic gaze upward to places reachable only with the greatest danger and not by will power alone. This is why every aesthetic effect and every concomitant mystical effect dissipates as soon as a cloudy sky shrouds the snow caps and pushes them down to earth, folding and enveloping them with all other land below. Only against clear blue sky do these peaks point infinitely and continuously upward to a site of the supra-terrestrial, to another order of existence. If we can speak of any kind of landscape as transcendent, we must say this of firm landscape—where nothing but ice and snow remain: no vegetation, no valley, no pulse of life.* And because the transcendent and absolute, in whose atmosphere this landscape unfolds, defies words, so it also lies beyond all form, unless it is childishly humanized. For everything formed is by definition bounded, whether bounded by mechanical pressures and forces setting one thing's boundaries where another's begin, or, as with a living being, bounded in its own inner form of life by finitude of powers of development. The transcendent is to this extent formless, for to have form is to have limit, and so the absolute as the limitless is that which cannot be formed. Things therefore can be either formless *beneath* all formation or formless *above* all formation. The Alpine mountains, however, are formless in both regards at once: on the one hand, in their dark unredeemed earthy massivity and, on the other, in their transfigured snowy heights, thrusting upward over all movement of life on earth. The mountains' very lack of intrinsic form creates and brings together for us a feeling and symbol of immense powers of existence: of things less than all form and at the same time more than all form.

In this great remoteness from life lies perhaps the Alpine peaks' last secret for us. Let us consider first, in general, the contrast of mountains and sea as phenomena of experience. Invariably we find the seas and oceans to be a symbol of life: their unfathomable depths, their constant shifts of form and movement, alternately calm and stormy, drifting into the horizon in an unending rhythmic play without goal—all of this invites the soul to project onto them its own feeling of life. Outwardly similar in form and symbol, the sea seems to reproduce life's texture in a stylized, schematic, supra-individual way and to grant us a feeling of freedom and liberation that in reality we only otherwise gain in a very pure, deep, and intense way from the form of the picturesque. The sea releases us from

* [Trans.] Firm: the compacted snow to be found on the upper parts of a glacier, not yet fully compressed into ice. Simmel refers to this feature recurrently in subsequent paragraphs.

life's immediate quantitative givenness and restrictedness through a sense of overwhelming dynamism that invites life to lead beyond itself and its own forms. By contrast, in the mountains, a feeling of redemption from life's contingent overbearing ordinariness and fragmentariness emerges from the opposite direction: not, that is, from any stylized fullness of life's passions but instead from an essential distance from life. Here life is surrounded and in some way woven into something higher, purer, firmer, and stiller than life can ever be. In Worringer's terminology, the sea draws empathy from life, whereas the Alps create abstraction from life. And all of this intensifies as the mountain rocks culminate in pure firn. At the cliff edges we still feel certain downward-driving forces, where matter rising up meets matter rolling, rinsing, or crumbling away. At any given moment, this tug of war may come to a halt, before coming alive again for the spectator as ongoing movement. But essentially the firn landscape leaves behind all sign of forces in dynamic play. Everything rising from below is now blanketed in snow and ice. No vital powers or latent dark motions—no coming-into-being of form through snowfall, melting and glaciation—can be felt any longer within these forms, and so they assume now an aura of timeless removal from the flux of things. In just the way in which the Alps symbolize the two kinds of formlessness I have mentioned, so they also here show themselves to be formless in time. The Alps are not so much life's negation—for any mere “negation” still stands under the aegis and presupposition of life—but rather life's *Other*. They are the image of untouchability by movement in time as the form that life takes. Firn landscape, one might say, is absolutely “ahistorical” landscape. Here, where not even summer and winter can be distinguished, all links to human lives and fates coming and going in time—always at least partly evident in other kinds of landscape—are sundered. Almost always, the picture our soul forms of its world takes after our form of existence in that world; but in the timeless world of the firn landscape, none of this can occur because no life of ours is possible there. And now we see a more historical side of the contrast of the mountains with the seas as symbols of a continually moving human fate. Where seas and oceans have been most intimately bound up with our fates and development as a species, time and again connecting countries to one another, mountains have invariably functioned more negatively in human history, isolating peoples from one another, separating them and hindering interaction between them.

And finally, the Alps also run against life in another way, having to do with our sense of the relevance of differences of quantities and qualities of things in experience. As human beings, we are creatures of measure. All phenomena appear to us as having or being either quantitatively more or

quantitatively less of their own quality. But quantities of things are relative. Large amounts of things exist only because small amounts of things exist; high things exist only because low things exist; frequent things only because rare things; and so on. Nothing is measurable for us other than by relations. Every pole of something has a counterpole, and nothing strikes our attention other than in contrast to something else in its own frame of being. Now, it should be evident how important this is for any felt sense of unity in mountainous landscapes. For in any mountainous environment, where nothing “above” is possible other than by relation to things “below,” and nothing “below” other than by relation to things “above,” these spatial relations are so much more closely woven together than in any lower-lying landscape, where individual spaces of land can be delineated from one another more or less easily. In mountainous landscapes, the different parts only essentially connect to one another in their mutual relativity—in a unity of the aesthetic image, akin to the unity of an organism composed of vitally interacting parts. So all the more miraculous must it seem that we do not in fact experience the Alps at their greatest altitude and sublimity until all valleys, vegetation, and dwellings of man have vanished into the firm—until, that is, all things low-lying, as conditions of existence of all things high, have disappeared. All these other forms of the landscape, particularly vegetation, point inherently downward, suggest feelings of roots under ground, and make us sense everywhere the depths on which everything reposes. In the firm, however, everything is already “complete.” Because this landscape is void of all relation, of all contrast and opposition to itself, it demands no special additional work of completion or redemption by any vision of an artist and instead simply asserts its own indomitable force of inherent existence. This may be a yet deeper reason why the Alps have been more rarely an object of painting than other landscapes. But, to be sure, it is only in the pure firm landscape that things below seem to forfeit their right to existence. Only here, where the valley floor disappears altogether, is a pure relation to an “above” produced; only here are we no longer relatively but absolutely “high,” rather than such and such a number of meters above sea level. Nothing in this mystical sublime compares with the “beautiful” in Alpine landscapes: the snowy mountains form no mere crown on a felicitous, lower-lying landscape nested in forested valleys with meadows and huts and suffused by their merry atmosphere. Only when all this has been left behind is something fundamentally, metaphysically novel discovered: an absolute highness, void of all relative depth. One side of a correlation, which ought not be able to exist without the other, is nonetheless present resplendently. This is the Alps’ paradox: all highness depends on the relativity of “above” and “be-

low” and is conditioned by depths, yet highness here exists as something unconditioned that not only requires no depths but only first emerges at the point that all depths disappear. Herein lies that feeling of redemption we owe to the firm landscape in solemn moments and feel most decisively in its way of standing over against life as life’s Other. For life is the ceaseless relativity of antitheses, of one thing always determined by another as its opposite: a moving flux of beings constantly conditioned in their being. At the sight of the Alps, however, we sense a symbol of life redeeming itself at its highest point of intensity in something that ceases to conform to life’s form and instead transcends life and stands over against it.

The Philosophy of Landscape

On innumerable occasions we will have walked in open nature and taken note, with varying degrees of attentiveness, of trees and watercourses, meadows and cornfields, hills and houses, and of the myriad changes in light and clouds. But just because we pay closer attention to one particular item or bring together in one glance a variety of differing ones, this does not amount to our being conscious of perceiving a "landscape." For that to occur, our attention may not be captured by just one item within our field of vision. For there to be a landscape, our consciousness has to acquire a wholeness, a unity, over and above its component elements, without being tied to their specificity or mechanistically composed of them. If I am not mistaken, we are rarely aware that a landscape is not formed out of an ensemble of all kinds of things spread out side by side over a piece of ground and viewed in their immediacy. The peculiar mental process that generates a landscape out of all this, I will here try to analyze in reference to its preconditions and forms.

To begin with, that the visual objects on a spot of earth are part of "nature," and they may even include human creations (which, however, would need to integrate themselves into it, as opposed to city streets with their department stores and automobiles), this in itself is not sufficient to turn this spot into a landscape. By nature we mean the infinite interconnectedness of objects, the uninterrupted creation and destruction of forms, the flowing unity of an event that finds expression in the continuity of temporal and spatial existence. When we designate a part of reality as nature, we mean one of two things. We can mean an inner quality marking it off from art and artifice, from something intellectual or historical. Or we may intend it as a representation and symbol of that wholeness of being whose flux is audible therein. To talk of "a piece of nature" is in fact a self-contradiction. Nature is not composed of pieces. It is the unity of a whole. The instant anything is parceled out from this wholeness, it is

no longer nature pure and simple, since this whole can be “nature” only within that unbounded unity, only as a wave within that total flux.

As far as landscape is concerned, however, a boundary, a way of being encompassed by a momentary or permanent field of vision, is quite essential. Its material foundation or its individual pieces may simply be regarded as nature. But conceived of as a “landscape,” it demands a status for itself, which may be optical, aesthetic, or mood-centered. There needs to be a unique, characterizing detachment from that indivisible unity of nature in which each piece serves as a transit-point for the totality of the forces of existence. To conceive of a piece of ground and what is on it as a landscape, this means that one now conceives of a segment of nature itself as a separate unity, which estranges it from the concept of nature.

This seems to me to be happening when someone shapes a field of apperception into the category of “landscape”: a self-contained perception intuited as a self-sufficient unity, which is nevertheless intermeshed with an infinite expansiveness and a continual flux. It is contained within boundaries that do not apply to the intimation of the oneness of God, the wholeness of nature, which continuously reshapes and dissolves the self-imposed boundaries of a given landscape. Torn away and standing on its own, a landscape is permeated by an opaque awareness of this infinite interconnectedness. In the same way, the work of a human being stands as an objective, self-contained construct that nevertheless retains an interconnectedness, though one hard to express, with the whole soul, the full vitality of its creator, sustained and still perceptibly permeated by it. Nature, which in its deep being and meaning knows nothing of individuality, is transfigured into an individuated “landscape” by the human gaze that divides things up and forms the separated parts into specific unities.

It has frequently been stated that an actual “feeling for nature” [*Naturgefühl*] emerged only in modernity, arising out of lyricism, romanticism, etc. I consider this a superficial view. Rather, it is the religions of more primitive epochs that seem to me to reveal a particularly deep feeling for “nature.” It is only the sensibility for that particular formation, a “land-scape,” that emerged quite late; and that is because this creation necessitated a tearing away from that unitary feeling of the whole of nature. The individualization of the internal and external forms of human existence, the dissolution of primordial ligatures into differentiated and self-contained entities constitutes the grand formula of the post-medieval world. This formula also resulted in our coming to recognize landscape within the realm of nature. It is no surprise that, in antiquity and the Middle Ages, there was no awareness [*Gefühl*] of landscape, since this object as such had not yet come into being with that inner resoluteness and

with its self-contained contours, which eventually came to be confirmed by the rise of landscape painting that, as it were, capitalized on this gain.

That one part of a whole should become a self-contained whole itself, emerging out of it and claiming from it a right to its own existence, this in itself may be the fundamental tragedy of spirit. This condition came into its own in modernity and assumed the leading role in the processes of culturalization. Underlying the plurality of relationships that interconnect individuals, groups, and social formations, there is a pervading dualism confronting us: the individual entity strives toward wholeness, while its place within the larger whole only accords it the role of a part. We are aware of being centered both externally and internally because we, together with our actions, are mere constituents of larger wholes that place demands upon us as one-dimensional parts in the division of labor. Yet, we nevertheless want to be rounded and self-determining beings, and to establish ourselves as such.

Out of this arise countless struggles and disunities in our social and technical-practical, intellectual, and moral lives. Yet that same form, in relation to nature, produces the conciliatory richness of landscape. Here is something individual, contained, self-contented, that at the same time continues to adhere to the whole of nature and its oneness without contradiction. It cannot be denied, however, that landscape only comes into being in a process whereby the life that pulsates within our perceptions and emotions tears itself away from the homogeneity of nature. The specific object thereby created and transposed onto quite a new level then, so to speak, from within itself opens up again toward that total-life [*All-Leben*] and reabsorbs the infinite into its still intact boundaries.

What kind of law, we need to ask further, determines this selection and composition? Whatever it is that we can take in through just one glance or from within our momentary field of vision is not landscape but, at most, the raw material toward it. In the same way a row of books placed next to each other does not by itself add up to “a library” — until and unless, and without a single book being added or removed, a certain unifying concept comes to encompass and give a form to them. However, the subliminal formula that generates landscape as such cannot be evidenced in an equally simple way, and in principle may not be so at all. The raw material of landscape provided by bare nature is so infinitely varied and changes from case to case. Consequently, the points of view and the forms that compose its elements into a sense-perceptual unity will also be highly variable. The route toward gaining an approximate idea, at least, seems to me to lead through landscape as an art form in painting. This is because an understanding of the problematic at issue revolves around

the following theme: landscape, as a work of art, comes about as the progressive continuation and cleansing of a process in which a landscape, in its ordinary sense, grows out of mere impressions of discrete objects of nature. An artist delineates one part within the chaotic stream and infiniteness of the immediately given world, and conceives of and forms it as a unitary phenomenon. This now derives its meaning from within itself, having severed all threads connecting it to the world around it and having retied them into its own center. We follow the same procedure—only in a less developed, less fundamental degree, and in a fragmentary way unsure of its boundaries—as soon as we perceive a “landscape” in place of a meadow, a house, a brook, and passing clouds.

What this reveals is one of the most profound determinations of all mental and productive life. Everything we call culture is comprised of a series of autonomous entities which have positioned themselves in their self-sufficient pureness beyond the entanglement of everyday life that runs its practical and subjectively oriented course. As examples, I refer to science, art, and religion. These can certainly demand to be pursued and comprehended in accordance with their own autonomous ideas and norms, freed from the turbidness of the randomness of life. But there exists yet another route toward their understanding, or rather, a route to yet another kind of understanding of them. It is the case that our empirical life, undirected as it is by principles, so to speak, contains continually the rudiments and constituents of those formations which struggle to raise themselves out of life and toward their very own development that crystallizes around life’s ideational core. It is not as though these creations of mind were already in place and our life, as it proceeds on the basis of whatever kind of desire and goal, merely appropriated particular segments of these creations and incorporated them. What I wish to refer to here is not this permanently occurring process, but one that runs in the exactly opposite direction.

Life, in its continuous flow, generates sentiments and modes of behavior one could call religious—even though they are in no way experienced as falling under the concept of religion or indeed as belonging to it. Love and impressions of nature, spiritual uplift, and dedication to the wider or narrower communities of mankind, these frequently enough are bathed in this light—which, however, is not reflected onto them by a fully fledged “religion.” Instead, religion itself comes about in that this characteristic element, which arises in the course of such experiences and co-determines their experiential mode, elevates itself into its own state of being. Transcending its substance, and in an act of self-creation, this element then condenses into the purified formations that bring it to expression,

namely, the deities, irrespective of any truth-content or significance these formations may possess in their self-existence and detached from all their fore-forms. Religiosity sets the tone for the way we experience innumerable sentiments and fateful events. It does not derive or, so to speak, emerge out of religion at a later stage, but rather the reverse. Religion grows out of religiosity, insofar as the latter comes to create substantive meanings out of itself, rather than merely shaping and modulating those already available in life and woven further into life.

The same applies in the case of science. Its methods and norms, in all their untouched superiority and assumed grandeur, are but forms of everyday cognition that gain an independent and absolute status. Ordinary cognition is a mere practice-oriented, ancillary means, somehow accidentally enmeshed with the empirical totality of life. In science, however, cognition has become its own end, a realm of the intellect ruled by its own legislature. Yet this immense transposition of its center and meaning is still nothing more than the cleansed and principled version of knowledge that is distributed throughout life and the everyday world.

A banal enlightenment approach tries to glue together the ideal provinces of value out of the baser elements of life. It aims to deduce religion from feelings of fear and hope and ignorance, and it considers knowledge as deriving from empirical chance events, serving only the senses. We need to realize, however, that idealist energies from the outset coexist with the practical ones that shape our lives. Provinces of value coalesce around the purified state of particular ideas in that these idealist energies assume legislative control over their own realm and create their own substantive meanings instead of just adapting themselves to external material.

This is also the essential formula of art. It would be entirely foolish to derive it from the impulse to imitate, to play, or other extraneous psychological sources, even though these may intermingle with its true well-spring and have a part in influencing its results. But art as art can only rise out of an artistic dynamic. It is not that art has its starting point in the completed work of art. It emerges out of life, but only because and to the extent to which everyday life already contains these formative powers. What we call art is their purified, autonomous outcome, which determines its own subject matter. To be sure, there is no concept of “art” involved in everyday speech or in gesturing, or when one’s perception forms its object according to criteria of meaning and coherence. Yet in all of these there are operative formative modes which in retrospect, as it were, we have to call artistic. If they form an object by themselves, autonomous and detached from all ancillary connections with life, one that is exclusively their own production, this then forms a “work of art.”

It is only after traversing this wide terrain that our interpretation of landscape gains its justification with reference to the ultimate grounds that form our conception of the world. Whenever we really do see a landscape, over and above an aggregate of separate natural objects, then we have a work of art *in statu nascendi*. It is noticeable how often we hear from non-artists, who are impressed by a landscape they are looking at, the wish that they were able to paint in order to capture this view. This is more than just a wish for a permanent reminder, which is just as likely to arise in the case of many other impressions of a different kind. It is rather more the case that, in this very act of beholding, the artistic form that is alive within us, however embryonically, has come to realize itself. While not endowed with enough creative capacity itself, it at least vibrates in the wish for it and its internal anticipation. There are a number of reasons one's artistic potential reaches a degree of realization precisely in relation to a landscape which is higher than when one beholds a human individual, for example. First, we approach a landscape with a degree of objectivity, which cannot be achieved as easily and immediately in the case of another human being, and which benefits the artistic process. In the case of the latter, we are constrained by subjective distractions, such as a feeling of sympathy or antipathy, by practical involvement, and, above all, by one still largely unexamined presentiment of what this person could come to mean to us if he or she became a factor in our life. This is an opaque and complex feeling which, to my mind, plays a significant part in determining the whole of our perception of even the most unfamiliar individual.

Adding to the difficulty of maintaining a composed distance toward the human image, as compared to a landscape, there is a contributing factor, which we have to call the resistance of the former against its being formed artistically. In our perception of a landscape, we can group together its parts in this or that way; the emphasis between them can be shifted in many ways, or the relationship of center and boundary can be varied. The human figuration, however, determines all this out of itself. It has accomplished a synthesis around its own center from within itself, and thereby demarcated itself unambiguously. In its own natural configuration it somehow already approximates a work of art. This may be the reason why, to the less practiced eye, the photograph of a person may more easily be confused with a portrait than is the case with the photograph of a landscape and the reproduction of a landscape in painting. The refiguration of the human appearance is not an issue. It alone results directly, as it were, from what is given in its appearance, while there still exists an intermediary stage before the painting of a landscape. Artistic categories already have to have been at work in the forming of objects of

nature into a “landscape” in the usual sense. In this respect, it lies on the road toward a work of art as a proto-form of it. The norms operative in this initial accomplishment can consequently be grasped from the vantage point of the work of art, which is the purified, and now autonomous, result of these norms.

The current state of aesthetics does not allow us, however, to assert anything beyond this fundamental point. There would not be any great difficulty in stating the rules which landscape painting has evolved relating to the choice of object and perspective, to lighting and spatial illusion, to composition and harmony of color. But these rules, as it were, refer only to that part of the formation of our first and singular impression of an object into a landscape painting which lies one stage above the general perception of a landscape. But that which leads toward the latter has been taken in, and naturally presupposed, by these rules. Even though it lies in the same direction as artistic creation, it cannot be ascertained from these rules since they only specify what defines art in the narrower sense.

To be sure, one of these formative factors imposes the depth of its problematic in such a way that it cannot be ignored. We say that a landscape arises when a range of natural phenomena spread over the surface of the earth is comprehended by a particular kind of unity, one that is distinct from the way this same visual field is encompassed by the causally thinking scholar, the religious sentiments of a worshipper of nature, the teleologically oriented tiller of the soil, or a strategist of war. The most important carrier of this unity may well be the “mood,” as we call it, of a landscape. When we refer to the mood of a person, we mean that coherent ensemble that either permanently or temporarily colors the entirety of his or her psychic constituents. It is not itself something discrete, and often also not an attribute of any one individual trait. All the same, it is that commonality where all these individual traits interconnect. In the same way, the mood of a landscape permeates all its separate components, frequently without it being attributable to any one of them. In a way that is difficult to specify, each component partakes in it, but a mood prevails which is neither external to these constituents, nor is it composed of them.

This characteristic difficulty in locating the mood of a landscape continues at a deeper level with the question: to what extent can the mood of a landscape be located within it, objectively, given that it is a mental state, and can thus reside only in the emotional reflexes of the beholder and not in unconscious external objects? These problems then intersect with the issue that is really of concern to us here. Mood is an essential—or maybe the essential—dimension that integrates all component elements into a landscape as a perceptual unit. But then, how can this be, considering that

a landscape acquires a “mood” only at the precise moment of being seen as a unitary phenomenon, and not as its antecedent, the mere aggregate of disparate pieces?

These are not artificially induced complications. Like an infinite number of similar ones, they become unavoidable as soon as thought dismembers ordinary lived experience, which is in itself undivided, and then attempts to comprehend it through the interrelations and assemblages of these component parts. But it may precisely be this realization that assists us here. Could it not be that the mood of a landscape and the perceptual unity of a landscape are one and the same thing, only viewed from two different angles, both one and the same means that can be expressed in a dual way, through which a beholder brings about a landscape, this particular landscape, out of adjoining pieces?

This approach would not be without analogy. When we love someone, then it seems that we, at the outset, possess some kind of fixed image of him or her toward which our feelings are then directed. In reality, however, that person, as initially perceived in an objective way, is a quite different one from the person we love. Our image specifically of him or her only arises together with our love for him or her. Especially someone considering this with great sensitivity would not be able to say whether the change in the image has given rise to love, or whether love has brought about a change in the image of that person. The same is the case when we reconstruct within ourselves the feeling arising from a lyrical poem. If this feeling did not directly arise in us while reading its words, then they would not constitute a poem, but a plain communication only. On the other hand, if we did not take its words as forming a poem, then they could not arouse that feeling within us.

In relation to such issues, it is obvious that the question has been posed wrongly were we to ask whether our unitary perception of an object or the feeling arising together with it comes first or second. There prevails, in fact, no cause-and-effect relationship between them, and, if anything, both together would count as cause and both as effect. Thus, both the unifying move which brings landscape as such into being, and the mood that a landscape projects at us and through which we comprehend it, are merely the result of a subsequent dismantling of one and the same psychic act.

This thus sheds some light on the opaqueness of the problem, hinted at earlier, of how one can justifiably assert that mood, an exclusively human act of consciousness, can be seen as a quality inherent in landscapes, meaning here an assemblage of natural objects not endowed with spirit. Such an assertion would indeed be illusory were landscape really only to con-

sist of such an intermingling of trees and hills, watercourses and stones. But landscape is itself already an ideational formation. It can nowhere be touched or entered into as a mere external entity. Landscape exists only through the unifying powers of the soul, as the intertwining of something given with our creative capacities. It is something that cannot be expressed through mechanical analogies. Mood thus attains its whole objectivity as landscape from within the scope of our formative acts. Since mood is a distinct expression of, and specific dynamic within, these acts, it gains its full objectivity in and through landscape.

Is not the feeling within a lyric poem an indubitable reality, one that is as independent of all arbitrariness and subjective frames of mind as are rhythm and rhyme? This is the case, even though one cannot find a trace of precisely this feeling within the individual words which make up the surface manifestation of a poem, which the natural process of linguistic creation has generated, as it were, unawares. But exactly because a poem, as this particular objective creation, is already a product of the human spirit, that feeling is, for this reason, a factually real one. A poem cannot be separated from that reality, as little as can vibrations of the air, once they have reached our ear, be separated from the sound through which they become a reality for us.

We should not, however, conceive of mood here as one of those abstract concepts we employ as a means of description in order to subsume under them the generality of highly varied moods. We call a landscape cheerful or serious, heroic or monotone, exciting or melancholic, and thereby allow its very own immediate mood to fuse with a layer which, intrinsically, is also psychically secondary and which retains of the original vividness only its unspecific reverberations. Rather, the mood of a landscape pointed to here is one pertaining to just this particular landscape and never to any other, even though both may possibly be subsumed under a general concept, such as melancholic. Such a conceptually typical mood may, however, be attributed to a landscape already formed. But the mood immediately pertaining to it, which would be modified through the alteration of just one single line, this mood is innate to a landscape and is inseparably fused with the coming into being of its unitary form.

It is a prevalent error retarding our understanding of art, and of the vividness of perception as a whole, to seek the mood of a landscape only in those general, literary-lyrical concepts relating to feeling. The actual and unique mood pertaining to a landscape can be characterized by such abstractions only as inadequately as the vividness of perception can be described with concepts. Even if mood were nothing more than the feeling evoked by a landscape in an observer, then this feeling, too, in its actual

determinateness, would exclusively be tied to just this, and precisely this, landscape and could not be transferred to any other. It is only by effacing its immediate and actual character that I can reduce it to general concepts, such as melancholic, cheerful, serious, or exciting.

While mood refers to a general dimension, that is, something not just pertaining to an isolated element of this precise landscape, it does not, however, signify a generality across many different landscapes. For this reason, it is possible to refer to mood and the coming into being of landscape, that is, the forming of its individual parts into a whole, as one and the same act. It is as if our various psychical energies, those to do with perception and with feeling, as if each one of them, in their own tonality, were just uttering one and the same word in unison. In front of a landscape, the wholeness of the being of nature strives to draw us into itself. Especially in instances such as these, it is evident that being torn into a perceiving and a feeling self is doubly erroneous. We relate to a landscape, whether in nature or in art, as whole beings. The act that generates it for us is immediately one of perception and feeling, and it only gets split into these separated constituents through subsequent reflection. An artist is someone who carries out the formative act of contemplative perception and feeling in such a pure form and with such vigor, that the given material gets completely absorbed and then, seemingly out of its own, comes to be created anew. While the rest of us remain more tied to this material, and still tend to note only this or that separate part, only the artist really sees and creates “landscape.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Portraiture

The essays in this chapter address questions of expression and selfhood in portrait painting and the human figure. "The Aesthetic Significance of the Face" (Die ästhetische Bedeutung des Gesichts) appeared in June 1901 (English translation 1959). "Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*" (Das Abendmahl Leonardo da Vincis) appeared in February 1905 in the Berlin newspaper *Der Tag*. It is known that Simmel visited Leonardo's fresco in Milan at the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie with his student and friend Margarete von Bendemann in August 1903 (GSG 7:361). "Aesthetics of the Portrait: Part I" (Aesthetik des Porträts) appeared in April 1905. "Aesthetics of the Portrait: Part II" (Das Problem des Porträts) appeared shortly after Simmel's death in October 1918 in the journal *Neue Rundschau*, based on a lecture by Simmel in Amsterdam from March 1918, given shortly after a second reading of his influential address "The Conflict of Modern Culture," first presented in Berlin in January 1918 (GSG 13:410).

The Aesthetic Significance of the Face

The human face is of unique importance in the fine arts. This importance, however, is described only in very general and approximate terms when it is said that in the features of the face the soul finds its clearest expression. What is it about the face that makes this possible; and, apart from this question, does the face have certain intrinsic aesthetic qualities that account for its significance as a subject in art?

The essential accomplishment of the mind may be said to be its transformation of the multiplicity of the elements of the world into a series of unities. In the mind, things separated in space and time converge in the unity of a picture, a concept, a sentence. The closer the interrelation of the parts of a complex, and the livelier their interaction (which transforms their separateness into mutual dependence), the more the whole appears to be pervaded by mind. For this reason, the organism, with the intimate relation of its parts and the involvement of the parts in the unity of the life process, is only once removed from mind itself.

Of all the parts of the human body, the face has the highest degree of this kind of inner unity. The primary evidence of this fact is that a change which is limited, actually or apparently, to one element of the face—a curl of the lips, an upturning of the nose, a way of looking, a frown—immediately modifies its entire character and expression. Aesthetically, there is no other part of the body whose wholeness can as easily be destroyed by the disfigurement of only one of its elements. For this is what unity out of and above diversity means: that fate cannot strike any one part without striking every other part at the same time—as if through the root that binds the whole together. Of the rest of the body, the hand, although closest to the face in organic character, still cannot compare with it. The marvelous interrelation and working together of the fingers give one the impression that each is, in reality, mutually independent—when, in fact, one hand always refers to the other; only the two together realize

the idea, as it were, of “hand.” The unity of the face is accentuated by the head’s resting on the neck, which gives the head a sort of peninsular position vis-à-vis the body, and makes it seem to depend on itself alone—an effect intensified by the fact that the body is clothed up to the neck.

Unity has meaning and significance only to the degree to which it contrasts with the multiplicity of whose synthesis it consists. Within the perceptible world, there is no other structure like the human face which merges such a great variety of shapes and surfaces into an absolute unity of meaning. The ideal of human cooperation is that completely individualized elements grow into the closest unity which, though composed of these elements, transcends each of them and comes into being exclusively through their cooperation. Among all perceptible things, this fundamental formula of life comes closest to being realized in the human face. By the spirit of a society we mean the content of those interactions which go beyond the individual—although not the individuals—which is more than their sum, yet still their product. In the same manner, the soul, lying behind the features of the face and yet visible in them, is the interaction, the reference of one to the other, of these separate features. From a purely formal viewpoint, the face, with its variety and diversity of parts, forms, and colors, would really be something quite abstruse and aesthetically unbearable—if, that is, the complexity were not at the same time a complete unity.

In order to make this unity aesthetically effective, it is essential that the spatial relation among the facial elements be allowed to shift only within very narrow limits. For aesthetic effect, a form must embrace its parts and hold them together. Any stretching and spreading of extremities is ugly because it interrupts and weakens their connection with the center of the phenomenon; that is, it weakens the perceivable domination of the mind over the circumference of our being. The large gestures of baroque figures, whose limbs appear to be in danger of breaking off, are repugnant because they disavow what is properly human—the absolute encompassment of each detail by the power of the central ego.

The structure of the face makes such centrifugal movement—that is, despiritualization—almost impossible from the outset. And when it does to some degree take place, as in gaping and staring, it is not only particularly unaesthetic, but, in addition, it is precisely these two expressions which indicate, as we now understand, the “loss of senses,” spiritual paralysis, the momentary absence of spiritual control.

The impression of spirituality is also strengthened by the fact that the face shows the influence of gravity less than the other parts of the body. The human figure is the scene in which psychophysiological impulses

struggle with physical gravity. The manner of fighting and resolving this battle repeatedly in each succeeding moment determines the style in which individuals and types present themselves to us. The fact that in the face mere bodily weight need not be overcome to any noticeable degree strengthens the impression of its spirituality. Here, too, suggestions of the opposite—closed eyes, head dropping to the chest, slack lips, lax musculature merely obeying gravity—are at the same time evidences of reduced spiritual life.

Man, however, is not simply the bearer of mind. He is not like a book in which spiritual contents are found but which, as the mere locus of the contents, is indifferent to their intrinsic nature. His spirituality has the form of individuality. The face strikes us as the symbol, not only of the spirit, but also of an unmistakable personality. This feeling has been extraordinarily furthered in the period since the beginning of Christianity by the covering of the body. The face was the heir of the body, for in the degree to which nakedness was the custom, the body presumably had its share in the expression of individuality. The body's capacity in this respect, however, probably differs from that of the face in several ways.

To begin with, bodies differ to the trained eye just as faces do; but unlike faces, bodies do not at the same time interpret these differences. A definite spiritual personality is indeed connected with a definite, unmistakable body, and can at any time be identified in it. Under no circumstances, however, can the body, in contrast to the face, signify the kind of personality.

Further, the body by its movements—perhaps equally as well as the face—can certainly express psychological processes. However, only in the face do these movements become visible in features which reveal the soul clearly and ultimately. The flowing beauty we call gracefulness must recreate itself with every movement of the hand, bend of the torso, ease of step: it leaves no lasting form in which the individual movement is crystallized. In the face, on the contrary, the emotions typical of the individual—hate or timorousness, a gentle smile or a restless spying of advantage, and innumerable others—leave lasting traces. In the face alone, emotion first expressed in movement is deposited as the expression of permanent character. By virtue of this singular malleability, only the face becomes the geometric locus, as it were, of the inner personality, to the degree that it is perceptible. In this respect, Christianity, whose tendency to cover the body and permit man's appearance to be represented solely by his face, has been the schoolmaster for those who would seek consciousness of individuality.

Besides these formal means of aesthetic representation of individuality,

the face has others which serve it on behalf of the opposite principle. The fact that the face consists of two halves which are similar to one another gives it an inner calm and balance which attenuate the excitement and intensity of the purely individual elements. For the very reason that the two halves usually do not present themselves exactly alike (owing to differences in profiling and lighting), each is a preparation for, or a fading-away of, the other. The separateness of the individual features is complemented and balanced by the essential comparability of the two halves.

Like all symmetrical forms, that of the face is in itself anti-individualistic. In the symmetrical structure, either of the two parts can be inferred from the other and each points toward a higher principle which governs them both. In all situations, rationalism strives for symmetry, whereas individuality always involves something irrational, something which eludes every predetermining principle. Sculpture, therefore, which presents the halves of the face symmetrically, is confined to a more general or typical style that lacks ultimate individual differentiation; painting, on the other hand, by virtue of the difference in the immediate appearance of the halves of the face resulting from various positions of the profile and proportions of light and shadow, reveals from the beginning a more individualistic nature. The face is the most remarkable aesthetic synthesis of the formal principles of symmetry and of individuality. As a whole, it realizes individualization: but it does so in the form of symmetry, which controls the relations among the parts.

