

**The origin of german tragic
drama/ Walter Benjamin; New
York: Verso, 1998 (27-56 p.)**

Epistemo-Critical Prologue

Neither in knowledge nor in reflection can anything whole be put together, since in the former the internal is missing and in the latter the external; and so we must necessarily think of science as art if we expect to derive any kind of wholeness from it. Nor should we look for this in the general, the excessive, but, since art is always wholly represented in every individual work of art, so science ought to reveal itself completely in every individual object treated.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre*

It is characteristic of philosophical writing that it must continually confront the question of representation. In its finished form philosophy will, it is true, assume the quality of doctrine, but it does not lie within the power of mere thought to confer such a form. Philosophical doctrine is based on historical codification. It cannot therefore be evoked *more geometrico*. The more clearly mathematics demonstrate that the total elimination of the problem of representation – which is boasted by every proper didactic system – is the sign of genuine knowledge, the more conclusively does it reveal its renunciation of that area of truth towards which language is directed. The methodological element in philosophical projects is not simply part of their didactic mechanism. This means quite simply that they possess a certain esoteric quality which they are unable

to discard, forbidden to deny, and which they vaunt at their own peril. The alternative philosophical forms represented by the concepts of the doctrine and the esoteric essay are precisely those things which were ignored by the nineteenth century, with its concept of system. Inasmuch as it is determined by this concept of system, philosophy is in danger of accommodating itself to a syncretism which weaves a spider's web between separate kinds of knowledge in an attempt to ensnare the truth as if it were something which came flying in from outside. But the universalism acquired by such philosophy falls far short of the didactic authority of doctrine. If philosophy is to remain true to the law of its own form, as the representation of truth and not as a guide to the acquisition of knowledge, then the exercise of this form – rather than its anticipation in the system – must be accorded due importance. This exercise has imposed itself upon all those epochs which have recognized the uncircumscribable essentiality of truth in the form of a propaedeutic, which can be designated by the scholastic term treatise because this term refers, albeit implicitly, to those objects of theology without which truth is inconceivable. Treatises may be didactic in tone, but essentially they lack the conclusiveness of an instruction which could be asserted, like doctrine, by virtue of its own authority. The treatise dispenses also with the coercive proof of mathematics. In the canonic form of the treatise the only element of an intention – and it is an educative rather than a didactic intention – is the authoritative quotation. Its method is essentially representation. Method is a digression. Representation as digression – such is the methodological nature of the treatise. The absence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure is its primary characteristic. Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object. This continual pausing for breath is the mode most proper to the process of contemplation. For by pursuing different levels of meaning in its examination of one single object it receives both the incentive to begin again and the justification for its irregular rhythm. Just as mosaics preserve their majesty despite their fragmentation into capricious particles, so philosophical contemplation is not lacking in momentum. Both are made up of the distinct and the disparate; and nothing could bear more powerful testimony to the transcendent force of the sacred

image and the truth itself. The value of fragments of thought is all the greater the less direct their relationship to the underlying idea, and the brilliance of the representation depends as much on this value as the brilliance of the mosaic does on the quality of the glass paste. The relationship between the minute precision of the work and the proportions of the sculptural or intellectual whole demonstrates that truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter. In their supreme, western, form the mosaic and the treatise are products of the Middle Ages; it is their very real affinity which makes comparison possible.

The difficulty inherent in this kind of representation proves only its peculiar quality as a prose form. Whereas the speaker uses voice and gesture to support individual sentences, even where they cannot really stand up on their own, constructing out of them – often vaguely and precariously – a sequence of ideas, as if producing a bold sketch in a single attempt, the writer must stop and restart with every new sentence. And this applies to the contemplative mode of representation more than any other, for its aim is not to carry the reader away and inspire him with enthusiasm. This form can be counted successful only when it forces the reader to pause and reflect. The more significant its object, the more detached the reflexion must be. Short of the didactic precept, such sober prose is the only style suited to philosophical investigation. Ideas are the object of this investigation. If representation is to stake its claim as the real methodology of the philosophical treatise, then it must be the representation of ideas. Truth, bodied forth in the dance of represented ideas, resists being projected, by whatever means, into the realm of knowledge. Knowledge is possession. Its very object is determined by the fact that it must be taken possession of – even if in a transcendental sense – in the consciousness. The quality of possession remains. For the thing possessed, representation is secondary; it does not have prior existence as something representing itself. But the opposite holds good of truth. For knowledge, method is a way of acquiring its object – even by creating it

in the consciousness; for truth it is self-representation, and is therefore immanent in it as form. Unlike the methodology of knowledge, this form does not derive from a coherence established in the consciousness, but from an essence. Again and again the statement that the object of knowledge is not identical with the truth will prove itself to be one of the profoundest intentions of philosophy in its original form, the Platonic theory of ideas. Knowledge is open to question, but truth is not. Knowledge is concerned with individual phenomena, but not directly with their unity. The unity of knowledge – if indeed it exists – would consist rather in a coherence which can be established only on the basis of individual insights and, to a certain extent, their modification of each other; whereas unity is present in truth as a direct and essential attribute, and as such it is not open to question. For if the integral unity in the essence of truth were open to question, then the question would have to be: how far is the answer to the question already given in any conceivable reply which truth might give to questions? And the answer to this question would necessarily provoke the same question again, so that the unity of truth would defy all questioning. As a unity of essence rather than a conceptual unity, truth is beyond all question. Whereas the concept is a spontaneous product of the intellect, ideas are simply given to be reflected upon. Ideas are pre-existent. The distinction between truth and the coherence provided by knowledge thus defines the idea as essence. Such is the implication of the theory of ideas for the concept of truth. As essences, truth and idea acquire that supreme metaphysical significance expressly attributed to them in the Platonic system.

