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Back cover: Hugo Ball. 1916. Swiss Literary Archives (SLA), Bern. Literary estate of Hugo Ball.

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On Aggregators

DAVID JOSELIT

The term *contemporary* has shifted from an adjective to a noun. Once a neutral descriptor meant to indicate recentness, *the* contemporary is now widely claimed as a period, composed of loosely related aesthetic tendencies, following and displacing modernism. In this regard, it enters a tradition of now discredited movements that includes "pluralism" and "postmodernism."[1] Unlike these predecessors, however, which took Euro-American art as their primary archive, *contemporary* encompasses the temporally coeval but geographically diverse expressions of a global art world—a point critics often emphasize by noting that the literal meaning of *con-temporary* is "with time," which in turn is sometimes poetically glossed as referring to "comrades in time."[2] A framework for global art is thus furnished through the undeniable and ostensibly value-free contention that work so designated occupies the same moment in time. There is, however, a paradox in rendering the adjective *contemporary* as a noun: When packaged as a period, *the* contemporary unconsciously reinscribes a model of temporal progression that was fundamental to modernism. While discussions of the contemporary typically emphasize its synchronic dimension—calling upon, as I've mentioned, the *con* to suggest simultaneity across different locations and perspectives—by definition it is always advancing. Like an avant-garde, the contemporary can only go forward, but unlike an avant-garde, the contemporary doesn't have an *avant*: Its forward movement does not carry the productive shock of being *in advance* or, perhaps more appropriate, of being out of sync with its time. In its discursive structure, the contemporary is a kind of blank or denatured modernism, one that is only ever "with" its moment. And this seemingly innocuous "with" masks the dramatically uneven development of globalization. For being together in time does nothing to redress economic disparity, as the victims of collapsed Bangladeshi garment factories producing inexpensive clothes for Western corporations can attest.

1. For two of the best accounts of contemporary art as a period, see Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), and Alexander Alberro, response to "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary,'" *October* 130 (Fall 2009), pp. 55–60.
2. See for example Boris Groys, "Comrades in Time," *What Is Contemporary Art?*, ed. Julieta Aranda et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), pp. 22–39.

OCTOBER 146, Fall 2013, pp. 3–18. *© 2013 October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

In their book *Anachronic Renaissance*, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood argue that the artwork's temporal heterogeneity—its capacity to introduce both future and past into material form—began to be recognized and manipulated during the Renaissance. For Nagel and Wood, "No device more effectively generates the effect of a doubling or a bending of time than the work of art, a strange kind of event whose relation to time is plural."[3] Under conditions of globalization, where the critic's challenge must encompass acknowledging how economic profits and political gains are extracted from the "plurality of time" (as when labor in "underdeveloped" parts of the world is exploited to produce wealth in "developed" regions), the bland pluralism of the "contemporary" is not enough. Uneven development carries with it asynchrony, not contemporaneity.[4] This is due not only to wide disparities in life opportunities in general but also to the different local histories of modern and contemporary art across the world that have carried an artist from Germany, China, or South Africa, for instance, to the present moment.

Period, or International Style?

Sometimes, as in the theories of Suhail Malik, "the contemporary" is described with little if any reference to art practices themselves—an understandable, if to my mind problematic, move given the proliferation of biennials, art fairs, museums, and other exhibition spaces that marked the intensified globalization of the art world in the 1990s.[5] Conversely, critics and academic historians of contemporary art express consternation privately, and sometimes publicly, at its daunting scale. On the last page of his 2012 book, *What Was Contemporary Art?*, for instance, Richard Meyer voices his exasperation:

> In 2012, as this book goes to print, the culture of contemporary art seems to be burning more intensely than ever. But the glare of now-ism—of the latest international art fair, *e-flux* posting, hot young artist, and auction-house record—can be fairly blinding. The spectacular immediacy of the contemporary art world threatens to overwhelm our ability to think critically about the relation of the current moment to the past.[6]

It is precisely such fear of blindness in the face of "spectacular immediacy" that motivates the transformation of the word *contemporary* from a contingent adjective to

3. Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p. 9.

4. As this article was going to press, a special issue of *Texte zur Kunst* (September 2013) was published on globalism, in which questions of asynchrony and the global art world are extensively addressed, especially by Susanne Leeb. Unfortunately, because of timing, I cannot take these arguments into account.

5. In a series of four lectures at Artists Space in New York during the summer of 2013, Malik developed a theory of the contemporary that intentionally avoided any inductive analysis from practices of contemporary art. According to him, the two fundamental structures of contemporary art include its anarcho-realism (a desire to escape the confines of the art world and make a difference in "real" life) and its fetishism of the present.

6. Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), p. 281. It must

a stable container. But this blindness is self-imposed. We must—and I think we can—sketch a historical framework through which to see contemporary art. It is urgent to do so, if only because the art of our time is so deeply imbricated in the accelerating economic inequalities of a world shaped by globalization. I have grown convinced that the concept of an "international style" may be of use in such a project. This category, typically associated in the Anglophone world with the dissemination of modern architecture in the 1920s and '30s, is now largely out of favor, not least because the very notion of a style has long been eclipsed in the visual arts by the logic of avant-garde movements (and more recently, as I have asserted, succeeded by the placeholder "contemporary" in lieu of an identifiable movement). The distinction between a "period" and a "style" may sound purely academic, but there are important distinctions: Periodization suggests a succession of visual languages, a string of new paradigms, whereas an international style encompasses the adoption and adaptation of an existing idiom by a culturally and geographically diverse, even unlimited, array of producers. Put slightly differently, an international style accommodates a wide variety of utterances *within* an existing language. What's more, an international style arises when a visual language has reached a point of saturation, when its dissemination has allowed it to become legible throughout a global art world.

It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's *International Style* was published in 1932, during a time when the avant-gardes of the previous two decades had lost their momentum, and innovation given way to a proliferation of styles, including genuinely international styles such as Surrealism.[7] It would be quite possible—though beyond the scope of this essay—to demonstrate that the history of modernism, whose art-historical accounts have been so heavily biased toward innovation, proceeded instead according to a dialectical opposition between avant-garde innovation and the enunciations of international styles. If we begin to disable our impulse to value innovation above all else, then the products of such international styles will no longer appear static or derivative, but rather as so many effects of modernism's becoming global—its asynchronous dissemination beyond the West, where so many of the modern formats were invented.

One of the great impediments to an understanding of global contemporary art is the vexing problem of the "derivative." From a perspective that overvalues innovation, it is difficult to credit works of art that "speak" in idioms invented elsewhere. But this is what much art made outside of the West, not to mention the preponderance of art made in the West, has done since around 1980, when strategies of appropriation and postmodern pastiche entered American and European art. From the perspective of an international style, the "derivative" is no longer a problem since what matters is not the invention of a visual idiom or style but how rhetorically effec-

---

be said that the purpose of Meyer's book is not to describe contemporary art but rather to demonstrate how "the contemporary" functioned already in debates around modern art during its institutionalization in the United States. This passage, however, gives the impression that the move to historicize is directly related to contemporary art's perceived annihilation of history.