Finally, there is another formal relationship, already mentioned, which gives the face its aesthetic significance and uniqueness. Much of the aesthetic character of objects which are changeable or which exist in many similar forms is determined by the extent to which a modification of the parts must occur in order to result in a change in the overall impression. Here, too, the ideal of conservation of energy is exemplified: in principle, an object is aesthetically more impressive or useful, the more sensitively it responds as a whole to the alteration of its smallest element. For this shows the sensitivity and strength of the interrelation of its parts, its inner logic, as it were, which requires that every change in a premise inevitably be followed by a change in the conclusion. Aesthetic contemplation and organization abolish the indifference of elements, a characteristic which belongs only to their theoretical images. Those objects, therefore, in which the mutual indifference of elements is suspended and the fate of each determines that of all others are the most receptive to aesthetic treatment.

The face, in fact, accomplishes more completely than anything else the task of creating a maximum change of total expression by a minimum

change of detail. The universal problem of art is to elucidate the formal elements of things by relating them to one another—to interpret the perceptible through its connection with the perceptible. Nothing seems more suited to this than the face, in which the character of each feature is integrated with the character of every other—that is, of the whole. The cause and effect of this circumstance is the immense mobility of the face. In an absolute sense, it commands only very slight changes of position; yet because of the influence of each change on its total character, the impression of intensified modifications, so to speak, results. It is as if a maximum of movements were invested even in its state of rest, or as if this state of rest were the non-extended moment toward which innumerable movements have tended, from which innumerable movements will come.

The height of this extraordinarily dynamic effect is achieved with a minimal movement by the eye. In painting, in particular, the eye derives its effect not only from its relation to the totality of the features—a relation it mediates by its potential mobility—but also from the importance of the gaze of the persons portrayed in interpreting and structuring the space in the picture itself. There is no other thing which, staying so absolutely in place, seems to reach beyond it to such an extent; the eye penetrates, it withdraws, it circles a room, it wanders, it reaches as though behind the wanted object and pulls it toward itself. The artist's use of the direction, intensity, and whole formal character of the gaze for purposes of dividing and elucidating pictorial space needs a special study.

The eye epitomizes the achievement of the face in mirroring the soul. At the same time, it accomplishes its finest, purely formal end as the interpreter of mere appearance, which knows no going back to any pure intellectuality behind the appearance. It is precisely this achievement with which the eye, like the face generally, gives us the intimation, indeed the guarantee, that the artistic problems of pure perception and of the pure, sensory image of things—if perfectly solved—would lead to the solution of those other problems which involve soul and appearance. Appearance would then become the veiling and unveiling of the soul.

Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*

Among artists of the highest rank, natural senescence sometimes seems to lead aging personalities to produce their finest and purest work. When capacities to create forms with sensuous appeal and steadfast dedication to the real begin to fade, only the very greatest, deepest, and most authentic contours of an artist's creative life remain. Thus it is with Goethe in *Faust Part Two*, or Beethoven in the Last Quartets. Where old age in the ordinary person gnaws away meaninglessly, terminating essential and inessential qualities alike, it is the privilege of a few great men that nature, even as it destroys them, does so as if at a higher plane and turns decay into a means of distilling from everything relatively superficial in them their truest eternal work.

In the sparse remains of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* in the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, after centuries of damage and deterioration of all kinds, this fate of great artists seems to have migrated to a great work of art itself. For what survives in this work seems to burst forth undivided from the depths of all art ever made with such absolute singular force, as though all the lost daubs of paint had been brushed away from a surface to reveal even more visibly an essential core. It is indeed as though, in just the moment before its last lights dim, this work's whole power and inner eternity shone out to us from behind a shattered outer shell.

In *The Last Supper*, the tasks Leonardo set himself became the common patrimony of all subsequent art. If the artistic problems arising for the first time in this painting were not simultaneously solved more perfectly by this work than at any time after it, an inadequate understanding of previous developments would make it hard for us to appreciate Leonardo's unparalleled achievement in this painting and the complete novelty of the world created by it. For not only is this work a first beginning; it is also a last end. Above all, for the first time in this work a situation is

shown that captures a plurality of individuals and gives to each the most powerful and complete expression of their individual being. To be sure, Giotto and Duccio also paint images of crowds in shared states of arousal. But their figures tend to remain anonymous selfless bearers of an affect, or mere examples of the general concept of a mood or passion. In Leonardo's masterpiece, by contrast, common arousal succeeds, as never before, in pushing to the fore the deepest uniquely felt aspects of personal being. A miraculous event here takes place as something self-evident, whereby an external happening—Christ's words "One of you will betray me"—addresses a dozen completely different individuals and drives each to the fullest articulation and revelation of his individual character. The proceedings and the participants are so structured around one another that Christ's words touch each single disciple's moment of unique being. For the first time, that full inner freedom of personality with which the Renaissance overcame the particularism of medieval man and lent its stamp to the modern age is achieved in a group painting—that freedom for which the world and all its affairs are nothing but a means and occasion for the ego to find itself. All tension between enduring character of the person, on the one hand, and momentary states of arousal caused by outside forces, on the other, is here resolved into a higher unity. The commotion of the apostles becomes now the canal through which the authentic being of the figures floods outward spontaneously and reveals corporeally an immense diversity of temperaments, moods, feelings, and depths of the individual soul. It is, in general, art's meaning and pleasure for us to illuminate elements of experience running on indifferently, incidentally, and inimically to one another in ordinary reality and to reveal these to be, in truth, deeply interconnected and mutually harmonious, each the symbol of the other. Art's harmony can be any number of things: the sense of a poem and audibility of its words, its tonal rhythm and scan, in contrast to the disorderliness of words in non-artistic utterance; or the playful freedom with which artists remove things and events from blind necessity, as though their own ground of creative being were the same as the completely different lawfulness of nature; or the sensuous attraction of lucid spatial form, of the dabs of paint and play of light and shadow that make up the grace of a portrait, which itself must also meet very different kinds of requirements of likeness to the model in all the subject's ordinary fortuity of existence and way of expressing soul. To all these ways in which art brings harmony to contingencies of life, Leonardo's painting now adds another. It shows the tremendous fate of Christ's words ringing out at one moment, not driving the disciples to any sameness of response but instead touching each deeply, personally, as if only through this commonality of

experience is that which makes each figure fully and uniquely himself brought to fullest development and exposure.

Thus it is that, perhaps uniquely in a painting of this number of figures together, no single personality is secondary in character. No personalities present in all the depth and fullness of their existence can be merely ancillary characters in a work, showing only one part of their being, while other, lead characters express everything they are within the work's domain. The problem of life in a modern society, the problem of how, from absolutely diverse and at the same time equally justified individual personalities, some kind of organic corporate unity can come to exist—this is solved here already in art, “in the image.”

Of great significance, too, is that matters take place at different instants of time in this painting. The gestures of the several clusters of figures represent Christ's words reverberating in them at different intervals of time after their utterance. For the cluster on the far right, the words must have been spoken a few minutes previously, for here we see a discussion already under way. Among some of the disciples, the first impact of the words appears to have passed, and some reflection has begun. Judas, by contrast, is depicted in the very first moment of surprise. In the figure rising on the right, we seem to see another yet moment in time, perhaps between Judas's initial reaction and the relatively calmer reactions of the others. Not only do all of these souls react to the deepest convulsion of their lives by laying before us the entire formula of their being; they also appear in the painting at the precise instant that this can be displayed most fully and clearly. This cannot be the very first moment for all of them. As Lessing once said, “First thoughts are everyone's thoughts”—meaning that immediate reflex reactions must look more or less the same, regardless of person, whereas the soul needs time to work on the first onrush of its distinctive way of feeling, and different souls need different lengths of time to do so. In Leonardo's painting, time's unity is broken in order to reveal a unity of intensities of soul at the highest point of their aesthetic effect.

Leonardo in this way made art's essential principle sovereign over a form of existence that seems most stubbornly opposed to art. Art expresses reality's contents in a completely different language from reality itself. That life's constant flux finds firm form in visual art, or that a multitude of natural colors reduce to one color in sculpture, or that tangible three-dimensionality becomes pure surface in painting—these are only the most obvious differences of art from reality. What we can sometimes take longer to realize is that depicted space too, in a picture, is in no way a copy of real space but an ideal figuration shaped by art's demands. This explains why in *The Last Supper* a completely new concept of time is

created. Here time is no all-purpose container for any random elapse of events, but rather that which fuses only those events most significant and insistent, irrespective of actual punctual succession. The compulsion that time exerts over us in everyday reality is broken as soon as life is addressed by the claims of art. The problem of temporal succession is overcome as soon as our experience of reality is suffused with artistic structures of necessity. Narrative paintings of the quattrocento still respond to real temporal form, even when they naively assemble different stages of a sequence of events into a single frame. Images of the trecento achieve a certain "timelessness," but only by surrendering that wealth of life that shows itself in temporal form. By contrast, Leonardo transforms events in time themselves into vehicles of a timeless artistic reality that dispenses with temporal conditionality and discloses only that reality's object in its pure inner meaning.

In making *The Last Supper* take place at quite different instants of real time, Leonardo's masterpiece demonstrates art's autonomy even over time in existence, where powerlessness and subjection to the given seem to be our ineluctable lot.

Aesthetics of the Portrait: Part I

When the external world exists for us as pure appearance, as pure image for the eye, unalloyed by any kind of thinking with meanings ulterior to an image's surface, we still feel, even in these interrelations of pure sensory elements, various senses of harmony or friction, of stasis or movement, balance or accentuation, typicality or individuality. Sensory impressions produce feelings in us that we express as qualities of the things themselves, as attractions and values of things' form and color: qualities void of any kind of supplementation or intensification stemming from matters deeper and spiritual that are not given to the senses but only mediated by them. When art now has at its disposal, in an unmediated fashion, pure sensory images, pure visible material, its first and direct significance will consist in those appealing, illuminating, calming, or rousing qualities and conditions it brings to our attention in and among the forms and colors on the canvas. From a human figure's total elements of existence, which ordinary awareness perceives without discriminating aspects of outer form from everything felt to derive from a person's inner psychic life, a portrait extracts this figure's pure form of visibility. The first office of the portrait is here to present purely the meaning of a person's *appearance*—not a meaning behind this appearance. For in ordinary reality, a person's pure surface appearance is by no means self-evident to us. Among our ordinary interrelationships, including even those proceeding solely from people's outward marks of appearance, psychic dimensions have such sovereign importance that our perceptions immediately move beyond exterior features toward psychic elements whose symbol these features are or appear to be. Usually the image we have of a person, present before us or recollected, consists of a confused mix of sensory elements, on the one hand, and psychic elements, on the other, which we are unwilling and unable to separate clearly. Similarly, a person's movements and actions, social background, and general contingencies of life, not to mention our own shift-

ing perspectives and interests as spectators—all of these things inhibit a clear and unambiguous picture of appearances. Faced with all of a person's multifarious fluctuating elements of existence, including nonperceptual elements, a portrait generates an abstraction of everything we genuinely *see* in this person, or genuinely *could* see if our eyes were sufficiently autonomous organs. Admittedly, such an abstraction is something a mere photograph could also accomplish. But at issue in the following, as I have hinted already, is specifically *meaning* in appearances: in question is a way in which a portrait can make us feel a sense of meaningfulness, rightness, and necessity in each outward feature of a person relative to all other such features, as distinct from any reference of these features to psychic dimensions behind appearances. Through lighting and form, through shifts of accent and selection and construction of perspective, the contribution of a portrait is to bring a subject's pure phenomenal character of appearance to a complete fullness of clarity, visual appeal, and feeling of immanent necessity for us. Herein lies one of art's profoundest differences from other ways we have of forming pictures of the world. Usually when we understand one appearance by reference to another, we posit the existence of causal powers passing from one element to the other. We assume things' appearance to be created through an exchange of energies not themselves visible as such. In declaring one appearance necessary to the extent that another behaves in such and such a way, we do not think of the second appearance's immediate surface engendering the character of the first's but solely of interconnecting movements and energies at play beneath both appearances' surfaces as merely various elements among others of the sensory manifold. By contrast, in art, a quite new type of necessity prevails. In an arabesque, for example, we may feel one part of the pattern to be continued necessarily in another part or, alternatively, only incidentally continued in it, i.e., not consequent on its relation to the first part. When an artistic form displays one particular color among others, we expect another of its colors to be linked necessarily to the first, not by any natural causal relation but purely by some perceptual relationship. The portraitist convinces us of a strict coherence of features in a face. Whether we are acquainted with the subject or not, we sense this mouth to be necessary beside this nose, and these eyes possible solely between these cheeks and forehead. All surface elements seem to justify one another reciprocally, like the curves of an arabesque, but at a level much more complex, forged from infinitely more interconnections. Often in ordinary reality, we are not in a position to understand such mutually created aspects of inner necessity in a human face and figure. All natural causality operating beneath surfaces' appearances, which inexorably produces one form on condition

of another, differs fundamentally from all conditionality prevalent among surfaces themselves. And for this latter conditionality to strike us sufficiently, the former causality often needs to be displaced and confined to a medium with a quite new refracting angle. This perfection of intrinsic vision, this excavation of the sense, appeal, and inherent lawfulness of the purely perceptual, which alone constitutes material for art—this, I have said, still depends on a capacity of visible aspects to express something invisible, something like a soul. And here the meaningfulness of a human appearance, as art alone can express it, stands on the same plane as that of arabesque.

Yet no one will be quite satisfied so far with this account of the work of art. For no theory can dismiss the claim of a portrait—always raised and often fulfilled—to present in some way the soul of a person by means of this person's corporeal being. Any adequate theory must be able in some way to solve the puzzle of relations of visible form—to whose pure presentation all art is entirely primarily devoted—harboring simultaneously something more than this and not consisting in lawful relations of surfaces alone. But popular thinking certainly goes awry in thinking of human appearances, even in art, only as ciphers of meanings, not intrinsic to appearances themselves but pertinent solely to ulterior mental contents transmitted to us by them. Such assumptions stem from the primary importance human beings tend to attach to inner psychic intentions relative to practical interests in one another, where the body and corporeal life in general function largely merely as carriers or tools. Any such way of thinking about art would mean its reduction to a role of mere means. Purging art of any ability to impart incomparably unique experiences, it would mean art's contraction to a mere branch of psychology. One very simple consideration may serve here to illustrate the contrast of roles played in the portrait by corporeal dimensions, on the one hand, and mental dimensions, on the other. In painting, acts of artistic crafting, stylizing, and unifying pertain only to exterior facets of life, while animate characteristics in a person sustain this person's specific traits of appearance, or are symbolically disclosed by these traits—in contrast to literary writing, where psychic existence and occurrences are treated in the same primary position as outward appearances in visual art. If a model's inner character were known to us by some other route, such as by personal acquaintance or testimony of someone, the portrait would perhaps awaken no interest in us, at least no artistic interest. Only as the soul of specifically *this* perceptible body before us, never in and for itself, is this character of value for us in a portrait—just as with the unique “idea” germane to a history painting, which otherwise might just as well have been communicated by

some other means. The anecdotal interest that uncultured people tend to find simply in a picture's "idea" or process of execution, which leads them to think of the picture's sensory qualities merely as means to the idea's representation, mirrors this same type of mere interest in the "soul" of a portrait. Certainly such a soul, like a history painting's subject matter, constitutes a work of art's indispensable starting point and endpoint. But no such soul or subject matter can describe art's proper accent and scope of activity as such, because art simply accepts this soul or subject as it finds it in the psychological or historical order of things and is strictly able only to create *appearances*, or to fashion and refashion them.

It seems to me that the quite novel tone that exposure to art injects into life consists precisely in inversion of this kind of practical relationship of body to soul. As art, portraiture utilizes a body's and soul's ordinarily lived interconnectivity only in order to fulfill its essential ultimate purpose, which is to produce unity, form, and clarity in its material, in human appearances. In direct contrast to everyday practice, portraiture focuses on outer life, and interprets this outer life by means of inner life—not the reverse. In generating cohesion among the elements of appearances, rendering each facial feature intelligible and meaningful through another, an artist has no better means of assistance and criteria of orientation than to think of these interrelating and interacting elements as expressing a distinct soul of some distinct character. This is that profound delight that art alone can bequeath us: the feeling that the purest, most perfect, and pellucid image of our appearance, considered purely as appearance and purely according to laws of aesthetic perception, is at the same time that which most powerfully and unambiguously conveys soul behind appearances. If unity in a face means that each part's form is necessarily determined by each other's, this reciprocity of proximate elements condenses into the unity of a soul—a unity not unlike that of the political assembly of citizens in the unity of a government, or the congregation of believers in the unity of their religion. Whether a successful attempt has been made to bring a person's perceptible existence to the most intrinsically harmonious, penetrating, and necessary state of visibility can be measured by a portrait's ability to convince us of the soul of this person.

But whence arises this parallelism of two essentially independent orders? What secret link joins perfection in pure appearances to perfection in these same appearances as revelation of things nonperceptual? In some respects, this question can and should remain a mystery—for ourselves as spectators as much as for artists. For precisely the assumption that no connection exists between the two orders makes their consonance all the more a blessing for us in a great portrait, as though art were here gracing

us with a harmony of elements of the world that are alien to one another from the standpoint of pure intellect. But scientific inquiry must nonetheless seek to shine a light on this puzzle, however shrouded and obscure it might seem.

When perceptible elements are seen free of the real forces subtending their corresponding substances, as pure visible phenomena with a special unity and lawful organization of their own, it is plain that all of these relations unfold in the eyes of a *beholder*. Though all relevant elements exist in and of themselves, like the curves of an ornament, it is only ourselves as spectators who refer them to one another, who sense their different grades of prominent lighting and location, who feel the necessary links that make one element the supposition of another, and who draw them all together in a self-sufficient unity, as their own perfect aspect of completeness for us. But a spectator's soul can only perform this unifying role by dint of its own unity, its fundamental and irreducible capacity to knit together its own manifold levels and orders of being into the unitariness of an ego, of a self-consciousness. Only a soul can perform this work of unification—but it cannot accomplish this task arbitrarily: it cannot do it for any random assortment of elements. Elements must evince certain qualities of commonality and contrast, prominence and subtlety, motion and stasis, in order to awaken a soul's unifying energy—even if unity always remains a soul's prerogative, only triggered by the things themselves without being produced by them. What strikes us as some things' heightened configuration of perceptual lucidity and lawful interrelationality needs ultimately to be understood as unitariness in appearances and therefore as precisely that phenomenal determinateness in which a spectating soul shows its unifying capacities most completely and forcefully. And this now seems to me to be the mediating link by reason of which form and shape in pure appearances become simultaneously the strongest and most unequivocal expression of soul. The sense of psychic unity this link evokes for spectators is at the same time invested by spectators into this link. To the degree to which our soul feels its own activity in a particular substance of things, it ascribes these things the same inner unity and vitality they arouse in itself.

At stake in these considerations is not some notion of an invisible inner essence behind a human face—for only ordinary everyday practices of life, not art as such, drive this way of thinking. Nor can there be any question of some general type of psyche underpinning particular features—for this must remain a matter for psychological empirical investigation. What is decisive is solely that spectators are led by an artist's work of greatest harmonic shaping and clarification of appearances to imbue ev-

ery preexistent animate character of sensory life with an extraordinary energy and determinateness, to synthesize features unusually clearly, and thus to see such features as psychic unity amid outer appearances. Unity *is* soul, for everything corporeal is insuperably disparate and dispersed. Only in and through soul are things inwardly sewn and woven together, in ways without parallel in the purely external world. Hence the unity of features we call harmony, lawfulness, and necessity in a work of art means simply this unity's being borne along by a soul that is either recognized or imparted by spectators who enact this work of unifying animation for themselves—inasmuch as the work of art's form moves a spectator's soul to the most concentrated awakening and integration of relevant sensory elements.

This may help illuminate something rather enigmatic in a portraitist's creative achievement. Given to portraitists is purely a subject's outward appearance, often without a chance to learn much of the subject's character and temperament in advance. Nevertheless, from this pure outward image, they must in some way elaborate those features that most clearly and securely express the subject's inner being. Appearances must yield a soul, and yet a soul must yield appearances! Yet this circle is resolved, for a soul, insofar as outward appearances can be its symbol, is nothing other than cohesion of unitary features. Lifted out of context, not even an eye would express anything at all, any more than would any other element of a face. To found such cohesion in pure visible appearances is therefore, in reality, to point to that entirely unifying action that is loosely called presentation of the soul by means of the body or presentation of the body by means of the soul. A portrait artist need make no psychological inference from outside to inside in the way that practical life continually requires, for a portraitist's *métier* and aims do not lie with interior but with exterior being. An artistic act of establishing a state of necessary and palpable coherence and unity in sensory appearances *is* nothing other than the process of lending sensory form to a soul, which an artist sees simply as the focal point on which all the relevant rays of appearance converge. Self-evidently of highest value for artistic agency is that this should be the case—that cohesion of features should become the sign of a soul as soon as such cohesion has been pursued to some definite and convincing level of necessity, as if crystallizing organically from all relevant relations of the sensory elements on display. This is a portraitist's or figure painter's guarantee that the formative work has succeeded—a guarantee plainly unavailable to ornamentalists or to painters of landscape or still-life images. No other such categories of art preclude accidental or arbitrary form as thoroughly as portraiture. None involve alteration in one part so

unconditionally entailing alteration in all parts and details of the work of art as whole, such as is the case with pictures of the human face. That art has almost always seen its highest and truest task as lying in depiction of the human figure stems assuredly not only from art's reproducing anthropocentric characteristics of the mental world in general but from its specific claim to unify and spiritualize appearances, here fulfilled more completely and convincingly than in any other type of subject matter. For no other sphere of artistic material has this capacity to make art's realization of this claim (and solely this claim) open our eyes at once to a wholly different order of things, to soul in existence—like the sudden illumination of colors in a Geissler tube at a definite electric voltage.* Psychic expression does not here simply *supplement* the sensory figuration—as a symbolic meaning might extend the beauty of an ornament, or sacred religious feelings an image of the Virgin Mary. Instead, sensory perfection simply *is* here a form's immediate revelation of indwelling soul. What is called animate life in a picture is nothing more and nothing less than such harmonized sensuous interconnectivity of a form's constituent parts. Human appearances afford art this unique ability to be perfect solely from the standpoint of visibility and simultaneously to be something more than visible.

Here it might be thought that prior psychological familiarity with a model ought still to be of the greatest assistance to a portrait artist. As little as it would absolve artists of tasks of elaborating and unifying appearances, might it not at least spare them certain dead ends and point them in the right direction to some extent? Yet here a difficulty arises that might seem to place everything said so far in question. The tacit assumption up to this point has been that the soul of a person made visible in general and in principle through his or her appearance is the same in qualitative character as this specific person's *actual* psychic condition. But this is in no way fully self-evident. The banal fact that like-minded souls can inhabit the most different-looking bodies, and the most diverse souls similar-looking bodies, must give pause for thought. Whence derives, then, this affinity between a particular outward appearance and a particular character of soul? One matter at least should be clear. So far as our conscious awareness is concerned, any such affinity can arise only from the regular and characteristic connections we experience of specific corporeal elements, on the one hand, and specific psychic elements, on the other. But, of course, variability of the human species, giving independence to

* [Trans.] Glass gas discharge tube: an early form of neon lighting, invented by Heinrich Geissler in 1857.

so many different traits of our existence in infinitely diverse combinations and permutations, can scramble such connections. Just as time and again within a particular soul, one trait can belong to the soul's total complexion equally as well as its exact opposite; or just as, within a face, dissonant features can grate against others—so an exterior characteristic tied normally to a specific inner psychic condition can become dissociated from the latter and joined to another such condition that previously we may have experienced as very different. If this were not the case, our judgments of other people would not be the infernally difficult and deceptive business we constantly find them to be. Human beings' rich diversity of natures consists precisely in each person's inheriting influences from countless ancestors in incalculably different configurations. To be sure, the scope and degree of this heterogeneity is limited by a person's life-capacity being tied to a certain adaptive intercompatibility of each of his or her total constituents of existence. But well beneath this threshold are the cases that concern us here—such as the dissembling angelic countenance of a mean personality, or a roguish comic spirit weighed down by inner melancholy, or a renowned dignitary concealing a real pettiness and narrowness of mind. How, under these circumstances, are painters to proceed? Are they to reshape the given appearance in such a way as to reveal the soul they may already know from ordinary experience? Are they to highlight a feature that in some way “gives the model away”? Our answers to these questions reveal our basic convictions about the nature of portraiture. If all “psychological” interpretation sees its artistic goal as lying solely in representation of psychic life as such and naively concludes from this that the model's soul, as it actually is, must be revealed at all costs in the picture—this psychological realism seems to me wholly unartistic. The portrait, as a sensuously visible picture of the sensuous visibility of man, can elaborate fundamentally only this sensuous visibility, by releasing the very fullest expression of psychic interiority available from this visibility—but such elaboration can proceed only through appearances, not away from them or toward some supplementary soul not directly symbolized in them for us. This, of course, is not to suggest that some divergence between the apparent and real soul of a person always or even frequently occurs; it is only to emphasize that in the main, no experience of any connection at all between inner and outer states would be possible if the same exterior did not indicate the same interior in most cases. Therefore, when divergence occurs and the portraitist decides for one side of the dualism—the appearance side—this only makes clear the basic precept that should prevail as well in every case of convergence of the two sides. In a sense,

an artist fashions the features of a face into an “ideal” soul, irrespectively of whether this soul corresponds to the one with which these features are associated in the real person—although this is most often the case.

An exact counterpart to this exists in poetry. Considered purely aesthetically, a poem, like any other work of art, seems to fall to us from heaven. All historical and psychological conditions, all intention and mood from which the work has been produced, lose relevance for it except insofar as they can be felt in it as discernible qualities. Any empirical psychic states of the poet that might explain psychologically the poem’s production remain in principle extraneous to the finished work’s value and significance for any reader with an interest in aesthetic judgment. To be sure, in every lyrical poem we sense the fate and feelings, the despondency and exuberance, of a soul; but this, in a sense, is only a fictive soul, lending the work meaning and substance but residing really only *in* the work, rather than behind it—not as the actual soul of a poet but as the creation or transposition of a poet’s soul into the sphere of art. The soul expressed in verse belongs to the same space as the soul that endows a portrait with unity and sense. The lucidity and potency of this soul and its mood is the degree to which a poem’s elements have attained inner perfection and integration, just as a portrait’s soul is the artistic measure of its subject’s features. We are mistaken if we imagine soul in individuals as itself constituting art’s ideal domain, without further creative recasting. A soul’s psychological reality is no less a mere segment of nature than simple physicality. Naturalism seems to me to be driven out of its last invisible refuge only when we recognize soul in a work of art as a special ideal figuration arising solely from artistic categories and responding solely to artistic demands, independently of any correspondence to a real soul behind the work, as frequently as such correspondence may in fact occur. A soul’s meaning in art is different from its meaning in reality. The sense of its appearance is proper to a painterly work of art only when it reveals itself to us as a sense of *appearance*.

Aesthetics of the Portrait: Part II

Common opinion will see the task of painting as being to present the visibility of the world in pictorial form, in accordance with artistic norms. But this visibility of the world raises a problem that this simple formulation to some extent occludes. For what we really see in a human figure (confining ourselves to this as a topic for art here), namely, pure sensory opticality, is not at all the same as what we habitually describe as the visible in daily life. What we ordinarily think we see is most often a medley of the seen and other inner and outer inputs, ranging from emotions to valuations and associations with movements and surroundings, and inflected in turn by variation in spectators' points of view and involvements and shared practical interests. In short, one human being for other human beings is a constantly shifting complex of sensations and psychic associations, of sympathies and antipathies, judgments and prejudices, memories and hopes. All this affects a person's way of physically appearing to us, and usually we have little inclination or opportunity to disentangle what we really *see*, as pure sensory opticality, from everything else. At the same time, we see too little: we overlook all number of visible aspects of a person because our attention is not directed to them and because they have no practical meaning for us. What we like to call someone's image and think we actually see is both something very much more and something very much less than this person's real visibility.

To explore this real visibility of a human figure is the first office of the portrait. A portrait shows what we see in a person purely with our sense of sight—or would or could see if this sense were sufficiently autonomous. A painter's eye discriminates a pure optical sensory image from the inevitably multifaceted and simultaneously fragmentary mesh of impressions that make up a particular person for us in our everyday practice of life. It abstracts what is purely perceptual from our rough-and-tumble reality as human beings. Of course, this is a sensuous rather than intellectual

work of abstraction, and no simple matter of literal reproduction, in the manner of photography. But at any rate, to the extent that painters can proceed only from a purely optically evident phenomenon of form and color, their artistic reworking of that which is naturally given can start only from that which is sensuously given. This is by no means as obvious as it sounds. Time and again, it is said that a portraitist lays bare what is hidden in appearances, or reveals the soul of a person, or that a picture symbolizes an idea or type, and such like. Quite how a portrait fulfills such claims made for it will be for us to determine in due course. But *prima facie*, these assertions are mistaken. No portrait's object stems from any region beyond sensuous appearances. Any such object is, rather, brought to highest clarity and appeal, and to a feeling of its inner autonomy, purely *as* appearance—through effects of form and lighting, foregrounding and backgrounding, displacement and omission, construction and selection of perspective, and so on. All appeal and autonomy of this object is carried entirely by a visible surface and its interrelated parts. A painter elicits solely from external visible evidence all natural connections linking this surface indissolubly to everything nonvisible in this body and soul, its whole life and cosmos. Purely painterly considerations of clarity, characterization, and harmony require this mouth to be shaped in such and such a way next to that nose, or these eyes between this forehead and these cheeks. The structure and dynamics of a whole subcutaneous body, of a whole relationship of the person to the world, are given in a surface's complexion. As Goethe says, "Nothing in the skin that's not in the bones."* If all of this is realized, if an artist succeeds in exhibiting a whole person in visible surface form, we may say that the task of portraitists is exclusively to express the autonomy and aesthetic significance of precisely this segment of visible reality. Their work is the completion of the sense of sight as such: the elaboration of pure appearances in their appeal and inner necessity for us.

Yet one may feel that the goals of a portrait have not yet been fully captured at this point. Leonardo's dictum that painting has just two things to represent, namely man and his soul, expresses perhaps primitively an idea that no theory of art can dismiss. It cannot be completely wrong to have thought for ages long that the picture of a person must grant access to something like a soul lying above or beyond immediate sensory, spatially optical appearances, and to have believed this more or less accomplished for us by various portraits. Any impression we have of a real person

* [Trans.] *Es ist nichts in der Haut, / was nicht im Knochen ist*; from Goethe's poem "Typus," of 1815.

standing before us seems to lend credence to this. No doubt can exist that we do not perceive another person exclusively with our eyes, as at first some mere lump of colored, moving, sound-emitting matter—in short, a puppet—and then project into this a psychic life, character, and contents by association and analogy with our own experience. Body and soul are not two modular parts of a person, the former immediately given to our senses, the latter available only by deduction from sense data. Rather, a person is, and is solely perceived by us as, a vital unity—and is bifurcated in this way only by subsequent abstraction. Not through our eyes alone, as isolated anatomical instruments, but only as whole unitary human beings do we perceive other whole human beings. Our five senses are merely the canals through which our whole perceptual capability flows. Just as the perceiving person is a whole being living wholly in his or her different functions, so from the outset a person perceived is one vitally embodied psychophysical unity, not composed subsequently by any kind of work of synthesis. Certainly, all kinds of contingencies, gaps, and imperfections of our empirical life lead us not quite to feel this unity in all its seamless roundedness and instead to find it one-sided, fragmentary, warped, and corroded by fluctuations of our powers and interests. But this unity nonetheless persists as the crucial continuous factor beneath all partial perceptions and differentiations, separations and reconstitutions, in which people manifest themselves to others. Ultimately all art rests on this touchstone of the anthropological unity of body and soul, complementary to the metaphysical unity of reality and idea. All efforts of thinkers to define body-soul connectivity in terms of interaction, parallelism, or some other notion merely seek to stitch together the sundered parts of something that is a daily immediate experience for us, namely our felt unity of life continually running through all contingent separateness of body and soul.

But once man has been fissured in this way, the two sides each become starting points for a particular conception of human existence, which then has to be in some way deciphered rather than immediately intuitively grasped. The result in practical life and art are two approaches moving both in parallel and in opposite directions to one another. Practical orientations on this view start, with some exceptions, from assumptions about a person's psychic behavior. In the plans we form and carry out, in our states of happiness and suffering, our fates of life and work, we are shaped by the ways in which other people—that is, other souls—greet us, whether they be wiser or more foolish than us, love or hate us, nurture our aspirations or block them. Nothing is more apposite in this sense than a man of such practical realism as Napoleon having famously described war as “a matter

of psychology.” Alongside our own intentions, it is claimed, it is other people’s intentions that decide our fates of life. So far as practical action is concerned, a person’s body, appearance, movements, and utterances are for others no more than a kind of handwriting, relaying to us a soul’s relevant states, moods, intentions, and energies. We may concentrate on someone’s pure bodily life for aesthetic or sensuous reasons, but in all decisive practical conduct we move directly to the person’s psychic states and developments, of which his or her bodily being is no more than a bridge, a symbol, or an interpreter for us.

But wherever art is concerned, relations of body and soul move in the opposite direction to this—for reasons indicating an especially difficult problem, as we shall see. Unity of the two divided parties of body and soul is something we sense only in a person really present to us. When a person enters the room, he or she has a total existence that we as spectators register as psychophysically one and indistinct. A picture, however, does not possess this unity. The spectator of a portrait does not behold a life in its fullness but rather a surface configuration of pure forms and dabs of paint. And so the question arises: how can this abstraction on the canvas bring forth the idea of an inner life, of some definite animate character? Mere association from habit, from having repeatedly connected the sight of a human body with a soul in some way, cannot explain this. Even if we were to recognize animate life by inference from personal experience, we would never be able to do so with any specificity. For this would be to suppose that a body exactly identical to one’s own could be known as linked to an entirely definite psychic state, which would be just as impossible and ludicrous as to believe that one could glue together the experience in question from bits and pieces of other, roughly similar experiences. For this would leave unexplained the decisive issue of the *unity* of organic experiences, greater than any simple aggregate of parts and in no way mechanically generable from them. Some other line of inquiry must therefore be taken if we are to understand a portrait’s animate character, whose purely external optical qualities I have sought to clarify.