This is evident above all in the *Symposium*, which contains two pronouncements of decisive importance in the present context. It presents truth – the realm of ideas – as the essential content of beauty. It declares truth to be beautiful. An understanding of the Platonic view of the relationship of truth and beauty is not just a primary aim in every investigation into the philosophy of art, but it is indispensable to the definition of truth itself. To interpret these sentences in terms of the logic

of their system, as no more than part of a time-honoured panegyric to philosophy, would inevitably mean leaving the sphere of the theory of ideas; which is where – and perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the statements to which we have referred – the mode of existence of ideas is illuminated. The second of these pronouncements needs some amplification. If truth is described as beautiful, this must be understood in the context of the *Symposium* with its description of the stages of erotic desires. Eros – it should be understood – does not betray his basic impulse by directing his longings towards the truth; for truth is beautiful: not so much in itself, as for Eros. And so it is with human love; a person is beautiful in the eyes of his lover, but not in himself, because his body belongs in a higher order of things than that of the beautiful. Likewise truth; it is not so much beautiful in itself, as for whomsoever seeks it. If there is a hint of relativism here, the beauty which is said to be a characteristic of truth is nevertheless far from becoming simply a metaphor. The essence of truth as the self-respecting realm of ideas guarantees rather that the assertion of the beauty of truth can never be devalued. This representational impulse in truth is the refuge of beauty as such, for beauty remains brilliant and palpable as long as it freely admits to being so. Its brilliance – seductive as long as it wishes only to shine forth – provokes pursuit by the intellect, and it reveals its innocence only by taking refuge on the altar of truth. Eros follows it in its flight, but as its lover, not as its pursuer; so that for the sake of its outward appearance beauty will always flee: in dread before the intellect, in fear before the lover. And only the latter can bear witness to the fact that truth is not a process of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it. But can truth do justice to beauty? That is the innermost question of the *Symposium*. Plato's answer is to make truth the guarantor of the existence of beauty. This is the sense in which he argues that truth is the content of beauty. This content, however, does not appear by being exposed; rather it is revealed in a process which might be described metaphorically as the burning up of the husk as it enters the realm of ideas, that is to say a destruction of the work in which its external form achieves its most brilliant degree of illumination. This relationship between truth and beauty shows more clearly than anything else the great difference between

truth and the object of knowledge, with which it has customarily been equated, and at the same time it provides an explanation of that simple and yet unpopular fact that even those philosophical systems whose cognitional element has long since lost any claim to scientific truth still possess contemporary relevance. In the great philosophies the world is seen in terms of the order of ideas. But the conceptual frameworks within which this took place have, for the most part, long since become fragile. Nevertheless these systems, such as Plato's theory of ideas, Leibniz's Monadology, or Hegel's dialectic, still remain valid as attempts at a description of the world. It is peculiar to all these attempts that they still preserve their meaning, indeed they often reveal it more fully, even when they are applied to the world of ideas instead of empirical reality. For it was as descriptions of an order of ideas that these systems of thought originated. The more intensely the respective thinkers strove to outline the image of reality, the more were they bound to develop a conceptual order which, for the later interpreter, would be seen as serving that original depiction of the world of ideas which was really intended. If it is the task of the philosopher to practise the kind of description of the world of ideas which automatically includes and absorbs the empirical world, then he occupies an elevated position between that of the scientist and the artist. The latter sketches a restricted image of the world of ideas, which, because it is conceived as a metaphor, is at all times definitive. The scientist arranges the world with a view to its dispersal in the realm of ideas, by dividing it from within into concepts. He shares the philosopher's interest in the elimination of the merely empirical; while the artist shares with the philosopher the task of representation. There has been a tendency to place the philosopher too close to the scientist, and frequently the lesser kind of scientist; as if representation had nothing to do with the task of the philosopher. The concept of philosophical style is free of paradox. It has its postulates. These are as follows: the art of the interruption in contrast to the chain of deduction; the tenacity of the essay in contrast to the single gesture of the fragment; the repetition of themes in contrast to shallow universalism; the fullness of concentrated positivity in contrast to the negation of polemic.

The demand for flawless coherence in scientific deduction is not made in order that truth shall be represented in its unity and singularity; and yet this very flawlessness is the only way in which the logic of the system is related to the notion of truth. Such systematic completeness has no more in common with truth than any other form of representation which attempts to ascertain the truth in mere cognitions and cognitional patterns. The more scrupulously the theory of scientific knowledge investigates the various disciplines, the more unmistakably their methodological inconsistency is revealed. In each single scientific discipline new assumptions are introduced without any deductive basis, and in each discipline previous problems are declared solved as emphatically as the impossibility of solving them in any other context is asserted.¹ It is one of the most unphilosophical traits of that theory of science which, instead of the single disciplines, takes as the point of departure for its investigations certain supposedly philosophical postulates, that it considers this inconsistency as coincidental. However, far from characterizing an inferior and provisional stage of knowledge, this discontinuity in scientific method could positively advance the theory of knowledge, were it not for the ambition to grasp the truth – which remains an indivisible unity – in an encyclopaedic accumulation of items of knowledge. Systems have no validity except where they are inspired in their basic outline by the constitution of the world of ideas. The great categories which determine not only the shape of the systems, but also philosophical terminology – logic, ethics, and aesthetics, to mention the most general – do not acquire their significance as the names of special disciplines, but as monuments in the discontinuous structure of the world of ideas. Phenomena do not, however, enter into the realm of ideas whole, in their crude empirical state, adulterated by appearances, but only in their basic elements, redeemed. They are divested of their false unity so that, thus divided, they might partake of the genuine unity of truth. In this their division, phenomena are subordinate to concepts, for it is the latter which effect the resolution of objects into their constituent elements. Conceptual distinctions are above all suspicion of destructive sophistry only when their purpose is the salvation of phenomena in ideas, the Platonic τὰ φαινόμενα σώζειν.

Through their mediating role concepts enable phenomena to participate in the existence of ideas. It is this same mediating role which fits them for the other equally basic task of philosophy, the representation of ideas. As the salvation of phenomena by means of ideas takes place, so too does the representation of ideas through the medium of empirical reality. For ideas are not represented in themselves, but solely and exclusively in an arrangement of concrete elements in the concept: as the configuration of these elements.

The set of concepts which assist in the representation of an idea lend it actuality as such a configuration. For phenomena are not incorporated in ideas. They are not contained in them. Ideas are, rather, their objective, virtual arrangement, their objective interpretation. If ideas do not incorporate phenomena, and if they do not become functions of the law of phenomena, the 'hypothesis', then the question of how they are related to phenomena arises. The answer to this is: in the representation of phenomena. The idea thus belongs to a fundamentally different world from that which it apprehends. The question of whether it comprehends that which it apprehends, in the way in which the concept genus includes the species, cannot be regarded as a criterion of its existence. That is not the task of the idea. Its significance can be illustrated with an analogy. Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars. This means, in the first place, that they are neither their concepts nor their laws. They do not contribute to the knowledge of phenomena, and in no way can the latter be criteria with which to judge the existence of ideas. The significance of phenomena for ideas is confined to their conceptual elements. Whereas phenomena determine the scope and content of the concepts which encompass them, by their existence, by what they have in common, and by their differences, their relationship to ideas is the opposite of this inasmuch as the idea, the objective interpretation of phenomena – or rather their elements – determines their relationship to each other. Ideas are timeless constellations, and by virtue of the elements' being seen as points in such constellations, phenomena are subdivided and at the same time redeemed;