7. For an inspiring new take on this period, see Devin Fore, *Realism After Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

tive it is in its particular utterances. Listen to Hitchcock and Johnson in their introduction, titled "The Idea of Style":

> There is now a single body of discipline, fixed enough to integrate contemporary style as a reality and yet elastic enough to permit individual interpretation and to encourage general growth.
>
> The idea of style as the frame of potential growth, rather than as a fixed and crushing mould, has developed with the recognition of underlying principles such as archaeologists discern in the great styles of the past. The principles are few and broad.[8]

This short passage is intensely illuminating. It defines an international style as a "body of discipline," a finite language, but nonetheless as one that is capable of great elasticity. It is characterized by its openness to "individual interpretation and to . . . general growth." An international style thus implies neither an "anything goes" ethos like that of pluralism or the contemporary, nor the geographically and aesthetically homogeneous tendency of a movement. As Hitchcock and Johnson declare, style is a "frame of potential growth, rather than . . . a fixed and crushing mould." In other words, it need not matter where a particular aesthetic vocabulary was developed (that's the avant-garde fallacy); rather, what's important are the enunciations made within this language in relation to particular places and times: their rhetorical urgency, in other words, their eloquence, and even their beauty.

Our current international style draws its building blocks from Conceptual art. These include the proposition, the document, and the readymade.[9] Let me briefly define each in turn.

> *Proposition.* Conceptual art transferred aesthetic value from objects to propositions. When an artwork assumes the form of a proposition, as Lawrence Weiner has always insisted in the instructions that accompany his pieces, the work's

8. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style*, (1932; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), p. 36.

9. There has been much important work on Conceptual art beyond Europe and the United States, especially in centers such as Buenos Aires, Moscow, Tokyo, and Beijing. A very partial list of this rich literature includes: Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas, 2007); Andrea Giunta, *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Ana Longini, ed., *Listen Here Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004); *Total Enlightenment: Conceptual Art in Moscow 1960–1990* (Hatje Cantz, 2008); Matthew Jesse Jackson, *The Experimental Group: Ilya Kabakov, Moscow Conceptualism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); William Marotti, *Money, Trains, and Guillotines: Art and Revolution in 1960s Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Doryun Chong et al. eds., *From Postwar to Postmodern: Art in Japan 1945–1989* (New York: the Museum of Modern Art, 2012); Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press). For a groundbreaking early survey of Conceptual art worldwide, see *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, foreword by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss, introduction by Stephen Bann (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

1. The artist may construct the piece
2. The piece may be fabricated
3. The piece need not be built

Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership

L.W.

Lawrence Weiner. Statement of Intent. *1969.*
Courtesy of Moved Pictures Archive, NYC.
© 2013 Lawrence Weiner/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

integrity is unaffected by a receiver's decision of how to act on it. In other words, the proposition functions like a score, which can generate a profusion of enunciations or remain without issue, as pure potential. This performative dimension leads to another essential characteristic of the proposition: It locates a work's value in the character of its enunciations, which may be multiple, or even infinite. Propositions thus continue and even give discipline to the mid-twentieth-century tendency toward "liveness" pioneered by the inventors of Happenings, especially the artists and dancers associated with the Judson Church in New York and with Fluxus and video in Europe and the United States. Indeed, these persist to this day through the scored activities of Relational Aesthetics and practices such as those of Tino Sehgal. In this sense, liveness refers to a stress on the actual enunciation of an image as opposed to its physical construction and composition. It should be clear that what I'm calling "liveness" is not limited to performance art per se but instead should be taken as describing a condition of plasticity or transitivity in the action of images over time.

Document. In Conceptual art, the mediums of photography, film, video, and text began to serve the role of "documentation," whose status as an artwork is still often questioned—perhaps because documents are believed to capture content without explicitly composing it. In my usage, "documents" refers not only to the "documentary" (as a practice seeking truth) but also to the more general category of artifacts that store an event or experience that was initially durational. Thus, like propositions, documents have a distinctive temporal signature: They store time. It is consequently perfectly possible that by this definition documents may be fictional, or para-fictional, to use Carrie Lambert-Beatty's term, or that they may document the formal effects (such as resolution or degradation) of their circulation in the sense of Hito Steyerl's concept of a "poor image."[10] The document is what Bernard Stiegler, in a ponderous but nonetheless useful formulation, calls "tertiary retention," or the exteriorization of memory: "Becoming past, this passage of the present is then constituted as secondary retention, that is, all those memorial contents [*souvenirs*] which together form the woven threads of our memory [*mémoire*]. Tertiary retention is a mnemotechnical exteriorization of secondary retentions which are themselves engendered by primary retentions."[11] In other words, our various technologies allow us to exter-

10. See Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *October* 129 (Summer 2009), pp. 51–84; and Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *e-flux journal* 10 (November 2009), unpaginated download (http://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-defense-of-the-poor-image; accessed 10/17/13).

11. Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 9.

nalize, and store (and therefore lose intimate contact with) our own actions and thoughts. This is related to what Marshall McLuhan referred to as media prostheses, but whereas McLuhan understood the prosthetic as an enhancement of perceptual experience, tertiary retention alienates us from it. Stiegler goes on to argue that our unprecedented capacity to store information (what has been in the news lately under the category of "Big Data") actually proletarianizes us, by making us ignorant of our own intellectual/technical means of production.[12] The document, then, is a type of object that stores information captured over a certain duration, and thereby stores time.

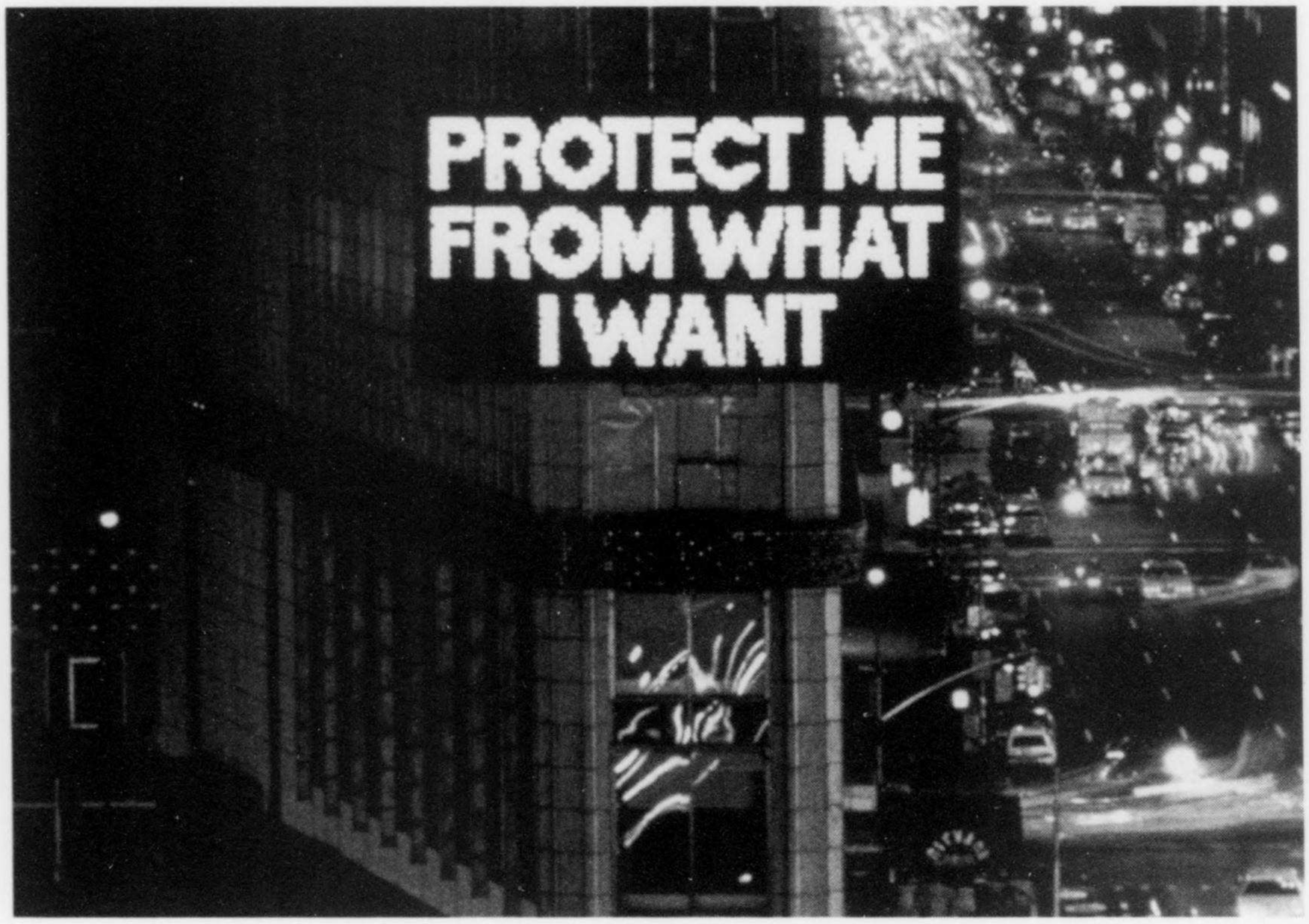
Readymade Readymades of one description or another are now virtually ubiquitous in works of art. They are not necessarily used singly, or polemically, as Duchamp did, to chart the physical and conceptual distance between one meaning and another (from bathroom fixture to sculpture, in the canonical example of *Fountain* in and after 1917). Rather, they serve as lexicons—even palettes—of compositional elements that are already saturated with meaning and suffused with the aesthetic and technical procedures of commercial design. The readymade is a crystallization of labor, use-value, and desire. It thus multiplies the dimensions of potentiality that are implied by the proposition as I have defined it. It is anachronic in Nagel and Wood's sense since it holds together a previous use with a current one, a history of production with future-oriented and virtually unlimited scenes of consumption.