The first relevant corollary of the foregoing is that psychic elements have a quite different role in the visual arts from their place in lyric art. Psychic life is the very stuff of artistic recasting in poetry, where it is organized, stylized, and bounded off to the point of transcending all everyday reality in pure artistic vision. In pictorial art, by contrast, psychic life is no intrinsic object of elaboration but purely an outcome of corporeal phenomena. Only as the soul or animate content of a particular visible body does it have value in portraiture—never in itself, as with poetry. The psychic aspect of a portrait lies, crucially, in what we call the *unity*

of a face, revealed or borne by its features' expressing soul through their total commonality to one another—our feeling, that is, of a consistent common life and radiance of these features, each one conditioned by every other. If painters, purely by means of sensuous qualities—the only means they have at their disposal—manage to achieve a certain organized mutual determinateness of elements of form, all autonomous in their total common relations to one another, the idea arises of the animate life of this corporeal being. And complementarily, as soon as any sense of animate life begins to emerge from the picture surface, it reinforces in this surface an extraordinary unity and coherence that makes palpable the indivisible roots that have driven up the forms on the surface. Here is the precise relevant sense of interaction at issue: by dint of artistic unification, a corporeal phenomenon awakens in the spectator the idea of a soul, and this in turn works back on the corporeal phenomenon and lends it a heightened appearance of unity, composure, and balance of features. This interaction is the artistic form in which the immediate real unity of body and soul manifests and constantly reaffirms itself. Strictly speaking, unity *is* soul, and everything purely corporeal, as such, is chaos. Any organism is, of course, already a unity, but only the animate organism is fully and strictly a unity. Only in and through soul are things inwardly woven together and suffused—in a manner without analogy in the purely external world, and possible only insofar as soul is itself unity. Where unity of features threatens to unravel, as, say, at the sight of a face with gaping eyes, dropping jaws, and sagging cheeks, we have a strong impression of diminished psychic life, of “lifelessness” [*Entgeistertheit*]. Thus, in a work of art that presents life's unity purely on the surface of a picture plane, unity of features—let us call this simply these features' necessary, harmonious, lawlike interrelations—is nothing other than this unity's being borne by a soul. In ordinary reality, we experience such unity naïvely, indistinctly, and unmediatedly; whereas a work of art, in exploring a human figure's various elements and awarding leadership to one of them, acquires a more precarious but also a much more deeply necessary, more consciously and energetically effective, character of unity. Soul is the law that assures cohesion and order among features that alone compose a painterly reality, just as laws of nature are the order and intelligible unity and structure of things, rather than the things themselves or anything else in these things.

That it should be possible at all for a variously painted surface to appear to bear a soul, and for this appearance of soul in turn to mold that surface into a meaningful, intrinsically unitary figuration, leads naturally back to basic feelings of a life not yet fragmented into parts. But noteworthy is the direction in which visual art restores such unity. In a sense, we may

say that art purposely utilizes man's animate nature in order the more securely to confer lawful unity and cohesion on the sensuous images it displays. By contrast, practical life moves in the opposite direction: a body's character and movements are here merely a means to accede to the soul and to interpret it. To see this as also an aim of portraiture is a complete mistake—even if some artists have expressed this view themselves in their theoretical statements. It must be said categorically that all that painters have at their disposal are, from the first to the last, dabs of paint, and that their sole purpose is to fashion human figures' optical surface appearances into artistically perfect forms. No such fashioning can be a mere means to reach something that is not visible. Painting is not psychology, and if painting's purpose were to reveal a person's soul, a portrait of the person would be entirely redundant in the event of our already knowing him or her by other means, from observation, testimony of other people, or private confession. Art is, as Schopenhauer says, "everywhere on target." Art is no site of thoroughfare for anything other than itself. Consequently, anything relevant to a work of art as means to an end can only be something exterior to the work's specific significance as a work—as with a real person's soul for portraiture. To the extent that it is desirable to speak at all of art in this language of means and ends (which is always somewhat problematic), anything unconnected to an artist's task of fashioning pure forms and colors of appearances can at most be a means for a work. For otherwise a portrait would be no different from any kind of didactic art [*Tendenzkunst*], exploiting artistic values for purposes ulterior to artistic values themselves.

Yet of course, if the preceding considerations are to be an answer to the essential problem of the portrait, to the question of the significance of expressed psychic life for depicted corporeal surfaces, this answer can only be a general statement of principle, covering a plethora of diverse and divergent examples among actual historical portraits. By comparison with ordinary empirical appearances, artistic recasting requires unity of facial features to be strengthened and deepened to a much greater—an extra-ordinary—degree. In someone familiar to us from ordinary real life, we already have some knowledge of this person's unitary character from how he or she moves and speaks. By contrast, a portrait must first *produce* this knowledge exclusively from visible stable forms and colors of facial features, and in this way make what is in fact an abstract part of a whole substitute for something fully and genuinely a whole. Now at this point one might think that means other than the impression of a soul might equally be deployed to realize this aim of knowledge or feeling of unity of being. Might not such a sense of cohesion be just as well conveyed

through some formal linear pattern adhering to a pure surface plane, in an even more exact sense? We do after all call an arabesque unitary by reason of the exact symmetry, harmony, and equilibrium of its elements, its curves and corners; other arabesques, where this is not the case, we may find confused, haphazard, disjointed, and consequently disunitary. Artistic tasks of unification of human appearances might perhaps be solvable in this ornamental manner too, without need for an idea of soul. This experiment has in fact been made to a certain extent. The history of the human image shows appearances stylized all the more stringently, formally, and symmetrically, even geometrically, the less an expression of soul is sought or accomplished. The more ornamentally harmonized and perfected the former, the less the latter. In much primitive art, as well as hieratic Egyptian art, appearances are gathered together into forms—including non-anthropomorphic forms—that already by themselves impart a sense of self-completion in a way that perceptually guarantees from the outset the unity of what is molded into them: forms such as the circle, triangle, or rectangle, made of halves exactly symmetrical around a central axis. Unity does not here come from the object itself, growing organically in and out of this object. Instead, a meaningful rational schema already exists that incorporates appearances and transfers to them its own coherence. In classical Greek and Renaissance art, this formative impulse, though largely replaced by expression of soul, has by no means entirely disappeared but has simply become much livelier, more supple, and more complicated. How far the one principle predominates and the other recedes can be traced quite exactly. But animate character as the sustaining function of phenomenal unity only reaches full dominion with Rembrandt. We see this above all in the infinite wealth of elements and nuances with which Rembrandt surpasses earlier art. For if soul is in any way lacking as sole unifying force, with its place still occupied by a geometrical schema, all elements must be reduced and simplified in order to be accommodated under this latter. Soul is a deeper, more far-reaching and moving formative principle to the extent that it can govern wholly free-playing, endlessly differentiated elements resistant to prior calculation. A most extreme statement of the soul-driven principle can be seen in certain portrait busts of Rodin, which with evident intent see symmetry in the two halves of a face as a last vestige of schematism to be destroyed, and instead stress asymmetry almost to the point of exaggeration. Soul here shows perhaps for the first time its infinity of possibilities. Of course, earlier art, for its part, is not without certain elements of soul as unifying constituents, just as little as Rembrandt entirely extinguishes what I have called the ornamental principle, or pure formal interdependence and

decorative interrelationship of parts of a surface. Crucial is only that one or the other of the two diametrically opposed principles takes the lead in deciding how human appearances are to find unity.

All art forms relate to life in a way marked by each form's selecting, from real life's diverse, constantly fluctuating totality of countless, heterogeneously mixed elements, just *one* element, one sense-world, one possibility of feeling and forming, and thereby creating one delimited zone capable of absorbing any number of contents of the world and arranging them according to its particular laws. Each art form is also in a certain way one-sided and tonally fixed, whereas reality weaves all of its contents together in one great unity for each life-course of an individual. But elements and directions of this unity of life remain dirempted, alien, and antithetical to one another in ways unknown to art. Though art as a whole, in its self-restriction, is much more one-sided than life, and though all of its diverse capacities are more autarchic and foreign-seeming to us, an individual art form is infinitely more unitary and inwardly bound up with its contents. In ordinary experience, elements are both nearer to and further from one another than in art. Portraiture is no exception to this general account of art's place in the world. Our previous considerations had to concentrate precisely on the sense of sight, as a portraitist's sole available starting point, before pondering the role of soul in a portrait's sensuous interior reality and assigning to it a clear, tightly defined relationship to corporeal phenomena. In life's ordinary reality, to be sure, we experience body and soul immediately as one. But often, then, they drive apart, each from the other, and become mutually incidental, alien, contrary, and unrelated. By contrast, art's vocation, in revealing animate character as the unifying moment of sensuously perceived appearances, seems to be to play out body and soul against one another in order all the more powerfully and intelligibly to exhibit the two as one. Admittedly, lived reality possesses an inner interwoven potency of elements, of which art might seem a mere reflection. But life must pay for this with chaos, its elements a thousand times disrupted, meaninglessly accidental, and mutually at odds. By contrast, in art's circumscribed realm, all elements acquire a sense of firm, pellucid, more-than-fortuitous harmony. And this is art's redemptive, felicitous gift to us. For since it too finally comes from life and draws from life's pulse-beat the forces of its development, the harmony that things find in art's mirror—as partial as this harmony may be—affords us a presentiment and surety that life's elements at their deepest level do not perhaps drift apart from one another with such desperate indifference and contrariety, despite all that life so often makes us inclined to believe.

CHAPTER SIX

Theater

This chapter presents Simmel's statements on theater and dramatic performance. "Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Weavers*" (Gerhart Hauptmanns "Weber") appeared in 1893 in *Das Sozialpolitische Centralblatt*, a journal supportive of the trade union movement in Germany. Simmel refers to a first private performance of the play in Berlin in February 1893 under supervision of the police, following prohibition of the play at Berlin's principal Deutsche Theater (GSG 17:448–49). Simmel's three main essays on theater appear under similarly worded titles in German and have been rendered here with the addition of the suffixes "Part I," "Part II," and "Part III" for clarity. "Theater and the Dramatic Actor: Part I" (Zur Philosophie des Schauspielers) appeared in December 1908. "Theater and the Dramatic Actor: Part II" (Über den Schauspieler: Aus einer "Philosophie der Kunst"), appeared in March 1909 in the Berlin newspaper *Der Tag*. "Theater and the Dramatic Actor: Part III" (Der Schauspieler und die Wirklichkeit) appeared in January 1912 in the *Berliner Tageblatt* (English translation 1968).

Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Weavers*

Like the founding charter of a political party or the proceedings of the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, Gerhart Hauptmann's play *The Weavers* documents some of the liveliest impulses of our present social movement. Like the events to which this journal [*Das Sozialpolitische Centralblatt*] is devoted, Hauptmann's play dramatizes the deep currents of life inevitably shaping all symbolic products of our time. In depicting, in gripping broad brush, the squalor of Schlesian weavers from the 1840s and their revolt against exploitation, Hauptmann's intention has certainly not been to incite social agitation, and his personal statements tell us that his sole interest in this work has been in the poetic problem, not in his subject matter's relationship to movements of the day. But nothing better attests to these movements' power and influence today than precisely such an avowal of exclusively poetic interests on Hauptmann's part, for it shows how deeply the misery of the masses and their yearning for redemption has penetrated into the hidden unconscious sources of the poetic imagination. In previous ages, a poet's and public interest in such problems would have been unthinkable. That an artist's formative impulses should seem to converge naturally on the topic of social movements, without any conscious intention to do so, is much stronger proof of these movements' all-pervading grip over our time than any didactic poetry might ever be.

Novel in Hauptmann's plays is that entire social classes are the subject of action on stage, rather than individual human persons. Prominent in each of the five acts of this drama are always different social types of people, and the last act takes place in a weaver's family, not one of whose members we meet at any earlier moment in the play. Individuals themselves are not the bearers of the dramatic development; they are borne along by the development. Diversity of characters experiencing and reacting in the most varied of ways to social class as fate is precisely what throws into relief this commonality of class to all concerned. Individuals may be good or bad, patient or rebellious, but all expressive action of

their nature is determined ultimately by the lottery of class. Class is life's material, and all individuality only a tool for molding this material in various ways—but never in any way beyond class's preset constraint. One person's despair, another's brutality, another's servility—all these are so many formally different reverberations of a single common material center that is the universal lot of class, with which all individuals must come to terms over the course of their lives, even if each in their own way. Thus in Hauptmann's play, the social worldview absorbed by individuality from its milieu finds artistic expression for the first time. The struggle against romantic individualism, whose impact on the field of real and material interests has been reported on every page of this journal, wins a victory for the first time on the plane of "pure forms."

In this complete break with romanticism, Hauptmann also refuses to portray his weavers as especially sublime or noble characters at the mercy of diabolical oppressors. His personages are limited, uncouth, weak people, as low and stunted as the punishing atmosphere under which they toil. But precisely *this* moves us, and does so incomparably more than if they had been moral heroes, for while oppression of the good by the bad may be stirring drama, all theater requires a certain element of the fortuitous individual constellation. The true register of Hauptmann's play is one in which social-historical necessities lead one class to dominate another quite regardless of whether one class or the other comprises good or bad individuals. The real tragedy he depicts is this ineluctability of class as fate, where some in society are "up" and others "down" "without regard to person." This, he shows, is what fate and "tragic fate" mean for us today. At this play's second performance in Berlin before highly cultured circles, one saw how prior social schooling brings to light a far greater moral and aesthetic significance of class as fate today than any dramatization of purely individual fates.

The police permitted this performance only before a closed audience, not to the public. Yet, year on year, they allow the crudest French farces to be performed at Berlin's Residenztheater, which saturate our people with nothing but sexual titillation and meretricious pleasures. At Berlin's Panoptikum, the public are treated to waxworks images of bloody deeds and gory horrors under the title "Not for the Faint-Hearted," as if the coarsening of sensibilities and incitement to sadism and wild cruelty these exhibits awaken among the young crowds that flock to them were no cause for alarm at all. One of the greatest works of art, borne of the utmost moral and artistic seriousness, however, is denied to the multitude—to this multitude who, if they have a right to anything, surely here have a right to their own, for only *their* spirit is the soil on which this fruit of art can grow. *That* is our people's "aesthetic education."

Theater and the Dramatic Actor: Part I

The art of dramatic acting involves an inner contradiction that poses a puzzle for philosophy. We feel actors to express spontaneously the essential ground and temperament of a life articulating itself immediately in the events of its own destiny. And the miracle is that this life finds expression via a content given and formed from elsewhere, from words and actions with meanings and interrelationships not borne of actors' personal and autonomous feelings and conduct but prearranged and foreign to them. In the way in which the objective contents of their performances and actors' creative subjectivity as artists uniquely interlace with one another, we should expect actors to present a special and peculiarly transparent compound of these elements—although nothing reducible to these elements.

Dramatic scripts, that is, cannot fix by themselves how actors are to play a role. For it is clear that a role such as Camille, played so perfectly by Sarah Bernhardt, would strike us as unsatisfactory and contradictory if an actress with a quite different personality such as, say, [Eleonora] Duse were to perform it in the same manner, or if, for example, [Josef] Kainz were to copy [Tomasso] Salvini's rendering of Hamlet. Our sense is that the poetically objective characters of Marguerite Gautier or Hamlet do not impose rigid requirements on an actor.* As odd as it may seem, how actors are to interpret a role stems not—not even ideally—from the role itself but from a way in which their own artistic impulses relate to that role. If we assert that certain actors get a role “wrong,” we mean by this

* [Trans.] Sarah Bernhardt, French actress (1844–1923); Eleonora Duse, Italian actress (1858–1924); Josef Kainz, Austrian actor (1858–1910); Tomasso Salvini, Italian actor (1829–1915). Marguerite Gautier is the title character in *Camille (La Dame aux Camélias)*, a novel by Alexandre Dumas, adapted by the author for the stage in 1852 and set as an opera by Giuseppe Verdi (*La Traviata*) in 1853.

that they fail to link correctly their own, in some way manifest, artistic subjectivity to the playwright's objective material, or that they are unable to respond to this material in any way fully and independently. How else are we to understand three different actors' ability to play the same part in three different ways, each equally satisfying and valid as "interpretations" and therefore each impossible to consider right or wrong by reference to some unequivocal benchmark of the script itself—if not precisely in terms of some valid ideal of consonance of the performance with an actor's natural peculiarities? No objective task exists, such that all that actors must do is adapt themselves to what has been set before them by the playwright. Rather, a third element comes into play: a need for *this* actor, like perhaps no other, to respond to a role as the law that accrues to this particular theatrical personality from the role. To approach the matter in this way is to overcome all false objectivity that makes actors mere puppets of their role and requires them ideally to play the same role in the same way—and it is to overcome likewise all false subjectivity that thinks of actors as acting as themselves on stage "by nature," as if their roles formed no more than accidental garments of their individuality. The ideal at issue consists in a question of how an actor's individuality is to take charge of a role in order to achieve the best artistic performance possible. Such an ideal regulates an actor's every mood and velleity so stringently and objectively that we can say that it rises above the actor like a moral norm of the character's objective situation, demanding only what this particular personality can and must yield up by way of ethical conduct—in ways quite different, perhaps, from what might be expected of another personality under the same circumstances.

To speak of actors as "well-cast" is to say that a particular relationship of subjectivity and dedication to role gives them little trouble in playing their part and that an unfolding of their psychical reality coincides in some way naturally—seemingly of its own accord—with their talents' basic drive to artistic accomplishment. In this way, the true meaning of actors "playing themselves" becomes clear. Certainly it can happen that a perfect artistic performance arises simply from actors living out their own sheer nature and temperament in a kind of subjective realism, for whose dramatic awakening the content of the part is little more than a pretext. However, it is an expedient rather than truly penetrating way of speaking to say that such an achievement results from some fortuitous coincidence of subjectivity in a player with the playwright's character. For if the ultimate deciding factor lay really in the playwright's designation, this achievement could result only from a single actor, or from other actors performing in some way absolutely identically to this actor, whereas

in reality it seems to occur by no means infrequently and in performances of the same role by personalities not at all similar to one another. In truth, the relevant artistic considerations hinge always on questions of how an actor's individuality is to stylize and arrange itself around a role so as to fashion the most perfect possible theatrical image. For the key issue on stage is not the written drama but the artistic originality and authenticity of the theatrical acting. It is *this* acting's ideal perfection as a potentiality of the individual theatrical personality that is coextensive with the artistic realization of an actor's intrinsic temperamental capabilities, insofar as this realization is to be understood as the complete relevant artistic contribution in which actors "play themselves." Certainly sometimes in enduring ethical life, someone's nature needs only to follow its own spontaneous impulses, without need of cultivation, in order to satisfy a moral imperative deeply and wholly. Such is the case in what we like to call the "beautiful soul." But such a person still follows no external commandment but rather an ideal demand of his or her essence in the given situation. Such a person's purely instinctual action is distinguished ethically by the fact that others manage to accomplish the same conduct only by overcoming certain opposing instincts. In the case of the "beautiful soul," all impulses and natural ego-based desire coincide with all elements of a higher morally conscious ideal life. Harmony prevails not between someone's existence and an external imperative addressing this person but, rather, inwardly, between, so to speak, the real and the ideal person we find etched within in invisible lines—such that where no felicitous unity occurs, we can establish this unity only through efforts of overcoming and reformation of our nature. Essentially the same state of affairs arises in the present issue. If we praise a performer of Hamlet by describing this actor as a "natural Hamlet" who "plays himself," we speak misleadingly and superficially. For although we now come closer to the heart of the matter, the problem remains that many "natural Hamlets" can exist in real life with no talent for playing Hamlet on stage or for any acting at all. Decisive is that third ideal element, beyond both the real nature of the actor and the playwright's Hamlet, which an actor must pursue in order to bring to highest expression the Hamlet most congenial to *his* own artistic capacities. If his vital impulses and unique temperamental qualities push spontaneously toward this ideal form, preestablishing his performance of Hamlet as if effortlessly, and performing it with those "invisible lines" of his personality, *then* we can say that he "plays himself" in Hamlet. Now he is perfect not in any everyday reality of himself but in the ideal demands of his role as Hamlet, which emerge from this reality and chime with it as if by serendipity.

Conventional notions of acting as consisting in an ability to take on another, quite different personality, or any number of personalities, beg a deeper question, namely that of how it is that a creative performance produced with inventive ingenuity by one psychophysically unique individual can at the same time, in every single gesture and word uttered, be *given* to spectators. If, of all human pursuits, art is that activity in which the objective necessity and ideal self-evidence of a content arises from the most sovereign freedom of the subject, theater is the most radical example of this activity. In painting, artists are not present in the creative product with the same enormous compass of their transient subjectivity. At the moment of its creation, the product detaches itself from them, and the seemingly merely extraneous fact that their work possesses a physical existence of its own, different from the work of the actor with its inseparability from spatiotemporal limits of the actor's presence on stage, demonstrates indeed a significant preponderance of the personality in theater compared with painting. And yet, equally, painting is not objectively regulated to anything like the same extent as theater. Realist painters are not constrained as absolutely by their subject matter as actors are by the text of their parts. Simply in respect of execution (and quite apart from all other matters), realist painters retain nothing like the same degree of commitment to both objectivity and subjectivity of the productive process.

Theater thus assumes an instructive position in more general philosophical conceptions of art. Our soul's manifold sides send our life in multiple directions that lack a common denominator, either practically or theoretically. Our diverse facets of life relate to one another often with a kind of mutual indifference, not issuing in antagonisms of a positive or productive nature. Art, however, appears in some degree to unify these usually disconnected features of our being and evaluative life, in ways not easily rationally comprehensible. Art resembles a kind of preestablished harmony or state of grace *above* life and not deriving from any forces of life's individual elements. One should not say that art "reconciles life's dissonances" — which is nothing more than an empty phrase — so much as that art uniquely brings together some of life's otherwise thoroughly disparate directions and demands. Let us recall the double challenge of the portrait: to articulate optically and artistically and as clearly and appealingly as possible a person's pure external appearance, and at the same time to reveal unambiguously this person's inner psychic character. Though pure appearances are shaped by ideals fundamentally different from those by which our psychological being is symbolized and revealed, a perfect work of art evinces both kinds of shaping in parallel. With a kind of sensuous intelligence, it seems to refer back to those unitary inexpressible roots that

permit both orders of being to fuse in the realm of appearances. The same is the case when a poem brings language to a point of the most sonorous appeal by unifying elements of rhythm and melody into a self-contained work of acoustic art—while at the same time delivering a *meaning* with a purely fortuitous relation to the verbal sounds created. Through these sounds, as expressive means formed around a principle heterogeneous to them, this meaning must reach such a degree of clarity, beauty, and depth that it is as if the expressive means had evolved for this purpose alone—solely for the sake of the poem's inner sense and its utterance. As if miraculously, great works of art only seem to need to accomplish one of these two demands in order for the other to drop into place by itself. Now we can see more easily that an analogous parallelism of normally quite divergent concerns is effected in theater. A human fate unfolding in its own logic, temporal structure, and interwovenness of psychological elements and exterior necessities is entirely foreign to dramatic form with its symmetrical components, its climactic rhythms, and the smooth continuity of action over time. Yet precisely this dramatic form endows such a fate with a framework for its fullest life and clearest self-presentation, or, more precisely, offers the organizing power that allows the most diverse fates to find the fullest expression of their meaning and most intense being. It seems therefore to be the essence of every art form to confer unity on moments of appearances that otherwise only either converge with or diverge from one another incidentally. Art creates a harmony we tend to experience like a gift, as something happily unearned amid the foreignness and confusion of the world's elements, or as the intimation of some metaphysical wholeness of things in sundered appearances.

It is here that theater's central problem resides. As I have stressed, actors' words and deeds on stage strike us as stemming spontaneously from their own impulses and situations. Actors do not recite, declaim, or act out a content in such a way that we could treat this content as the true and sole matter at hand. Acting has no "objective mind," such that its recitation could be coordinated in some way with the printed word, or with the recorded word of a phonograph. Such would be the mere play of a puppet, acting not for itself independently of the given content but only as something like a transcription device that imparts a content to others. On the contrary, actors act for spectators purely from themselves. The contents they present to us stem not from a book or consciousness of another but directly from their soul. They present *themselves*. The doing and suffering we watch in them is their entire unfolding person, as if in life's reality. Events on stage unfold for us, wholly intelligibly and emotively plausibly, from the personalities before us and from the visible conditions

of their fate and character, even as we know that all of this has been set down objectively by another soul, by the playwright, whose work we find nourished by the actors' vital sources. The ideal and timeless events of the play with its poetic and fictitious structures form a wholly autonomous order and figuration, independent of any real person; yet now another theatrical order of occurrences, also autonomous and also intelligible psychically in its evolving sensuous being, comes into agreement with this first order in *content*. The result is a harmony of two mutually self-sufficient principles—a happy coalescence of two heterogeneous orders of being and possibility, arising not from any natural process but only as *art*.

One might think that such parallelism can be explained simply by one soul creating and passing over a content to other souls and thereby stimulating those other souls to “reproduce” that content. But matters are not so simple. For dramatic acting is not reproduction in the same sense that the color printing of a painting is reproduction: it is its own fully independent kind of creativity. In performing a play in forms of their own artistry, actors draw entirely on their own productive individuality. The aspect in which they can be bound unconditionally to the given content and personality of the playwright and nevertheless remain autonomous in their creative subjectivity, in what rightly may be called the “illusion” of their art—this is that preestablished consonance of independent orders of being whose effects our conceptual thinking understands as the reconciliation and harmonization of the world's elements in art.

Theater and the Dramatic Actor: Part II

Dramatic acting is more than a mere “art of reproduction.” Acting is thoroughly creative in itself, even if the material with which it works, the script of the playwright, is already art—in contrast, for example, to nature for the painter. Thus acting’s basic problem lies in this question: in what does its creative aspect consist, if its entire fixed and prescribed content already possesses complete form as art?

Acting has a double task in this regard. Characters in dramatic scripts are not whole persons but complexes of textually defined parts of persons, containing nothing of the gestures and demeanor, tone of voice, and general indescribable atmosphere of life that accompanies every individual. To create these things, actors must consult not the text but their own being, instincts, and experiences, for in these they find a still unprocessed reality to incorporate into their acting as artists and—analogously to the visual artist—organize according to foreground and background, shape around a unitary idea, subsume under a law of style, and transform into something symbolic of inner necessities rather than contingent and extraneous. In this, the playwright’s text offers only a sense of direction, a general framework, for actors to make art out of this raw material of reality.

Yet an actor’s contribution lies not merely alongside but *in* the given dramatic work—for only here does the true problem reside. An answer to the question of what it is that makes dramatic acting an art form must start from a very simple principle: an actor’s task is to bring a play to life as sensuous performance. The content of this task is given to the actor as “objective mind.” A creative process in the mind and soul of the playwright has assumed a particular kind of verbal objectivity, from which this process unfolds once again in the mind and soul of the reader. As a poetic work, the dramatic content is projected onto the level of mind, whose unique nature is symbolized sensuously in writing and reading. This content an actor commits to the level of the visible and audible, making out of the

one-dimensionality of a pure mental stream something with the three-dimensionality of full sensuous life. Regarded thus, an actor's contribution is not supplemental to the dramatist's work but rather its transposition into a new form of existence. But equally, actors do not perform roles on stage as they might in ordinary life, like things inserted into a space-time continuum ceaselessly running on. They do so with an eye to formal perfection, to visible and audible impact, and to laws of style (their own style, not that of the playwright's original pure text), and they interpret their role from an angle of its appeal, inner unity, and intelligibility for spectators. The performed play is therefore not simply the dramatic script made audible and visible, for then it would be no artistic contribution in its own right but simply the direct recital of another work of art. It is, rather, this recital's authentically artistic form. That is, the sensory elements bearing the form are only very loosely connected with life outside the performance and instead reach a unity symbolized by the framing effect of the dramatic scene, analogous to the way a picture's islandlike self-sufficiency is established literally by the picture frame. In contrast to contingent sensory phenomena in ordinary reality, these elements are formed teleologically and harmonized and suffused by an idea of the whole. In this way, an actor's performance constitutes a primary artistic contribution rather than anything derivative, like a mere switch of the drama's external form. Performance creates for the play an artistic meaning that only performance can realize and that the play as poetic text cannot by itself possess.

In this concept of sensuous enactment, as superficial as it may perhaps seem, are to be found all truly artistic challenges of the actor's art, of which the most important is this: artistic fashioning is most threatened by distractions and extra-artistic temptations at precisely the point where its work begins. These dangers have to do with the dependence of an actor's form-giving viewpoint and way of ordering the sensory material around a unitary idea on effects produced on the real, present spectator. This dependence ought not to make any difference to a performance's purely artistic character and independence of effects of the bare moment. It is possible for an actor's orientation to the spectator to remain so entirely contained within the ideal norms of his or her role that no direct relationship to an audience in the here-and-now exerts any influence at all. Of course, actors always perform for an audience, but they do so for an essentially ideal audience whose core expectations are constituted by inner objective laws of the actors' artistic contribution. Yet insofar as actors must endow a role with full sensuous presence and in so doing respond at every moment to contingent changes of mood in a real, present audience, they are prone to substitute for the ideal spectator that defines the

laws of their art the real spectator sitting before them, and in this way to slip out of the purely artistic sphere. This today is what so many artistically sophisticated people find alienating, indeed unbearable, in theater. Actors may be inclined to play their roles on stage only half of the time and during the other half to play directly “to the gallery,” with the result that theater as a sovereign art form can seem bastardized by a person-to-person relationship proper to the non-artistic sphere of ordinary reality. The feeling, today quite widespread, that theater in some sense “lies” to us does not draw its kernel of truth from the relationship of performance to real life—imitated on stage in such a way that something unreal appears to us with the gestures of something real. Rather, if we find an actor “unconvincing,” what we sense in his or her performance is not too little but too *much* “reality”—that is, too much direct lived reality of the moment. “Convincing” actors, by contrast, are those who adhere strictly to the self-enclosed artistic space of their roles and draw truth from a logic of laws proper to their roles, rather than from a relation to anything unmediated by these laws. The actor’s danger is that his or her performance may only *seem* to unfold in the abstract spectator-neutral world of art, but in fact be drenched in and led by a relationship of concrete person to concrete person. Expressed paradoxically, the complaint of mendacity in theater rests not on a feeling of the disappearance of ordinary reality but on a feeling of the disappearance of artistic *nonreality*.

In the history of theater, it is interesting to note some stylistic differences in this crucial connection. Classical French theater would be performed for the courts, whose members would occasionally take up positions on the stage itself, alongside the players. This spectacular instance of an orientation to present audiences that expatriates theater from its distinct sphere of interest to a space extraneous to itself explains why such drama moved to the opposite extreme in its aspect of rigid stylization and foreignness to reality. The concessions expected of actors on stage to extra-artistic reality would be to some extent countered by an impregnable self-composure and radical abstractness of the contents performed. The same outcome occurs in reverse in modern realism. Here theater seeks to dispel any idea that the events on stage are pure fiction. The real is supposed to take place on stage with the least stylized immediacy. But in this process, a state of complete closure and indifference to the audience is sought on behalf of the theatrical image, as if no audience existed and dramatic events occurred of their own accord, from inner necessity, like real events unaffected by the presence of an observer. Hence the vilification of the theatrical “virtuoso” in modern realism, for virtuosi perform directly to an audience. Hence too the predilection, particularly in this movement’s

early stages, for developments of offensive bluntness, where disregard of the spectator joins with a contented self-containment of events on stage. From this also follow two reasons for realism's rejection of monologue in theater—the first being a particularly weak one. Its first claim, that reality shows no instance of monologue, founders on the problem that no empirical analogues exist even for the most realist of realist performances on the theatrical stage; it is only this movement's nervous and peculiar dogmatism to insist that every single sentence and gesture stems from ordinary reality and to forget that the play as a whole, in its form and entire mode of presentation, stands beyond all such reality. More compelling is realism's second claim: that monologue, more than any other aspect of a play, tempts actors to address an audience directly, to quit the stage setting, and to converse in virtual dialogue with a silent but real present interlocutor in the stalls. Monologue thus threatens most acutely realism's principle that events on stage follow their own laws and grant no right of participation to spectators. This is precisely the sense of the stage instructions of the Duke of Meiningen with their "especial insistence," in the name of dramatic autonomy, that players on stage "not stare at the audience."*

These, then, are the artistic dangers of the particular kind, or rather degree, of "sensuous enactment" required of an actor. Other art forms revolve around just one of the five senses and abstract from ordinary reality by constructing just one sensory sphere of artistic difference out of the plurality of senses engaged constantly in daily life. A painting, for example, exists absolutely and exclusively for our eyes, even though we could also in theory touch, smell, taste, or hear (by tapping) the canvas on which it has been painted. This makes it easier for painting and other art forms to set a clear distance from reality and from spectators, for the removal of our ability to respond to a work with multiple senses at once makes us less inclined to incorporate a work into our real and immediate contexts of life. By contrast, theatrical actors differ from painters or poets in not being able to step back from their artistic work and part company with it as something ideally existent in its own sense-specific realm. For actors, in the full sensuous performance of their roles, not only produce a work of art: they *are* the work of art, and therefore bear a much more demanding responsibility to protect spectators from infractions of the boundaries of the artistic sphere, even as their task of bringing artistic contents to full sensuous life constantly tempts them in this direction. In no other art form, it seems, is the challenge of presenting art and *only* art as great.

* [Trans.] Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826–1914), aristocratic patron of theater and music, as well as influential theater director and theorist.