so that those elements which it is the function of the concept to elicit from phenomena are most clearly evident at the extremes. The idea is best explained as the representation of the context within which the unique and extreme stands alongside its counterpart. It is therefore erroneous to understand the most general references which language makes as concepts, instead of recognizing them as ideas. It is absurd to attempt to explain the general as an average. The general is the idea. The empirical, on the other hand, can be all the more profoundly understood the more clearly it is seen as an extreme. The concept has its roots in the extreme. Just as a mother is seen to begin to live in the fullness of her power only when the circle of her children, inspired by the feeling of her proximity, closes around her, so do ideas come to life only when extremes are assembled around them. Ideas – or, to use Goethe's term, ideals – are the Faustian 'Mothers'. They remain obscure so long as phenomena do not declare their faith to them and gather round them. It is the function of concepts to group phenomena together, and the division which is brought about within them thanks to the distinguishing power of the intellect is all the more significant in that it brings about two things at a single stroke: the salvation of phenomena and the representation of ideas.

Ideas are not among the given elements of the world of phenomena. This gives rise to the question of the manner in which they are in fact given, and whether it is necessary to hand over the task of accounting for the structure of the world of ideas to a much-cited intellectual vision. The weakness which esotericism invariably imparts to philosophy is nowhere more overwhelmingly apparent than in that particular way of looking at things which is the philosophical approach required of the adepts of all the theories of neo-Platonic paganism. The being of ideas simply cannot be conceived of as the object of vision, even intellectual vision. For even in its most paradoxical periphrasis, as *intellectus archetypus*, vision does not enter into the form of existence which is peculiar to truth, which is devoid of all intention, and certainly does not itself appear as intention. Truth does not enter into relationships, particularly intentional ones.

The object of knowledge, determined as it is by the intention inherent in the concept, is not the truth. Truth is an intentionless state of being, made up of ideas. The proper approach to it is not therefore one of intention and knowledge, but rather a total immersion and absorption in it. Truth is the death of intention. This, indeed, is just what could be meant by the story of the veiled image of Sais, the unveiling of which was fatal for whomsoever thought thereby to learn the truth. It is not some enigmatic cruelty in actual meaning which brings this about, but the very nature of truth, in the face of which even the purest fire of the spirit of inquiry is quenched. The mode of being in the world of appearances is quite different from the being of truth, which is something ideal. The structure of truth, then, demands a mode of being which in its lack of intentionality resembles the simple existence of things, but which is superior in its permanence. Truth is not an intent which realizes itself in empirical reality; it is the power which determines the essence of this empirical reality. The state of being, beyond all phenomenality, to which alone this power belongs, is that of the name. This determines the manner in which ideas are given. But they are not so much given in a primordial language as in a primordial form of perception, in which words possess their own nobility as names, unimpaired by cognitive meaning. 'It is to some extent doubtful whether Plato's theory of "Ideas" would have been possible if the very meaning of the word had not suggested to the philosopher, familiar only with his mother tongue, a deification of the verbal concept, a deification of words: Plato's "Ideas" are – if, for once, they might be considered from this one-sided viewpoint – nothing but deified words and verbal concepts². The idea is something linguistic, it is that element of the symbolic in the essence of any word. In empirical perception, in which words have become fragmented, they possess, in addition to their more or less hidden, symbolic aspect, an obvious, profane meaning. It is the task of the philosopher to restore, by representation, the primacy of the symbolic character of the word, in which the idea is given self-consciousness, and that is the opposite of all outwardly-directed communication. Since philosophy may not presume to speak in the tones of revelation, this can only be achieved by recalling in memory the primordial form of perception. Platonic anamnesis is, perhaps, not far removed from this kind of

remembering; except that here it is not a question of the actualization of images in visual terms; but rather, in philosophical contemplation, the idea is released from the heart of reality as the word, reclaiming its name-giving rights. Ultimately, however, this is not the attitude of Plato, but the attitude of Adam, the father of the human race and the father of philosophy. Adam's action of naming things is so far removed from play or caprice that it actually confirms the state of paradise as a state in which there is as yet no need to struggle with the communicative significance of words. Ideas are displayed, without intention, in the act of naming, and they have to be renewed in philosophical contemplation. In this renewal the primordial mode of apprehending words is restored. And so, in the course of its history, which has so often been an object of scorn, philosophy is – and rightly so – a struggle for the representation of a limited number of words which always remain the same – a struggle for the representation of ideas. In philosophy, therefore, it is a dubious undertaking to introduce new terminologies which are not strictly confined to the conceptual field, but are directed towards the ultimate objects of consideration. Such terminologies – abortive denominative processes in which intention plays a greater part than language – lack that objectivity with which history has endowed the principal formulations of philosophical reflections. These latter can stand up on their own in perfect isolation, as mere words never can. And so ideas subscribe to the law which states: all essences exist in complete and immaculate independence, not only from phenomena, but, especially, from each other. Just as the harmony of the spheres depends on the orbits of stars which do not come into contact with each other, so the existence of the *mundus intelligibilis* depends on the unbridgeable distance between pure essences. Every idea is a sun and is related to other ideas just as suns are related to each other. The harmonious relationship between such essences is what constitutes truth. Its oft-cited multiplicity is finite; for discontinuity is a characteristic of the 'essences . . . which lead a life that differs utterly from that of objects and their conditions; and which cannot be forced dialectically into existence by our selecting and adding some . . . complex of properties which we happen to encounter in an object; but whose number is, by the same token, limited, and every single one of which must be searched for

laboriously at the appropriate place in its world, until it is found, as a *rocher de bronze*, or until the hope that it exists is shown to be illusory.¹³ Ignorance of this, its discontinuous finitude, has, not infrequently, frustrated energetic attempts to renew the theory of ideas, most recently those undertaken by the older generation of the romantics. In their speculations truth assumed the character of a reflective consciousness in place of its linguistic character.