I am not claiming that "post-Conceptualism" or global conceptualism per se is our current international style.[13] Taking seriously the difference between an avant-garde and an international style means recognizing that the invention of new lexical formats such as propositions, documents, and readymades is the work of an avant-garde, but adapting and expanding the syntactic capacity of these forms once they attain saturation as a lingua franca is the work of an international style. International styles foster "local" as well as "standard"

12. For an influential account of Big Data see Viktor Mayer Schönberger and Kenneth Cukier, *Big Data: A Revolution That Will Transform How We Live, Work, and Think* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013)

13. For Peter Osborne, "contemporary art is postconceptual art" (3). But the definition he offers in his latest book is based not on a systematic analysis of actual art but rather on philosophical grounds that at times verge on the tautological: "The reason that the idea of postconceptual art may be said to determine the contemporaneity of 'contemporary art' is that it condenses and reflects the critical historical experience of conceptual art in relation to the totality of current art practices" (53). Indeed, he dismisses much art-historical work on contemporary art at the outset to make way for his more abstract definitions, putting his project in line with that of Suhail Malik. See Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013).

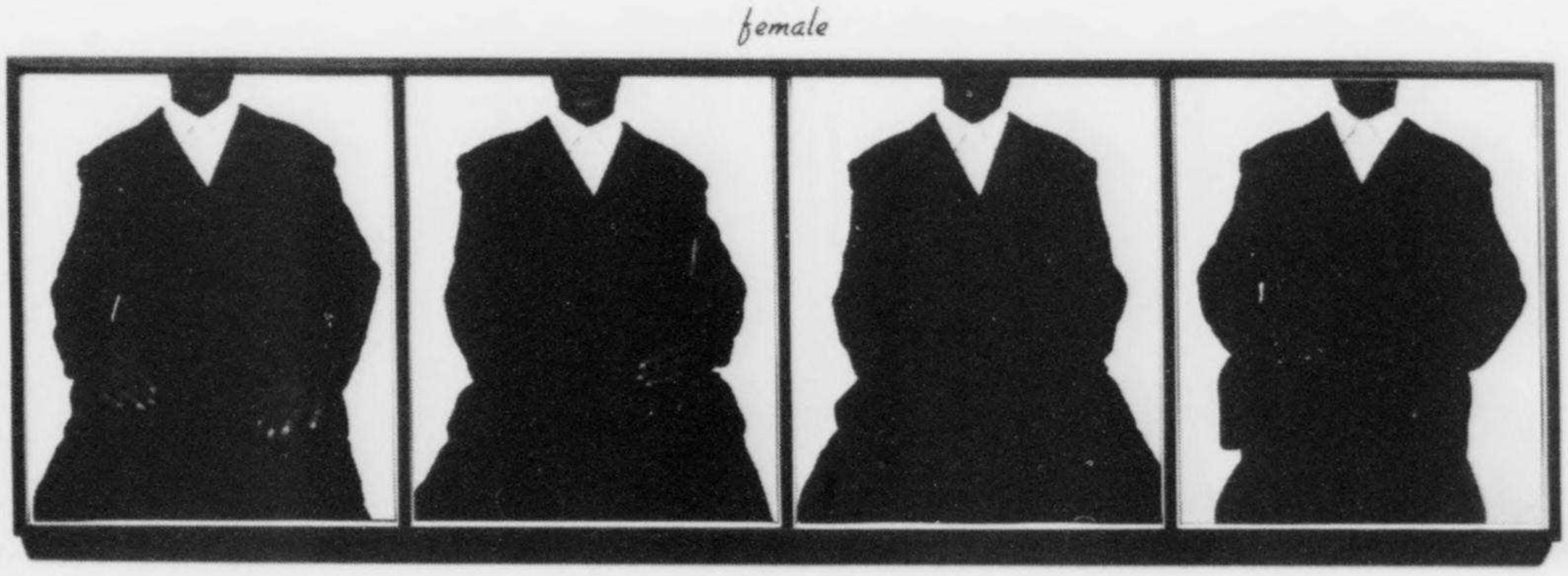
dialects. American Conceptual works of the 1960s and '70s, for instance, tended toward the declarative, developing a rhetoric of administration that was nonetheless characterized by tautology and Kafkaesque absurdity.[14] The postmodern "dialect" developed from Conceptual art during the late '70s and '80s



Jenny Holzer. Protect Me from What I Want. *1985.*
© 1985 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.
Photograph by John Marchael.