Theater and the Dramatic Actor: Part III

As uncertain and critical as one may be of “public opinion,” that is, the vox populi, generally there is a core of relevant and reliable content in the dark premonitions, instincts, and evaluations of the masses. Obviously this core is surrounded by a thick shell of superficial trivialities and biased information. Nevertheless, its fundamental accuracy will usually become apparent in the realms of religion and politics, or in intellectual and ethical matters. Only in one area, the field of the art, which appears to be even more accessible than others, is the judgment of the masses hopelessly misguided and completely inadequate, especially with respect to fundamental issues. An abyss without bridges cuts off the majority from insight into the essence of art forms. Therein rests the deep social tragedy of art.

In the dramatic arts, which appeal more directly to a public audience than any other, genuine artistic values seem to be sprung not from the intentions of the artist, but from the immediate impression he makes on the audience. Because of this democratized mass appeal, dramatic art would seem to be more profoundly naturalistic than any other art form. Thus public opinion sees the essence of dramatic art not in the written drama, but in the dramatic actor.

A dramatic play exists as a self-contained work of art. Does the contribution of the actor now elevate this play into an art form of greater magnitude? If this question seems inappropriate, we might rephrase it. Does the actor transform the work of art to a more convincing level through his physical, live appearance? But, if this is true, why do we demand that his performance somehow bear the imprint of art, and not simply that of mere realistic naturalism? All the problems dealing with the philosophy of the dramatic art converge on these questions.

The role of the actor, as it is expressed in written drama, is not a total person. The role is not a man, but a complex of things which can be said about a person through literary devices. The poet cannot give the actor

unambiguous instructions concerning the inflection of language, the tone of voice, or the pace of delivery. He can only project the fate, the appearance, and the soul of a person through the one-dimensional process of poetic imagery. The actor then translates this image into a three-dimensional character accessible to all the senses.

The actor's essential mistake is to identify the sensual interpretation of an artistic content with its full realization. For the ultimate realization of drama is a metaphysical idea which cannot be embodied through sensuous impressions. The content which the poet molds into a dramatic script reveals completely different connotations when transformed into sensuous expression. The actor gives meaning to the script, but he does not transform its content into reality. This is why his acting can become art, which, by definition, reality could never be. Thus, if painting appears as the art of visual sensuality and music as the art of acoustic sensuality, dramatic art appears as the art form of total sensuality.

In the realm of reality every single element and event is placed in an infinitely expanding series of spatial, conceptual, and dynamic relationships. For this reason, every identifiable element of reality is only a fragment and not a totality. It is the nature of art, on the other hand, to mold the contents of existence into self-contained unity. The actor raises all the visual and acoustical elements of reality into a perfectly framed unity. This is accomplished through the balance of style, the logic of rhythm, the movement of moods, the recognizable relationship between character and action, and the subordination of all details under the apex of the whole. The actor thus stylizes all sensual phenomena into a unity.

At this point reality seems again to penetrate the realm of the arts in order to bridge a void. How does the actor acquire the mode of conduct appropriate to his role when, as we have seen, this mode is not explicit in the script and cannot be made so? It seems to me that the actor cannot know how to perform Hamlet except through his own experience. He will rely on external and (more important) inner experience to realize how a human being who talks like Hamlet and has encountered Hamlet's fate generally behaves. Thus the actor submerges himself in the foundations of reality from which Shakespeare originally derived the role. From this he recreates the dramatic work of art, in the form of Hamlet. The dramatic composition guides the actor by providing a system of realistic coordinates corresponding to the individual's inner and outer experiences, reactions, fates, events, and their environmental surroundings. However, regardless of how much guidance he might get from the play, he could not understand its clues unless he had been empirically acquainted with them or similar ones already. At this point the contribution of naturalism ends.

Besides the written words of Shakespeare concerning Hamlet, the actor only has empirical reality with which to reconstruct everything Shakespeare did not say. Thus, he has to behave like a real Hamlet who has been restricted by the words and events prescribed for him by Shakespeare.

But this argument is quite erroneous. The activity of giving artistic form and constructing the artistic imprint transcends that reality on which the actor leans under the guidance of the script. The actor does not content himself with empirical reality. The coordinates of reality must become reallocated: accents become toned down, measures of time become subjected to rhythm, and from all the alternatives offered by reality, only those that can be uniformly stylized are selected. In short, the actor does not transform the dramatic work of art into reality; on the contrary, he makes use of reality, and transforms the reality which has been assigned to him into a work of art.

There are many sophisticated people today who explain their aversion toward the theater by saying that it portrays too many artificial pretenses. This opinion may be justified, not because of a shortage of reality, but because of a surfeit of it. The dramatic actor can be convincing to us only if he stays within artistic logic and eschews additional elements of realism, obeying a completely different logic.

It is wrong to consider it a "falsification" if the actor is different in reality from the role he assumes on stage. After all, no one charges a locomotive engineer with falsifying himself if he fails to run locomotives around his family table. It is not a deception when the penniless actor assumes the role of a king on stage. For he is a king in his function as an artist, an ideal king, but perhaps for this very reason, not a real king. This impression of falsehood is generated only by a poor actor, who either permits traces of his role in reality as a poor individual to enter into his stage role of a king, or else acts so very realistically that he carries us into the sphere of realism. In the latter case he creates a painful competition between two realistic images which contradict one another. This contradiction would never occur if the dramatic presentation kept the audience in the sphere of art, which is essentially estranged from reality.

We now see the total error in the idea that the actor must realize the poetic creation. In the dramatic presentation the actor exercises a special and unified form of art which is as far removed from reality as the poetic work of art itself. Thus we can immediately understand why a good imitator is not a good actor. The gift of being able to imitate other people has nothing to do with the artistically creative talent of an actor. This is true because the subject matter of the imitator is reality, and thus he strives to be received as a form of reality. The actor, however, like the painter of

a portrait, is not the imitator of the real world, but the creator of a new one. This artistic world, of course, is related to the phenomenon of reality, since both the real and artistic worlds are built on the accumulated content of all being. Reality, however, represents the first impression received of these contents. This stimulates the illusion, as though reality was the true subject of art.

In order to obtain the most refined method of keeping the dramatic arts in the sphere of reality, the dramatic writer derives his material from his psychological integration of previous experience. The words of the poet demand a reconstruction based on psychological experience. The task of the actor should make us conceive of the prescribed words and events as inevitable. Thus, his art should be applied or practical psychology. According to this view, the task of the actor is fulfilled by placing before our eyes convincingly and emphatically the essence of a human soul with its inner determination, its reaction to fate, its drives, and its emotional anguish.

The proper artistic contribution of the dramatic actor cannot be found in the apparent depth of his interpretation. Certainly it is only through his own spiritual experiences that an actor can understand the role of Hamlet. Moreover, the actor would only be a puppet or a phonograph if he were not able to represent this spiritual reality to the viewer for a chance to experience it, too. However, true art transcends this experience of a reproduced psychic reality. It flows from an ideal fountain, from the beginning, never toward a finished reality, but toward new demands.

We see here a revival, new in aesthetics, of the old error overcome long ago in philosophy—the idea that mental reality is something transcendent, ideal, superior to physical reality. Art, however, demands that the mere causality of factual processes should explicate meanings, that all the threads which extend into infinity of time and place should be laced together into a self-satisfactory whole, and that the confusion of reality should be rhythmically ordered. These demands do not correspond to the reality that flows from the dark fountain of being, inaccessible to our consciousness, even if this reality were of a psychic variety.

There is no doubt that these postulates concerning art originate in the minds of real human beings, as do ideas about the appropriate relation between the form and the content of reality. However, the content and meaning of the artistic work is juxtaposed in one's mind with the reality which the mind reconstructs from experience. The dramatic actor must make us understand the role of Hamlet and portray the turmoils of his fate. Through his gestures and the pitch and rhythm of his voice, he must also provide us with psychological insight, so that we all draw the con-

clusion that a given character must speak these words under the given circumstances. The genuine artistic process, however, only begins after all this has happened—after the role of Hamlet is made into more than a series of resounding words and exterior events, and has been resolved through the contribution of the actor into a spiritual reality which contrasts with the immediacy of excitement and empathy. Here the spiritually recreated process of reality crystallizes into an image. This is analogous to the sensually perceived impressions of the world of physical bodies which are transformed by the painter into a painting. This spiritual reality has thus become a picture for the dramatic writer.

We can now formulate these ideas into an axiom: The dramatic arts as such transcend both poetry and reality. The dramatic actor is neither what popular naturalism demands, an imitator of a man who finds himself in a given situation, nor what literary idealism demands, a marionette of his role with no artistic task besides what is already prescribed in the lines of the poetic work.

This literary point of view is particularly seductive to naturalism. If one does not permit the dramatic actor an individual contribution, produced according to autonomous artistic principles based on the final foundations of all art, then the actor becomes only the realization of a written role. A work of art, however, cannot be the material subject for another work of art. On the contrary, a dramatic play is a channel through which a stream, flowing from the very fundamentals of being, is directed toward the specifically individual artistic contribution of the dramatic actor. If it were otherwise, there would be no other final principles than those of drama and reality. On such a basis, then, the actor's task could only be considered dangerously close to naturalism, namely, to provide the appearance of reality for the dramatic play.

The attractive notion that the dramatic actor only infuses the dramatic play with life, and presents the live realization of a poetic work, leads to the disappearance of the genuine and incomparable dramatic art which lives in the realm between the written play and reality. It is just as distinctively original to represent elements of life through the medium of dramatic acting as to represent them through painting or poetry, or to recreate them through epistemology or religion. And the art form of the dramatic actor is something which is genuinely rooted in unity, despite the great variety of sensuous impressions and emotional reactions that it produces. It is not a composite of independent optical stimuli, acoustic rhythms, emotional shocks, or states of empathy. On the contrary, dramatic acting represents an inner unity produced from the diversity of all those great elements of which the dramatic impressions seem to be composed. In reality, they are only

developments from a single root, just as the multitude of different words in a sentence represent a single pattern of thought. There simply seems to exist an attitude of dramatic acting which man brings into this world as part of his manner of being and which makes him creative in this unique way.

The decisive point is the fact that the dramatic actor creates within himself a complete unity with its unique laws. His art, just as that of the poet, has its roots in the same fundamentals as do all other art forms. This is true even though it demands another art form, the poetic work, for its medium. Only the autonomous status of the dramatic art explains the strange fact that a poetic role, although conceived as an unambiguous one, can be presented by a variety of dramatic actors with completely different interpretations, each of which may be fully adequate, and none of which would be more correct or more erroneous than any other. This would be completely incomprehensible if the dramatic actor lived entirely within the dualism between the poetic work and reality. Within the frameworks of both the poetic role and reality (which might be thought of as the poetic counterimage), there exists only *one* Don Carlos or *one* Gregers Werle. Without a third, genuine, independent foundation, this separation of the various branches of the dramatic arts would lead to the destruction of the unities existing both within poetic works and within reality.

Thus dramatic acting is not, as is commonly thought, the reconciliation between the realism of poetry and reality. Nor is it the servant of those two lords. The accuracy with which the dramatic actor follows the poetic role, and the truth of the given world, are not mechanical copies of each other. Rather, the dramatic actor's personality interweaves those two roles as organic elements in his creative expression of life. He was born as a personality and not with a predetermined dependence on written dramatic works, or with a reality which he is expected to redraft.

Here we find one more example of an important historic task which confronts the present age: to replace mechanism with life processes. We have come to see how each individual's reality contains in itself a condensation of life, which determines its essence and includes in its development all those living realizations which surround it in organic interdependence. The mechanical principle, on the other hand, de-individualizes all these phenomena and reconstructs them, more or less externally, as mere combinations of others. If we understand the dramatic art as an expression of the primary artistic energy of the human soul, which assimilates both the poetic art and reality into one living process, instead of being composed of these elements in a mechanical fashion, then our interpretation of this art coincides with our distinctively modern way of understanding the modern world.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sculpture

The following essays show Simmel's special concern with sculpture as an art medium. "Michelangelo and the Metaphysics of Culture" first appeared in October 1910 in the journal *LOGOS: Internationale Jahresschrift für Philosophie der Kultur* and reappeared in November 1911 under the shorter heading "Michelangelo" in the collection *Philosophische Kultur*. Although equally concerned with Michelangelo's frescos in the Sistine Chapel, the essay dwells centrally on Michelangelo's sculptural works. "On Constantin Meunier" appeared in 1911 in *Philosophische Kultur* as a "prefatory note" to Simmel's essay on Rodin in that volume, translated below as "Auguste Rodin: Part II." It is separated here from the main Rodin essay for clarity. "Auguste Rodin: Part I" appeared in September 1902 in the newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt* as "Rodins Plastik und die Geistesrichtung der Gegenwart" (Rodin's Sculpture and the Mental Direction of the Present). It is known that Rodin sent Simmel a significant but no longer extant letter of thanks for this essay (*GSG* 22:511). "Auguste Rodin: Part II" appeared in 1911 in *Philosophische Kultur* as "Rodin: Mit einer Vorbemerkung über Meunier." The text—here presented minus its "prefatory note" on Meunier—is Simmel's longest essay on Rodin and is an enlarged version of a statement by Simmel from May 1909, titled "Die Kunst Rodins und das Bewegungsmotiv in der Plastik" (Rodin's Art and the Element of Movement in Sculpture), for which he again received a letter of thanks from the sculptor (*GSG* 22:697-99, 844). The essay incorporates Simmel's 1909 material unchanged with supplementary paragraphs. "Auguste Rodin: Part III," a short commemorative statement, appeared in November 1917 in the *Vossische Zeitung* under the title "Erinnerung an Rodin" (Reminiscences of Rodin), ten days after the sculptor's death. The text indicates that no further encounter took place between Simmel and Rodin after April 1905, although it is known that Rodin gifted him two drawings in December of that year, presumably by post (*GSG* 22:531-32).

Michelangelo and the Metaphysics of Culture

In the depths of our psychic existence seems to lie a dualism that makes us think of the world pictured in our soul not as a unity but as a duality of endless of pairs of opposites. Subsuming our existence in turn into this bifurcated world, we continue the dichotomy in reverse direction in the image we create of ourselves, which we consider composed, on the one hand, of nature and, on the other, of mind. We think of our souls distinguishing our being from our fate, of our visible life as possessing a firm and burdensome substance in conflict with a flowing, playful, or upwardly striving movement, and of our individuality as being set off from something universal that sometimes forms the core of our individuality and at other times seems to stand over and above our individuality as its idea. Some periods of art history make this division undetectable by building on one side of the duality with a sense of obvious self-evidence. Classical Greek sculpture represents man as an entirely natural being and incorporates seamlessly all that man expresses by way of spiritual life into this natural dimension of existence. It portrays man's substance only in the plastic-anatomical, and at the same time typical, formation of its surfaces and affords only the most limited scope to any inwardly eruptive movement as something distracting and individualistically contingent. Then, for the first time in Greek art, in the Hellenic period, artistic expression turns to the tension prevailing between man's static being and fate. Mighty acts and ordeals grip the figures and reveal the chasm yawning between our being and the incomprehensibility of our fate. Christian history gives these dualities an innermost metaphysical consciousness and resoluteness that is possible only on the basis of their radical mutual tension. The soul's passionate upward movement now casts aside all outer substantiality and form as something indifferent, and nature becomes hostile to the spirit, something to be destroyed. Man's eternal destiny absorbs into itself, to a certain extent, man's being: our fate of grace or

damnation remains remote from and oblivious to what we ourselves are. Gothic art seals this particular dualism—whether in its Nordic form, where the stretched, elongated, and unnaturally bent and twisted form of the body is made into a mere symbol of flight to a higher, supersensory plane, or in the Italian forms of the trecento. In the Italian forms, the dualism leaves behind any appearance of a persistently tortuous contest whose victor cannot quite realize its victory in perceptual form. Instead the appearance is of a state of solemn inner spirituality, untouched from the outset by all mere nature and firm substance—a state of perfection beyond life and life’s antitheses. The High Renaissance seems to shift the accent back to the other side, to nature, to firm self-sufficiency of existence and to the corporeal, which gains expressive form from organic powers of its own. Yet the High Renaissance’s ultimate tendency aims at something more than this—namely, to overcome the dualism. For though it does so from the starting point of naturalistic existence, and in this respect stands in complete contrast to the religious perfection of the trecento, it entertains a concept of nature—one later to find conscious expression in Spinoza—that views and experiences in immediate unity both corporeality and mind, substantial form and movement, being and fate.

This occurs first of all in portraiture. For in the portrait, the antithesis of body and soul is most completely overcome in the psychophysical phenomenon of individuality. Insofar as a soul belongs to this particular body and no other, and a body to this particular soul and no other, the two are bound to one another and woven into one another. Individuality emanates from this body and soul as their higher unity, as the complete human being, complete in distinctive selfhood. A person’s corporeal and psychic elements, his or her existence and fate, may, if torn from this essential unity of life, dwindle to particularities in foreign and dualistic relations to one another. But no diremption and disjunction need exist between these elements insofar as they express in their different ways the unity and uniqueness of the fundamental life of this one concrete human being. In the portraits of the quattrocento, which constantly want to be ever more personal and more character-driven, passionate accentuation of individuality derives more deeply from this striving of the corporeal and psychic elements of our existence for parity and for escape from Christian history’s dualistic and one-sided order. In discovering this equality first of all in the phenomenon of individuality, Renaissance portraits find unity as the form that shapes each side alike and guarantees their congruency. But with few exceptions, portraiture accomplishes this by exhibiting not the body as a whole but solely the head. Although the head’s natural givenness itself already indicates animation in substantial form and, conversely,

material visibility of mind, the individual portrait falls short of fully solving the problem at issue for a further reason: it solves it each time only for one special case. It does not reconcile the deeper roots of the antitheses. The dualism does not find a necessary unity through forces of its own but only in one case after another—serendipitously. In each unique phenomenon of individuality, the two sides are brought together anew. Botticelli draws the elements that Christian history assigned to separate homes both closer to unity and further from unity. His naked bodies and faces seem to accord perfectly with a coloration and rhythm of psychic mood in which deep arousal and hesitant stillness combine wondrously. Yet if one looks more closely, one sees that the rupture of body and mind, of being and fate, that stares out at us in Gothic art, has scarcely been overcome. The soul has returned to the body from its flight into the transcendent, but it has acquired a yearning that gropes around objectlessly and introspectively in a nowhere realm as melancholy, as frozenness in the elegiac moment, because here too it fails to find its home. Botticelli's bodies express the essence and movements of souls with a finely wrought symbolism, but no firm earthly anchorage in body and soul has replaced the once assured but now lost heavenly path, and at bottom the soul languishes in a pathless, irredeemable distance from the earthly and from all substantiality of appearances.

Yet at a stroke, with Michelangelo, and with the unity of art and existence his work represents, a solution is offered to all of these universal psychic and Christian historical diremptions. In the frescos of the Sistine Chapel, the statues of the tomb of Pope Julius II, and the Medici Chapel, equilibrium and sensuous unity of the most tremendous contradictions of life are brought forth. Michelangelo creates a new world, populated with beings that hitherto stood only in relation to one another—sometimes coupled to, sometimes uncoupled from, one another—and that now, from the outset, emanate from *one* life, as if permeated by an unprecedented force in whose current all elements are pulled along, unable to resist with any separate existence of their own. It is, above all, as if body and soul in humankind now recognized each other as unity after a long separation imposed on them by the soul's transcendence. When we think of the finest figures of Signorelli, we see in them a being, beauty, and provenance of their own that ultimately is alien to the soul and that only puts the body at the disposal of the soul as its tool. Michelangelo's bodies, by contrast, are so absolutely suffused by psychic interiority that even to describe them as "suffused" in this way is to suggest something too dualistic. Even to speak of some duality to be overcome seems to be to speak sketchily and inappropriately. For his souls' mood and passion are

immediately their form and movement: the very mass of their bodies. The mystery is that body and soul here become merely two words for one and the same human essence, unaffected at its core by any such nominal bifurcation. Their unity is much closer to the elements themselves than the quattrocento's partial reconciliation of them in the form of individuality. It is much more direct, for the life in general that pulsates in them itself overcomes the disjuncture of body and soul. In place of individualistic accentuation, Michelangelo asserts classical, supra-individual, type-oriented stylization. While one can perhaps describe Rembrandt's figures as crystallizing—perhaps even reducing—the fate of humanity in incomparable inner points of singularity, in Michelangelo's figures, conversely, a most intensely personal existence living from its own-most predicament expands and weaves itself into the most universal lot of humanity. The fullest passion, boring deeply inward and overflowing limitlessly outward, announces itself in quiet, classically typifying form. Perhaps such an explosively passionate spirit as Michelangelo, fired by such measureless conflicts, needed this, in a certain sense, more external and objective language of form to achieve formative productivity. Evidently, Rembrandt's interiority was never as mighty and titanic, never as dominated by a will to unify with such superhuman power those most extreme poles of life that constantly want to break in two. This is why he could be more subjective in mode of form and needed no such starkly straightening and supra-personal regimen of stylization. But the deeper and not purely psychological reason for Michelangelo's universalizing vision of form, transcending all purely contingent individuality, is that his figures express first of all a felt or metaphysical reality of *life as such*—of life developing in various meanings, stages, and fates but ultimately possessing a verbally indescribable unity in which the antithesis of body and soul has vanished as completely as the antitheses of individual particular existences and attitudes. Always only *one* life percolates alike through body and soul, with all elements of ecstasy and exhaustion, passion and prowess, proper to life as its inner rhythm and destiny.

This fusion of all dualistic elements in an unprecedented perceptual unity of life—unprecedented inasmuch as the ancient world's unity was more a naïve absence of differentiation, not deeply conscious of any such deep unreconciled antitheses of existence—finds further expression in the relation of form and movement in Michelangelo's figures. How a figure moves shows how its psychic life unfolds, and the naturally given form of its substance registers the flux of its psychic impulses. Foreignness of body and soul in the Christian worldview has its counterpart in art before Michelangelo in a merely contingent relationship of anatomical structure

and corporeal movements. Not even in Ghiberti, Donatello, or Signorelli do we sense that a particular motion requires precisely this particular body as its locus of expression, or that this particular body must prompt this specific motion as decisive for it. Only in Michelangelo's characters do we feel a unity of the given corporeal form breaking into this particular current gesture as its visibly logical consequence, for which only this particular body can be the substrate. Form and motion of the body are now, so to speak, only analyses performed retrospectively by us on an undivided life driven by one single inner law.

From this cancellation of all mutually foreign and incidental constituents arises a feeling of all Michelangelo's figures' consummate existence. A constant sense of the titanic in them, freed from empirical contingencies and relations, is not only the sense of their preternatural powers but also their inner and outer perfection of existence, the absence of which in us constitutes the specifically fragmentary character of our existence. This fragmentariness reflects not simply some inadequate capacity in us but rather each side of our existence yielding no overall unity and only to a certain extent constraining the other. Body and soul, being and destiny, nature and becoming, in us stand in some way in conflict and imbalance. Then, as soon as we feel truly *one* life streaming through all these canals—even if not necessarily always some especially strong or objectively flawless life—we have a consciousness of perfection and feel relieved of all painful halfness of existence in daily life. All Michelangelo's figures possess such formal perfection, despite what we shall shortly find to be the double tragedy that marks his predicament of innermost consciousness in relation to this fragmentary character of life. Certainly the realized meaning of his figures is always life in its entirety, lived from its unitary center and represented in a complete equilibrium of the antitheses that chance events and dogmas otherwise constantly jeopardize. So far removed is this unity of life from all polarization that even the difference of the sexes recedes in his figures. Though male and female characters in his painting are not physically blurred (as so often occurs in art history for diverse reasons), their sexual difference does not affect their ultimate core, their last ontological tendency. Dominant here is only the human as such, the perfect idea of humanity and its life, manifesting the phenomenon of man and woman only at one of its upper levels. The tremendous physical and characterological potency of Michelangelo's figures of the Sistine and Medici chapels bestows on male characters no specifically masculine quality, otherwise so typical of the Italian and northern Renaissance alike. And though female characters are fashioned similarly, they are not thereby stripped of their femininity. Thus these figures, though in no way sexless,

show that the aspect of the differential, one-sided, or incomplete in sexual difference—incomplete because these figures only together constitute “the human” as such—does not touch that center from which absolute life first flows toward them, as toward all other opposites and relations of life.

But such perfection of existence, freed of all reciprocal limitation of sides, is still in no way a state of bliss. Indeed it can be the extreme opposite of bliss. A first clue to this is the sense of tremendous solitude that suffuses and surrounds Michelangelo’s characters like a dense cloud. Deeply connected is the role played in his creations by sculpture, which bears a more intrinsic character of loneliness than painting. A sculpture lives in a world and ideal space whose limits are no greater and no different than the limits of its bodily being. Beyond those limits, no world exists with which it might have rapport. Insofar as the painted human subject stands in a surrounding space, room exists in this world for others and for spectators to enter and, to a certain extent, to come close. The sculptured subject and its spectators, by contrast, can never breathe from the same air; spectators cannot imagine themselves in the sculptured subject’s world. This is why any sculpture attempting to flirt with the spectator is so contradictory and contrary to its idea—much more so than in any analogous instance in painting. Artistically considered, it is precisely the success of their *sculptural* existence that makes the figures of the Sistine Chapel look so infinitely lonely, each as if exclusively in its own world, despite the decorative unity of the space they inhabit and their mutual belonging to a single idea. These are not “painted sculptures” or entities conceived in some sense as sculptures and then painted over. They are created entirely as paintings and yet exude from the outset a unique feeling of sculptural life. They are perhaps the only examples in art history of works entirely true to the style and formal laws of their medium and nevertheless intelligible completely in the spirit of another form. Perhaps sculpture is the form best adapted to expressing beings complete in themselves and balanced in all their moments. Disregarding music, whose unique absoluteness and abstractness confer on it a largely exceptional position among the arts, no form is less embroiled in the bustle of things, more incommunicative, more impervious to the world outside. Yet precisely in this capacity of sculpture to give purest representation to self-sufficient, impeccable, inwardly balanced existence, it becomes engulfed by a cool shadowlike solitude, never lifted by any turn of fortune. This solitude of sculpture in general is of course something very different from any solitude of a represented subject—just as the beauty of a work of art need not owe anything to the beauty of its object. Yet in Michelangelo, this distinction

has no meaning, for his figures tell of nothing outside themselves like a portrait or history painting. Just as the content of a concept has validity even if no object corresponds to it in the here-and-now, his sculptures remain formations of life transcendent of questions of being or nonbeing in other spheres of existence. They subsist immediately, not by title of anything beyond them. They *are* what they *represent* and imitate nothing that might be characterized differently in some other imitation. Everything they are accrues to them as works of art. One cannot speak of a weariness of the torments of life that longs for eternal sleep in some definite real night, just as little as one can speak of a piece of stone as longing to sleep in this sense. Instead, we must speak here of a particular meaning, mood, and fate of life becoming sensuously visible like any really living person, but in this case as an “*idea*”—if I may use this rather easy and overworn expression. The impression of infinite loneliness of Michelangelo’s figures stems from this ideal sensuous character of their immediate self-sufficient existence in his art and consummates a profound feature of tragic earnest, intrinsic to sculpture and shared with music. For both sculpture and music, I have said, exhibit, more than any other art form, a sovereignty, an essential solitude and inability to share their space with other beings, which in Michelangelo shows itself in an absolute inner balance of all elements. One parallel to this melancholy of solitude is the astonishment Franz Schubert once expressed in the question “Do you know of any truly cheerful music? I do not.” Only at first sight is it paradoxical to say this of sculpture too. As the most perfect of all sculptural forms, Michelangelo’s figures reveal, primordially, a weighty, somber earnest as the perfection of a purely formal artistic condition.

The amalgamation of elements in art before Michelangelo in a manner more or less lacking in interrelationship and equilibrium reflects no kind of subjective perfection of the individual, no kind of blissful overcoming of everything fragmentary in man. In Michelangelo this occurs, by contrast, in the synthesis of an antagonism more fearsome and portentous than anything else in art history. Physical gravity dragging the body downward now stands over against a countervailing impulse of movement of the soul. Every movement of our limbs shows at any instant the state of this struggle. Volitional energies drive our limbs according to quite different norms and dynamics from physical energies, and our lived body is the site of their mutual struggle, contention, or compromise. Herein lies perhaps the simplest symbol of our enduring form of life—in the pressure that things and circumstances, nature and society, exert over us, and in the countermovements of our freedom that cancel or contest this pressure or are crushed by it or surrender to it. Only amid these contrary

forces, each hostile and burdensome to the other, does the soul make itself felt, effective, and creative. If the soul's freedom were wholly unrestrained, it would lose itself in infinity, in a void, like a sculptor's chisel striking against nothing hard or firm. It is perhaps the most complex aspect of our life that what constrains its spontaneity and obstructs its free upward striving is at the same time the condition of our life's accession to visible expression and formative creation through doing and striving. How these forces are distributed in life, how one prevails over the other or how both are held in balance, and how far apart they stretch or what unity they take—this decides the style of individual phenomena, in life as much as in art. In Michelangelo, gravity, on the one hand, and ascendant psychic energies, on the other, face off at one another with hostile obstinacy, like two irreconcilable parties. In so doing, they interpenetrate, hold each other in check, and generate together a phenomenon of unparalleled unity of tense opposites. Michelangelo's figures are most often seated or reclining, in direct contrast to the passions of their souls. But with their robustness, perhaps even compactness, of attitude and outline, they give more potent expression to the interplay and mutual tension of their principles of life and the conquering-conquered power of each than any histrionic gesture could accomplish. We feel how physical mass wants to drive them down into a nameless obscurity and how sometimes a burdensome wall seems to rob even the columns of Michelangelo's edifices of any ability to breathe and stretch upward. Against this vehemence, which, like fate and as fate's symbol, weighs down on, or in, his figures, another force, just as mighty, strives forth: a passionate longing for freedom, happiness, and salvation, erupting from innermost cores of the soul. Yet the negative factor tends to outweigh the positive on all sides and seems to hold the last word, making the whole impression one of an incurable melancholy, of entrapment under a downward-dragging burden, and of a battle without prospect of victory. Still, the elements of fate and freedom, embodied perceptually as gravity, on the one hand, and psychic innervation, on the other, here reach a closer, more unitary, more resolute equivalence than anywhere else in art. Though gravity and spontaneity in art of the ancient world typically produce something entirely placid and never one-sided, this unity is in a sense guaranteed in advance and never put to the test of any antithesis. Interaction of opposing directions here constitutes a peace not preceded by conflict and therefore void of any pronounced consciousness of conflict. In the Baroque, the elements constantly displace one another in shifting imbalances, privileging at one moment a dull massivity and earthy material weightiness unchecked by any inner form-giving movement, and at another moment an affected sense of motion heedless of

physical constraints and conditions, as if all that existed were a passion of will and force torn free of all natural laws of bodies and things. These are the two directions that in Michelangelo stand in deadly opposition to one another, and nevertheless come together in an unprecedented unity of life. In the Baroque they fall apart, and do so with all the unconditional force that Michelangelo first gave them and had to give them in order to solve a gigantic problem on a gigantic scale.

In the figures of the Sistine ceiling and even more so those of the Medici tombstones and the slave sculptures, gravity seizes upwardly aspiring energy itself and drives down to the deepest seat of all impulses opposing or canceling it, repressing them from the outset.* And yet this burdensome mass, this palpable heaviness, is countered and animated in its innermost being by spiritual impulses struggling for freedom and light. That which seeks liberation and that which hinders liberation converge absolutely in one point, in an indifference of forces, sometimes with an appearance of paralysis, as if frozen in the great moment at which life's decisive powers cancel each other out. A life tragic in its innermost unity articulates itself in this dualism and grows and blossoms in it. Perhaps only in some Egyptian sculptures do we see something analogous to this compactness and earthy heaviness of the stone mass. Yet these Egyptian sculptures lack a sense of resistant striving impulses animating the stone, and of the stone being drawn into the soul's current in the gravitational event itself. Stone's inner substance here simply remains stone: mere natural heaviness, not yet absorbed into the clash of world principles and pushed toward form. Inasmuch as form, life, and soul here accrue to stone externally, the antitheses meet each other at most in a kind of spatial sense, rather than through any inner unity, be this one of balance or of conflict or, as with Michelangelo, both at the same time. Where Michelangelo's true unity of principles reveals a sense of fulfillment in nonfulfillment and nonfulfillment in fulfillment, Egyptian sculpture shows not even a drive to unity that remains unfulfilled but more a dull inert tension that is as yet no kind of drive at all. This lends to Egyptian statues a sense of being rooted to the spot in their dualism, indeed sometimes an aspect of the infinitely sad, in contrast to the tragic in Michelangelo. For tragedy exists wherever the oppression or destruction of a life energy by something inimical to it is not a contingent or extraneous event of conflict of these two potencies but a fate inevitably already preformed in the life-energy

* [Trans.] Slave sculptures: *Rebellious Slave* and *Dying Slave* (1510–1513), Paris, Louvre; *Awakening Slave*, *Young Slave*, *Bearded Slave*, *Atlas* (1520–1534), Florence, Accademia Gallery.

in question. Struggle is a tragic being's sole form of unity. Michelangelo's unfinished figures (but by no means only these) emerge arduously and strenuously from the block of marble, in utmost contrast, notably, to images of Aphrodite rising from the sea, as perception or as symbol. In the case of Aphrodite, nature joyfully releases beauty and animated existence from herself because in this existence she recognizes her own law and does not lose herself in any higher formation. In Michelangelo, on the other hand, stone seems jealously to preserve its downward-directed nature, its weighty formlessness, and does not relent in its struggle with the higher formation, even as it must. This sense that struggle describes the specific manner in which antitheses reach artistic unity points to a category of metaphysical depth in which some of the most epochal spirits in the life of the mind have concurred. This seems to have been Heraclitus's meaning in describing the world's being as the relation and unity of opposites, and strife as the creative and formative principle. It must have occurred to him in this that struggle means not only that one party fights with another and vice versa—not just two parties, each moving in a particular way—but one utterly unitary category whose content or appearance is diremption, as when one speaks of the swing of a pendulum and refers to two directions of movement at once. The estrangement and altercation of the two parties is one unitary occurrence. Life as unity of the multifarious expresses itself most powerfully, intensely, and tragically not as peaceful cooperation of elements but as their struggle and will to mutual negation. This unity of life, as something only fully tangible in such violent tension, is shaped metaphysically. If the world for Heraclitus is the sum of antitheses and the product of strife, it is expressed in artistic form in Michelangelo wherever the antitheses of an upwardly straining soul and a downward dragging gravity are forced together in images of incomparable visual perfection. Corporeal weight shows itself to be a moment drilling down into the soul, indeed first originating in the soul, and conflict of soul and lived body appears as a struggle of opposing intentions of the body.