In the sense in which it is treated in the philosophy of art the *Trauerspiel* is an idea. Such a treatment differs most significantly from a literary-historical treatment in its assumption of unity, whereas the latter is concerned to demonstrate variety. In literary-historical analysis differences and extremes are brought together in order that they might be relativized in evolutionary terms; in a conceptual treatment they acquire the status of complementary forces, and history is seen as no more than the coloured border to their crystalline simultaneity. From the point of view of the philosophy of art the extremes are necessary; the historical process is merely virtual. Conversely the idea is the extreme example of a form or genre, and as such does not enter into the history of literature. *Trauerspiel*, as a concept, could, without the slightest problem, be added to the list of aesthetic classifications. But not as an idea, for it defines no class and does not contain that generality on which the respective conceptual levels in the system of classification depend: the average. The consequent inadequacies of inductive reasoning in artistic theory could not long remain concealed; hence the critical bewilderment of modern scholars. With reference to his study 'Zum Phänomen des Tragischen', Scheler asks: 'how . . . are we . . . to proceed? Are we to assemble all manner of examples of the tragic, that is to say occurrences and events which are said to create the impression of the tragic, and then analyse inductively what it is that they all have "in common"? That would be a kind of inductive method which could be supported by experiment. This would not, however, lead us any further than self-observation at those moments when we are affected by the tragic. For how justified are we in accepting that what people describe as tragic is tragic?'¹⁴ The attempt to define ideas

inductively – according to their range – on the basis of popular linguistic usage, in order then to proceed to the investigation of the essence of what has been thus defined, can lead nowhere. Invaluable though common linguistic usage may be to the philosopher as a pointer to ideas, it is dangerous to be misled by loose speech or thinking into accepting it, in interpretation, as the formal basis of a concept. Indeed, this permits us to say that it is only with the greatest reservation that the philosopher may adopt the habitual tendency of ordinary thinking, which is to make words into concepts embracing whole species in order to be more sure of them. And the philosophy of art has not infrequently succumbed to this temptation. When Volkelt's *Ästhetik des Tragischen* – to take one striking example from many – includes in its analyses plays by Holz or Halbe alongside dramas by Aeschylus or Euripides, without so much as asking whether the tragic is a form which can be realized at all at the present time, or whether it is not a historically limited form, then, as far as the tragic is concerned, the effect of such widely divergent material is not one of tension, but of sheer incongruity. When facts are amassed in this way so that the less obvious original qualities are soon obscured by the chaos of more immediately appealing modern ones, the investigation in which this accumulation was undertaken – with a view to examining what these things have 'in common' – is left with nothing but some psychological data which, on the slender basis of an identity in the subjective reaction of the investigator or, at least, the ordinary contemporary citizen, are held to establish the similarity of things which are in fact quite different. In terms of the concepts of psychology it is perhaps possible to reproduce a variety of impressions, regardless of whether these impressions have been evoked by works of art; but it is not possible to express the essence of a field of artistic endeavour. This can only be done in a comprehensive explanation of the underlying concept of its form, the metaphysical substance of which should not simply be found within, but should appear in action, like the blood coursing through the body.

The reasons for the uncritical use of inductive methods have always been the same: on the one hand the love of variety and, on the other hand, in-

difference to intellectual rigour. Again and again it is a question of that aversion to constitutive ideas – *universalia in re* – which Burdach explains with such clarity. ‘I have promised to speak of the origin of Humanism as if it were a living being which came as a single whole into the world at one particular time and in one particular place, and then grew as a whole . . . To do so is to proceed in the manner of the so-called Realists of mediaeval scholasticism, who attributed reality to general concepts, or “universals”. In the same way – hyostatizing after the fashion of primitive mythologies – we posit a being of uniform substance and complete reality and call it Humanism, just as if it were a living individual. But in this and countless other cases like it . . . we ought to be clear that we are doing no more than inventing an abstract concept in order to help us come to grips with an infinite series of varied spiritual manifestations and widely differing personalities. It is a fundamental principle of human perception and cognition that we can do such a thing only if, as a consequence of our innate need for systematization, we see in these varied series certain properties, which appear to be similar or identical, more distinctly, and emphasize these similarities more strongly than the differences. . . . Such kinds of Humanism or Renaissance are arbitrary, indeed they are false because they give life, with its multiplicity of sources, forms, and spirits, the false appearance of a real unity of essence. Every bit as arbitrary and misleading is the term “Renaissance man”, which has been so popular since the time of Burckhardt and Nietzsche.’⁵ A footnote to this passage runs as follows: ‘An unfortunate counterpart to the ubiquitous “Renaissance man” is “Gothic man”, currently a source of much confusion, who haunts even the intellectual world of important and respected historians (E. Troeltsch!). And he has been joined by “Baroque man”, a guise in which Shakespeare, for instance, has been presented.’⁶ The correctness of such an attitude is evident, inasmuch as it is opposed to the hyostatization of general concepts – although this does not include universals in all their forms. But it is a quite inadequate response to a Platonic theory of science, whose aim is the representation of essences, for it fails to appreciate its necessity. Such a theory is, indeed, the only means of preserving the language of scientific exposition, as it functions outside the sphere of mathematics, from the boundless scepticism which

ultimately engulfs every inductive methodology, however subtle, and to which the arguments of Burdach provide no answer. For these arguments constitute a private *reservatio mentalis*, not a methodological defence. As far as historical types and epochs in particular are concerned, it can, of course, never be assumed that the subject matter in question might be grasped conceptually with the aid of ideas such as that of the renaissance or the baroque, and to adopt the view that a modern insight into the different periods of history can be validated in, for instance, polemic confrontations in which, as at great historical turning points, the epochs faced each other eyeball to eyeball, so to speak, would be to misunderstand the nature of one’s sources, which is usually determined by considerations of contemporary interest rather than the ideas of historiography. As ideas, however, such names perform a service they are not able to perform as concepts: they do not make the similar identical, but they effect a synthesis between extremes. Although it should be stated that conceptual analysis, too, does not invariably encounter totally heterogeneous phenomena, and it can occasionally reveal the outlines of a synthesis, even if it is not able to confirm it. Thus Strich has rightly observed of baroque literature, in which the German *Trauerspiel* had its origins, ‘that the principles of composition remained unchanged throughout the entire century.’⁷

Burdach’s critical reflection is inspired not so much by the desire for a positive revolution in method as by the fear of material errors of detail. But in the last analysis a methodology must not be presented in negative terms, as something determined by the simple fear of inadequacy on a factual level, a set of warnings. It must rather proceed from convictions of a higher order than are provided by the point of view of scientific verism. Such verism must then, in its treatment of the individual problem, necessarily be confronted by the genuine questions of methodology which are ignored in its scientific credo. The solution of these problems will generally lead to the reformulation of the whole mode of questioning along the following lines: how is the question, ‘What was it really like?’