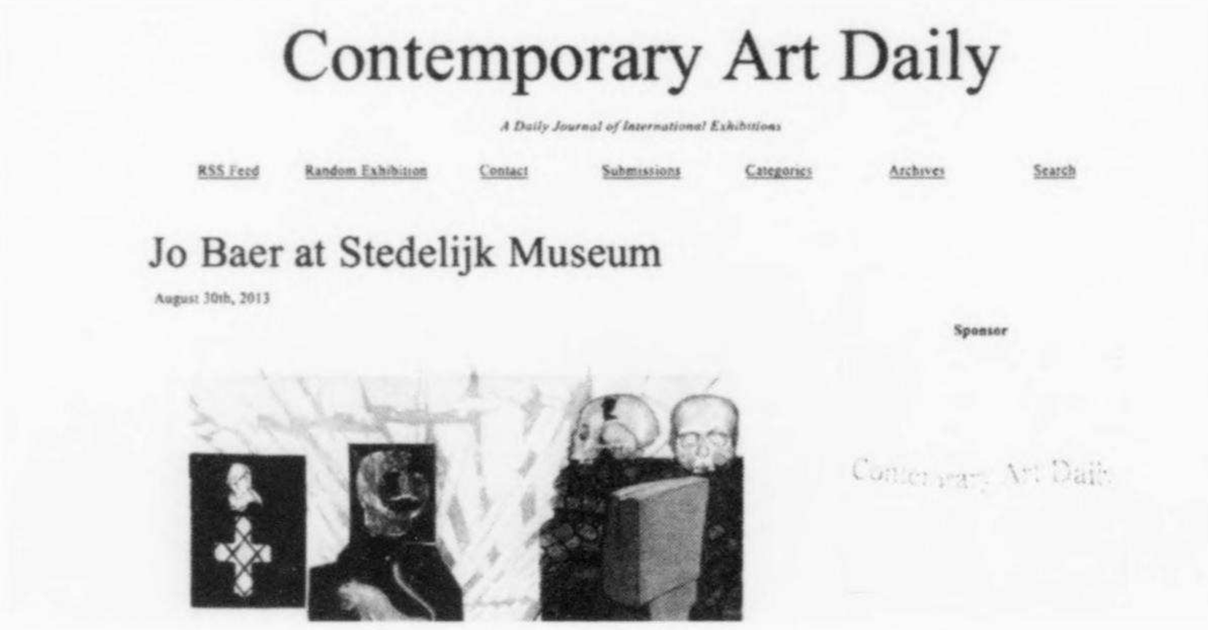
was couched in the rhetoric of advertising rather than bureaucracy (think of Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer as opposed to Hans Haacke and Lawrence Weiner), and it tended to appropriate existing commercial language rather than simulate bureaucratic or social-scientific languages. The identity-based dialect of Conceptual art that emerged so powerfully during the early 1990s merged genealogies of stereotypes with psychoanalytic theories of intersubjectivity (think of Glenn Ligon or Lorna Simpson), and so on. The most pervasive

14. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990), pp. 105–43.



Lorna Simpson. She. *1992.*
Courtesy of the artist and
Salon 94, New York.

"global" dialects of the present moment, however, proceed from a different syntactic model: that of the aggregator. Aggregators are online services such as Contemporary Art Daily or e-flux that filter information for art-world consumption, making it possible, as a new generation of artists and critics has begun to assert, to shape vast flows and reservoirs of art-world information through the digital template of search algorithms and screen-based visual interfaces from laptops to smart phones.[15]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Jo Baer at Stedelijk Museum

August 30th, 2013

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Contemporary Art Daily,
accessed August 30, 2013.

Aggregators

It is instructive to browse the definitions of "aggregate" in the Oxford English Dictionary. The first entry states that an aggregate is "constituted by the collection of many particles or units into one body, mass, or amount; collective, whole, total." In legal terms, an aggregate is "composed of many individuals united into one association," and grammatically it signifies "collective." In each sense, an aggregate selects and configures relatively autonomous elements.[16] It presents, therefore, an objective correlative to the concept of the multitude as developed by Paolo Virno, Antonio Negri, and Michael Hardt. The multitude, a resistant social force indigenous to globalization, is distinct from both national citizenship and class membership along traditional Marxian lines. Instead of

15. See Michael Sanchez, "2011: Art and Transmission," *Artforum* 51, n. 10 (Summer 2013), pp. 294–301.

16. As I am describing aggregates they are close cognates to Bruno Latour's notion of "assembling the social." See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2007).

founding a collective based on a unified *identity* (as American, for instance, or proletarian), a multitude constitutes itself from discrete individuals drawn from a variety of communities and locations in response to shared conditions or provocations. As Hardt and Negri put it:

> The concept of multitude, then, is meant in one respect to demonstrate that a theory of economic class need not choose between unity and plurality. A multitude is an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference. . . . This is the definition of the multitude . . . singularities that act in common.[17]

One need not subscribe wholeheartedly to Hardt and Negri's utopian claims on behalf of the multitude to recognize its exemplary structure. Like a search engine, the multitude aggregates heterogeneous entities (in this case, persons) through the action of a filter. That the multitude's filter is a common cause (such as immigration rights) as opposed to the algorithms and page rankings employed by Google makes the filters no less homologous. They are both mechanisms by which singular entities (persons and objects) may act in common.

Aggregators such as Contemporary Art Daily function as "curated" search engines. Their intentionality of selection is what distinguishes such services from Google's algorithmic automatism.[18] Moreover, this logic is present on many scales of the art world at once: from individual works whose procedures are aggregative, to communication circuits like Contemporary Art Daily and Art.sy, right up to biennials and art fairs. These last differ from conventional museum presentations in that their structures are aggregative: providing a common space for singular or autonomous pavilions and national exhibitions in the case of biennials and participating galleries in the case of art fairs. I will identify two syntactic structures that persist across all of these scales.

> *Asynchrony* The aggregate is a figure of uneven development, both literally and metaphorically, and this is why it exemplifies the deep structure of globalization. I've mentioned uneven development in terms of global divisions of labor, but there are at least two kinds of asynchrony specific to the art world. The first arises from the distinctly different chronologies that characterize modern art's introduction and adoption in different parts of the world. If in Europe avant-gardes were arguably devoted to representing and theorizing the unevenness of industrial modernization from the late-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries (including, importantly, mass urbaniza-

17. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 105.

18. Of course, Google searches themselves, like those of other search engines, are skewed by various efforts to increase Web-page rankings and also through paid advertising.

tion), in vast regions of the world—including many nations in Asia and Africa, where modern Western forms were introduced as belated, but hegemonic or neo-colonial languages as opposed to avant-garde protests—modern art is pressed into service as an *agent* of cultural and economic modernization rather than an *opponent* to its many devastating consequences. In this regard, it is no coincidence that booms in Chinese and Russian contemporary art accompanied these nations' market liberalization in the late '80s and '90s. A booming art market is a bellwether of full-fledged membership in a global economy. When we say "modern art" or "contemporary art," then, we are referring in drastic shorthand to a wide array of different dialects, each with its own genealogy: They may be mutually intelligible, but they nonetheless remain distinct and often contradictory.

The second species of asynchrony arises out of the enclave model of art-world development. Global art very often means little more than the installation of museums, biennials, or other cultural infrastructures by local elites who are seeking to consolidate global legitimacy in partnership with their opposite numbers in the developed world. These contemporary art enclaves often have little if anything to do with either indigenous art practices or forms of art that don't pass the threshold of a global international style (characterized, as I have asserted, by competence with a lexicon of propositions, documents and readymades, best learned in the art schools of the metropolitan West).

The Common Aggregates furnish platforms where semi-autonomous elements come together. Since these elements are not integrated into a coherent structure (whether it be composition, construction, or non-composition) but rather have their conceptual unevenness heightened, aggregates raise the question of the common. The aggregate differs from two of its close modern cognates: montage and the archive. In montage, individual elements are subsumed within an overall compositional logic; even if the source of its constituent elements remains apparent, these components don't typically maintain the disarming quality of independence characteristic of an aggregate, which seems always in danger of falling apart. An archive's principle of selection is inclusive with regard to a theme, institution, period, or event. It serves to collect, preserve, and even constitute evidence as a pillar of epistemological stability. Aggregates, on the other hand, proceed from an obscure principle of selection, typically staging confrontations among an array of objects that embody entirely different values or epistemologies.