Thus it is that Michelangelo's figures possess that existential perfection that has always been sensed in them, and in a certain sense thus it is too that art's task in general is solved. What divides in two in natural and historical reality and subsides into mutually foreign and silent fragments is here unified in a higher life as art. And yet, Michelangelo's figures create a new problem, his own problem: they evince a terrible lack of salvation. The impression remains that all their victory over earthly individual neediness, all their titanic perfection, all their assimilation of every power and aspiration of existence, betrays a yearning whose fulfillment is not included in that rounded unity of being. At issue here is something decisive

for the character of Michelangelo's figures, for his artistic creative process, and finally for his own life.

The fate in question arises from the Renaissance character of his work. His figures' will to life and yearning belong entirely in a sphere of the earthly, and are fueled by a tremendous need for redemption, for exemption from pressure and cessation of struggle—a need intensified by the gigantic scale of their being. No contradiction exists in this lust for more plenitude, more bliss, more freedom. In a sense not easy to determine, these figures' yearning still forms a part of their perfect being, as their being forms part of their yearning. As this being is earthly, nourished from sources of wholly worldly dimensions, their yearning is for something absolute, infinite, unattainable—but immediately so, and not for anything strictly transcendent. Inwardly, these figures glimpse something possible on this earth, if never real: perfection not of a religious nature but forged from their own being, a state of redemption coming from no God and not capable of coming from any God but rather from the powers of life itself. In the innermost of senses in which these beings' yearning constitutes their existence, they are supra-empirical but not supra-earthly creatures. The religious yearning awakened in them by Christianity and fashioned by the Gothic has moved by an axial rotation in the direction of the earthly, of the intrinsically experienceable, even if never experienced. This yearning has brought with it into the world all the passion, all the discontent with everything actually given, all the absoluteness of a “further, further,” that first emerged from, and in, the relation to a supersensory world. An endless course of earthly paths takes the place of paths to the supra-earthly, which latter, considered closely, are by no means as infinite as the former but are always able to reach their goal or appointed end, whenever that may be. Religion's deepest enchantment is that its object is something infinite that nevertheless can be achieved, through a finite effort at the end of a finite path, even if on Judgment Day. But this configuration is reversed when, as with Michelangelo, all character of religious feeling as rhythm, intensity, and relatedness of individual moments to the whole of existence, as previously cultivated in this feeling by Christian transcendence, is transported into the earthly. The mind imagines a goal, by definition finite, but now, in the new dispensation, this goal is something unattainable, something ideal, that prescribes the yearning's direction but leads this yearning to no conclusion within anything finitely conceivable. A contradiction arises between the form of the desiring and striving life and its content. The content this form must assume is not inwardly adequate to it, for up to this point, the form has been educated in a content utterly different. Christian Gothic yearning needs heaven, and

when such yearning now shifts to the earthly dimension of the Renaissance, it must pine for something unfindable or must fix on it. Religion shows man a desired infinity on a finite scale, whereas here a desired finitude recedes on an infinite scale. This is the portentous logical expression of the position of a man with a religious soul oriented to the infinite and absolute, who has been born into the life and style of a time that redirects its ideals from heaven to earth and finds its ultimate satisfaction in a work of artistic shaping of the purely natural. In magnitude, power, and equipoise of all human energies, Michelangelo's forms seem to have reached a point of perfection. There is no further for them to go, yet nevertheless they feel themselves impelled to strive further. So long as human beings are in any way incomplete on this earth, they may aspire and hope indefinitely. But what of a man satisfied only by a yearning oriented by quite different dimensions, who has reached the end of a yearning given to him alone on this earth and does not feel this to be a true conclusion? What can remain for him other than a desperate gaping into the void? Perfect and at the same time unblessed: this is the conclusion of the two premises from which Michelangelo's figures begin.

One work exists by Michelangelo to which all the foregoing reflections do not apply. In the *Rondanini Pietà* we feel neither any dualism of directions of life in their artistic formal cancellation, nor any more desperate dualism of finite perceptual image and demand and desire for the infinite.* Here, mighty resistance and struggle have disappeared altogether; no stuff exists any more against which the soul might need to defend itself. The body has abandoned the struggle for itself, and the impression is one of disembodiment. In this work, Michelangelo has denied his art's Renaissance life-principle. And if this principle entangled him in a terrible state of irredemption, of tension between a transcendent passion and its necessarily inadequate corporeal expressive form, this denial has not settled the antagonism. Redemption here remains purely negative and nirvana-like. Struggle has been surrendered without either victory or conciliation. The soul, freed from bodily weight, has not run its lap of victory into the transcendent but collapsed at its threshold. This is Michelangelo's most treacherous and most tragic work: the seal of his inability to reach salvation from a path of artistic creation centered in sensuous perception.

Here we see the last fearful predicament of his life, as his late poems proclaim it: one of investing all his long life's forces and energies into a creative project that has not fulfilled its ultimate needs and deepest ne-

* [Trans.] *Rondanini Pietà*: Michelangelo's last sculpture, 1552–1564, Castello Sforzesco, Milan.

cessities, and could not have done so because it works on a plane different from that on which the yearning's objects lie.*

The fables of the world have filched away
The time I had for thinking upon God

Painting nor sculpture now can lull to rest
My soul that turns to His great love on high,
Whose arms to clasp us on the cross were spread

But once be born: and he who dies afire,
What shall he gain if erst he dwelt with me?

No doubt can exist that Michelangelo's last, deepest, and most terrible experience was that he could no longer glimpse eternal values in his work. He saw that his path had led him away from everything important to him. The confessions of his poems immediately make clear that something supersensory resides in the art he creates and the beauty he worships that is the fount of their value. At one point he speaks of the heartening beauty of man represented in art. If the nonpictures of the day had destroyed this work,

All beauty that to human sight is given
Is but the shadow, if we rightly see.

Plainly it was the great crisis of Michelangelo's life that after having originally found all absolute value and every supersensory idea fully enacted in the perception of art and beauty, he now discovered, in old age, that

* [Trans.] Simmel's quotations from Michelangelo's poetry are from a German translation of uncertain origin, with no verse numbers provided. Or they may possibly be Simmel's own translations. The English translations here are from *The Life of Michelangelo Buonarroti* (1893) by the English Victorian writer John Addington Symonds. For a more modern source, see *The Complete Poems of Michelangelo*, trans. J. F. Nims (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). See also Simmel's early essay of 1889, "Michelangelo als Dichter" (Michelangelo as Poet), which cites some of the same verses in different German renderings (*GSG* 2:37–48). Simmel published this essay shortly after completing studies for his doctoral minor in Italian Renaissance literature with the noted Michelangelo scholar Herman Grimm, predecessor to Heinrich Wölfflin as professor of art history at the University of Berlin and son of Wilhelm Grimm (of the Brothers Grimm).

all of this value and ideality lay in a realm to which art and beauty offered no access. His deepest metaphysical suffering was that what alone reveals absoluteness, perfection, and infinity to us, namely, appearances and their attraction, also conceals this from us—promising to lead us there and nevertheless leading us away. This realization became the most fateful and insufferable crisis for him because, for all that, his heart and sensuous artistic passion remained not one iota less mightily wedded to appearances and their appeal. He comforts himself with the words that in his heart of hearts he cannot believe it a sin to love beauty since God has made beauty too.

It is understandable that this soul would be dominated by art and love, for in both we believe that in the earthly we possess something more than earthly:

I seek the splendour in thy fair face stored;
 Yet living man that beauty scarce can learn,
 And he who fain would find it, first must die.

Michelangelo's fate was to demand all the fullness of the infinite from all the fullness of the finite. Art and love are the two elements that humanity offers as means to fulfillment of this yearning, for which his genius and passion were born—and so he is beholden to both, even long after recognizing both unfit for his fate's calling. In this situation, a feeling rises up that seems to have accompanied his entire existence, namely that this existence is a fragment and that its pieces form, in the end, no unity. Perhaps this explains the tremendous impact on him of Vittoria Colonna.* Here he confronted, perhaps for the first time, the, so to speak, formally perfect human being—the first in his life not to be born of fragmentariness and dissonance. Plainly this was an extreme case of the kind of impression a very perfect woman often arouses in strong and outstanding men. Not just this or that particular perfection do such men admire in such women, but their unity and wholeness of existence—in relation to which a man can feel his life to be a mere fragment, a mere congeries of unfinished elements, even if any one of these elements in themselves surpasses the woman's wholeness in force and significance. When Michelangelo made her acquaintance he was an old man and knew that he would no longer by his own devices bring the unfinished, rough-hewn, and mutually inhib-

* [Trans.] Vittoria Colonna (1492–1547): Italian noblewoman and poet; close literary correspondent of Michelangelo.

ited aspects of his being to a rounded and polished conclusion. Hence his infinite awe at the sight of a life that has no place for the fragment and that he felt to be so unconditionally superior in form to his own—as a Renaissance man, for whom form of life meant everything—that he never even thought of asserting against this life some singular accomplishment of his own. Hence his humility and modesty toward this lady. By definition, no singular accomplishment on his part, however tremendous, could reach the level at which her life's perfection lay. Thus can be seen Michelangelo's love for Vittoria Colonna not as a singular experience coordinated toward another but as the consequence and fulfillment of an entire fate of life.

This is to solve at the same time a unique problem related to the erotic character of Michelangelo's images. In their number and tone, his poems and many other statements leave no doubt that he led an erotically charged life of the most passionate intensity. Often enough, his poems unite this love life symbolically with his art. And yet, remarkably, not the slightest hint exists of any such eroticism in his visual art, by way of either content or mood. Among all other such artists, an erotic tone vibrates unmistakably in their creations—from Giorgione to Rubens, to Titian and Rodin. Nothing like this can be felt in Michelangelo. What his figures seem to say and live, along with the stylistic atmosphere his mood immerses them in, contains no trace of this or of any other particular affect. They suffer simply a generalized fate in which all definitely identifiable elements have dissolved. Pressing upon them and shaking them to the core is life in its entirety, life as fate in general, hanging above us all and surrounding us all, and only congealing into particular experiences, affects, quests, and repulsions in the course of particular days. Each of Michelangelo's human characters stands back from specific concrete forms of the fact of fate. He reveals this fact as something *sui generis*, free of every phenomenal this or that of the world's contingencies. But this is not the abstraction of man in classical sculpture, who, barring a few hints particularly in Greek heads of youths, stands beyond fate. Greek ideal figures, from the pre-Hellenic period, may be "lively" enough, but life as such is not a predicament for them, as it is for the figures of the Sistine ceiling and the Medici tombstones. This may now shed some light on Michelangelo's love poems and help reduce their apparent distance from the character of his visual art. In the erotic passion that moves him, as subjective, accentuated, and immediately personal as it may be, it is the moment of love as *fate* in whose omnipotence all these fulgurations are centered. No specific content of eroticism penetrates his works, but the fact of fate to which love is attributed or extended is the common denominator of his experience, his

poetry, and his art. Only in a few pictures by Hodler is this sensibility as palpable.* Love is no mere affect limited to points in space and time, but rather the air we breathe and cannot escape: a metaphysical fate that burns, weighs, and gravely bears down over humanity. It grips us like the earth turning in its orbit and pulling us with it. It is a fate not merely of men and women as a sum of individuals but something claiming us like an objective world-dominating force. The sense that an individual fate is given with life, that life's rhythm constitutes the essence and lynchpin of any individual destiny, and that this rhythm is onerous, ineluctable, and ever-present in every draw of breath—this is the element common to Michelangelo's love poetry and to his sculptures and painting. No anthropomorphic projection of the artist's own lot is at issue here. Instead, this is a genius's metaphysical feeling of the world's essence, from which his own essence flows and acquires sense. His figures' ultimate meanings for us are the same as his inner attitude to life. The fate of the world and life in general build the core and meaning of any personal destiny, which for its part rests not purely on a subjective reflex of fleeting pleasures and pains but on a suprapersonal significance, on an objectively valid being. Therefore, when his late poems speak of the eternal ruin that awaits him, they tremble not at some such thing as damnation in hell but at the torment of the pure thought of being someone such as to deserve hell. This is another expression of his sense of inadequacy of existence and action—but with an utterly different valence from that of the pusillanimous, weak person creeping under the cross. Hell is here not something menacing inward from the outside but the logical continuation of an earthly constitution. A transcendent heaven and hell, wholly removed from all earthly directions of life, in the sense felt for example by Fra Angelico, would have been very alien to Michelangelo. Here again can be seen his entire Renaissance worldview: an absolute premium is placed on earthly personal existence. Objective values are fulfilled through subjective life—but in no dependency on contingent egocentric subjectivity. This is that personalism that Nietzsche taught and that so deeply impressed this philosopher in the Renaissance ideal. The ego, and ultimately only the ego, is at stake, but only the objective meaning of its existence is relevant—not its contingent states of pleasure and pain, which in a sense are of no concern to the world's being. It was Michelangelo's torment to be imperfect, fragmentary, and unfaithful to his ideal in an earthly life formed and delineated by his own freedom. A dogmatic-religious image of retribution in hell is only the period-specific projection of this anguish in him. The torments

* [Trans.] Ferdinand Hodler (1853–1918), Swiss painter.

he believed awaited him in the afterlife are merely a sensualized expression of his time and personality only allowing him to strive after a transcendent absolute ideal with the means and path of an earthly existence—and it was across the bridgeless abyss that spanned this absolute ideal and the earthly path that he dared to gaze.

I have mentioned the tragic character of Michelangelo's figures, echoing his life in all its profundity. Tragedy, I have said, signifies that what runs against a will and a life as its contradiction and destruction nevertheless evolves from the deepest last fundamentals of this will and this life itself—in contrast to the merely sad, where a chance misfortune inflicts the same destruction on the destroyed subject's innermost meaning of life. Tragedy consists in a character's being annihilated by the same roots from which it grows in meaning and value. In this sense, Michelangelo is a tragic personality through and through. Directed to the artistically perceptual and to the earthly and beautiful, his life foundered on the transcendental yearning that stretched this necessary line of direction to its breaking point. But this yearning too was necessary. Stemming from the deepest bases of his nature, he could just as little escape this inner self-annihilation as run away from himself. An "other" world faces him and his figures, a world incomprehensibly distant and impossible to satisfy, almost like Christ's threatening and hideous gesture on Judgment Day: the crushing fate of these figures' will to life. From the outset, they are assailed by this problem and need of an absolute, of an existence set free of all earthly measures. Just as their yearning upward is pervaded by their weighty lugubrious materiality, so their earthly existence carries from its roots a yearning for infinite extension and absolute satisfaction, inextricably accompanying their whole being as their deepest will's intention. The fulfillment of their being is the destruction of their being. In Michelangelo, the very forces, rhythms, dimensions, forms, and laws enabling him to complete his earthly being and art were themselves destined simultaneously to overstep this earthly plane, and in so doing, turning back on themselves, to deny the life they nurtured. In no other known man of the greatest accomplishments has an oppositional, destructive, and devaluing aspect of existence grown so immediately and resolutely from this existence's most essential, most life-affirming directions, bound to them a priori, indeed identical with them. Even more perhaps than in his works themselves, the titanic character of Michelangelo's nature appears in these works' finally signifying nothing to him beside the task he felt preying upon his soul.

The idea to which Michelangelo martyred himself seems to belong to humanity's unending problems: to find life's redemptive completion in

life itself—to fashion the absolute in the form of the finite. In the greatest variety of incarnations, it accompanies Goethe's life, starting with the thirty-eight-year-old's cry, still full of hope: "How infinite the world becomes if one only truly holds fast to the finite!" And it continues in the seventy-nine-year-old's similar but more mystical reflection on the need for immortality as means of conserving those earthly powers of ours that we have not yet fully expended on this earth. Faust demands most passionately of life that he realize an absolute claim over himself: "Let him look round, feet planted firm on earth. . . . Why haunt eternity with dim surmise? . . . In forward-striving pain and bliss abide."* And yet, a few pages later, he must start anew in heaven and be "instructed," since the new day blinds him. The eternal love from above must participate in him in order to redeem him! In Nietzsche can be seen the same path of ultimate yearning: the passion for something absolute and infinite, realized from a realistic lingering with the earthly. All this explains Nietzsche's ideal of nobility as fulfillment of every most extreme demand for biological breeding; his doctrine of eternal return and the *Übermensch*; his ideas of wanting to reclaim the infinity and transcendence of every real limit for earthly courses of events; and finally his idea of the dream of Dionysus and semitranscendent mysticism gathering up threads that nevertheless refuse the finite and want to span into infinity. Before Nietzsche, no one had done so much as Michelangelo to fold life into the earthly perceptual form of art and to let life reckon with itself—not only by fashioning an unprecedented perceptual unity of body and soul, free of the soul's sequestration in heaven, but also by bringing to perfect expression, in the unique motion of his figures and the battle of their energies, all discrepancies of lived experience and all tragedies of a realm above and a realm below. Yet in taking to its logical conclusion this possibility of leading life along a path of art to unity and perfection, Michelangelo realized terribly that the end in fact lay beyond these limits. To this day, humanity's fate in history seems to have been to advance to the very furthest possible on the plane of life, only to discover that reaching this point discloses the plane's boundaries but not *our* boundaries. It is perhaps humanity's telos to find the realm in which our finitude and neediness can redeem themselves absolutely and perfectly, and to do so without having to migrate to another realm of yonder realities, of ultimately dogmatic revelations. Yet all visionaries such as Michelangelo, who imagine attaining all values and infinity of this second realm without quitting the first, want to resolve or force the dualism into a synthesis. In so doing, they move only so far as the

* [Trans.] Goethe, *Faust*, part II, act 5, scene 5; trans. P. Wayne.

sheer demand that the one realm yield the provisions of the other. They do not reach any new unity beyond these antitheses. As with his creations, so also with Michelangelo's life: it remains the last and most portentous of his tragedies that humanity has still not found any such Third Realm.*

* [Trans.] "Third Realm" (*das dritte Reich*): likely an allusion to the theme of a coming "third realm"—a utopian world order of justice—in Henrik Ibsen's play *Emperor and Galilean* (1873).

On Constantin Meunier

All cultural production seems to divide into the duality of form and content. We feel justified in thinking of culture in this way by the independence with which at different times either form or content assumes a certain development that pushes ahead and leaves the other behind. This we find revealed in art, as a bearer or mirror of general culture, in the way in which artistic genius so often raises art to higher levels by one or the other of two means: on the one hand, by making received forms open to contents that hitherto had seemed wholly resistant to them or, on the other hand, by creating forms or styles that allow any number of contents to find expression in just one new register, without regard to originality of contents. Two sculptors stand out for us today in the degree to which their works' newness announces the newness of our time. They signify two of the most divergent tendencies of our culture, the one lending sculpture a new content, the other affording sculpture a new stylistic expressive form. One imbues sculpture with a new idea of culture, the other with a new *feeling* of culture. They are Meunier and Rodin.

Meunier's great achievement is to have discovered artistic aesthetic value in corporeal labor. Millet and other painters of working people made labor a subject for art more in its ethical or emotive significance—more in something *associated* with labor than in its immediate phenomenal character. Before Meunier, laboring gestures seemed completely to contradict the kind of exterior perfection and expressive interior unity with which human figures find meaning in sculpture. Labor, occurring on the object, was thought to lead individuals outside of themselves and to shatter the inner plastic composure of human form, entangling figures in recalcitrant exteriority and hindering the figure's ascent to self-sufficient unity as a work of art. Labor was considered a mere contingent need of man, in deepest contrast to the necessity and simultaneous freedom proper to

art and to humanity in art. This most likely explains why sculpture has so often shown man as restless, even somnolent, or as thoughtful or passionate or at play, but never at *work*. Meunier saw that labor is not something extraneous to us but our *deed*, binding our exterior to our inner life and extending the peripheries of our being without threatening our unity. The miracle in labor is that a subject's action is subservient to the demands of a material—to the extent that otherwise we would have no need to work but could simply dream or play—and nevertheless this material flows back into a subject's sphere of being. Meunier's figures, in their artistic perfection, engaged in acts of lifting, pulling, rolling, and rowing, show us the powers that working people invest in materials and see returning to them. Labor makes a tool of the body, and Meunier understood that through labor tools too become parts of the body. Sensing that laboring movements fully and perfectly express meanings of human appearances, he discovered in the worker a whole realm of aesthetic values. Perhaps in this regard his only earlier counterparts are [Goethe's figures of] Hermann and Dorothea: characters from a close-knit community, lacking in any great aesthetic pathos or intensity of life, living only for work and from work, but represented in the classic grand style.* Life circumscribed by labor is figured as a site of rich artistic delineation; the two characters are not removed from this life-context, and this context is itself shown to yield possibilities of artistic elaboration. In just this way, the nineteenth century's social movement found in the worker a realm of *ethical* values. The notion that work relates only to outcomes and not to human subjects and their working lives, which previously seemed to sequester the worker from values in general, is corrected by this movement for the first time, and Meunier shows this artistically in treating laboring gestures on a par with every other aesthetic form of the body—also for the first time. Of course, some thirty years ago, Van Gogh also worked along these lines in his peasant drawings, demanding explicitly that artists depict peasants at work—which all the old masters, he felt, had neglected to do—and that a worker's movements be painted for the sake of this *workers' movement*. Here we sense again something of great import for the philosophy of culture. Movement in labor, now released into aesthetic value, rises to awareness not only as a discrete perceptual phenomenon but perceptually also as something inextricably bound up with an entire plight of life of

* [Trans.] Goethe, *Hermann and Dorothea* (1797); epic poem, set during the period of French occupation of the Rhineland at the beginning of the French Revolutionary Wars, ca. 1792.

our lower social classes. This is how Meunier portrays his workers: not in traditional fashion as individually exemplary men and women, now only represented in the new “pose” of work. Rather, we are made to feel perceptually that this figure could be really one among many, one from a crowd, rather than any special personality—although also not any “representative” of the mass, which would still be an individualizing as well as conceptual, rather than perceptual, kind of marker. Here one finds no allegory of the “worker in general”; individuals belong thoroughly in the real circle of their comrades and are in no sense “distinctive,” and yet they are aesthetically perfect and exquisite in precisely this regard. All appeal of “distinction” in them, which usually we describe as an aristocratic quality, is now purely perceptual in character and no longer tied to any difference of the one from the many. In the realm of aesthetics, the same relation to value is realized that Maeterlinck’s philosophy of life affirms for the elements of the individual soul. Our happiness, our value and greatness, lie not in things extraordinary, not in heroic endeavors, deeds, and experiences but in everyday existence, in all of its nameless monotony. As with social democracy, essential life in individuals is seen as lying in that which binds them to others, which is why a condition is possible in which subjective and objective values that hitherto seemed to rest on difference, distinction, and special individual gifts become open to all on account of the equality of all. By showing how, in attaining high aesthetic value, a worker need be no different and need act no differently from any other person, since work itself embodies this value, Meunier is able to dispense with every tendency to agitation or to sentimentality, so typical of other artistic homages to the worker. All presentations in this latter vein tend to assert that man is worthy and beautiful in such and such a way *despite* labor—whereas Meunier shows this to be the case precisely *because* of labor. Here again we see his work’s deepest meaning and most thoroughly artistic aspect: in not separating human beings from their work or positing a value in humanity that work might seem to conceal, he reveals aesthetic perfection in labor itself—in work as it is carried out by the broad mass of working people.

Yet one of the deepest preconditions of the recovery of this new content of art was that it could not be represented in any new stylistic form. Meunier succeeded only in indicating that a modern worker is to be viewed and stylized artistically in just the same fashion as a Greek youth or Venetian senator. And the social movement he echoed likewise lent only a new content to ethical sensibility. Its redirection of justice, compassion, and altruism to the working class meant a tremendous extension of moral consciousness, but not a new *style* of moral consciousness. Only

Nietzsche generated this latter. Meunier found a new object world for life's artistic value but no new form, no new stylistic principle for viewing life artistically. Only Rodin has found this. Rodin brings to light not a new content for sculpture but rather a *style*: a style able to express our modern soul's unique attitude to life.

Auguste Rodin: Part I

Before Rodin, the history of sculpture comes to an end with Michelangelo. What succeeds this earlier master is either Baroque eclecticism or, even in nobler manifestations, derivative work in the shadow of his style and under the spell of antiquity. Only in the art form of portrait busts, where tasks of disclosing a subject's unique individual character make reliance on traditional schematic models least attractive and push more creative spirits toward new syntheses of style and content—only here do we find more original personalities such as Houdon and Hildebrand.* But these remain isolated instances that set no deep legacies of form and style on a par with the world-defining creations of antiquity, of Gothic art, of Donatello and Michelangelo. Even the genius of Meunier established no new style for sculpture—only new contents. Meunier discovered human labor as a formal subject for art. He found beauty and stylizability in the laboring human figure, where all previous sculpture had sought these qualities solely in figures in states of rest or play or passionate tragic turmoil. But this was only to pour new wine in old bottles. Meunier's work extended the classical style but did not overcome it.

If the history of an art form is to involve development in style beyond repetition in style, we may say that sculptural history after Michelangelo only resumes with Rodin. Rodin is the first to break away definitively from antique schemes toward a new style. Naturalism, which has experimented less frequently with sculpture than with other art forms—and in fact has only done so in Romanic countries—has also sought to free itself from classical precepts. But its freedom is solely a freedom of the emancipated slave, not a freedom for any new law of art. As Nietzsche showed that our morality is not the absolute morality we hold it to be but one

* [Trans.] Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828), French neoclassical sculptor; Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921), German neoclassical sculptor.

among others, so Rodin demonstrates that classical form, once thought synonymous with sculptural style as such, is not absolute but historical in authority and takes its place only alongside other forms in history. This achievement is all the more difficult to describe in words as the sheer extent of Rodin's innovations precludes much meaningful reference to precursors. All that is possible initially in the following will be to determine a place for his work in general cultural history and development.

Yet only in one part of his work as a whole do we find Rodin's new style unambiguously dominant—a style itself generated in a fusion of the modern mind with Michelangelo's legacy, the latter considered as a kind of masculine principle, the former as feminine. Rodin has himself traversed so many different historical styles that one has the impression of his being able to work simultaneously like Donatello or Verrochio, Michelangelo or Bernini. Master of his art in all of these repertoires, he lays bare how much the modern mind can accomplish as a whole. But in one element of his work, he shows what he himself wishes to communicate, and in this he shows less the *extensity* than the *intensity* of the modern mind. By this I mean the following. The deepest inner difficulties of the nineteenth century consisted in conflict between individuality and lawfulness. Individuals can no more escape from their own uniqueness and singularity than they can from those inner necessities of existence and action that we call lawfulness. This seems contradictory inasmuch as our concept of law, derived from the natural sciences and jurisprudence, always requires generality and indifference to that which is individual. An individual person or thing or phenomenon must be subsumed under a valid norm for all cases. It is this that helps explain a yearning, found in inner and outer aspects of life alike, for what one could call a law of the individual or "individual law," for a unity of purely personal self-fashioning, endowed with all the dignity, scope, and determinacy of law, and yet free of all mere formulaic generality. Now wherever it has not been naturalistic, modern sculpture has existed thoroughly under the sway of the general law bequeathed to it by classical art, which has never enabled a truly personal and uniquely spontaneous life to appear in sensuous form or in any concomitant dimension of soul. Certainly naturalism has permitted this. Naturalism has extricated subject and object from all extraneous forces of general rules foreign to innermost life. But in so doing, it has submitted life to mere chance, to an anarchic, idealess fashioning of the passing moment. The twin principles of form that have lain asunder and unreconciled now constitute the very unity of Rodin's art.

As with Rembrandt, here is to be found an absolute freedom from any schema external to the creative soul. Every form of every work by Rodin

transcribes directly his vision and sensibility as a completely individual personality. Hence all of his figures take on a freedom arising from unconditional service of each particular and external detail to his intentions and impulses as a creative ego. But this freedom, whether we express it as freedom of the creator or of his creatures, has all the strictness, cohesion, and dignity of a law-bound existence. One feels the necessity with which all parts cohere into an organic work of growth whose inner assurance of purpose precludes any fortuitous contingency. Yet never are we referred to something like an abstract type that might equally be a law for others. Instead, everything that is not fortuitous, everything that cannot be otherwise than it is, signifies only that each part and the unity of all parts express one and the same soul and are invulnerably held together by this soul. The ubiquitous problem of how a purely individual being can at the same time be a law-bound being, and of how it might be possible, without falling into anarchy or rootless arbitrariness, to reject the claim to validity of general norms on the basis of their holding merely for all *other* persons—this is the problem that Rodin's art solves, and does so in the way that only art does, which is to say, not by principles but in unique visions.

In Rodin's art we see that two tendencies, seemingly born to irreconcilable hostility, are in fact, in their common opposition to real art, largely two sides of the same coin—namely, naturalism and conventionalism. Both naturalism and conventionalism acquire their formative norms essentially heteronomously. Naturalism copies nature's impressions; conventionalism copies the template. Both are nothing but imitative doctrines compared with the work of true creators for whom nature is the material and occasion for a work of infusing the world with forms moving in those creators themselves. Naturalism and conventionalism emerge as artistic reflexes of the two great dogmas of the nineteenth century: nature and history. Both threaten to stifle the autonomous sovereign personality: the former by mechanically suborning the soul to the same blind compulsive forces as the falling stone and the sprouting blade of grass; the latter by reducing the soul to a mere point of intersection in threads of society and tying its entire creative powers to functions of survival of the species. Weighed under by these two overpowering magnitudes of nature and history, individuals forfeit both unique selfhood and agency and become mere points of thoroughfare for forces extraneous to them. In art, as a result, we find that naturalism fetters human beings to the pure givenness of things, while conventionalism shackles life to the historically given and socially sanctioned.

Perhaps, of all art forms, sculpture is the most susceptible to conven-

tion. Inventive genius is rarer here than elsewhere. All the more tremendous, then, is Rodin's ability to overcome convention in this domain without lapsing into naturalism. In sculpture, material resistance and brittleness of the medium seem to create very special difficulties for any expression of immediate animate life. Though sculpture may offer certain negative virtues of repose and freedom from the pettier vagaries of subjectivity, its tendency is to fix lesser creative spirits in the tracks of standard expressive forms and to allow only the most unique and powerful personalities to uncover new expressive possibilities from its essential physical recalcitrance and reserve. To release animate life in stone is clearly a far more challenging undertaking than to do so in the fluent, yielding stuff of oil or tempera, words or sounds. When, after Michelangelo, this magic of subjective soul began to disappear from sculpture, sculpture became specifically the unmodern art form. For it is surely the basic striving of modern times that soul seeks to realize itself everywhere as sovereignty of personal existence. Only when Christianity broke asunder the naïve unity of nature and mind and when physics substituted pure mechanisms for soul in the world, only then did the soul sense the enormity of its task: not only to preserve its unique essence amid this alien shell of machinery but also, in some way, to spiritualize this machinery and make it its own. Deeply significant for modern life in this sense is Kant's hugely audacious claim to define the world in all its contents in time and space as a pure representation of human consciousness. But this amounted solely to an act of repossession of the world by soul in a theoretical sense, in something of the manner of a political declaration of sovereignty. The soul's need remained to appropriate the world ever more closely to itself and to assimilate it to its law.

Seen from one perspective, this appropriation occurs through modern technology. But modern technology makes a slave of man, binding people to interests so extraneous to them that exteriority assimilates the soul far more than the soul assimilates exteriority. Socialism's attempt to submit life entirely to a meaningful order and, through planned organization, to expunge chance twists of fortune from life, has its place only ultimately in the soul's deepest yearning to fashion everything after its own image. The disappointments and frustrations the soul inevitably experiences in pursuing these goals through science, technology, and social reform have increased immeasurably a longing for art, indeed even a passion to drench our entire outer world in art. For only in art does the mind's victory over given existence appear complete; or, put another way, everything we call art seems to be the activity in which things' independent and finally incomprehensible existence becomes fully responsive to inner movements

of the soul. But in each work of art, this victory must be won inwardly anew, which is why, in merely stamping its materials extrinsically with traditional models, conventionalism so gravely misses art's meaning. Again, only Rodin has shown what sculpture can offer here to the modern soul's yearning. In Rodin's works we feel at last again a sense of the stone's and bronze's absolute animate life. Inner life seems to vibrate on the stone's surface, effortlessly molding it to its own intentions, rather as one says that the soul builds for itself its own body.

But the plasticity of matter for the soul is not yet art in its full meaning, for art only truly appears through a way of forming and endowing matter with a purely perceptual appeal, distinct from any kind of communicative purpose or intent. A materialized form must possess a beauty, a uniqueness, power, and unity that makes it luminous and attractive to the eye without signifying anything, or without expressing any feeling extrinsic to it. Only a form's immanent appeal raises subjectively externalized feeling to a level of supra-individual validity and communicability. Miraculous in visual art is that sensuous formal qualities of space, outline, and color, following solely their own laws and rules of attraction, nevertheless profoundly disclose that which is essentially nonperceptual, namely inner psychic life—such that the perfect fulfillment of the one demand seems tied to the demand of the other. That these two functions of appearances, ordinarily so disconnected from one another and linked only incidentally—on the one hand, pure sensory images, on the other hand, symbols and utterances of the soul—become one in art: this perhaps is the deepest blessing art affords us. In this lies art's pledge to us that life's elements are not finally as void of coherence as life may make us want to believe.