susceptible, not just of being scientifically answered, but of actually being put. Only with this consideration, which has been prepared for by what precedes and will be concluded in what follows, can it be decided whether the idea is an undesirable abbreviation, or whether, in its linguistic expression, it establishes the true scientific content. A science in conflict with the language of its own investigations is an absurdity. Words, along with mathematical signs, are the only means of expression available to science, and they are not signs. For in the concept, to which the sign would, of course, correspond, the very word which realizes its essence as idea, is depotentiated. The verism, which is served by the inductive method of the theory of art, is not improved by the fact that the discursive and inductive questions ultimately converge in a 'view' [*Anschaung*]⁸ which according to R. M. Meyer and many others, is capable of assuming the form of a syncretism of the most varied methods. And this, like all naively realistic paraphrases of the problem of methodology, brings us back to our point of departure. Because it is precisely the view which must be interpreted. Thus the image of the inductive method of aesthetic investigation reveals its customary murky colouring here too, for the view in question is not the view of the object, resolved in the idea, but that of subjective states of the recipient projected into the work; that is what the empathy, which R. M. Meyer regards as the keystone of his method, amounts to. This method, which is the opposite of the one to be used in the course of the current investigation, 'sees the art-form of the drama, the forms of tragedy or comedy of character or situation, as given factors with which it has to reckon. And its aim is to abstract, by means of a comparison of the outstanding representatives of each genre, rules and laws with which to judge the individual product. And by means of a comparison of the genres it seeks to discover general principles which apply to every work of art.'⁹ In such a philosophy of art the 'deduction' of the genre would be based on a combination of induction and abstraction, and it would not be so much a question of establishing a series of these genres and species by deduction, as of simply presenting them in the deductive scheme.

Whereas induction reduces ideas to concepts by failing to arrange and order them, deduction does the same by projecting them into a pseudo-logical continuum. The world of philosophical thought does not, however, evolve out of the continuum of conceptual deductions, but in a description of the world of ideas. To execute this description it is necessary to treat every idea as an original one. For ideas exist in irreducible multiplicity. As an enumerated – or rather a denominated – multiplicity, ideas are rendered up for contemplation. This it is which prompted Benedetto Croce's fierce criticism of the deductive concept of genre in the philosophy of art. He rightly sees in classification, the framework of speculative deductions, the basis of a superficially schematic criticism. And whereas the nominalism of Burdach, which is based on the concept of the historical epoch, and his resistance to the slightest loss of contact with the factual, are to be attributed to the fear of departing from what is correct, Croce's totally analogous nominalism, which is based on the concept of the aesthetic genre, and his analogous devotion to the particular, are to be attributed to the concern that departure from it might mean the complete loss of the essential. More than anything else, this interest in the essential is precisely what is calculated to show the aesthetic genres in their true meaning and in the right perspective. *The Essence of Aesthetic* criticizes prejudice in favour 'of the possibility of distinguishing a greater or lesser number of particular artistic forms, each of which is definable within its own limits as a particular concept, and each of which is furnished with its own rules . . . There are still many aestheticians who write about the aesthetics of the tragic or the comic, or of lyric or humour, and the aesthetics of painting, or music, or poetry . . . ; but what is worse, . . . in judging works of art, critics have not entirely renounced the habit of measuring them against the genre or the particular art-form to which, in the critic's opinion, they belong.'¹⁰ 'Any conceivable theory of the division of the arts is untenable. The genre or the class is, in this case, a single one: art itself, or the intuition; the individual works of art, on the other hand, are infinite in number: all are original, and none can be translated into another . . . Considered philosophically, nothing is interposed between the universal and the individual, no sequence of genres or species,

no *generalia*.¹¹ This statement is perfectly valid in respect of the aesthetic genres. But it does not go far enough. For although it is clearly futile to assemble a series of works of art with certain features in common, if the intention is to establish their essential quality rather than to produce a collection of historical or stylistic examples, it is equally inconceivable that the philosophy of art will ever divest itself of some of its most fruitful ideas, such as the tragic or the comic. For these ideas are not simply the sum total of certain sets of rules; they are themselves structures, at the very least equal in consistency and substance to any and every drama, without being in any way commensurable. They therefore make no claim to embrace a number of given works of literature on the basis of certain features that are common to them. For even if there were no such things as the pure tragedy or the pure comic drama which could be named after them, these ideas can still survive. And their survival can be helped by an investigation which does not, from the very outset, commit itself to the inclusion of everything which has ever been described as tragic or comic, but looks for that which is exemplary, even if this exemplary character can be admitted only in respect of the merest fragment. Such an investigation does not therefore contribute to the development of standards for the reviewer. Neither criticism nor the criteria of a terminology – the test of the philosophical theory of ideas in art – evolves in response to external comparison, but they take shape immanently, in a development of the formal language of the work itself, which brings out its content at the expense of its effect. It is, moreover, precisely the more significant works, inasmuch as they are not the original and, so to speak, ideal embodiments of the genre, which fall outside the limits of genre. A major work will either establish the genre or abolish it; and the perfect work will do both.

The impossibility of the deductive elaboration of artistic forms and the consequent invalidation of the rule as a critical authority – it will always preserve its validity in the field of artistic instruction – provide the spur to a productive scepticism. This can be likened to a pause for breath, after which thought can be totally and unhurriedly concentrated even on the

very minutest object without the slightest inhibition. For the very minutest things will be discussed wherever the work of art and its form are considered with a view to judging their content. To snatch hastily, as if stealing the property of others, is the style of the *routinier*, and is no better than the *heartiness of the philistine*. In the act of true contemplation, on the other hand, the abandoning of deductive methods is combined with an ever wider-ranging, an ever more intense reappraisal of phenomena, which are, however, never in danger of remaining the objects of vague wonder, as long as the representation of them is also a representation of ideas, for it is here that their individuality is preserved. It goes without saying that the radicalism which would deprive the terminology of aesthetics of many of its best formulations and would reduce the philosophy of art to silence is, even for Croce, not the last word. Rather he states: 'To deny the theoretical value of the abstract classification is not to deny the theoretical value of that genetic and concrete classification which is not, in fact, "classification" at all, but is what we call History.'¹² In this obscure sentence the writer touches – alas, all too fleetingly – on the core of the theory of ideas. But the psychologizing tendency, thanks to which his definition of art as 'expression' is undermined and replaced by that of art as 'intuition', prevents him from perceiving this. He fails to see how the contemplation which he described as 'genetic classification' can be reconciled with an idealist theory of art forms in the problem of origin. Origin [*Ursprung*], although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [*Entstehung*]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a dual insight. On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and re-establishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete. There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of