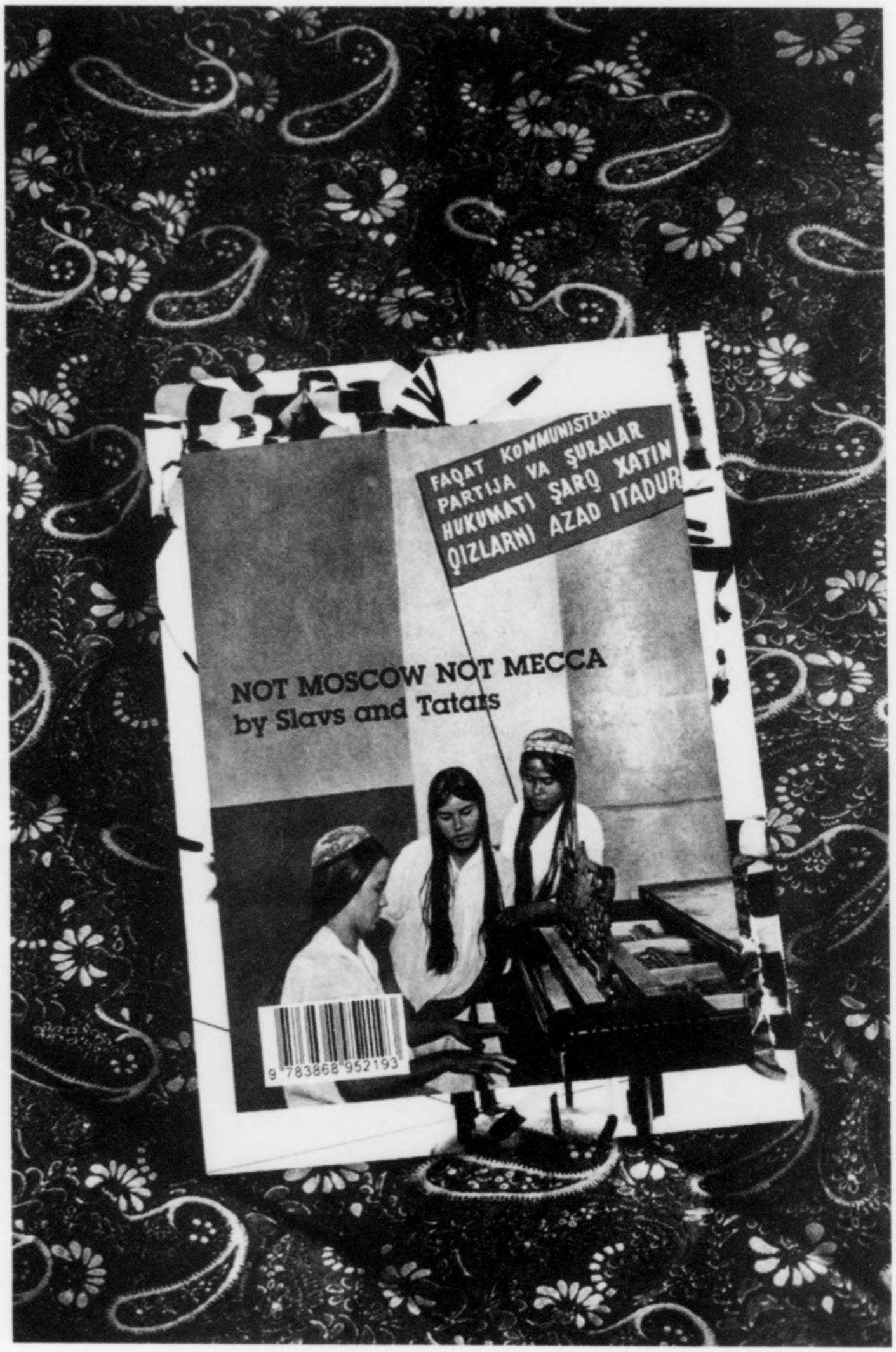
***

I will adduce just one example of the logic of aggregates in practice. Slavs and Tatars is an anonymous collective whose work addresses an often overlooked geopolitical region, the area east of the Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China, which witnessed one of the epic ideological contests of the twentieth century, between Islam and Communism. Through texts (transmitted in books as well as in artifacts in exhibitions) and objects, Slavs and Tatars explore, among other themes,

Slavs and Tatars. Not Moscow Not Mecca, *installation view, Secession, Vienna, 2012. Photo courtesy of Secession/Oliver Ottenschläger.*

syncretic expressions of Islam developed in Central Asia under Soviet policies of religious suppression. Often Slavs and Tatars heighten the asynchrony of this ideological collision through the citation of medieval scripture as a means of drawing out mystical strands in modern and contemporary art through a logic of what they call "substitution." Indeed, they describe their work as explicitly aggregative: "The collision of different registers, different voices, different worlds, and different logics previously considered to be antithetical, incommensurate, or simply unable to exist in the same page, sentence, or space is crucial to our practice."[19] This desire to bring

19. "The Shortest Length Between Two Points: Slavs and Tatars in conversation with Franz Thalmair," in Slavs and Tatars, *Not Moscow Not Mecca* (Vienna: Secession, 2012), p. 15.



Slavs and Tatars. Not Moscow Not Mecca. *2012.*
Photo courtesy of Secession/Christine Wurning.

"different registers" onto the "same page, sentence, or space" is what I have identified as the aggregator's impulse to furnish a platform where unlike things may occupy a common space. In their exhibition *Not Moscow Not Mecca* at the Vienna Secession in 2012, for example, the group generated an exhibition based on the trans-regional histories of fruits in Central Asia, which they wittily called *The Faculty of Fruits*, and which included the apricot, the mulberry, the persimmon, the watermelon, the quince, the fig, the melon, the cucumber, the pomegranate, the sour cherry, and the sweet lemon. A book was produced that documents the fascinating histories of how

Slavs and Tatars. Not Moscow Not Mecca,
installation view, Secession, Vienna, 2012.
Photo courtesy of Secession/Oliver Ottenschläger.

these fruits grew out of and into various Central Asian cultures, both agriculturally and through myth and legend. The gallery presentation included arrays of ready-made (or seemingly readymade) fruits distributed on mirrored platforms in a cross between veiled allegory and blinged-out cornucopia. Each of the three formats that I mentioned at the outset is deployed in this aggregative syntax: the *proposition* (how does fruit embody the historical asynchronies of Central Asia?), the *document* (through an account of each fruit's geographical migration and cultural associations

published in the artists book), and the *readymade* (manifest in "real and imagined" fruits arrayed on the platforms). But the syntax of the work established asynchrony among adjacent things; their physical co-presence and conceptual unevenness raises the question of how a common space may be imagined, thus making *Not Moscow Not Mecca* aggregative according to my definition.

Don't Accumulate, Aggregate!

In *The Society of the Spectacle,* Guy Debord gives a definition of images that is as influential today as Clement Greenberg's association of modernism with flatness was in the mid-twentieth century. With stunning brevity, Debord declared in 1967: "The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image."[20] The partial truth and poetic power of this slogan tend to veil how reductive, even caricatural, it is. For if we reduce images to the epiphenomena of brute accumulation it is certainly time to give up on art. In fact, modern art developed many alternate means of understanding accumulation, including but not limited to collage and montage, which introduce jarring visual disjunction into conditions of media accumulation, the readymade, which undermines the identity between a commodity and its image; and more recently the "archival impulse," by which formations—or multitudes—of images can produce alternate epistemologies.[21] In these strategies, *modern art renders the unevenness and precariousness of accumulation articulate.* Unlike "the" spectacle, it does not totalize. In our current moment, it is the aggregator that makes hyper-accumulation eloquent by causing asynchronous objects to occupy a common space. Aggregators filter a world saturated by commodified information, making the unevenness of globalization plastic and visible. Aggregators speak in tongues.

20. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), p. 24. Italics added.
21. See Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Fall 2004), pp. 3–22.

For Prestige: Hegel in the Light of Mauss*

DENIS HOLLIER

The proposition most essential to what Bataille calls his "general economy" is that the quantity of energy produced by a given system is always greater than the energy that is necessary for the maintenance of that system. A system is, by definition, unable to contain itself; it is unable to hold itself within itself or to circumscribe itself; it exceeds itself. A system is condemned to go beyond its own self-given boundaries; it is condemned to secrete a margin that is both endogenous and inassimilable, in an experience of the external that is anterior to any empirical experience of exteriority; it is the experience of an outside that emanates fundamentally from within, an otherness that is anterior to the meeting with an external other.

The Accursed Share opens with a cosmological perspective whose primary element is the expenditure of solar energy. The universe turns around a center that is itself in movement and that does nothing but expend itself: This is all it does, and it does this ceaselessly. The Sun radiates, disseminating without return, randomly, without feedback, emitting its substance into the infinitude of space. Its expenditure, strangely, is unidirectional at the same time as it is inexhaustible; it is its own source of itself; it is nourished out of itself, fed by itself, like gold, which Zarathustra said "always makes a gift of itself."[1] The Sun "is nothing but radiation, a gigantic loss of heat and light, flame, explosion."[2] "A sun wastes its forces into space."[3] "It loses itself with no accounting, without counterpart." "In the Sun, energy is purely and simply thrown away."[4]

Mauss writes, "The ideal would be to give a potlatch and that it not be repaid." This is the only quotation from Mauss's *The Gift* that is to be found in "The Notion of Expenditure."[5] For his own purposes, Bataille takes up this quota-

* This essay originally appeared as "Pour le prestige: Hegel à la lumière de Mauss," *Critique* 788–789 (January–February, 2013), pp. 7–21.

1. Georges Bataille, cited in the notes for "La Limite de l'utile" (1941), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 513.
2. Bataille, "Van Gogh Prométhée" (1937), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 498.
3. Bataille, "Corps célestes" (1938), in ibid., p. 517.
4. Bataille, cited in the notes for "La Limite de l'utile," p. 556.
5. Bataille, "La notion de dépense" (1933), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 310.

OCTOBER 146, Fall 2013, pp. 19–30. *© 2013 October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

tion again in *The Accursed Share* in the chapter that deals with the potlatch: "Actually, as I have said, the ideal would be that a potlatch could not be repaid."[6] But the expenditure of solar energy is not a potlatch. The energy that the Sun gives is not returned to it; yet neither does the Sun actually "give" it: the energy is simply wasted. So, is the ideal here to succeed in giving, losing, dispensing, without risking being caught up in a circuit of restitution, to manage to give without being threatened by what Mauss calls *revanchieren*, without the gift's setting off the expectation of a return, a gesture of gratitude, and without leaving oneself open, in one's own turn, to the obligation of receiving?

I. Gifts

In the opening chapter of *The Accursed Share,* Bataille takes up his initial proposition, "the Sun gives without ever receiving," and adds: "Men were conscious of this long before astrophysics measured that ceaseless prodigality . . ."[7] However, the first example of a civilization that he proposes, the Aztecs before the Spanish conquest, does not sit well with this a priori confidence that men allegedly had in the inexhaustible nature of solar energy. The writings of the Franciscan missionary Sahagún, which he cites abundantly, describe, to the contrary, the anxiety inspired in the Aztecs by the prospect of the Sun's exhaustion. That anxiety is one of the leitmotifs of their myths, and their response was to practice human sacrifice with an addiction and a cruelty that, even today, can only appear to us to be close to madness.

Men must constantly nourish the Sun by shedding human blood. To be sure, Bataille is careful to make it clear that "the victim of the sacrifice cannot be consumed in the same way as a motor uses fuel."[8] Yet this is exactly what he describes. War is presented as the great earthly supplier of solar energy, whether it be the blood of the warriors who give their lives on the field of battle or the blood of the vanquished who are reduced to slavery and later sacrificed. Essentially, wars are required for the nourishment of the Sun, for "if they ceased the Sun would cease to give light."[9] Men shed their blood so that the Sun will not go out.

But this is not what really interests Bataille. This schema, the insertion of the ritual hecatombs into a circuit of exchanges between men and heaven, is not his focus of interest. Undoubtedly, for him, the Sun needs to be nourished and sacrifice does constitute an unavoidable stage in a vast economic negotiation that takes place on a cosmic scale. The Sun, like the Minotaur, is an impatient and pitiless creditor. It absolutely must have its due. Bataille, however, who mentions this indigenous self-justification, does not stop at the sacrificial blackmail of the *do ut des.*

6. Bataille, *The Accursed Share,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988), p. 70.
7. Ibid., p. 28.
8. Ibid., p. 56.
9. Ibid., p. 49.

He calls attention to something else: at the origin of these sacrifices, there was a desire for consumption in which the sun was not the consignee but rather the example, the model. More than feeding the sun, it was a matter of following its example. The repeated nourishment of the sun was only a secondary effect, a collateral benefit from the shed blood, while its first cause was the desire for consumption that haunts being—the desire that itself also nourishes itself from itself, the desire to be consumed, consumed by the desire to be consumed, consumed by consumption. Consumption, the key term in the general economy, has nothing to do with exchange, whether that exchange be equal or unequal. Neither has it anything to do with consuming, which is still the active and transitive consumption of an object by a subject. Consumption is an inner experience in which subject and object are effaced before an impersonal intimacy. It eats away at being from within. The use that Bataille makes of this word is, moreover, often almost grammatically irregular, as when he uses the verb intransitively, with neither direct nor adverbial complements—for example, when he speaks of the communion of "those who consume intensely"; lexicographers, no doubt, refer to this as a hapax.[10] This construction is not to be found in any dictionary; it is neither that which consumes itself (as does a fire) nor that which is consumed (by fire, by example, or by leprosy), nor is it a person who consumes himself or herself (in melancholy). It is a pure intensity, with neither intentionality nor an object; it is without external cause and conjoins intimacy and destruction. There is a connotation of slowness; consumption as a slow-burning fire.

This sacrificial intimacy is not unrelated to the myth of a fundamental bond between the Aztecs and their victims, a myth that Bataille takes up while at the same time underlining the bad faith on which it rests. One of the chapter's paragraphs is titled "Intimacy of Executioners and Victims." Executioners and victims are, if one will allow the expression, on the same wavelength. The model here is the self-sacrifice of the god Nanauatzin, of whom it is said "he had become the sun" by throwing himself into a fire.[11] These bloody rituals are understood to have taken place in the unanimous atmosphere of an improbable consensus, a mixture of enthusiasm and intoxication in which there was supposedly no separation between sacrificers and victims, between those who carry out and those who undergo the sacrifice—a sort of egalitarian and festive participation of all before death, whether in sacrifice or war. "As soon as he is consecrated and during the time between the consecration and death, he enters into the closeness of the sacrificers and participates in their consumptions: he is one of their own and in the festival in which he will perish, he sings, dances and enjoys all the pleasures with them."[12] The sacrificer takes "his victim as a son, as a second self."[13]

10. Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, p. 59.
11. Ibid., p. 48.
12. Ibid., p. 60.
13. Ibid., p. 53.