To realize the unity of this dualism is the ultimate meaning of all art. But while every great work of art accomplishes this seemingly self-evidently, the hallmark of specifically modern art is that in each case each of these two elements is perfected in sharp and conscious separation from the other. For this is the developmental formula of modern mind: to uproot life's elements from primordial unity, to individualize and to differentiate, and to bring to consciousness of themselves, in order to draw them back again into a new unity. Wherever this undertaking fails in any way, what persists is a characteristically modern sense of fracture, of bare specialization of individual contents of existence. Modern art has in no way escaped this predicament unscathed. In one way, it has seen its task as being to convey contents of thought, mood, character, and ideas by means of sensuous forms viewed more or less as mere tools of expression. But in another way, frequently under the influence of Japan, it has sought the pure attraction of form: of line, spatial articulation, and color. This

pattern of differentiation has resulted in separation between art oriented to content and art directed to form. In Rodin's work, however, these two sides coalesce. Sometimes it can seem that his figures and groups have been composed solely in outline, but seen correctly, his outlines, his play of corporeal mass and cancellation of this mass, his balance of protruding and receding relieflike parts—all of this occurs so perfectly that his work has no need to appeal to anything soul-like behind sensory appearances and instead stands forth as art in pure form. Yet form in Rodin is also form of the deepest psychic content—content that fills each form always exactly to the brim, without ever spilling over. Sense as psychic content of form, on the one hand, and sense as material-sensory quality of form, on the other, are here intensified to their extreme, first as if separately, then ultimately to unite in one another. Rodin's art, and modern art in general, may lack the magic of those old masters in whose works art's roots still bear a plenitude of attractions in unbroken unity. But once differentiation has taken place—as a path of perfection, and simultaneously of tragedy—and has dissolved this earlier state of affairs, modern life finds its highest calling only in reunification of the elements, whose discrete separate life cannot now be revoked. This, I believe, is to be seen nowhere more clearly than in the work of Rodin.

And finally this convergence is important in one further respect. Often Rodin's sculptures are unfinished in the most varied of degrees, to the point that a figure only extrudes from the block of marble or stone in a few parts and in barely discernible contours. One unmistakable characteristic of our time is here that evocations and intimations of things come more and more to exceed clear fulfillments that leave nothing to the imagination. We crave a minimum of objective givenness that unlocks a maximum of our own agency. We love a parsimony and discretion in things that triggers our interpretive powers and makes us feel their riches first through inner riches of our own. Occasionally Rodin exploits to the utmost this trait of the modern soul by making this apparent incompleteness impress on us the relation of material and form. The figure that only in this instant seems to break away from the stone heightens to the utmost a tension between the material's unyielding burdensome mass and the animated form it must release. Without this vestige of weighty earthiness behind and around it, the finished figure would not muster the same spirituality and freedom. By the same token, this deficit of full form stimulates the most vigorous input of the spectator. Recent critics' emphasis on art lovers and connoisseurs repeating the creative process in themselves points to something able to occur in no more energetic fashion than our imaginative completion of the incomplete: our own release

of the form still concealed in the stone. To the extent that our activity shuttles back and forth in this way between the work and its effect in us, the work fades into a distance—a distance that the sensibility of modern individuals always feels necessary between themselves and things of their world. For it is a modern person's simultaneous strength and weakness to demand from things not their rounded wholeness but only their aspect of most potent inspiration, their most sublimated extract—and yet only “as if from afar.” As a consciously chosen means of expression, nothing is more telling in Rodin than this lingering of the figure in the stone, which in Michelangelo's sculptures only ever occurs from minor error or from physical hindrance and appears tragic in effect, reinforcing the burdensome fate that drags down all his creations into a nameless darkness. In Rodin, this appears undeniably refined, and reflects the price that modern people must pay if they are to exercise their most native capacities in accomplishments that, on the one hand, dispense with immediate classical power and unity but, on the other, articulate a style of life uniquely their own. Where such articulation occurs as consummately as it does in Rodin—it is this that we must admire in his work, regardless of the value or absence of value we may want to see in modern styles of life themselves.

Auguste Rodin: Part II

Greek sculpture, in its genuine and classical manifestations, arises on the basis of Greek ideas of firm, perfect, and substantial being, and on an understanding of this being as formed, and of form as lying emphatically beyond time and flux. Unrest of becoming, indeterminacy of transition from one form to another, movement as continuous shattering of the well-wrought figuration—all this for the Greeks denoted a tendency to evil and the ugly, perhaps precisely because the reality of Greek life was itself one of unrest, disruption, and uncertainty. In its heyday, Greek sculpture sought the enduring and substantial form of the body beyond all mere passing states that accrue to it through movement, and it sought the body's anatomical physical structure, which in fact is an abstraction as the body is always moving in some particular manner. Only a minimum of movement occupied any place in this ancient ideal, for all movement was seen as displacing the body from its well-turned repose and reducing it to something incidental and sporadic. A millennium and a half later, Gothic sculptural art made the body into a bearer of movement and in the process dissolved all substantial assurance of its form. This expressed a passionate state of the religious soul feeling itself estranged from the body, precisely on account of the body's firm materiality and formed self-sufficiency.

Christian religious radicalism has no knowledge of the body's value or even, so to speak, of the fact of the body. In truth, only the soul exists for it, not the body—just as stone in Gothic cathedrals does not exist with a meaning and gravity of its own but only as one aspect of an ascending supportive power. As the body is here a mere means to an end for sculpture, a contradiction arises in the Gothic style's indifference to the body as form, namely, a contradiction arising in practical life as asceticism, where the body is both present and not present. All of these pressed, elongated, distorted, bent, twisted, and disproportioned figures resemble asceticism in sculptural form. The body is made to perform what it cannot perform:

to become the bearer of soul striving upward to the transcendent, indeed of soul dwelling in the transcendent. Even today, we are stirred by something stemming from a way in which soul in these figures is no longer in truth *their* soul but rather something arising from somewhere beyond them, so that the body makes the most impossible of attempts to come close to this soul. With gestures of this kind, soul expresses the fact that it cannot express itself. Only existing for the soul to distance itself from it, the body, so to speak, distances itself from itself in its own movements.

Later, only Ghiberti and particularly Donatello bring body and soul together. Movement now inheres in the body intrinsically and no longer as symbol of the body's denial. Soul expressed in movement is now thoroughly the soul of a body bearing this movement. Yet even in Donatello, the two moments' difference and unity—substantial corporeal form, on the one hand, passionate movement, on the other—do not yet reach decisive and strong expression in the freestanding figure; they do so only in relief, where movement can flourish in an exterior bodily environment. The body, as permanent materiality in three dimensions, is not yet individualized and not yet sufficiently molded to allow animate movement to run its course and prosper by itself. Certainly, soul no longer grasps beyond the body to transcendence in the Gothic manner, but neither is it unmistakably bound up with exclusively this body's individual being. We remain unable to feel any unitary root releasing precisely this organic-plastic figuration of bodily substance and its movement as the expression of one and the same being. Donatello prepared the way for the Renaissance and its unique sense of life—but only prepared the way. If we may speak, cautiously and very generally, of this Renaissance sense of life as expressed in the quest and feeling for that unity of nature and mind that medieval Christianity tore apart, then it must be said that the particular upshot of this problem in the relation of sculptural form to movement—the former more naturelike, the latter more spiritual—is solved definitively only by Michelangelo. The sense of bodily movement and ceaseless restless becoming that Michelangelo's figures exude is what enables the body's substantial sculptural form to reach perfect expression, and in each case, this form strikes us as the uniquely appropriate bearer for precisely this movement and this endless becoming. The tragic pathos of Michelangelo's figures is that being is dragged into becoming; form into endless dissolution of form. Artistically speaking, all struggle is solved: ancient ideals of stasis, on the one hand, and movement, on the other, find equilibrium. Although we then of course feel the more human and metaphysical contours of this conflict all the more insistently, never are we led to think that Michelangelo's bodies could move in any other way

or, conversely, that the relevant psychic processes—the sentences these movements enunciate, so to speak—could reflect any other origin than precisely these bodies. Despite all their mighty force and violence, these movements never burst beyond the body's well-rounded outlines. In a language of movement, Michelangelo expressed exactly what a body *is* in structure and form, as still material substance.

Seen in this light, Rodin's accent falls entirely on the body's motion. His equilibrium of movement and corporeal substance is measured on an entirely different scale, starting from a far greater degree of motion. Movement in Rodin is the presupposition or basic tone of the harmony he achieves, which for Michelangelo was still "pure body" in its abstract plastic structure. In Rodin, motion now assumes completely new realms of predominance and expressive means. A new suppleness of joints, a new autonomy and vibrancy of surfaces, a new tactility of contact points between two bodies or of one body with itself, a new use of light, and a new way of letting planes meet, battle, or converge with one another—in all these ways, Rodin injects into the figure a new quantum of movement, more complete than possible hitherto, lending sensuous shape to all feeling, thought, and inner lived experience of the whole human person. And this holds likewise for the figure's self-emergence from the block of stone, which Rodin often leaves still partly intact, immediately sensualizing the figure's *becoming* as the very meaning of its presentation. Each figure is captured at a station of the endless journey it makes through life without rest—and often at so early a station as to be barely discernible from the block. Here it is that motion in Rodin most grips the spectator. Absence of full form means that a maximum of "stimulation" results from a maximum of encouragement lent to autonomous activity on the part of the spectator. If there is truth in the theory that viewers of art repeat the creative process in themselves, this can occur no more energetically than in our imagination's activity of finishing the unfinished and thereby moving productively between the work itself and its final effect in us. Without doubt, movement in us is that which most fully elicits *expression* from us. For nothing else is common to our being in both body and soul; movement brings these two otherwise unconnected worlds as if under one common denominator, one single form.

With Van Gogh, the elements of body, soul, form, and motion are combined in yet another way. Like no other painter, Van Gogh conveys in his pictures a life so impetuous, so throbbing and feverish; and most puzzling and astonishing is that this occurs not (or only relatively seldom) through any depiction or suggestion of images of movement. At first sight, what characterizes most of Van Gogh's landscapes and still lives is simply

a state of being—not, as with Rodin, a haltless coming and going from place to place. And yet in their agitated and tempestuous sense of restlessness, they outstrip even Rodin's, in a way that makes their origin in the peaceful standstill of their objects one of the uncanniest of artistic syntheses. Perhaps in precisely this kind of immanent antithesis—such as also exists in Michelangelo, in much more resolved form—a feeling of movement reaches its most extreme and unprecedented intensity.

It would be possible to compare movement in sculpture in its relationship to enduring form to the musical element in poetry in its relation to contents of thought. Goethe's poetry in this regard might be said to mirror Michelangelo's balance of elements in sculpture. One might say that in Goethe's most perfect poems or in the poetry of Faust's transfiguration, content and sound accomplish such absolute unity because each has been taken to its very highest level. Timeless thought-content, on the one hand, and its own sensuous movement, on the other, have evolved from a state of such perfect intertwinement in the creator's life that in the created work each suffuses the other to its very limit, falling short of nothing and overshooting nothing. By contrast, in Stefan George's poetry, which reveals the same kind of development of the modern mind we see in Rodin, music becomes the dominant principle—not only in an outer sensuous aspect but also in an inner one. In George, content is not necessarily neglected, but content seems to grow from the music, from rhythmic melodic movement. In Rodin similarly, movement is primary and seems to co-opt plastic structure to some extent as its material substrate.

In contrast to mechanical naturalism and conventionalism, Rodin seeks the impression. But, as paradoxical as this may sound, his is an impression of the supramomentary: the timeless impression—not of any particular side or instant of a thing but of the thing as such; and also an impression not merely of the eye but of the whole human person. Just as George's great accomplishment is to have found a monumental form for poetic expression of subjective experience, so is Rodin's to have blazed a trail to a new monumentality—a monumentality of becoming and movement, no longer tied to being or to any classical ideal of substantiality. Precisely this is what Rodin himself once described as one of his goals: a "latent heroism of each natural movement."

Rodin has recounted that he asks his models often to adopt and to change poses at random. Interesting for him is suddenly the turning or bending of a limb: a twist of the heels, a raised arm, the angle of a joint. He concentrates on a moving body part on its own, separate from the rest of the body. Then, often a long while later, he sees in his mind's eye the whole body in a characteristic pose and knows straightaway that one or the other

of the studies belong to it. There can be no doubt for him that each particular gesture generates the body to which it belongs and grows into, unconsciously. Movement builds a body for itself; life its form. No clearer break with antiquity could be imagined in this regard—or indeed with Michelangelo. For even in the perfect unity and equilibrium of elements he attains, Michelangelo's point of departure remains the classical ideal of substantiality and roundedness of anatomical form. This he liquifies with a fervor and impulsivity of feeling and movement, until both sides entirely absorb one another. In seeking to bestow permanent value and timeless significance on movement, Michelangelo essentially only returns movement to stability. All burning passion notwithstanding, Michelangelo's movements are always at a certain relative point of repose and balance in which the figure can linger. This is his way of displaying movement's timeless import. In contrast, all of Rodin's most significant creations renounce this. Their movements are really movements of the fleeting moment. But in these movements, these figures' whole meaning of life is contained. In them, they are completely bound to their own transmomentary being as otherwise only the more substantial and immutable form of the body is. This is why their gestures strike us in one way as vague—because they cannot be described with atemporal *concepts* and thereby hived off from the continuity of life's movement, as with classical style—and yet, in another way, they strike us as wholly clear and appropriate for the feeling that accompanies their flow. These gestures disclose a moment, but this moment is the whole, the entire fate. They differ in this way from [Goethe's] “moment of fruition,” from any moment of climax or intense pause. They are wholly momentary but not particularized in the sense of this motif in Goethe, whose weakness was to want to overcome time's momentariness by prolonging it into something he could keep steadily in view. In Goethe's fruitful moment, only a great amount of something is conveyed; whereas in Rodin's gesture, everything is conveyed. Before Rodin, timelessness in sculpture seemed only attainable through a work's object or content acquiring a character of rest, permanence, and substantiality. Sublime removal from temporal flux was thought achievable only through, or as, persistence in time. A few isolated cases aside, Rodin was the first fundamentally to reveal artistic timelessness in pure motion as such.

Just as this coincidence of being and movement in our bodily appearance point for Michelangelo to an ultimate psychic root of life, that is, to a Renaissance idea of the soul in perfect harmony with itself—however distant from this ideal his figures may in fact feel themselves to be in their yearning—so soul as the focus of all bodily visible life for Rodin

is always our *modern soul*, and this modern soul for him is something so much more labile and mutable in the moods and destinies it creates for itself and therefore so much more closely related to movement than is the soul of Renaissance man. Dante's *transmutabile per tutte guise*, which certainly describes the entire Italian Renaissance, signifies only essentially a pattern of alternation between diversely colored states of being, each intrinsically substantial and unambiguous: between melancholy and rapture, impotence and courage, faith and despair. By contrast, all modern *transmutabilità* suggests a continual sliding, guided by no firm poles of direction or points of rest: less a switching between "yes" and "no" than the simultaneity of "yes" and "no."

In all of this, Rodin took the decisive step beyond classicism, and in the process also beyond conventionalism. Insofar as modern man no longer possesses antiquity's simplicity of being nor the Renaissance's harmonious ideal of life with its roots in antiquity, the persistence of classical form in sculpture today marks a gaping discrepancy with contemporary feelings of life and cannot help but issue in conventionalism. Such conventionalism, prevalent in sculpture more than in any other art form, might incline one to think of sculpture as the specifically unmodern art. Naturalism might have seemed to be the first to destroy convention. Yet naturalism turns out to be only conventionalism's shadow companion. Both naturalism and conventionalism acquire their formative norms essentially heteronomously. Naturalism copies nature's impressions; conventionalism copies the template. In principle, both are nothing but imitative doctrines compared with the work of true creators for whom nature is the material and occasion for a work of infusing the world with forms moving in those creators themselves. Naturalism and conventionalism emerge as artistic reflexes of the two great dogmas of the nineteenth century: nature and history. Both threaten to stifle the autonomous sovereign personality: the former by mechanically suborning the soul to the same blind compulsive forces as the falling stone and the sprouting blade of grass; the latter by reducing the soul to a mere point of intersection in threads of society and tying its entire creative powers to functions of survival of the species. Weighed under by these two overpowering magnitudes of nature and history, individuals forfeit both unique selfhood and agency and become mere points of thoroughfare for forces extraneous to them. In art, as a result, we find that naturalism fetters human beings to the pure givenness of things, while conventionalism shackles life to the historically given and socially sanctioned. The one ties us to everything that *is*; the other to everything that *has been*. Neither grants us freedom and necessity in the sense in which we seek these in the work of art. We rebel

against convention because it offers no real inner necessity but only a legacy of historical happenstance that nevertheless wants to compel us like a law, while nature, in its unreflected immediacy, is mere simple reality, not yet articulated into freedom and necessity. That things “must” naturally behave as they do, or that natural laws “impel” them to do so, is just as much an anthropomorphism and almost as much a confused vacuity as the notion that nature “always speaks truthfully.” Just as truthfulness only means anything where mendacity exists as a possibility, so all compulsion presupposes the possibility of resistance and opposing freedom. Natural objects merely exist: they only “must” be as they are because we invest in them in some way our feelings of freedom and being otherwise. Freedom and necessity alike are victories of the soul over pure facticity of existence. Both arise only from our work of fashioning material according to a necessity deriving from inner meanings of our existence as creative agents and from our way of expressing life in created forms—not from any contingent law of convention or from any abstract law of nature. In painting, Rembrandt is the artist most fully able to liberate individuality of the self from these twin exteriorities. However, the price Rembrandt pays in doing so—so absolutely and acutely—is to dispense with what could be called the cosmic dimension. Deposited in his figures’ faces are the stations of a life-course that shape each figure from the outset in unique inner experience. Not apparent in these figures, on the other hand, are any darker states of fate and grace that surround an individual soul in the metaphysical ground of things. A specifically Germanic concept of the individuality of the self that allows Rembrandt to unite freedom and necessity is not to be found in Rodin. Instead, the French sculptor guides his figures to an altitude and direction of life we may call cosmic, to a place beyond not only naturalism and conventionalism but even beyond freedom and necessity of the person. To be sure, here, too, the soul obeys no schema imposed on it from outside. Here, too, soul shapes the body’s appearance and gestures purely from within. But this interior soul is shot through, overwhelmed, itself animated by, a much greater fate than its own, one native to its earthly life but placing and enveloping it simultaneously in a metaphysical space. The storms driving it feel like fates of the world as such, whereas in Rembrandt’s figures these storms break forth exclusively from the individual soul and blow solely in this soul’s own chosen direction. Whether a trembling young mother worn down by life or a small wretched Jewish boy, all Rembrandt’s figures retain something profoundly self-assured, where Rodin’s by contrast are dissolved—dissolved, that is, by forces mightier than purely personal fates: by a predicament of existence that fills space in general and therefore also their own space

and becomes in this way also *their* predicament. For Rodin, it is love in general or despair in general or contemplation in general that become fates of the individual, as cosmic dynamics—not as universal concepts in the sense of classical allegory, but as immediate life, pulsing in the very being of the individual.

A deeper consideration now comes into view in this link between Rodin's overcoming of classicism and the supremacy of motion over being in sculpture today. Hardening into convention, classicism has disappeared today for lack of any ability to support freedom and necessity in any artistic sense—just as with naturalism. Rodin, on the other hand, in centering the artistic creation in pure inner laws of individuality, draws both these moments together, and so his figures in this sense form “laws unto themselves.” Their material form is the most plastic expression of their inner being. Yet insofar as this inner being is—if I may put it this way—dissolved chemically in a cosmic or metaphysical-psychic atmosphere by which it is suffused and which it suffuses in its turn, it is far more pledged to movement than the Germanic-Rembrandtian form of individuality. The latter, culminating in firmly delineated personality, responsive to each singular person's individual law, rests on possession of a more stable, persistent, unfluctuating core or scope of being. As radically as Rembrandt breaks with classicism in all other respects, his vision of individuality has not quite severed its last mooring to classical ideals of the highest, most generalized being. The individual as such still possesses a substance that, even if indescribable in concepts, is assured of its limits, burdened only by itself, and constant throughout life's troubled waters. Rodin's figures, on the other hand, are subject at their core to precisely these waves of life. They are wracked from within by something as little external to them as wind to atoms of air swept up by such wind—for moving atoms of air simply are what “wind” is. Analogous are certain modern ideas about substance and energy. What was once recorded in a phenomenon as rigid and stable is today dissolved into oscillations, into ever more pervasive kinds of movement; and such movement of an individual entity is itself only a shaping or transitory manifestation of the whole cosmic quantum of energy. It is not enough that an entity be pure autonomous movement, as if perfectly self-contained. Its ontological boundary must itself blur or dissolve for its own inner movement to be immediately a wave of life's cosmic stream. Here, and only here, has movement become absolute, namely, where individuality as form no longer resembles a membrane circumscribing a movement unfolding exclusively inside this membrane but where, rather, this last refuge of enclosure has crumbled away to reveal

a content, itself already movement, at one with infinite movement of the world, of life, of fate.

The quality of motion in question is quite different from that of Baroque art, or of Japanese art. In Baroque art, movement is greater only in a superficial sense. For in the Baroque form, any firm point, any measure, anything capable of standing as counterweight and boundary in space and outline to the most passionate of movements—any transcendental ego of apperception, in Kant's sense—has disappeared. Such slippage of the ego-point is understandable for a time lacking in the Renaissance's concept of personality but not yet in possession of a modern concept of the person in the manner formulated by Kant and Goethe. Notions of bare causal flow and of substanceless lawlike-impersonal play of natural forces are here the shibboleths of a mechanistic world-picture. Many Baroque figures are conglomerates of movements, rather than movements of any one person. In Japanese art, and most precisely in Japanese painting, what moves is not the body as such but rather the body's outlines. Purpose and content are not the moved body in itself and for its own sake but only a body's decoratively moved linearity. Only when soul sets itself against a body's gravity, and by impulse draws a body's materiality upward and diverts its purely nature-based motion, can soul manifest itself—but insofar as Japanese art dispenses with a body's fleshy material substance, soul here finds nothing to master and move that might reveal its own movement.

Inner motion in Michelangelo is certainly no slighter in degree than in Rodin but it is less ambiguous, less problematic, and more concentrated in a single intense direction. Its expressive form does not demand as high a quantity of exterior movement as the vibrating fractal motion known to modern souls, for whom the fate of individuals is not anything definitive—as it is with Michelangelo—but rather a liminal point of wandering from one undefined place to another, fond of paths without goals and goals without paths. Ancient sculpture sought a kind of logic of the body, where Rodin seeks its psychology. For the essence of modernity is psychologism, in the sense of a way of experiencing and interpreting the world through inner reactions, indeed *as* an inner world. Modernity is the dissolution of firm contents in fluid elements of the soul, which itself has been purged of all substance and whose forms are pure forms of movement. That is why music, as the most mobile of all arts in this sense, is the authentically modern art; and it is why poetry, which most expresses the yearning of its age, is founded in its age's music. And it is why landscape painting, too, is the specifically modern accomplishment of painting as the expression of a particular *état d'âme*, more evidently dispensing with

firm logical structure in its use of color and framing than figure painting. Where antiquity clings to the animate body, showing man mostly in states of permanent substance, modern times favor above all the face for its disclosure of our inner flux of life. But for Rodin, soul resides less in the face than in the entire animate body. Often Rodin's faces are little defined or distinctive. Animate motion and all radiance of the soul's powers and passion, expressed hitherto in the face, instead show themselves for him in a turning and stretching, a trembling and shivering of the whole body's planes and surfaces, in reverberations of a psychic center diffused over an entire body's bending or leaping, crouching or darting. In general, a person's being always has something at bottom sealed off from us and inaccessible to us, whereas a person's motion has something that reaches us or that we can reach. Therefore, wherever a modern *psychological* tendency shapes our picture of the whole body, it does so in a body's movement.

The tendency to motion is modern art's deepest relationship to realism. Significant is not only that intensified movement in real life shows itself in intensified movement in art but also that both the style of life and the style of this life's art spring from a deep common root. Not only does art mirror a more mobile world; art's mirror has itself become more mobile. The feeling that Rodin's art partakes of current life not only in its objects but also immediately in its style is perhaps why he characterizes himself as a "naturalist." But herein also lies Rodin's significant difference from naturalism, which often only seeks to reproduce contents of things in an extraneous and mechanical fashion. Extreme naturalism disparages style and fails to see that a style, saturated in the sense of our life, can be much more truthful and faithful to reality than all imitation — not as such by *having* truth as by *being* truth.

If the pervasive goal of art is felt to be to offer repose, reconciliation, and redemption from life's hurly-burly and from life's convulsions and contradictions, it seems important to consider that release in art from disquiet or hardship of life can succeed not only through flight into something like the opposite of these states but also precisely through a most perfect stylization and refinement of these states. Ancient culture absolves from ills and pains of existence by negating or by shielding us from them in some absolute way. By contrast, Rodin redeems us precisely by creating the most perfect picture of life absorbed into all passion of movement. As a Frenchman has said of him, "*C'est Michelange avec trois siècles de misère de plus.*" Rodin redeems us from the life we live in reality precisely by bringing us to relive this profoundest life of ours as *art*.

Auguste Rodin: Part III

News of Rodin's death leads me to reminisce for a moment, if I may, on a meeting I once had with this great master. Many years ago, when Rodin's name was still as good as unknown in Germany, I sought to characterize his art in a study I published at the time. This he arranged to be translated (as he read no German) and wrote me a touching letter of thanks, urgently inviting me to pay him a visit sometime in Paris. When I went over in 1905, I met him in his atelier on a day he was receiving a large circle of guests, among them some distinguished and elegant ladies.

He was a small, broad-shouldered man of enormous physical strength, carrying around marble busts with him like toys—which I could barely lift. My first impression was of a man neither especially important nor especially pleasant. There was something shifty and desirous in his eye, like a shrewd businessman. Genially he guided me around the various works and spoke a lot, but I soon had a sense that these were ready-made phrases and that he had been playing tourist guide with me to his own creations. Only when, with some annoyance, I began to say how I for my part read these things did he become more serious and took me to a back corner of the atelier; and just as I begged not to detain him any longer from his other guests, he asked me to visit him in his villa in Meudon where he had set up a little museum of his works. There I spent a highly memorable day with him alone. He liked to theorize and showed a great literary education, despite knowing no foreign languages. Yet it was very difficult to bring the conversation to decisive and essential matters. He preferred to speak in commonplaces and generalities and seemed to want to avoid deeper problems as rather tiresome and almost physically vexatious. But I did not let up, and finally—thinking of Odysseus forcing elusive Proteus to tell the truth—got him to speak candidly and personally of his art and life. The direct, conventionless German way of expression seemed congenial to him. “With you I can speak freely—whereas here no one

understands me,” he said. I mentioned a large anthology of published statements and essays on his work by his countrymen and voiced my discomfort at his art’s being interpreted almost everywhere in terms of an erotic sensuality. He too described this as highly irritating. “Naturally I am a sensuous man,” he said. “I am constantly sensuously excited by my impressions of things” (here he meant particularly his models). But, he said, “*Ce n’est pas la sensualité du sexe.*” The direction of everything he said about art in these hours converged on questions most crucial and substantial. He left completely aside all matters of mere effect or technique and shared with me an incredible sensibility for the finest nuances of things. In fashioning a head, he explained, he started always with an egg form. This he found to be the “primal phenomenon” [*Urphänomen*] (an expression he of course did not use himself), from which everything evolved. With alacrity he drew me an egg on the plinth of a recently finished marble bust and, as if by metamorphosis, brought out a head. “The back of the head, you see, is key,” he said. “It carries the whole ensemble of the parts. If I see a bust from behind at an exhibition and the back is not right, I don’t need to look at the front—it cannot be good.”

It was obvious that perception of the subtlest features of the real in its organic unity so dominated his consciousness that barely could he have sensed any sovereign input of his own artistic vision, instead characterizing himself passionately as a “naturalist.” “I only do as I see,” he said. I pointed to a highly stylized head of a horse he had just modeled and asked whether he had really seen such a head. “*Non, naturellement,*” he said. “*Je modifie un peu.*” (To this, of course, I could only reply, inwardly to myself, “*Eh bien, ce peu—c’est Rodin.*”) What he called his naturalism presupposed a concept of “nature” we could have agreed upon only with great difficulty. He showed me an Egyptian sparrow hawk image, one of several wondrous ancient Egyptian and Greek artifacts in his collection and a work of strict geometrical stylization and absolute reduction to a few decisive lines and surfaces. This, he said, was just about the greatest work of art he had ever known; for, he added—and here he rather bewildered me—“*C’est la Nature.*” Only laboriously could I make clear to him that his “*nature*” differed quite profoundly from any sense of nature in naturalism, indeed, was its very antithesis, and came much closer to what the eighteenth century and especially Rousseau had meant by this, namely, not immediate contingent reality but more an inner essence overlaid by this reality: an intuited ideal that speaks more of how reality *should* be than of how it actually is. But, as I said, all creation from the spirit felt so “natural” to him that he simply could not see any difference in this from basic naturalistic mimesis. Consequently, straight after his as-

surance that he only did as he saw, he went on to speak to me of his highly interesting productive process. Often he would ask his models to adopt multiple poses and to vary them at random. What interested him would be suddenly the turning or bending of a limb: a twist of the heels, a raised arm, the angle of a joint. He would concentrate on a body part in motion, separate from the rest of the body. Then, often a long while, he would see the body as a whole before him in a characteristic pose and recognize straightaway the study that belonged to it. Quite clearly, he thought of this stupendous imaginative involvement on his part as simply the most self-evident logical consequence of the original naturalistic impression.

And just as he denied any creative agency of his own *vis-à-vis* nature, so he spoke of the history of sculpture. In almost the exact words used by Ibsen, speaking to me about theater some years ago, Rodin insisted that he never thought of himself as treading entirely new paths: his was a work of continuing the tradition of the classics, which experienced some sort of interruption only in the eighteenth century.* That he thought of himself, rightly or wrongly, always to be building on these two touchstones, natural reality and artistic heritage, had perhaps something to do with his modesty. He had the quiet security of a man focused exclusively on his *métier*, content within its limits and never asking about his work's impact or impression on others. Especially pleasing was how he spoke of his peers in sculpture. Our conversation touched on figures whose work must have been anathema to him, but I never heard him cast any aspersion, and on everything he had something positive and appreciative to say.

But he also showed that great suffering of artists that, as illusory as it perhaps may be, seems deeply and darkly connected with the most real creative capacities: that fear of being denied a chance to complete an absolutely decisive work by some external twist of circumstance. Just as with Michelangelo's Julius monument, which was to remain forever a fragment, a fate of his life, so Rodin spent many years contemplating a gigantic work that he called "the tower of labor." This, as he showed me in a little model, was to be an enormous column girdled by a winding staircase. The column was to display, in the form of an unfolding band, all kinds of human labor, realistically and symbolically represented. He spoke tremulously of this work as closer to his heart than anything in his entire life. "I will never accomplish it," he said. "By myself I cannot do it,

* [Trans.] Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906): one of at most four or five passing references to the Norwegian playwright in Simmel's writings. Unfortunately, nothing is known of the conversation to which he alludes in this sentence.

and no one will help me. People ask me for portraits and buy individual figures, but for the essential matter I am left in the lurch.”

By the time we parted, the shell of conventional pleasantries with which he first greeted me had long dissipated. Probably he felt more at ease and more able to speak openly with a foreigner he might not meet again than with a compatriot. Certainly Bergson once said to me—a few years ago, when something called Europe still seemed to exist—that he did not go out of his way to meet Rodin. “*Il ne parle que des banalités*”—those were Bergson’s words to me. I could have put Bergson aright now. For it was perfectly clear to me now that this banal phraseology of Rodin’s was nothing but the façade of a deep and passionate soul, just as with his erotic adventures, whose not entirely seemly details had been the talk of Paris. All this was a cloak around a great inner solitude he sought both to hide and to banish—in vain, as it seemed to me. For it struck me that no redemption came to him from any religious idea or belief. He clung steadfastly to life, which he felt not in any personally constraining way but in its cosmic rootedness and diffusion. A famous German poet, very close to him, related to me how, not long before the war, Rodin had sought him out in his Paris apartment in a feverish and desperate state and confessed to him, in an awkward and faltering voice, that on that day, for the first time ever, he had thought about death—and then that he had spoken of dying, quite primitively, almost childishly, as of something incomprehensible: “*Pourquoi laisser tout ça. . .*”^{*} Rodin must, I think, have been one of those men at home in all ways of the world and yet not with other people. He could express himself consequently only in his art. His relations to others were, in some ways, egoistic and hedonistic, sometimes perhaps brutal, in other ways, superficial and formulaic, but definitely in all ways disconnected from his work.

As I bade him farewell, we sensed that we would not see each other again. And perhaps this was for the good. A while afterward, he sent me a few friendly lines at New Year, but again written in the conventional tone, making me realize that our trusted hours on that occasion belonged to those blessed encounters of the soul one ought not attempt to repeat.

^{*} [Trans.] The “famous German poet” is almost certainly Rilke.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Literature

This final cluster of writings assembles pieces by Simmel on aspects of literary prose and poetry. “Maurice Maeterlinck’s *Wisdom and Destiny*” (Maurice Maeterlinck: Weisheit und Schicksal), from 1899, is a review of Maeterlinck’s prose work of 1898, *La Sagesse et la destinée*. “Stefan George: Part I” (Stefan George: Eine kunstphilosophische Studie) appeared in 1901 in the *Neue Deutsche Rundschau* following publication of George’s poem cycle *Der Teppich des Lebens und die Lieder von Traum und Tod, mit einem Vorspiel* (*The Tapestry of Life and Songs of Dream and Death, with a Prelude*), which George dedicated to Simmel. The essay is a revised version of an earlier statement by Simmel, published in Maximilian Harden’s journal *Die Zukunft* in 1898 under the title “Stefan George: Eine kunstphilosophische Betrachtung” (GSG 5:287–300). “Stefan George: Part II” (Stefan George: Der siebente Ring) appeared in July 1909, mainly discussing George’s poem cycle of 1907 *The Seventh Seal*. “Goethe and the Creative Life” is an abridged translation of chapter 1 from Simmel’s monograph on Goethe (GS 1913a), headed “Living and Creating” (Leben und Schaffen). “Individuality and Character in Goethe and Shakespeare” is an abridged translation of chapter 5 from the Goethe monograph, headed “Individualism” (Individualismus). The two chapters present some of Simmel’s most important ideas on Goethe but are too long to reproduce in their entirety (see further above, introduction, §5). Simmel’s two letters to Rainer Maria Rilke, from 9 August 1908 and 11 March 1915, are the only two extant letters of significant substantive interest in the Collected Edition of Simmel’s works (GSG 22:642–43). The first discusses Rilke’s *The Book of Hours* (*Das Stunden-Buch*), published in April 1905. In a letter of thanks to Simmel, dated 26 August 1908, Rilke wrote that Simmel’s words had shown him “a new side of the path I trod blindly” and “the landscape through which it leads” (GSG 22:646–47). Simmel’s second letter is a reply to a letter from Rilke of 6 March 1915, thanking Simmel for offprints of his essays and referring to Rilke’s continuing plans to write on Egyptian art and sculpture, based on the holdings he had been visiting in Berlin since November 1914 at the Neues Museum (GSG 23:495–96, 500–501; further above, introduction, §§3, 9).