its history. Origin is not, therefore, discovered by the examination of actual findings, but it is related to their history and their subsequent development. The principles of philosophical contemplation are recorded in the dialectic which is inherent in origin. This dialectic shows singularity and repetition to be conditioned by one another in all essentials. The category of origin is not therefore, as Cohen holds,¹³ a purely logical one, but a historical one. Hegel's 'So much the worse for the facts', is a well-known statement. Basically what it means is: insight into the relationship between essences is the prerogative of the philosopher, and these relationships remain unaltered even if they do not take on their purest form in the world of fact. This genuinely idealist attitude pays for its confidence by abandoning the central feature of the idea of origin. For every proof of origin must be prepared to face up to the question of its authenticity. If it cannot establish this, then it does not merit the name. This consideration would seem to do away with the distinction between the *quaestio juris* and the *quaestio facti* as far as the highest objects of philosophy are concerned. This much is indisputable and inevitable. It does not, however, follow that every primitive 'fact' should straightaway be considered a constitutive determinant. Indeed this is where the task of the investigator begins, for he cannot regard such a fact as certain until its innermost structure appears to be so essential as to reveal it as an origin. The authentic – the hallmark of origin in phenomena – is the object of discovery, a discovery which is connected in a unique way with the process of recognition. And the act of discovery can reveal it in the most singular and eccentric of phenomena, in both the weakest and clumsiest experiments and in the overripe fruits of a period of decadence. When the idea absorbs a sequence of historical formulations, it does not do so in order to construct a unity out of them, let alone to abstract something common to them all. There is no analogy between the relationship of the individual to the idea, and its relationship to the concept; in the latter case it falls under the aegis of the concept and remains what it was: an individuality; in the former it stands in the idea, and becomes something different: a totality. That is its Platonic 'redemption'.

Philosophical history, the science of the origin, is the form which, in the remotest extremes and the apparent excesses of the process of development, reveals the configuration of the idea – the sum total of all possible meaningful juxtapositions of such opposites. The representation of an idea can under no circumstances be considered successful unless the whole range of possible extremes it contains has been virtually explored. Virtually, because that which is comprehended in the idea of origin still has history, in the sense of content, but not in the sense of a set of occurrences which have befallen it. Its history is inward in character and is not to be understood as something boundless, but as something related to essential being, and it can therefore be described as the past and subsequent history of this being. The past and the subsequent history of such essences is – as a token of their having been redeemed or gathered into the world of ideas – not pure history, but natural history. The life of the works and forms which need such protection in order to unfold clearly and unclouded by human life is a natural life.¹⁴ Once this redeemed state of being in the idea is established, then the presence of the inauthentic – that is to say natural-historical – past and subsequent history is virtual. It is no longer pragmatically real, but, as natural history, is to be inferred from the state of completion and rest, from the essence. The tendency of all philosophical conceptualization is thus redefined in the old sense: to establish the becoming of phenomena in their being. For in the science of philosophy the concept of being is not satisfied by the phenomenon until it has absorbed all its history. In such investigations this historical perspective can be extended, into the past or the future, without being subject to any limits of principle. This gives the idea its total scope. And its structure is a monadological one, imposed by totality in contrast to its own inalienable isolation. The idea is a monad. The being that enters into it, with its past and subsequent history, brings – concealed in its own form – an indistinct abbreviation of the rest of the world of ideas, just as, according to Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686), every single monad contains, in an indistinct way, all the others. The idea is a monad – the pre-stabilized representation of phenomena resides within it, as in their objective interpretation. The higher the order of the ideas, the more

perfect the representation contained within them. And so the real world could well constitute a task, in the sense that it would be a question of penetrating so deeply into everything real as to reveal thereby an objective interpretation of the world. In the light of such a task of penetration it is not surprising that the philosopher of the *Monadology* was also the founder of infinitesimal calculus. The idea is a monad – that means briefly: every idea contains the image of the world. The purpose of the representation of the idea is nothing less than an abbreviated outline of this image of the world.

Given the previous history of the German literary baroque there is an apparent paradox in an analysis of one of its principal forms – an analysis which sees its task not in establishing rules and tendencies, but in concerning itself with the metaphysics of this form, understood concretely and in all its fullness. One of the most significant of the many and varied obstacles which have militated against our appreciation of the literature of this epoch is unmistakably to be found in the – for all its importance – awkward form which is especially characteristic of the baroque drama. The drama, more than any other literary form, needs a resonance in history. Baroque drama has been denied this resonance. The renewal of the literary heritage of Germany, which began with romanticism, has, even today, hardly touched baroque literature. It was above all Shakespeare's drama, with its richness and its freedom, which, for the romantic writers, overshadowed contemporaneous German efforts, whose gravity was, in any case, alien to the practical theatre. While the emergent science of German philology looked on the totally non-popular efforts of an educated bureaucracy with suspicion. Notwithstanding the genuine importance of what these men did for the language and the national heritage, and notwithstanding their conscious participation in the development of a national literature – their work too obviously bore the imprint of the absolutist maxim: everything for the people, nothing by the people themselves, to be able to win over philologists of the school of Grimm and Lachmann. A spirit, which prevented them – although they were

labouring on the construction of a German drama – from ever using the material of German popular culture, contributes in no small way to the agonizing violence of their style. Neither German legend nor German history plays any role in baroque drama. But even the widening, indeed the indiscriminating historicism of German literary studies in the last third of the century did not do anything for the study of the baroque *Trauerspiel*. Its difficult form remained inaccessible to a science in which stylistic criticism and formal analysis were the most humble auxiliary disciplines, and the obscure physiognomy of the authors peering out through uncomprehended works did little to inspire historical-biographical sketches. Though in any case there can be no question of the free or playful unfolding of poetic genius in these dramas. Rather did the dramatists of this age feel constrained by force to apply themselves to the task of actually creating the form of a secular drama. And however many times, between Gryphius and Hallmann, they applied themselves to this task – all too frequently in schematic repetition – the German drama of the Counter-Reformation never achieved that suppleness of form which bends to every virtuoso touch, such as Calderón gave the Spanish drama. It took shape – precisely because it was of necessity a product of this age – in an extremely violent effort, and this alone would suggest that no sovereign genius imprinted his personality on this form. And yet here is the centre of gravity of every baroque *Trauerspiel*. The individual poet is supremely indebted to it for his achievement within it, and his individual limitation does not detract from its depth. This needs to be understood if the form is to be investigated. Even then, of course, it remains essential to adopt the kind of approach which, in order to contemplate a form at all, is capable of elevating itself, in the sense of recognizing in it something other than an abstraction from the body of literature. Indeed, in comparison with some of the efforts of the baroque, the form of the *Trauerspiel* is much the richer. And just as every speech-form, even the unusual or isolated, can be seen not only as a testimony to the man who coined it, but also as a document in the life of the language, and evidence of its possibilities at a given time, so too does any art-form – and far more genuinely than any individual work – contain the index of a particular, objectively necessary artistic structure. Older research remained unaware of this