The entire preparation for the sacrifice is thus intended to make the victims forget that they are prisoners of war. Its purpose is to make them forget that, if they are put to death, it is because they are foreigners, and that they are put to death in the place of those who sacrifice them. The entire preparation aims to reabsorb their initial status as foreigners by making them share the life of their guardians in such a way that they will die impregnated by the atmosphere of consumption in which the whole of the Aztec society bathes, and in such a way as to assimilate them, to integrate them, and to mask in these hecatombs their character as "a sacrifice of substitution."[14]

The Aztecs developed a complete casuistic system for what one might call voluntary sacrifice by procuration. Their "official theologians" "placed the voluntary sacrifice of Nanauatzin above the others," but did they reach the point of actually convincing themselves that the sacrifice of prisoners of war who had become slaves was a voluntary sacrifice? Bataille notes with some candor: "We cannot know to what extent the victims of Mexico accepted their fate," but he says this in order to add, " . . . it is clear that, from the time of Sahagún's informants, these death orgies were tolerated because they impressed foreigners."[15] Concerning these substitutions, he speaks strangely of "a beginning of humanity"; a softening of the ritual had occurred, shifting onto others the internal violence. "The substituting of a prisoner for the king was an obvious, if inconsequent, abatement of this sacrificial frenzy."[16] The sovereign "himself was supposed to have been, in more ancient times, the culmination of the cycle of sacrifices: His immolation—consented to by the people he embodied . . . " [17]

The second of the cultural examples presented in *The Accursed Share* is that of the Indian societies of the Pacific Northwest that practice the potlatch. This chapter takes up, with some modifications that we shall return to later, Bataille's article "The Notion of Expenditure," which he wrote after his reading of Marcel Mauss's *The Gift.* (Between May 1931 and June 1933, Bataille borrowed on three occasions from the Bibliothèque Nationale the issue of *L'Année sociologique* in which Mauss's text appeared.) There was no intention here on the part of Bataille to distance himself from what he took to be Mauss's central concern; quite the contrary. However, his reading does nonetheless displace the center of gravity of Mauss's essay, whose subtitle in the issue of *L'Année sociologique,* we should not forget, is "Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies." While Mauss sees the gift in terms of exchange (implying, if not necessarily a commercial exchange between two persons, at least a comparison between the value of two objects), Bataille is

14. Bataille, *The Accursed Share,* p. 55.
15. Ibid., p. 60.
16. Ibid., p. 55.
17. Ibid., p. 63. "Un roi militairement puissant eut le loisir de se refuser à la mise à mort rituelle—au sacrifice—en présentant une victime de substitution [A militarily powerful king was free to refuse his own ritual death—at sacrifice—by presenting a substitute victim]." Bataille, "Hegel, l'homme et l'histoire" (1956), in *Œuvres complètes,* vol. 12 (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 352.

interested in its aspect of loss and of pure expenditure. The fact that he retains from Mauss only the references to the potlatch, and that he says nothing of the Melanesian *kula*, the description of which actually comprises the first half of *The Gift*, is already in itself a first sign of the lack of interest Bataille has in that which in the gift in general, and in the potlatch as a specifically ceremonial gift, strictly concerns exchange, i.e., reciprocity. It is equally significant that, from among the various forms that the potlatch can take, Bataille focuses only on what Mauss, following Davy, calls the potlatches of destruction, and that he leaves aside the forms that involve exchange. This semantic re-centering has important implications. Unlike the gift, expenditure, according to the simplest definition, effectively rules out intersubjectivity. As a scenario with only one character, strict expenditure puts into play only the one who expends. It is a solitary experience that, to be precise, needs no other person in order to take place. Unlike the gift, expenditure or loss does not need to be recognized.

We must go back, at this juncture, to a text written a few years prior to "The Notion of Expenditure": "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," which Bataille wrote in 1931 for an *Almanach érotique* that was never to be published. Here we find the first reference in Bataille to the potlatch (he mentions "the great ritual destructions of products in British Columbia"). The word "expenditure" has still not appeared at this point. But one of the most surprising aspects of this text, written in reaction to de Sade's surrealist aestheticizing of experience, and in which Bataille sought to promote an action-based heterology, a sadism that would be "practical" and not simply theoretical, in fact the most surprising aspect, is that—apart from just one surprising exception when Bataille writes, "It is in the nature of man to take pleasure in the suffering of others," pointing out that in the deepest part of all erotic pleasure one always finds the "lubricious participation" in a death agony—there is not the least reference made, not even an allusive reference, to the intersubjective relationship of mastery and servitude; there is no reference whatsoever made to the dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity that is, however, essential to the scenario of sadomasochism and that was equally essential to the commentary on the works of de Sade that Bataille, Klossowski, and Blanchot were to make after the war. Sadism, in Bataille's "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," is reduced to a "desire to put one's entire mind and body in a state of expulsion," to a "need for an unlimited projection—expulsion or excretion—of human nature" independent of any relationship between two subjects.[18] It is an excess in the physiological sense of the term: nothing more than the response to the internal tension of an organic system that cannot "*retenir* (control)" itself (as one says of a child). What it puts into play is the simple endogenous need to be, or to put oneself, out of oneself.

18. Bataille, "La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 58 and 61.

In other words, expulsion and expenditure here have no target; they are not directed towards anyone; they are not directional. The use value, insofar as it manifests itself in expenditure, does not expect to be recognized; it neither asks anything nor promises anything to anyone, setting up no expectation whatsoever in return; it is unconditional (Bataille likes to speak of "insubordination"), and it answers for itself in no other way than by its self-affirmation. True enough, intersubjectivity, if it is not thematized in the text, is decidedly put into practice in the very performance of this "open letter to my current comrades" that brings together proximity (the virile fraternity of the revolutionary comrades) and verbal aggressivity.

Three years later, "The Notion of Expenditure" inherits this model: "use value," which Bataille contrasts in a very classic way with "exchange value" and which in some way is by definition the value of the unexchangeable, prefigures expenditure. Another dimension is, however, established. The loss drive, it happens, is no longer put into play by the sole pressure of an internal source; it has an external goal. What is involved here is not just an incontinence, an inability to contain oneself, to keep a hold on oneself, to keep for oneself the excess that one has inside. Expenditure now becomes public and takes on a dimension of challenge and provocation. It is addressed to someone. It becomes spectacle. Through this sumptuary and noneconomic dimension, the potlatch stands apart from simple exchange. "Various types of unproductive expenditure," Bataille will emphasize, take place within the framework of "great competitive spectacles"; " . . . energy is lavished, squandered in such a way as to provoke a feeling of stupefaction . . . immense crowds are witness to it."[19] The "need for destruction and loss" is no longer a simple endogenous need. Inscribing itself into a structure of rivalry, it no longer arises solely from the order of need, but rather enters into that of desire: desire that is now not simply the desire to expend but the desire to expend more than one's rivals. This competitive, ostentatious, and agonistic feature brings in an essential difference from the description that Bataille had given of solar expenditure and Aztec sacrifice. It is moreover significant, from this point of view, that Bataille's major criticism of the industrial bourgeoisie was not for its avarice, its drive to hoard wealth, but for its failure to spend in public: "It has consented only to spend for itself, within itself."[20]