Maurice Maeterlinck's *Wisdom and Destiny*

For a long time now, philosophy has only been able to survive on our public stage as the unanswerably important discipline of strict scientific thought. Yet today, as more and more voices call on philosophy to show us once again life's meaning, the hour seems to have returned for those great independent sages who teach always that even in systematic philosophies, the profoundest, most redemptive and eternal things have only ever consisted in that which transcends the purely intellectualist, scholastic, or logico-empirical perspective. From among the countless ways of thinking about life that refract our everyday existence in fragmentary and confused ways, the philosophical genius selects and articulates just one vision in such a strong fashion as to emerge as something absolute over all relative details of reality, like one great substance underpinning all reality's disparate shifting features. The special authority the philosophical genius confers on one or another of life's great aspects in this way has significance less as truth than as experienced reality, less as documentation of an objective nature of things than as the salient consequence of an impression made by the world on a distinctively attuned sensibility—so long as this sensibility is powerful enough to be guide and interpreter for similarly felt but unclear notions of the world held by others.

The core of every great philosophy thus expresses an inner way of *existence*: something supra- or pre-intellectual, anterior to truth and falsehood, whose scholastic-systematic form is merely an outer shell prone to disintegrate with the passing of time. *Wisdom and Destiny* by the Belgian poet Maurice Maeterlinck—now in a serviceable translation—gives us in loose reflections a philosophy of life of the first order. What we had known previously of this man's work here in Germany was mainly of a mystical symbolist nature. In earlier works, Maeterlinck appeared to be fleeing from all contradictions and unbearable realities of the experienced world into a transcendent realm that rises above and weaves

around these realities like something governed by a secret all-reconciling, all-transfiguring harmony of souls. Now, in place of this escape, which tended rather more to sidestep life's difficulties than solve them, he offers something incomparably deeper and more powerful. Reconciliation is now to be found in life's midst itself, and the soul is shown capable of reckoning with fate from its own resources. The book teaches man's innermost imperturbability and resourcefulness in the face of everything called destiny in the broadest sense. This is meant not in the sense of a religion that embeds the whole world in one single idea of salvation. Neither is it meant in the spirit of Spinoza's purely intellectualist redemption from life's strains, pains, and passions; nor in Fichte's heroic sense of the moral ego as the world's sole real force, confronting everything given empirically from the outset as nothingness. Rather, what we are shown here is that salvation of the soul does not oblige us to renounce riches either of our outer or inner worlds and that in all of the soul's storms, frustrations, and temptations lie ways of ennobling life and deepening its interiority. We learn that every calamity needs to be felt to the full if we are to find in it secure footholds from which to rebuild our lives, and that no sensuous or evil soul exists that has not at least occasionally felt some greater value or good to lie buried at some deeper level of its being. Maeterlinck's teaching thus infuses the world with an infinite optimism that has no need for exterior proofs: an optimism founded solely in our inner life's capacity to make of our world what it will and to retain at every moment a possibility of the good and the noble, indeed of finding its true substance in this. All twists of fate and misfortune may persist, but they have a secret tendency to return to these values of the good and noble. And alongside this basic theme, Maeterlinck has a second motif serving to clarify and concretize the first, namely that life's highest values lie in all aspects of ordinary daily existence and have no need for heroic or outstanding acts and experiences in the face of catastrophic adversity. Such acts always have something incidental and extraneous about them. The real self and the soul's sure wholeness consist in a permanent uninterrupted life of a thousand elements. Great extraordinary passions and epiphanies and wild pleasures are things we may want to savor, but their benefit resides only in what they bequeath to our silent, nameless, steady hours of life and, during such hours, in opening our eyes to depths and moments of beauty we might have overlooked without their exaggerating effect. "We want to be happy not *in order* to be happy," he tells us, "but to learn to see clearly what it is that some futile expectation of happiness may have concealed from us all along."

This demotion of the unusual to a means of spiritualizing the com-

monplace, this valuation of the everyday as the sole space for an enduring inner human life, capable of surviving all accidents and contingencies of experience—this, we may say, is the deepest philosophical outlook of *democratic* thinking. Just as heroism here has meaning only in simple values of disposition and character common to all humanity, so this democratic worldview seeps downward into all circumstances of life of the ordinary individual soul and shows our happiness and dignity to have their true place at a level of ongoing daily life, of deeds and experiences common to everyone, of things quotidian and dependable, not extraordinary or improbable. For here alone dwells our soul, insofar as it dispenses with everything extraneous, fortuitous, and incidental and merely momentarily arousing. This is plainly diametrically opposed to Nietzsche's scale of values, with their restriction of life's ends and greatest moments to an individual's and a society's highest peaks of achievement, to distance and distinction, and to incomparable pioneering missions. In Maeterlinck, able instead to unveil noble values within a democracy of life's elements, we discover for the first time an authentic rival to Nietzsche and to the Nietzschean belief in such values' sole chance of recovery through an aristocracy of all orders of life. But because both Maeterlinck's and Nietzsche's teachings only embody different ultimate psychic moods and visions, both elude scientific demonstrability—for only non- or pre-ultimate things are susceptible of scientific proof. No doubt, in Maeterlinck's writing too, purely scientific criticism will find countless points of weakness and obscurity. But in it, there is that great irrational power that does not address us like a moralist with the words "thus should the world be, even though it is not so"—but tells us rather, "thus is the world *because* it is to be so." I know of scarcely no book by a living author of such great and at the same time quiet character, no work that lays bridges over so many abysses of the soul—without seeking in even the slightest way to conceal the horrors of their depths.

Stefan George: Part I

When art lovers react negatively to artists of their day, their judgments seldom move much beyond dissatisfaction with particular works or personalities, or perhaps with the capacities of a particular wave of artists. They do not extend to a sense that an entire range of problems addressed by artists has been neglected or traduced. Usually each successive generation largely accepts the new art of its time. In poetry in particular, the tyranny of romantic and erotic themes would long ago have been unbearable for us were it not for this suggestive grip that art seems constantly to exert over current audiences. Insofar as the soul consists essentially in unity of appearances—in contrast to all things corporeal that languish in inescapable dispersion—no art form is more suited than poetry in its compactness to making this unifying power and secret capacity of the soul real and manifest. But in recent times, the great diversity of contents in which the soul is capable of revealing its deepest being in poetic form has been neglected in favor of this one romantic-erotic sense of unity. In large part, Goethe's influence is responsible for this, if only in the sense in which Michelangelo is responsible for the rise of the Baroque. Goethe's immeasurable gifts enabled him to turn every utterance flowing from immediate and instinctive feeling into a work of art. He could "sing as the bird sings," and did so with quite effortless distance from everything merely disjointed and subjective, which otherwise is the stumbling block of so much romantic-erotic art. Of course, so far as amorous turmoil is concerned, even the worst versification can have an effect of distance, which helps explain the sense of redemption and freedom a dilettante can find in such verse. But seen from strictly artistic considerations, almost all poetry of the nineteenth century—with the outstanding exception of Hölderlin—is suffused extraneously with the breath of naturalistic impulsive life. Even if one is not to spurn the appeal of such poetry in too severe a spirit, it bespeaks the poverty of an age that can only accept an

art form exploring the full breadth of our inner life with the addition of attractions stemming essentially from outside the realm of art.

Perhaps the line traveled by the artistic phenomenon of Stefan George is best understood as responding to this conjuncture. The organic, or rather, superorganic, process of art that allows life's contents to develop over and above life itself can be glimpsed from the high vantage point from which this poet presents both himself and us with a view over these immediate impulses that are his object—and first of all in the passion and tenderness with which he depicts life's values beyond love. For George shows that only thus can artists reveal their true powers, in contrast to a more purely accidental character of romantic-erotic utterances left to themselves. He shows how much depends on unity and depth of an ego, over against feelings arising in part only from a peripheral or exterior source in the world. Before 1895, his poetry takes artistic refinement to a stage of highest seclusion from everything else. Indeed from the outset, his poetry is characterized by a will to assert itself exclusively as art. Whereas usually a poet's primary concern is with contents of feeling and imagination and with artistic form essentially as a means of presentation and evocation of such contents, George's accomplishment has moved fundamentally in the opposite direction: all contents for him are but means for producing pure aesthetic values. Certainly, this orientation has seduced many other, lesser spirits into mere formalism, into seeking artistic perfection through a euphonious correctness of rhyme and rhythm. Every work of art teaches us that distinctions of form and content serve only a purpose of intellectual analysis, and that a work itself transcends this dichotomy in reality. Aesthetic pleasure, as something identical neither to our feeling for a work's design or idea nor to enjoyment of pure exterior formal harmony, is tied to a unity in relation to which these moments are only elementary means. The stricter the inner logic of a work of art, the more this inner unity shows itself in the slightest alteration of the so-called form entailing an alteration of the whole, and thus also of the work's so-called content, and vice versa. The same thought or feeling cannot possibly be expressed "in two different ways." Only superficial abstraction, positing—as so often in popular misconception—the general *concept* of a content in place of a real, individual, and precisely delimited content, can assign the same content to multiple varieties of expression. Certainly, love in the abstract can be expressed in greatly diverse ways; but specific love, such as in the sense of Goethe's *Trilogie der Leidenschaft*, is expressible only in such and such a way and would alter in nuance with every change of word.* A work of

* [Trans.] "Trilogy of Passion," a series of three poems by Goethe, published in 1827: "To Werther," "Elegy," and "Atonement."

art's incomparable unity makes the duality of form and content in this respect redundant, just as any specifically aesthetic state of engagement goes beyond all primary feelings bound up with these elementary constituents of a work. From the outset, George's first published poems intimate this exclusively aesthetic intention, not wanting to state anything beyond this intention—such as feelings or thoughts in themselves—but also not rejoicing in light formalistic play and polish, and in so doing they stand apart from typical conventional poetry of the day. Only romantic-erotic themes in these early poems—tender and pure as they are—occasionally lead him to slip into the old manner.

Yet only in *Jahr der Seele* [Year of the Soul] (1897) is George's turn in this direction fully complete. Here his theme, almost exclusively, is the relationship of man and woman, but from this as a subject for art he gains a distance from all unmediated stimuli of experience that only a fully objective artistic treatment can supply. His achievement is so deeply to transform the emotive raw material as to enable an unlimited work of aesthetic fashioning. Relative to the living being of its object, all art has a touch of resignation. Art refrains from consuming its object's reality in order to unlock greater qualitative content from it than the object itself possesses. In the way that renunciation from one angle and plenitude from another offset one another, each as condition of the other, both jointly create the appeal of aesthetic relations to things. In *Jahr der Seele*, resignation penetrates to the roots of feeling: all motions and profundities of love in this book stand under the sign and color of resignation at their source. And resignation is here not a mere not-having and not-wanting but something filled with aesthetic value, as counterpart and condition of a work of drawing on the last, deepest, and finest meaning and content of man, of human relations and sensibilities. It is in this way that erotic themes, usually only incidentally and externally coupled to artistic form, enter thoroughly into the formative process. All intrinsic material appeal of the subject matter, which once appeared opposed to aesthetic conditions, is now unified with these conditions and placed in their service. The form of resignation in which immediate feeling is uniquely admitted as art creates from within—precisely as this feeling's content—a distance that art could only otherwise confer subsequently and in a certain way externally.

The distance here described with a spatial symbol gains added meaning when understood equally as a temporal relation. What is called our present never in fact corresponds to its strict concept. Although the present in concept is nothing more than the watershed of past and future, we seek a moment of rest in its uncanny transience by picturing it as made of one part past and one part future. But while logically ambiguous, our *feeling*

of the present is thoroughly clear. Certain contents of perception are accompanied by a feeling that can only be expressed by saying that this item is present—which is not yet the same as saying it is real. Some items have a tone of presence, an inner potency, without our thinking of them as in any way real, and, conversely, some things can be real but lack presence. Now our sense of experienced presence has many different relationships to the lyrical poem. In Goethe's early poems of youth, we feel this presence with an extraordinary intensity. These poems' emotive condition is present to us in a way that is immediately channeled and poured into their form in its original warmth. By contrast, in the elder Goethe, a sense of presence of poetic lived experience has disappeared. Inner fate, when it passes into the care of art, now seems to be closed off from such presence. Yet here again, the fate in question is not some preexisting material to which art then accrues; rather, here too the character of artistic form is from the outset the character of emotively experienced substance. It is only that the moment of feeling no longer has a tone of presence, of a complete living "now." The reason for this shift is that in old age Goethe's experience is wrought with an entire past life, such that every instant is no longer simply this instant but the deposit of a thousand earlier, similar and dissimilar instants. Hence even poems of his that spring from an emotive state as immediate as the *Trilogie der Leidenschaft* become works of complete aphoristic compression. The moment's content acquires a general supra-momentary validity and assumes relationships to an entire span of life.

George's poetry too moves beyond presence in this sense. But in George's writing, this distance is achieved not, as by Goethe, through an overbearing richness of the past that smothers over and draws away the present from its own place, but rather through inner features of the work of art. Sensation, feeling, and image reach us from the outset like a kind of pure content, void of any relation to definite moments in time. This differs from the way the special quality of something's being felt or sensed, which we signify with the idea of presence, always has something incidental about it. Generally among other writers, we find that often a poetic content has been realized as if by powers of fate from somewhere outside itself, as if this content owed its vitality not to values of its own but to a felicitous or infelicitous meeting of inner and outer events. Even in deeper, stronger poetry, we feel frequently that lyrical values and accentuations have originated from individual contents only as momentary excitations, crystallizations, or complications of emotional fates. An aura of presence only accompanies what is intrinsically meant and felt like the flare of a rather sudden and accidentally lit fire. Clarity and warmth accrue to the specifically artistic images and ideas with a kind of exterior serendipity,

not with immanent necessity. By contrast, in George—although not only in him—an entire sensibility seems to break forth from individual elements, words, and thoughts of the poem itself, rather than from some discrete fortunate moment of experience. In his writing we feel a qualitative inner difference of impressions for which the idea of diverse origins of a work of art can only be a symbolic expression. We have a sense of being unable to describe the impression a world makes on us other than as produced by the mind and will of a god, even though clearly such a world's historical genesis cannot be grounded in this way since we speak only of its qualitative nature as something symbolically displaced from a mode of being to one of becoming.

What I mean by such transcendence of all bare presence in George's poetry reflects a universal dispensation of the soul that is perhaps clearest in the domain of knowledge. To communicate with others by means of concepts is to presuppose that all possess a firmly defined content of these concepts, even if we do not imagine this content to be real at every moment. We accept that just as an ideal differs from a reality, so a state of affairs marked by a concept differs from something perceived, and that while a conceptually marked state of affairs is also only perceived, what we mean by it rises above all contingencies of momentary consciousness in just the same independence from the latter as the content and validity of civil laws from the extent to which citizens subject to these laws actually comply with such laws. A duality of this nature must exist just as much between valences of the emotive meaning of psychic phenomena as between logical valences. We sense—without being clear to ourselves about this in any abstract way—that a definite feeling or inner resonance or answer of the whole soul corresponds to words in the same way as to things, and to sentences in the same way as to fates. This, we might say, is words' and sentences' objective content of subjectivity: this is what they seek and *are* when correctly articulated in a language of interiority. Over and against this insistent interior space of emotive meaning and validity, by contrast, is then a chaos of purely contingent real feelings of persons—though a chaos more or less akin to that of the feelings we have of things according to their laws of relationship to us. All art now seems in greater or lesser degrees to evoke precisely those inner stirrings that respond with a kind of objective necessity to precisely the words and colors, thoughts and forms, emotions and ideas, that pervade a given work, like descriptions to the entity they describe. Certainly we are speaking here only of subjective inner states of the soul in their connection to outer sensuously given elements, but the fact of this connection is experienced as evincing objective necessity, as inhering in the very character of the given elements.

Perhaps this describes the sense of timeless meaning we accord to works of art. Timelessness or eternity in laws of nature means that consequences of particular conditions are objectively necessary, irrespective of moments of time in which they occur or whether they occur at all at particular moments or how often. Timelessness of an idea means that its logical or ethical significance is intrinsic to it, such that whether we adopt it for ourselves or not, it can only ever have this specific meaning, *if* we want to think this idea at all, now or in a thousand years' time. And in a not dissimilar way, art convinces us that particular subjective motions—or feelings, as we call them, perhaps not entirely correctly—belong to each of its elements by dint of each element's intrinsic constitution. We may or may not completely realize these elements as motions in ourselves, today or tomorrow or ever, but if we want to register these expressions, images, and forms in a manner proper to them, we can do so only with these specific emotive processes and no others.

To set forth all elements of a poem in their sovereignty of objective validity and make us feel what inner necessity of psychic reaction orbits each word, thought, and metaphor like a celestial body—this is George's greatest achievement in his most recent work, *Der Teppich des Lebens und die Lieder von Traum und Tod, mit einem Vorspiel*. This work's "prelude" [*Vorspiel*], which I find the summit of his writing to date, depicts, in twenty-four poems, how a higher life of ever wider aspiration to ideal powers redeems us from torrid reality.* The image of the "angel" guiding him through existence discloses for him the entire general form of our highest potencies of value: a muse for the poet, truth for the scholar, ideal practice for the man of action. Each value for each figure is an ultimate instance, whose unity means for us as much the height of all happiness as the most merciless and painful of duties—something that separates us from the world below as much as it acquaints us with our own higher sublime values, and releases us from the demands and pleasures of ordinary flat life, even as it makes us responsible to this instance alone and to ourselves. The angel is both the meaning a life has and the norm guiding this life from above. After Goethe, I know of no poetry in which something so completely generalized as this motif of the angel—something so evidently artistic, so intangible and resistant to concretion—is nevertheless made so palpable to the senses. The tremendous solemnity of this motif would be incompatible with its form's sensory appeal were not each word and each

* [GS] Of concern to me at this juncture are not George's poems purely as poems but rather the extent to which they instantiate certain thoughts in the philosophy of art. I make no claim here to expound George's oeuvre in all the fullness it deserves.

other element to strike us as necessarily gaining meaning from a relationship to this motif alone, and were not the work of art as a whole, in this sense, to evolve exclusively from these interior meanings and to reject all derivative enrichments from outside itself. George's verses achieve an incredible gravity and significance from the strictness with which each word resounds purely with its exact sense of interiority and excludes everything playful and capricious in each word's contingent and merely subjective continued resonance and repetition. It is impossible to pinpoint what compositional peculiarities, what psychological acoustics and imbrications of logical content and versification, enable him to succeed in this. But it is simply that words and thoughts, rhymes and rhythms, seem to come into their element for the first time, as though all our inner motions belonged to *their* objective nature and structure alone. A synthesis is produced that makes elements entirely generalized and abstract affect us in a wholly sensuous and aesthetic manner. We sense something subjective in us as something objectively necessary and intrinsic to the work itself. If, in these angel poems, a harmonious play of sounds—though a “play” as little “playful” as anything childlike is childish—bears a depth of vital content transcendent of all bare form by itself, this is because all co-resonant, momentarily triggered feelings possess, so to speak, a whole signature of lawfulness, a whole aggregate value of objective groundedness, beyond everything purely subjective. And plainly this too is simply another way of saying that in each element of George's works, the sole psychic meaning we hear is this element's innermost and own-most timeless meaning, transcendent of every ephemeral fact of its being felt or not being felt by a given individual subject.

This also relates to another peculiarity of George's poetry, especially of his most recent work. Such consummate artistry, governed solely by a will to objective art and countenancing no place for any purely personal tone, nevertheless goes hand in hand with a quality I can only describe as one of intimacy. In his poems, we feel a soul sharing its most secret life with us, as if with one of its trustiest friends. This is exactly parallel to the highest task of visual art, in the sense of a need to satisfy formal laws and ideals of pure visibility and to fashion human appearances after norms and criteria of balance and attraction that truly adhere solely to these appearances' self-subsistent spatial form and color, and in so doing to impart an idea of *soul*, of character, of perpetual supravisible mental life behind appearances. This task rests on one truly metaphysical premise, namely that an image's degree of unitary completeness at the level of appearances, measured by conditions purely immanent to this level, should bring with it exactly the same degree of unitary completeness at the level of soul. A

perfect work of art satisfies both of these opposing and most often divergent poles of legislation in equal degree, such that when one pole is highest for it, completeness in respect of the other pole falls into its lap as if by mystical harmony. And so, if it is possible for these poems of George to respond unreservedly to norms of objective aesthetic perfection and at the same time to have an appeal and depth borne of a wholly personal intimacy germane to an order quite different from this more formal and purely artistic order, then we need to clarify these two otherwise so emphatically mutually independent levels of understanding at their point of convergence—as I shall undertake in the following.

Certainly I consider it the first requirement of all truly aesthetic contemplation that these same reflections should hold for a work of art viewed as a wholly self-contained cosmos, absolutely detached from its creator and from all feelings, meanings, and allusions that might accrue to it from some genetic relationship to its creator. Treated as such, all intentions and moods from which a work may be created cease to have any bearing on the created object other than to the extent to which they become objective qualities of it. These are henceforth essential not because the artist felt them subjectively but because they perceptibly inhere in the work itself. Any genetic historical-psychological understanding of a work in this respect falls outside the boundaries of validity of any strictly aesthetic appreciation. Yet, equally, the question arises, I contend, as to whether such appreciation does not still directly involve some possibly alternative relevant concept of a subtending creative personality. Necessary for any comprehension of a work of art and its meaning for us still remains that we view it as the expressive product of some definitely constituted mind. For only so regarded can a work be for us the kind of interconnected unity to which we can feel justified in inwardly reacting in ways impossible toward some mere combination of exterior natural phenomena. Such an active and yet unconscious personality that we feel to subtend the work is not the work's actual author, about whom we may know various other things. It is, rather, an ideal personality, which is to say, nothing other than the idea of a soul that has produced precisely this work. All the ways in which we assemble a multitude of sensory impressions into the unity of an object, into a nuclear substance that is the mirror-image of our own soul—these are the ways in which a work's manifold tones and colors, words and thoughts, enter into interaction with one another and are suffused, contained, and sustained by a soul from which we feel these elements to be emanating toward us and to which we ascribe the source of the unity they form in our soul. The very fact that we react to a work of art *sub specie animae* in this way is one underlying category that

makes a work fundamentally what it is for us—just as a segment of nature is what it is for us in the extent to which we treat it under the category of cause and effect. But just as causality is only the immanent law that synthesizes appearances into a unity and is no thing-in-itself standing behind appearances, so the creative personality onto whom we project a work of art is nothing behind or beyond the work itself but purely an inner condition of our understanding of this work, or purely and exclusively a function of its givenness for us. Therefore, from the purely aesthetic point of view, any reference to a real person in the sense of a creator as historical personality can only be to a certain kind of stranger figure or illegitimate interloper. The relevant personality instead dwells exclusively in a sphere of the ideal, as the form in which all individually given aesthetic aspects of a work intelligibly cohere with one another. We may, for instance, find a work by Michelangelo tragic and be reminded in this of a soul striving infinitely against a sheer weightiness of inner and outer reality, of an artist yearning to reconcile himself with God, of a man torn apart by a dualism that makes him value his own being and action only after an ideal of absolute perfection and tortured by a consciousness of being merely a beginning, a fragment, a piece of half-formed matter. We may indeed find all of this to be expressed and symbolized in Michelangelo's sculptures—in these works of which almost none are entirely finished, works marked by a maximum of tension between the most passionate affect on his part, on the one hand, and physical limits of expressive possibility, on the other: by struggle between an inner will to perfection and a fact of incompleteness and incompleteness thrust up against this will from outside itself. But to think of these works by Michelangelo gaining such meanings solely through the imprint of a personality behind them is to remove them from the domain of the aesthetic and to interpret them by reference to elements essentially external to them as objects of art. We must therefore specify very carefully (as difficult as this may be in immediate perception) the extent to which these works of Michelangelo strike us as tragic *in and of themselves*—as is undoubtedly the case—rather than by dint of any knowledge on our part of their creator's real life. But this we can accomplish only by virtue of a ground of animate life that rises up to us from the sensuously given forms as their source and bearer. Needed for this is simply a general and instinctive awareness of the expressions and representations of interiority that underpin social existence in general and art in general and are entirely distinct from historical knowledge of a specific individual personality. At issue is no actual empirical person but the human person in general, albeit one modified by whatever definite content the work in question can present to us concerning this person. A

rough analogy is the extent to which we can understand a given sentence in a language by hearing in ourselves the psychic motion that normally and logically generates it, without recourse to any particular and perhaps quite different psychic constellation that might have originated it in a particular situation. This is why nothing fallaciously circular stops us from inferring a creative soul from a work and simultaneously interpreting this work by reference to this soul. For in truth, out of our stock of instinctive psychic self-understandings, something new accrues to the work that first lends it meaning and life—something that is not contingent, historical, or derivative of another order but a necessary crystallization of this work's inner law of phenomenal givenness. As a circle, this is no more something avoidable than our attributing causal interconnection to a sequence of sensory impressions and then seeking to understand these impressions and their sequence by reference to this causality.

Now here, finally, it should be clear why it is that George's poems, even in their great distance from subjectivity and pure fidelity to laws of art, nevertheless can appear so wholly intimate, so wholly revelatory of last depths of the soul and personal life. The supra-individual personality that, so to speak, crystallizes in the work of art and is sensed in this work as its focal point and subtending carrier, joins these two poles of intimacy and objectivity together. The ideal soul whose relation to the work we only very imperfectly express with the spatial metaphor of something that "stands in" and "stands behind" the work is here precisely what bears the quality of intimacy. A work's inner law, its appearance of all-pervading, all-uniting animate life, means here a disclosure of the most inward life—a continuation of the deepest inner stirrings into outer aesthetic appearances. But because a work's emotive qualities point us to no concrete singular personality but solely to the personality that is objectively immanent to these qualities, as their radiant expression and condition of existence, this intimacy is most sharply distinguished from any kind of indiscrete personal disclosure. We detect this latter tone, for instance, in Paul Heyse's otherwise very deep, and in their way very beautiful, poems, written on the death of his child (his "Verses from Italy"). In these poems, we still hear, on a quite naturalistic level, the poet's real pain, the real empirical suffering of the authorial personality, from a space of things wholly extraneous to the sphere of art. The result is an aesthetically embarrassing and eclectic *mélange* of two quite heterogeneous domains: reality, on the one hand, comprising concrete, contingent individuals, and art, on the other, comprising objective timeless meanings of things, released from their historical personal substrates. By contrast, George, in cleaving strictly to this latter realm, can still voice wholly personal emotions

pertaining to a personality that encompasses a poem's words and thoughts as their a priori and inner unity and as the true meaning of an individual reality—only rescued from this reality and clothed in a mode of pure ideality. And insofar as art here becomes a vessel for ultimate values of personality, the reader even of these poems, as objective in their artistry as they are, may now also feel sensations of the most subjective nature, as if henceforth transfigured. Even as the personality by dint of whom we comprehend these poems' emotive qualities remains purely an ideal catalyst of the work itself and no real empirical person, we feel gratitude to this personality for giving us and making us admire something we can at the same time transform into an object of our love.

Stefan George: Part II

If the temporal sequence of an artist's total oeuvre is understood as a development of some kind, that is, if we see in each work's "before" and "after" or temporal position a meaning or inner necessity that lifts the sequence out of the *mêlée* of contingent worldly events, what inheres in such a development is a norm and potency not easy to describe. Though this is no simple organic vegetative growth, such as governs our instinctual life—artistic will is far too deliberate and goal-led for this to be the case—it is also no planned determinacy, such as characterizes a life devoted to scientific or practical programmatic labor of some kind. Artistic development is a third way beyond these two alternatives. For while such development seems driven by dark, deep-rooted forces with no sense of direction, these very forces, at a still deeper level, seem endowed with a clear ideal goal and an implacable knowledge of the way forward. It is as if, at every instant, artists saw clearly before their own eyes every next step and the one after that—and yet as if this clarity were nourished by purely naturalistic, involuntarily evolving drives. Yet by no means is every artistic *vita* really such a development—at least not so far as my mortal eyes can see. For even when an artist sustains work of high caliber across many diverse phases, often a sense of the whole is lacking, which in rare cases seems like something bestowed on a corpus of work by design from on high.

With the appearance this year of his most recent anthology, *Der siebente Ring* (The Seventh Seal), it is impossible not to notice a linear, evolving unity in the work of Stefan George. By this I do not mean merely that George's, or generally other poets', later works are better, richer, or more mature than earlier or more youthful creations—which is often falsely taken to denote development in an artist. I mean rather that a mysterious sense of "design" of the whole—beyond the dichotomy of conscious versus unconscious causality—here confers on an individual work a meaning

different from all sense derivable from it in isolation. Describable in this way is perhaps what one might—Platonically speaking—call the “idea” that makes works such as these by George seem destined to realization over time and that transforms their serial emergence into something with the structure of a developmental process. George’s poetry springs from the subjective soul’s unitary center of uniqueness in a more pronounced and more absolute sense than any known to lyric writing heretofore. For even taking as given the intrinsically subjective character of all lyric expression in general, much poetry can still lend a sense of objective autonomous life to themes of fate or to atmospheres of landscapes or to intimate interlocutors or articles of religious faith. Or all of this can be so deeply assimilated that the soul speaks, in its own language, the language of things. By contrast, in George’s poetry, the poetic soul sings only of and by itself, not of or for the world or otherworld. Wherever things from outside the poet’s own lived experience find expression in his verses, such as anything historical or anything in other ways given, they often only resemble foreign bodies or incoherent impingements from a world that is not his own and cannot become his own. Or if all these things do nevertheless in some way become absorbed into the organic process of his art, they do so purely as *symbol*, and the soul in consequence always remains self-contained, mirroring purely itself in the forms of things. This is why George most often expresses himself in the image of landscape, for it may be that of everything given externally, landscape offers the soul the most yielding pictoriality, as though we are not essentially journeying out of ourselves when we venture into landscape. I know of no lyricist capable of living so exclusively, almost metaphysically, from himself and making us feel so compellingly that all objective being has been ingested in his work as but so many different roles for the play of his own soul.

Yet the more decisive “idea,” whose ever greater realization constitutes his poetry’s development, is this, that in the articulation given it by him, the soul’s subjectivity and solipsism assume a *monumental* form of expression. For no other words can describe the manner in which everything most deeply personal and most inwardly definitive and self-composed becomes poetry for George. Monumentalization of the purely and thoroughly poetically lived life is the synthesis and principle of his art. This synthesis he carries out by means of a mediating, more general form that acquires immediate inner life in order to evolve out of this inner life into the dimension of the monumental, into all the strictness and absoluteness of purely artistic figuration, and to spurn in the process all merely naturalistic gushing out of unfiltered experience. A poem only first attains objectivity and trans-subjective validity by dint of a law of steadfastly observed

artistic form, and does not thereby need to quit its own center of origin in the soul's own-most inner life and exposure to its own fate. In a previous essay, I located the essence of George's poetry in this primacy of artistic form and figuration over the revelation of contents of raw affect. His latest work makes clear, however, that this primacy is but the precondition for the fulfillment of a development in cultural and intellectual history of even deeper consequence. In some earlier cases, from Shakespeare's sonnets to Goethe's *Trilogie der Leidenschaft* to some of Hölderlin's poems, lyric writing already assumes a monumental style, but with George this becomes the yearning and accomplishment of an entire life's work, from his first *Hymnen* through *Hirtengedichte* and *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* to *Der Teppich des Lebens* and now *Der siebente Ring*, finally making the direction of the entire trajectory unambiguous. From this vantage point, *Das Jahr der Seele* now looks more like a side-path, one oriented around another idea that serves only to highlight the main route all the more unmistakably. In George's work as a whole, we now see that the style otherwise witnessed only in great sculpture or music, architecture or theater, penetrates, quite fundamentally and ever more expansively, those last inner recesses of the totally self-enclosed life, whose dimensions usually only have space left for a monumental style in exceptional cases. The majesty of this achievement in George lies in a tension between, on the one hand, the capaciousness and vaulting ambition of such a style, seemingly disclosing the structure of all potencies of the world and fate, and, on the other hand, the unconditional interiority of pure psychic experience, revolving solely around itself and nevertheless suffusing this monumental style to its very outer limit. It is significant that such suffusion does not—as far as I can tell—take place in those parts of *Der siebente Ring* where great historic personalities and events inform the material. The monumental style finds its purest and most congenial content not solely in the soul's absorption of material of the world into itself—even material of the grandest nature—but only in being and speaking utterly of itself. Art's miracle is to be able to exhibit aspects of empirical life normally disconnected and unreconciled with one another as perfectly cohesive moments of one unity. Only as art, and only when subject to art's norms, do life's disparate elements start to dovetail with one another in such a way that in one element's meaning a new meaning of another element becomes manifest. And so now, if the unconditionally centripetal character of experience in George's poetry—its absolutely unparalleled sense of sovereign, self-reliant inner life—pervades the monumental style in all its scope and power, then the antagonism of these two sides turns into a complementarity, as each meaning of the one side plumbs the last depths

of the other. The poetic achievement of a monumental style for the most intimate autonomous life of the soul—not only in isolated works but in the goal-assured development of an entire life's oeuvre—is something of great moment not only for art but for all of life's travails. For it indicates that human beings' task of creating for the infinity of their existence an infinity of forms in which to live and labor has been rewarded with a new solution.