because it never paid attention to the analysis and history of forms. But that was not the only reason. An extremely uncritical adherence to baroque theory of drama also played a part. This is the theory of Aristotle, adapted to the tendencies of the time. In most of the plays this adaptation amounted to a coarsening of the model. Commentators were all too ready to speak of distortion and misunderstanding, without first trying to discover the substantial reasons for this variation, and from here it was not far to the opinion that the dramatists of the period had basically done no more than apply respected precepts in an uncomprehending way. The *Trauerspiel* of the German baroque appeared to be a caricature of classical tragedy. There was no difficulty in reconciling with this scheme of things everything about these works which was offensive or even barbaric to refined taste. The theme of their *Haupt- und Staatsaktionen* was seen as a distortion of the ancient royal drama, the bombast as a distortion of the dignified pathos of the Greeks, and the bloody finale as a distortion of the tragic catastrophe. The *Trauerspiel* thus took on the appearance of an incompetent renaissance of tragedy. And herewith arose a new classification, which necessarily thwarted any appreciation of the form in question: viewed as renaissance-drama the *Trauerspiel* stands condemned, its most characteristic features denounced as so many stylistic shortcomings. For a long time, thanks to the authority of the historical catalogues of subject-matter, this assessment remained uncorrected. In consequence Stachel's meritorious *Seneca und das deutsche Renaissancedrama*, the basic work on the subject, is rendered quite devoid of any noteworthy insight into the essence of the *Trauerspiel*, to which it does not necessarily aspire. In his work on the lyric style of the seventeenth century, Strich has revealed this equivocation, which inhibited research for a long time. 'German poetry of the seventeenth century is customarily described as being renaissance in style. But if this form is understood to mean more than the superficial imitation of the devices of antiquity, then it is misleading, and merely shows the lack of understanding of the history of styles in literary studies, for this century possessed no trace of the classical spirit of the renaissance. The style of its poetry is, rather, baroque, even if one does not think only of bombast and excess, but considers also the profounder principles of composition.'¹⁵ A further and remarkably persistent error

in the literary history of this period is bound up with the prejudice of stylistic criticism: the assumption that its drama is unsuited to the stage. This is not perhaps the first time that perplexity in the face of an unusual scene has given rise to the thought that such a thing was never realized, that works of this kind would not have been effective, that the theatre ignored them. In the interpretation of Seneca, for instance, there occur controversies which, in this respect, are similar to the earlier discussions about baroque drama. Be that as it may – as far as the baroque is concerned, the century-old fable, handed down from A. W. Schlegel¹⁶ to Lamprecht,¹⁷ that the baroque drama was something to be read rather than performed, has been disproved. Indeed the quality of *theatre* speaks with particular emphasis in those violent actions with their eminently visual appeal. Even the theory does, on occasion, stress the scenic effect. The dictum of Horace: 'Et prodesse volunt et delectare poetae', forces the poetics of Buchner to face up to the question 'of how the *Trauerspiel* can conceivably be a source of delight; the answer is: not in its subject matter, but most certainly in its theatrical representation.'¹⁸

Burdened down by so many prejudices, literary scholarship necessarily failed in its attempts to arrive at an objective appreciation of baroque drama, and has moreover only intensified the confusions with which any reflection on the subject must now grapple from the outset. One would hardly believe it possible, but it has even been argued that the baroque *Trauerspiel* represents a genuine form of *Tragedy* because its effects are the same as those which Aristotle attributes to tragedy, namely pity and fear – although it never occurred to Aristotle to declare that only tragedies could arouse pity and fear. One of the older authors has made the quite ridiculous observation: 'Through his studies Lohenstein became so attuned to a past world, that he forgot the contemporary world and, in expression, thought, and feeling, would have been more comprehensible to a public of antiquity than to the public of his own day.'¹⁹ Rather than refuting such extravagances, it should be pointed out that an artistic form can never be determined by its effect. 'That a work of art should be per-

fect and complete in itself is the eternal and essential requirement! Aristotle, who had before him the height of perfection, was thinking of the effect? How absurd!"²⁰ Thus Goethe. No matter whether Aristotle is completely above the suspicion against which Goethe defends him – it is nevertheless crucial to the method of the philosophy of art that the psychological effect which Aristotle defined should have no place whatever in the debate about drama. Hence Wilamowitz-Moellendorf declares: 'it must be realized that *catharsis* cannot exercise a determining influence on drama as a genre, and even if one did wish to regard the emotions by which drama achieves its effects as generically determinative, then the unfortunate pair, fear and pity, would still be quite inadequate.'²¹ Even more unfortunate and more widespread than the attempt to vindicate the *Trauerspiel* with the help of Aristotle is that sort of 'appreciation' which claims, in a few trivial *aperçus*, to have proved the 'necessity' of this kind of drama and, in so doing, to have proved either the positive worth or the futility of all value judgments – it is seldom clear which. The question of the necessity of historical phenomena is always a manifestly *a priori* question. The ill-conceived predicate 'necessity', with which the baroque *Trauerspiel* has frequently been adorned, is prone to change colour. It does not only mean historical necessity, superfluously contrasted to mere chance, but it also means the subjective necessity of sincerity in contrast to virtuosity. It is, however, obvious that we learn nothing from establishing that a work of art is necessarily prompted by a subjective disposition on the part of its author. The same is true of the 'necessity' which sees works or forms as preliminary stages of a subsequent development in a problematic context. 'The concept of nature and the view of art current in the seventeenth century may well have been irrevocably demolished; the innovations then made in respect of artistic technique continue to flourish, unfading, incorruptible, and imperishable.'²² So it is that the most recent account vindicates the literature of this age, but merely as a means. The 'necessity'²³ of appreciations resides in a realm of equivocations and derives plausibility from the only concept of necessity which is relevant to aesthetics. That is to say the concept which Novalis had in mind when describing the *a priori* character of works of art as their immanent necessity *to be there*. It is clear that this necessity

can be grasped only in an analysis which penetrates to its metaphysical substance. It will slip through the net of any moderantist 'appreciation'. And, in the last resort, Cysarz's new attempt is no more than this. Whereas in earlier studies it was the case that the principal features of a completely different way of looking at things simply passed unnoticed, in this latest one it is surprising that valuable ideas and precise observations fail to realize their potential because of the conscious attempt to relate them to the system of neo-classical poetics. Ultimately the tone is not so much that of a vindication in classical terms as of an apologetic excuse. In older works the Thirty Years War is normally mentioned in this context. It appears to bear the responsibility for all the lapses for which this form has been criticized. 'It has often been said that these were plays written by brutes for brutes. But this is what was wanted by the people of that time. Living as they did in an atmosphere of war and bloody conflict, they found such scenes quite natural; they were being presented with a picture of their own way of life. They delighted naively and brutally in the pleasure offered them.'²⁴

At the end of the last century research had strayed hopelessly far from critical examination of the form of the *Trauerspiel*. The attempt to find a substitute for reflection on the philosophy of art in a syncretism of cultural-historical, literary-historical, and biographical approaches has a rather less innocuous parallel in the most recent research. Just as a man lying sick with fever transforms all the words which he hears into the extravagant images of delirium, so it is that the spirit of the present age seizes on the manifestations of past or distant spiritual worlds, in order to take possession of them and unfeelingly incorporate them into its own self-absorbed fantasizing. This is characteristic of our age: there is no new style, no unknown popular heritage to be discovered which would not straight away appeal with the utmost clarity to the feelings of contemporaries. This fatal, pathological suggestibility, by means of which the historian seeks through 'substitution',²⁵ to insinuate himself into the place of the creator – as if the creator were, just because he created it, also

the best interpreter of his work – this has been called ‘empathy’, in an attempt to provide a disguise under which idle curiosity masquerades as method. In this adventure the lack of autonomy manifest in the present generation has for the most part been overwhelmed by the compelling force it encountered in the baroque. Hitherto there have been no more than a few isolated cases where the revaluation which began with the emergence of expressionism – and which was, perhaps, affected by the poetics of the school of Stefan George²⁶ – has led to a genuine insight which reveals new relationships within the material itself and not just between the modern critic and his material.²⁷ But the authority of the old prejudices is beginning to wane. Remarkable analogies to present-day German literature have given increased grounds for an interest in the baroque which, although it is for the most part sentimental in quality, is nonetheless positive in tendency. As early as 1904 a literary historian declared of this period: ‘It seems to me . . . that not for two centuries has there been a period in which artistic feeling has been closer than it is now to the baroque literature of the seventeenth century in its search for its own style. Inwardly empty or profoundly disturbed, outwardly pre-occupied with technical problems of form which seemed at first to have very little to do with the existential problems of the age – this is what most of the baroque writers were like, and, so far as one can see, the same is true of at least those present-day poets who impress their personality upon their work.’²⁸ In the meantime this opinion, expressed here all too diffidently and guardedly, has been substantiated in a very much wider sense. 1915 saw the publication of Werfel’s *Die Troerinnen*, a herald of the expressionist drama. It is not entirely fortuitous that the same subject is to be encountered in the work of Opitz in the early days of the baroque drama. In both works the poet was concerned with the instrument of lamentation and its resonance. In both cases what was therefore required was not ambitious artificial developments, but a verse-form modelled on dramatic recitative. The analogy between the endeavours of the baroque and those of the present and the recent past is most apparent in the use of language. Exaggeration is characteristic of both. The creations of these two literary styles do not emerge from any sense of communal existence; the violence of their manner is, rather, designed to conceal the absence of

widely accepted works of literature. For like expressionism, the baroque is not so much an age of genuine artistic achievement as an age possessed of an unremitting artistic will. This is true of all periods of so-called decadence. The supreme reality in art is the isolated, self-contained work. But there are times when the well-wrought work is only within reach of the epigone. These are the periods of ‘decadence’ in the arts, the periods of artistic ‘will’. Thus it was that Riegl devised this term with specific reference to the art of the final period of the Roman Empire. The form as such is within the reach of this will, a well-made individual work is not. The reason for the relevance of the baroque after the collapse of German classical culture lies in this will. To this should be added the desire for a vigorous style of language, which would make it seem equal to the violence of world-events. The practice of contracting adjectives, which have no adverbial usage, and substantives into a single block, is not a modern invention. ‘Grosstanz’, ‘Grossgedicht’ (i.e. epic), are baroque words. Neologisms abound. Now, as then, many of them are an expression of a desire for new pathos. Writers were attempting personally to gain a mastery of that innermost formative power from which the precise but delicate language of metaphor derives. Glory was sought in devising figurative words rather than figurative speeches, as if linguistic creation were the immediate concern of poetic verbal invention. Baroque translators delighted in the most arbitrary coinings such as are encountered among contemporaries, especially in the form of archaisms, in which it is believed one can reassure oneself of the wellsprings of linguistic life. Such arbitrariness is always the sign of a production in which a formed expression of real content can scarcely be extracted from the conflict of the forces which have been unleashed. In this state of disruption the present age reflects certain aspects of the spiritual constitution of the baroque, even down to the details of its artistic practice. Just as the pastoral play formed a contrast to the political novel, which then, as now, attracted the interest of respected authors, so, nowadays, do the pacifist avowals of faith in the ‘simple life’ and the natural goodness of man. Men of letters, who today, as always, live their lives in a sphere cut off from the active national feeling of the people, are once again consumed by an ambition in the satisfaction of which the writers of the baroque period were, of course,

and in spite of everything, more successful than the writers of today. For Opitz, Gryphius, and Lohenstein were occasionally able to perform gratefully rewarded political duties. And here our parallel reaches its limits. The baroque writer felt bound in every particular to the ideal of an absolutist constitution, as was upheld by the Church of both confessions. The attitude of their present-day heirs, if not actually hostile to the state, that is revolutionary, is characterized by the absence of any idea of the state. And finally, so many analogies should not lead us to forget this great difference: in seventeenth-century Germany, literature, however little account the nation took of it, underwent a significant rebirth. The twenty years of German literature which have been referred to here in order to explain the renewal of interest in the earlier epoch, represent a decline, even though it may be a decline of a fruitful and preparatory kind.

All the more powerful, therefore, is the impact which can be made at this very moment by the expression of related tendencies in the eccentric artistic medium of the German baroque. Confronted with a literature which sought, in a sense, to reduce both its contemporaries and posterity to silence through the extravagance of its technique, the unfailing richness of its creations, and the vehemence of its claims to value, one should emphasize the necessity of that sovereign attitude which the representation of the idea of a form demands. Even then the danger of allowing oneself to plunge from the heights of knowledge into the profoundest depths of the baroque state of mind, is not a negligible one. That characteristic feeling of dizziness which is induced by the spectacle of the spiritual contradictions of this epoch is a recurrent feature in the improvised attempts to capture its meaning. 'Even the most intimate idioms of the baroque, even its details – indeed, perhaps they more than anything else – are antithetical.'²⁹ Only by approaching the subject from some distance and, initially, foregoing any view of the whole, can the mind be led, through a more or less ascetic apprenticeship, to the position of strength from which it is possible to take in the whole panorama and yet remain in control of oneself. The course of this apprenticeship is what had to be described here.