Goethe and the Creative Life

If mental life differs from life of the purely corporeal organism in possessing *contents* and not only being pure *process*, practical action, similarly, at the truly human level, has a *result* and is not, or is no longer, simply a continuously replete coursing along of life. Consequences of action do not dissolve entirely immediately into a context of life from which their causes originate but instead subsist to some extent beyond this context, even if they may eventually be drawn back into it. Life in this way surrenders its character of pure subjectivity, for these consequences or emergent products have their own norms and knit together their own meanings and outcomes in purely objective orders. Such a possibility of depositing the results of life's energies outside of life itself, and assuredly in some way outside of the subject, places cultivated man in a certain dualistic situation of existence that is usually resolved in a fairly one-sided manner. One type of average behavior conducts a merely subjective life in which each moment's content is nothing but a bridge between the preceding and succeeding moment of a process to which this behavior remains in thrall. In the economic domain, this is the fate of people who labor today solely in order to live tomorrow. Another type of behavior only wants to produce objective things, regardless of the cost or benefit to individual life. All value of work for such people is defined by purely objective norms. The former type of people never move outside of their subjective intention of life, whereas this latter type never return back to themselves—never create anything from their own being but only ever from an impersonal order of things.

Now it is the essence of genius to display the organic unity of these two, so to speak, mechanically disjointed sides. A genius's life unfolds solely from its own innermost unique necessities—but the contents and results the genius creates have objective significance, as though brought forth by the norms and ideal demands of objective orders of things. The impression of something exceptional that is essential for genius stems from a way

in which subjective life and objective values form a singular unity in this individual, while never or only ever accidentally coming together in any other type of person. Thus it is that a genius can appear both as the most autonomous, most world-forsaking, and most self-reliant being and as a pure vessel of objective necessity, of God. Perhaps more than any other human being, Goethe belongs here to that type of genius whose subjective life issues as if by nature in objectively valuable production, in art, in knowledge, and in practical conduct.

[...] Precisely this characterizes a man whose life developed outward from an inner center, driven by forces and necessities of his own self, and whose finished oeuvre was nothing but a spontaneous product of this development, not a prior goal on which all his action depended. [...] That purposiveness of specialized man who can only value life as a process of being drawn along toward a goal, instead of as one growing forth from its roots, was quite alien to Goethe, and this certainly also accounts fundamentally for his rejection of all teleological conceptions of nature. When he says that nature “would be too great to reach goals and would have no need to do so,” this also applies to himself. Not even his work [*Werk*] was, in any conventional sense, the goal of his labor [*Arbeit*]. It was, rather, its outcome—in a most basic and noncontingent sense of this word.

[...] Goethe’s antipathy to professionalism and schooling was not any kind of extreme individualism, for he also greatly stressed a cooperative spirit among scholars and deplored all proclivities to “monologue.” His, rather, was an antipathy to the determination of life’s labor by fixed, ideally preexistent contents. Amorous life and play meant for him that life’s energies were to evolve independently of all things external that prescribed directions for life in ways at bottom foreign to it, however worthy these directions might have been in themselves. Indeed, he even regarded life’s every substantive result as inessential to the process from which all results stem and flow. “Human beings are significant,” he tells us, “not for what they bequeath but for what they bring about and enjoy and move others to bring about and enjoy.”* And even more monumentally, he says, “Important in life is clearly life, not results.”** This is in Schiller’s sense that man is only fully man when he plays. In play, individuals slough off all

* [Trans.] “Nicht insofern der Mensch etwas zurückläßt, sondern insofern er wirkt und genießt und andere zu wirken und genießen anregt, bleibt er von Bedeutung.” From *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, part 2, book 7.

** [Trans.] “Es kommt offenbar im Leben aufs Leben und nicht auf ein Resultat desselben an.” From conversations with Caroline Herder, 4–8 September 1788, in *Goethe: Gespräche und Begegnungen*, vol. 3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), 237.

influences of the technical object, to give free reign to the energies of their essence. No longer oppressed by objective orders alien to them, their directions in life are shaped exclusively by their own desires and capabilities.

[...] The “professionalism” that Goethe so hated constantly pushes away the tasks facing modern people from the directions of their capabilities. The extent and consequences of the demands of life’s increasing objectification has a logic beyond our mastery and requires of us, as subjects, an arduous and subjectively meaningless expenditure of energies. The upshot for us as modern people is a palpable sense that we have not worked hard enough unless we have worked too much. Subjectively, indeed, we work too much, because we must make extra conscious efforts to fill the gaps in our spontaneous selves in the process of satisfying the demands of this differently oriented structure of objectivity—while at the same time having no outlet for the creative possibilities and powers we *do* want to engage. Such diremption of subjective and objective horizons of action is the ultimate explanation for so many people’s intentions of life today deteriorating into rationalistic, bureaucratic regimentation, on the one hand, and anarchic formlessness, on the other—in contrast to Goethe’s ability to forge, from the unity of these horizons, a ceaseless and most intensive “work of play.”

[...] It is a mistake of the first order to think that anything of the slightest import is gained for our understanding of a poetic work by referring to its “model.” At best, a work’s so-called model is but one of thousands of elements from experience that contribute to it and that in any case, even if one could count them all, would still leave the poetic work, for the sake of which we are in any way concerned with these elements, untouched even by a single atom. Unearthing the model as a work’s pre-artistic substrate highlights precisely what has nothing to do with a work as a *work of art*. That such overvaluation of the model has wide currency in popular and academic notions of art alike is no coincidence. It arises from a mechanistic-mathematizing worldview that believes it has comprehended all reality when and only when it has reduced it to copies of things. In finding something in reality to which the work of art apparently bears likeness or “sameness,” we are supposed to have “explained” it. And to this deification of likeness is then added the vulgarest notion that between *cause* and *effect* some likeness must also exist. Ultimately it is coarse and externalizing theories of milieu that subtend this overestimation of the model as an explanatory ground for the work of art. Inner creativity is here always supposed to be understood—or rather replaced—by elements mechanically transferred from outside, whereas in truth all that these elements can hint at is an autonomous life of the work of art,

entirely heterogeneous to them. If, as recently, “lived experience” [*Erlebnis*] is also invoked as the source of a work of art, this is in no way essentially to break with notions of genesis from milieu and model but only to refine them with a subjectivist twist. For artistic spontaneity does not arise from lived experience in any immediate way either. Though both experience and spontaneity form aspects of the life of the ego, the former here relates merely externally to the latter. The very general concept of lived experience must be much more tightly defined if justice is to be done to it as a basis for comprehending works of art in the manner Goethe envisioned.

The possibility of the connection at issue lies in both lived experience and creativity drawing a common presupposition and form-giving principle from life’s process in all its persistent character, intentions, and rhythms. Though different for each individual, perhaps just one very general, not conceptually definable formula exists that describes an ego’s psychic processes in terms of both receptivity to the world through lived experience, on the one hand, and creative activity in the world, on the other. That one such law governing all phenomena of an individual life may indeed exist seems to have struck Goethe very early on when he wrote in his diary in 1780, “I need to look more closely at the circle turning around in me, from good days to bad days: my passions, my attachment, my impulse to do this or that. Invention, execution, order: everything changes but follows a regular circuit: cheeriness, gloominess, strength, weaknesses, elasticity, serenity, and desire.”* Now to the degree that this basic daily movement of a man’s nature is itself already characterized predominantly by formative artistic spontaneity, to just this degree will lived experience also itself already bear features of creativity and artistic values, from the outset and in the very manner of his life. Where the root juices of a personality that first assimilate reality and first fashion it into lived experience are themselves already artistically tinged, lived experience is already, so to speak, an artistic half-product and no longer fundamentally alien or anterior to the work of art. To one extent or another, this is the case with all artists and is the reason why so many of the greatest stylists and sovereign redesigners of the real have sincerely believed themselves to be merely faithfully transcribing the impressions of nature and immediate experience. [...] To illustrate this with a rather crude example: just as the religious visionary sees “God’s handiwork” everywhere because he or she sees all things as parts and possible proof of a divine plan for the world, so an artist literally *sees* things of the world from the outset as possible works of art; and these things become lived experience for this artist through

* [Trans.] *Tagebücher*, 26 March 1780.

the same categories through which they become works of art when these categories function even more actively and autonomously.

[...] That the relation between lived experience and work of art was so uncompromisingly close for Goethe, leading him to proclaim what seems at first glance an incomprehensibly literalistic descriptive naturalism of poetry, stems simply from the incomparably high degree to which basic artistic forms permeated the fibers of his life. [...] To be sure, it is hard to rebut the objection that if one takes any one of his works in isolation, none matches in power and perfection the *Oresteia* or *King Lear*, Michelangelo's Medici tombstones, Rembrandt's religious paintings, Bach's B-minor mass, or Beethoven's ninth symphony. But in no other artist do art's organizing powers penetrate so formatively and expansively into the unity of a personality that an entire universe of phenomena of experience of the world are transformed into potential works of art—simply by virtue of being lived and beheld. Thus if Goethe believed his works to be conveying nothing more than given realities, this was but one attempt on his part to describe theoretically the inner dynamic, the artistic a priori, by which ideas and life became *his* ideas and *his* life alone. His created works simply made and make visible that which his own vital processes themselves have already been fashioning out of life's raw contents of experience. And perhaps this is the best and highest example and illustration we have for our only taking from life that which we have invested in it, not only in what we know and enjoy but also in what we create. Creativity, for Goethe, seemed inseparable from experience because experience itself was creative for him.

Individuality and Character in Goethe and Shakespeare

In intellectual history, the concept of individuality may unfold from one of two possible starting points. First, any entity, whether a stone, a tree, a star, or a human being, may be seen as individual insofar as this entity is in any way delimited in scope as something self-subsistent and unitary. Significant here is not an entity's qualitative difference from others but only its being in some way centered in itself and to some degree continuously existent, regardless of whether or how far it may depend on or be woven into other contexts of things. If the world were to consist solely of absolutely identical atoms, each atom, even if qualitatively indistinguishable from every other, would in this sense still be an individual. By contrast, a second, higher concept of individuality is reached as soon as being-another [*Anders-Sein*] is seen as extending to qualities of a subject in question. In particular, with regard to human beings, important is now not only being another but being an other as other [*ein anderes zu sein, als andere*]¹—or difference from others not only in quantity but also in quality of being.

[...] In the world of ideas of the eighteenth century, what predominates is man's quantitative existence: the exhaustive and self-sufficient existence of an ego in one point, answerable to itself alone, and set apart from all fusions, bonds, and oppressions of history and society. Human beings, in their absolutely individual being, *are* as such just as metaphysically absolutely free as they morally, intellectually, politically, and religiously *ought* to be. In thus testifying to their own nature, human beings return to the ground of nature in general, from which social-historical powers have unseated them by taking from them their individual freedom of being-for-themselves in their own sphere. But nature in this picture is also the place of absolute equality or sameness [*Gleichheit*] before the law, and therefore all individuals in their ultimate bases of existence are equal or the same [*gleich*], like atoms in the most thoroughgoing atomism.

Qualitative differences between individuals are here not relevant to the decisive meaning of individuality. [...]

By contrast, toward the end of the eighteenth century and most purely among the Romantics, a second form of individualism emerges, which sees individuality as consisting not in a sphere of existence around a self-subsistent ego with a self-enclosed world but in contents of a person's world differing from one to another as qualities of different powers of character and expression. One could call this a more *qualitative*, as distinct from formal, kind of individualism. Here, both the deepest reality and the ideal demands of the cosmos and human affairs in the first instance are not human beings' independent existence as fundamentally equal and identical beings but their qualitative irreplaceability as fundamentally unequal and nonidentical beings. [...]*

Some theological idioms of thought, first, see the degree and direction of an individual's energies stemming from a transcendent power. Both an individual's contents of existence and individual existence itself are here seen merely to be bestowed on an individual as aspects of a transcendent plan for the world. Similarly, extreme sociologism makes individuals into mere points of intersection for threads spun out before them and around them by society: a mere vessel for social influences, from whose shifting complexion a person's contents and colorations of existence are seen as wholly derivative. Third and finally, naturalistic thinking foists on the individual a cosmic-causal origin of existence in place of a social one, where once again the individual is no more than a kind of illusion. As incomparable as an individual's form of life might perhaps be on this view, it arises only from the confluence of exactly the same stuffs and energies that compose stars or grains of sand and is no autochthonous origin of any of this person's own contents and activities of life. In all three of these cases, human beings cannot "live from within themselves" because all inner life that they have can express no creative powers of their own. What a person actualizes is not his or her "individuality," which is no substance in its own right, but something else: something metaphysical, social, or naturalistic that only happens to take on the form of human individuality, which itself cannot be anything productive, uniquely originary, or self-generating. The cardinal question of life is not answered for Goethe by any such notion of the individual as a point of thoroughfare for powers and currents of supra-individual provenance, or as the form of mental life assumed only

* [Trans.] Simmel moves on to state that individualism, in either of these two forms of definition, is threatened by three further kinds of worldview with a tendency to deny the individual all importance altogether.

by essentially nonindividual substances. It is decided only by a vision of the individual as an ultimate and intrinsically creative source of events in the world: a substance from which all forms of mental life originally evolve.

[...] It is true that some statements by Goethe suggest a view of individuals differing from one another not so much by variations of qualitative color as by quantitative degrees of intensity of life: of fullness of movement or force of self-preservation and self-assertion. [...] This, certainly, is one basic way of understanding human nature—and one that seems to me most closely embodied in the history of figure painting by the great Velázquez. In his figures too, we notice, more than anything else, different individual degrees of vitality and dynamism of existence, as though a spectrum of intensities existed, with *Count-Duke Olivares* and *Knight of the Order of Santiago* (in Dresden) at one end and the effete Habsburgs at the other, in whom life is but a scheme and no longer anything in any way real—as though Velázquez's every figure occupied a definite position along this artist's imaginary spectrum of quantities of life.

But developing alongside this in Goethe is also what I have called a later, qualitative kind of individualism that locates essences and values of people in their constitutive particularity or singularity. [...] Culminating in the romantic movement, this individualism finds its decisive initial breakthrough in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Disregarding Shakespeare for the moment, it is probably here for the first time in literary history that a world is described (even if only a small world of particular social circles) that itself is generated entirely from the uniqueness of its individual members and is developed and organized exclusively around these constituent elements. One thinks of course also of the greatest poetic example of a world-picture fashioned from sharply individualized personae: *The Divine Comedy*. But as little comparable in intensity of being and force of contour as Goethe's characters may be to Dante's, an important problem that does not first exist for Dante is resolved by Goethe's character portraits with a peculiar cachet: a problem, namely, of how these characters, from their own interactions, can give rise to a shared lifeworld. Dante's figures stand isolated beside one another, reaching unity not through any interrelationships of their own but only through the poet's transcendental wandering and through an overarching all-encompassing divine order that itself has no need for these individual personae as any kind of inner condition of itself.

Compared with Shakespeare's characters, Goethe's again highlight quite different categories pointing to basic fundaments of their contrasting creative styles. In its pure idea, Shakespeare's creative life resembles,

symbolically, creation by a divine being. In the world of his plays, the metaphysical Something, the chaos or unnameable being from which he fashions this world, disappears and passes over into the sum total existence of each individually fashioned character of this world. Correlatively, Shakespeare himself, as creator, steps back from these characters and leaves them to themselves and their own laws of self and is no longer a tangible and clearly detectable presence behind them. His artistic figures thus form an artistic analogy to the absolute metaphysical Something from which their world is formed. Their "naturalness" does not mean that a general unitary "nature as such" can be felt beneath each one, for no such thing joins them to any kind of common root-ground. Instead, each has imbibed every last drop of existence into itself and transmuted it exhaustively into its own individual form of being. And again, by the same token, Shakespeare as creator becomes invisible behind his own work, his creations in no way supplements, interpretations, or background or ideal burning fuses of his own being. It is at least a highly symbolic coincidence that we know very little about Shakespeare's personality apart from a few minor details. His characters and protagonists have detached themselves from him to such an extent that it is no more than slightly exaggerated to say that nothing would be taken away from our understanding and enjoyment of his works if they had been written by someone else. All of Shakespeare's tragic characters' existences penetrate to the last tips of their roots as individual beings and unbind them into unprecedented positions of perfect plasticity and independence from objective mutual commonalities and from all latent subjectivity of the poet otherwise joining them together again. Goethe's works and characters differ from Shakespeare's in both these respects. Goethe's poetic oeuvre rests on a feeling of precisely the same nature whose concept anchors his theoretical world-picture. The world in Goethe's vision expresses one universal unitary being that engenders his characters and takes them back into itself ("from cradle to grave: one eternal sea"), and at no moment fully releases them from this basic physical-metaphysical substance ("in everything, the eternal surges forth").* Mutual affinity among all of Goethe's characters, which with Shakespeare consists at most in a certain identity of artistic figuration, of style and magnitude of delineation, lies for Goethe in a sense of groundedness in a unity of nature, from which an individual character no more extrudes than a wave from the sea in perhaps never repeated

* [Trans.] "Geburt und Grab, / Ein ewiges Meer." From *Faust*, part I, scene 1 ("Night," Earth Spirit to Faust). "Das Ew'ge regt sich fort in allen." From Goethe's poem "Eins und Alles" (1821).

form. The “nature” in whose image or as whose product Goethe saw appearances is much broader and more metaphysical, more seamless in its way of undergirding all interconnections of characters to one another, than the “nature” that brings forth Shakespeare’s figures. But precisely for this reason, Goethe’s “nature” is also not as concentrated into the individual figure, not as infused into each figure with such volcanic momentum. In Shakespeare we learn about the nature of an individual character or phenomenon; in Goethe about nature in general, as each character’s always identical underlying ground. What Goethe says of himself: “And thus I divide myself, dear friends, and ever forth am one”—this holds too for nature and for all nature’s individual phenomena. * We are all children of one divine nature, whose “genius” lives on even in the “crassest philistinism” and whose condition is to make every single peculiarity of individual things take root as if from one basic inexpressible law.** Whereas Shakespeare’s individuals, like typical great men of the Renaissance, have torn themselves, so to speak, free from God and are metaphysical in their existence from head to toe, Goethe’s strike us as being members of one great metaphysical organism: fruit of one tree—without this “nature” causing any kind of qualitative commonality in them, even as it in some way persists in them and draws them back into itself. And similarly, seen from the authorial angle, these figures remain one with the unity of the poetic personality. They are woven together with one another as expressions of *one* creative subjectivity—and, again, without this in any way diminishing their constitutive uniqueness. In Shakespeare, the poetic-creative center of personality in which his characters’ outlines of life ultimately merge with one another is a kind of infinite vanishing point, whereas in Goethe this creative center never completely disappears from the field of vision. This does not mean that his figures, as describable phenomena, bear a family resemblance to their creator, as though features of Goethe’s essence could be detected in each one of them or as though these features composed his characters as if from ready-made pieces of himself in his hands. Certainly this self-modeling, this self-projection by Goethe of his own preshaped being into fictional forms, occurs frequently in his writing and has been frequently enough highlighted. But rather than this happening in some way naturalistically or mechanically, a deeper-

* [Trans.] “Und so spalt’ ich mich, ihr Lieben, / Und bin immerfort der Eine.” From Goethe’s poem “Teilen kann ich nicht das Leben” (1827).

** [Trans.] “Auch die plumpste Philisterei hat etwas von ihrem Genie.” From the fragment “Die Natur” (1783), a manuscript by Georg Christoph Tobler, based on conversations with Goethe.

lying, more purely functional aspect of Goethe's poetic work is here at stake. At issue is not a process of contents being carried over [*Übertragen-sein von Inhalten*] from poet to work but of a dynamic carrying-over [*Getragensein*]—or rather carrying-over-as-voice [*Vorgetragensein*]—of fashioned figures by a creator as fashioning agency. Characters do not exist for themselves in the same sense as they do in Shakespeare. Rather, they simply *are* the work of art given to us by the poet. They are just as self-sufficiently “organic” as Shakespeare's but exist less “from themselves” than from Goethe's vital will to art and worldhood. Mephistopheles and Ottilie, Gretchen and Tasso, Orest and Makarie, perdure, even in all their qualitative difference and autonomy, within the poet's creative life-sphere, and the juices of life in which all are bathed as from one unitary source remain palpable in them all. This is a recoupling of the created to creator by dint not of contents but of a vital creative process of unbroken continuity from one to the other. Most clear in this are Goethe's novels. Although the link in *The Sufferings of Young Werther* is supplied and perhaps concealed by an identity of *contents* of the poet's experience and the poetic work, in the *Wilhelm Meister* novels and *Elective Affinities* artistic style is pervaded throughout by our sense of the presence of a narrative voice. In these latter novels, there is no formal-artistic realism (whether naturalistic or more stylized realism) in the sense of events and persons left to themselves like unmediated existence on a theatrical stage. Instead, they are simply and really a “narrative”: narrative borne by a narrator we can continually feel behind them. Even when all characters stand as autonomous beings and all sense of composition has been torn up, as in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, the poet behind them remains a “unity of apperception.” This I mean not strictly in Kant's sense of an ideal objective interrelationship of cognitive contents indifferent to psychic processes of life, nor in a subjective sense of each state of consciousness being meaningful only as this particular subject's life-objectivation. I mean this rather in the unique sense of a relationship that subsists perhaps only between narrative and narrator. Events narrated have an objective unity, an intrinsic coherence of constituent elements, and the narrator has an intrinsic unity of personhood that sustains the psychological coherence of his creative ideas. But if a narrator-subject can be detected in his creative activity and objective work, the second unity of creative personhood now moves into the first unity of narrated events (which is what is meant by “detectability”) and the work assumes a new creative center of unity. Our always spatially oriented concepts and terms here make it very difficult to express how this creative center neither coincides with nor wholly diverges from the events narrated. But whether expressible or not, Goethe's novels work

in this way within essentially narrator-based categories of writing and in so doing manifest a remarkable category of self-objectified but not self-extinguished subjectivity that is the hallmark of his spiritual life and work as a whole.

Now if at this juncture one considers Shakespeare once more, Goethe's role as narrator, by comparison, even in his plays, from *Iphigenie auf Tauris* onward, seems to be virtually one of reporter on events. When Macbeth, Othello, Cordelia, or Portia speak, absolutely nothing is present in this ideal world of their speaking and acting other than they themselves. There is no Shakespeare moving them as their secret king: he is fully dissolved in their autonomous life. By contrast, for all their differences and subtleties of speech, Goethe's Antonio and the princess, or Faust and Wagner, Pylades and Orestes, all possess a relatively uniform basic rhythm, inasmuch as it is always in the end Goethe who brings them to speak. Perhaps this immediacy, this continuous flow of life's juices among them, and from Goethe himself as these juices' source, as if from some vital umbilical cord—perhaps this is the reason he so feared writing a “genuine tragedy,” believing the “mere attempt might destroy him.”* And it is the reason, too, why tension between subjectivity and objectivity affects him in a quite different way from Shakespeare. For the latter, it does not really exist as any kind of problem, whereas for Goethe it is something to be overcome, its poles felt, and the distance between them measured—so as to be drawn together again by life's vital function. Never would it have occurred to Shakespeare to characterize his created work as “objective” [*gegenständlich*]—like Goethe, who evidently felt himself in some way redeemed in this formulation. Shakespeare's plenitude of life gushes over into his characters' self-sufficient contours in the very moment it first springs forth, as if bypassing his own existence as subject. His characters are objective in an absolute sense of this word that is not first established by anything standing over-against-the-subject.

Now let me return finally from these structural aspects of personality-construction in Goethe's writing to our original problem of individualism. Almost every figure in Goethe's great works represents a way of viewing the world or a way of building an inner picture of the world on the basis of a personally lived existence. The world in question may be small enough, but it bears a basic character of worldhood inasmuch as it reflects

* [Trans.] “Ich kenne mich zwar selbst nicht genug um zu wissen, ob ich eine wahre Tragödie schreiben könnte, ich erschrecke aber bloß vor dem Unternehmen und bin beinahe überzeugt daß ich mich durch den bloßen Versuch zerstören könnte.” From Goethe's letter to Friedrich Schiller, 9 December 1797.

a particular mode of seeing, feeling, and emotionally coloring events, as well as a consistent power of shaping these events and everything concomitant to them around a central kind of essence and around a definite, smoothly constructed picture of the total contents of existence. This, as far as I can see, is something that cannot be said unproblematically of any of Shakespeare's characters except Hamlet. Neither Romeo nor Lear, nor Othello nor Antony, give rise to, or build from themselves, a *world* as such—like Faust or Mephistopheles, Tasso or Antonio, Charlotte or Otilie. Wilhelm Meister, in this same sense, is, in his very person, a world made of worlds. Each of these leading protagonists is the a priori of a world: the a priori of a worldview and of a way of shaping life—whereas Shakespeare's figures live with a world-picturing capacity absolutely pre-built into their existence. Surrounding them is an atmosphere of life and of their individual lives in particular, but not one that takes objectivated form as a general picture of existence centered in each of them, regardless even of their fate and will. Goethe's first precursor in this way of creating a work of art's microcosm from characters as centers of different individual mental worlds is Raphael. If I am not mistaken, Raphael's *School of Athens* displays for the first time in art history a way of symbolically encapsulating the world of the mind in general through personalities, each setting the particular musical key for a particular mental symphony of the world. This is precisely equivalent to how the speech of Goethe's protagonists relates to their being as a whole. The nature of this relationship for other writers and artists in general is decisive for all styles of art. Constitutive of principles of art and life in antiquity was that a dramatic character be the precisely delineated bearer of a particular type of acting and suffering, of a particular fate and way of suffering this fate. Man with all his traits and capacities had to fit into the form required by the work of art's theme—just as the sculptures of the Parthenon live precisely as the object and structure of the artistic moment demand. Life here exactly satisfies the relevant artistic form and is nothing overflowing into any wider currents of existence that might also be transartistic in some way. Only in the Hellenic period do we first sense a represented moment to be extracted or siphoned off from a personality's broad flux of life that itself is not exhausted by this moment but only visible in it. Unmistakable among all great depictees of the human being is that across all diversity of artistic styles and forms, everything their protagonists say and do seems to us to be merely the incidentally illuminated aspect of an entire, rounded personality that only happens to face us as spectators in mid-speech at this particular moment and is otherwise capable of infinite other utterances. What so often strikes us in Schiller's figures as unbearably mannered and

theatrical is that they possess no psychic interior life apart from what they communicate in their dramatic roles. Their boundaries of psychic existence coincide exactly with their reality on stage, with the result that they resemble pure performing actors who are nothing off the podium and absorb nothing of any other character's life in the drama other than what they themselves are made to say of it on stage. Of all Schiller's figures, perhaps only Wallenstein retains a discrete sphere of life larger than the sum of all individual utterances by him, or an energetic central core of personality that generates all these utterances and makes us appreciate how much more he might have said. By contrast, Goethe's characters are filled with this excess of possible speech at every moment their life appears to us. Are not Iphigenie and Tasso, Faust and Natalie, so much more than what one hears from them? What they say each time is always simply the outer light-ray of an infinitely rich inner total life, whereas Schiller's figures are only ever the light-rays themselves. Characters from Goethe's mature period are unique in being at once entirely classically rounded and at the same time, in everything they represent, only decisive cross-sections of an immeasurably more expansive totality of life, of which they are but colorful reflections. They resemble himself in their quality—which cannot be further defined—of making us hear, even in their every merely matter-of-fact or incidental utterance, the resonance of an entire immediate, unexpressed, and inexpressible unity of life.

The fact that, underpinning and overarching all their individual acts of speech, Goethe's characters' life objectifies itself or allows itself to be objectified each time into a "worldview" seems to me to have to do with his more intellectualistic outlook, compared with Shakespeare. To contrast the above-named characters of these two writers with one another is to recognize in all of Goethe's a touch of the theoretical, of intellectuality beyond natural being. Where natural being remains enclosed in itself or only relates to a surrounding world by, so to speak, radially penetrating into it, the ideal creativity of the theoretical person easily projects from itself the circuit of a whole world. Or, to define still more deeply this relationship between the artistic emergence of particular individual "worlds" and the theoretical character of individuals at the respective centers of these worlds, we can say that the interior elements of the theoretical person have, from the outset, an at least potentially logical structure. They are so formed that from some of them, others easily arise: from all elements expressed, an ensemble of other unexpressed, even unthought, elements can be succinctly inferred. By contrast, in the ontological character of Shakespeare's characters, one notices that being as such is nothing of any logical nature and is not logically constructible. Only being's qualitative deter-

minations can be conceptually disentangled and elaborated, while being itself remains simply a primordial given, a matter of sheer experience and lived experience; and the more an alogical fact of being dominates in one character, the less is it possible or permissible, by inferring nongiven from given elements in it, to interpret this character in terms of some particular total worldview. One perhaps purely psychological expression of this is that Shakespeare's personalities are creatures of *will* and consequently exhibit an aspect of unpredictability and spontaneity that distinguishes the life of the will from all intellectual propensities to methodical and continually productive consistency and coherence. It is no coincidence that the only Shakespearean figure whose nature might form the whole law and individual color of a *Weltanschauung* is Hamlet—a man, that is, not essentially of will but of intellect.

This hallmark of Goethe's characters, this way in which a whole world-picture can be baptized in their names and all their individual utterances seen as fragments of an ideally replete total vision and feeling of the world—it is this that now finally helps explain the sense of Goethe's conception of human individuality in terms of what I have called a second, "qualitative" form of individualism. Decisive here is all *difference* [*Anderssein*] of person from person. Where Fichte still privileges the first form of individualism when he says that "a rational being must be absolutely an individual but not this or that particular individual," the accent here by contrast falls on particularity of an individual and on everyone being unique and inexchangeable for anyone else. Even if an individual figure is meant as a type and even if reality so happens to produce two or more exactly identical beings, the sense of the idea is that all are different and that all express their fact of existence in their unique fashion and hold a position in the sum total of all contents of the world's being that they alone occupy. But this metaphysics of individuality is only fully visibly realized and vitally developed when the total existence and basic coloration that constitutes an individual in his or her singularity can flow through and around and coordinate itself in this individual. Thus human beings are only truly and fully individuals when they are not merely points in the world but themselves worlds; and this they can prove only by showing their qualitative existence to be the expression of a possible world-picture, as the nucleus of a mental cosmos, of whose ideal totality all their various actual deeds and acts of speech are only very partial realizations. Correlatively, if a person is understood as the fount of a world, as virtually the name of a *Weltanschauung*, such as is the case with Goethe's characters, every individual must differ from every other at the deepest of levels. Sameness or equivalence [*Gleichheit*] across all these individual worlds would

be meaningless. For then it would be sufficient to say that only one world exists and that every person represents one point of existence within it. It is meaningful to speak of an infinity of possible world-pictures and of each person being the center and law of such a world-picture only when no one picture can be substituted for another and when each increases the wealth and diversity of melodies in which the human mind can transpose the totality of all existence. Insofar as each of Goethe's great characters represents a way in which not only a particular fate or challenge but a whole world can be grasped, lived, and fashioned, they make us comprehend most fully his vision of the individual as the qualitatively unique being *sans pareil*.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Two letters by Simmel to Rilke, 1908, 1915

Simmel to Rilke, 9 August 1908

Dear Mr. Rilke,

I have been meaning to write to you for a long time—in fact, ever since I discovered your *Book of Hours* a few months ago. I cannot express how much I admire this work and how grateful I am for it. I find it impossible not to think that poetry in the great style, which accumulates all too rarely, has been extended in your work immeasurably. I am very far from wanting to offer any judgment; I would like only, as a philosopher, to communicate how extraordinarily interesting I find the turn taken by pantheism in your book. Pantheism, while perhaps forming the fundamental *mood* of all artistic creation, is not in fact a *content* that can be formed by art—for the reason that it consists in the denial of all particularity of form. Individual figurations dissolve into the absolute One and lose all meaning and title because every single thing, each *this* and each *that*, is simply God. That is why pantheism often seems somewhat lacking in plasticity and visibility. In your book, however, pantheism leads in reverse direction: not this and that is God, but, rather, *God* is this and that. Divine being enters into the individual particular forms and qualities and finds in them its full and exhaustive life. The singular does not melt into God and thereby forfeit its tangible, individually significant form; rather, God melts into the singular and the singular is thereby retained and strengthened in its particularity of form. The empirically fortuitous in individual things acquires in this way a, so to speak, transcendental legitimacy. This seems to me the only possible way in which pantheistic feelings can crystallize immediately in works of art: things do not issue in God; rather, God issues in things.

My wife too would like to thank you for this work and for her pleasure in it.

Sincerely,
Simmel

Simmel to Rilke, 11 March 1915

Dear Mr. Rilke,

Do you know the book by Hermann Schneider, *Kultur und Denken der alten Ägypter*? I have just got hold of it; it seems to be the first attempt to define an *idea* of Egyptian civilization—although, after leafing through, my impression is that the author's idea is not an especially profound one. Whether, in Egyptian art, one can address or even first pose a problem of the interiority of life, in the way I attempted with Michelangelo—this strikes me as very questionable. Michelangelo's world is still so much our own that a reasonably well anchored chain of inferences can be made from a given work of his to its psychical conditions. Egyptian art, however, comes to us laden with such immensely foreign understandings that inferences of this nature seem highly suspect. The fact that we can enjoy the mental fruits of this soil does not entail that the forces bringing forth such fruits must be accessible to us. I wonder, then, whether your question should be simply: what is Egyptian art *for us*?—a puzzle of this art for our situation *now*, rather than from their situation *then*. This too would be a task of the highest importance. You might find it helpful to speak with Mrs. Fechheimer.

Sincerely,
Simmel

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