At first, the displacement of the gift onto expenditure allowed , among other things, to get around the triadic structure of exchange: While one gives something *to someone*, while one exchanges something *with someone*, here one simply loses something (the loss is for no one): One expends. Expenditure has no addressee, or, to put it more exactly, there would only need to be one addressee for expenditure to become once again a gift. So it is only the more remarkable that we see the triadic structure reappear in a crucially important page of the chapter in *The Accursed Share*

19. Bataille, "La notion de dépense," p. 306.
20. Ibid., p. 313.

devoted to the potlatch. Bataille has just pointed out that the subject who gives, at the same time as he renounces his own property, acquires in exchange a power (a prestige). Prestige, in effect, has less to do with the wealth itself than with the public demonstration that one is not attached to it, that the person that one is is not in any way tied to one's wealth; the one who gives, as Bataille writes in a phrasing worthy of the classical moralists, "enriches himself with a contempt for riches . . . " But, he goes on to say, the one who gives "would not be able by himself to acquire a power constituted by a relinquishment of power: if he destroyed the object in solitude, in silence, no sort of *power* would result from the act . . . "[21] He continues: " . . . authentic consumption ought to be solitary, but then it would not have the completion that the action it has on others confers on it . . . this action that is brought to bear on others is precisely what constitutes the gift's power, which one acquires from the fact of *losing*."[22] The potlatch, he says again, is "*consumption for others*" (Bataille's italics).[23] Loss and expenditure, against the grain of their own tendency, must finally, like the gift, be recognized.

Neither Bataille's description of the alternation of production and consumption in economic activity nor the distinction he proposes between productive and unproductive expenditure, insofar as consumption is concerned, creates difficulties. But is there not a difficulty that attaches to the reason that unproductive expenditure, while it ought to be solitary in order to be "authentic," always ends up being ostentatious and agonistic? Why is expenditure fatally condemned to inauthenticity? Why does it need an other in order to occur? Why must it occur in front of some other? Why must it occur in public? Why, in a word, must it occur? Why is there ultimately no consumption that is not to some small extent "conspicuous"?

II. Recognitions

It is tempting to interpret the potlatch in light of the struggle for recognition described by Hegel in *The Phenomenolgy of Spirit.* Lefort does this in his 1951 reading of *The Gift.*[24] Lyotard, in 1974, again speaks of "the struggle for recognition, which is of course the model, spontaneous or controlled, allowing Mauss to decipher the potlatch."[25] A similar sense of affinity lay behind Bataille's investment in the project for a College of Sociology. In the lecture that he gave there on February 9, 1938, Bataille established an epistemological triangle in which the players would be primitive sociology, Hegelian phenomenology, and, emerging

21. Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, p. 69.
22. Ibid., p. 70.
23. Ibid., p. 69.
24. Claude Lefort, "L'échange et la lutte des hommes," in *Les Formes de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951) p. 26.
25. Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1993), p. 124.

out of the encounter of the other two, psychoanalysis: "Why not, I might ask, why not join the facts of the sociology that is, or claims to be, scientific with the rather purely phenomenological facts of Hegel. It is possible that what I am attempting to do lets itself be reduced to this confrontation."[26] Moreover, the bringing together of the texts of Mauss and Hegel had been, if not explicitly articulated in any detail, at least implicitly indicated by Kojève, who, from the first year of his seminar on *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in 1932, had introduced the notion of prestige into his reading of the dialectic of the master and the slave. Thus we have an "interpretative twisting" that Bruno Karsenti suggests, quite convincingly, would have had its origin in Kojève's reading of *The Gift* and would have then come back to influence his interpretation of Mauss's text: "When it is a question of characterizing exchange as a function of the element of rivalry that is expressed in it, it is [of Hegel] that one thinks . . . and more specifically of the reading of Hegel conducted in France, from the beginning of the '30s, in Alexandre Kojève's seminar on *The Phenomenology of Mind*."[27] There is thus a crisscrossing dance of interpretations in which first of all it is Hegel who is read in the light of Mauss, with the concept of prestige, and then Mauss in the light of Hegel, with the concept of recognition, even if the latter remains a concept that is more Hegelian than Maussian. Mauss himself, furthermore, uses the term "recognition" only once, in an oft-cited phrase: "The potlatch—the distribution of goods—is the fundamental act of public recognition in all spheres, military, legal, economic, and religious. The chief or his son is recognized and acknowledged by the people."[28] But is this the same recognition in each of these contexts? With the ceremonial gift, as Marcel Hénaff points out, "it is important for the act of giving to be known and to be seen by all and to be spectacular if possible. . . . To offer this challenge and uphold it in front of all is what brings prestige and glory in the *relationship of recognition* (which is clearly something entirely different from the struggle for recognition as Hegel presents it)."[29] This grafting of Mauss onto Hegel transformed into a grafting of Hegel onto Mauss introduces and effectively plays on an ambiguity by extending the register of recognition as *être reconnu*/"to be recognized" (the phenomenology of self-consciousness) to *l'être connu*/"the known being" (the mediology of prestige); the register is thus extended from recognition by the one to recognition by all.

26. Bataille, "Attraction and Repulsion II: Social Structure," in *The College of Sociology (1937–39)*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988), p. 115.

27. Bruno Karsenti, *L'homme total: sociologie, anthropologie et philosophie chez Marcel Mauss* (Paris: PUF, 2011), pp. 368–69. Karsenti concludes this chapter by referring to the importance that the Kojève-Mauss "theoretical articulation" had for the College of Sociology (pp. 376–78).

28. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), p. 39. Caillois, citing Georges Davy, writes: "donner au service rendu la forme d'un défi de pouvoir le reconnaître" ("to make sure that the service rendered was so costly it could not be recognized in return.") Caillois, *L'homme et le sacré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 116; Davy, *La foi jurée*, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1922), p. 175.

29. Marcel Hénaff, *The Price of Truth*, trans. Jean-Louis Morhange (Stanford: Stanford University, 2010), p. 136.

Bataille uses the word "recognition" in both of these ways. Certainly he uses it in the sense of prestige, of social recognition—that recognition with which, whatever his actual intentions, Bataille maintained the poorest of relations. To put it rather crudely, one could say that up until the declaration of war, in 1939, he pursued, with an aggressive "obstination" that was not without "presumption" and going so far as to speak of "megalomania," the "personal renown" that he thought he was owed.[30] At the same time, Bataille did everything he could so as to not get a reception. When what counts is to exert total control over one's own reception, it is perhaps not a bad strategy to stack the deck against oneself so as to have one's work be rejected. One has only to think of the many drafts of open letters that Bataille left behind without ever having sent and that are collected in the second volume of his complete works ("The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade" is the most finished). They were clearly unacceptable. In a letter to Kojève that he wrote on December 4, 1937, he refers to this personal repute, the search for which he had still not given up on, when he writes of "the exceptional difficulty experienced in making myself be 'recognized' (on the simple level at which others are 'recognized')."[31] A few months later, in July 1938, in "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," he speaks with condescension of "the hypocrisy bound up with the career and, in a more general manner, with the ego of the artist or writer . . . obligated to enter as living beings into the real world of money, fame, and social position . . . they are really only possessed by their careers."[32] Bataille, who only published in short-lived journals, who did all he could to scuttle the journals over which he had any control (*Documents*), who did not publish a real book, only a clandestine erotic novel that did not even appear under his name, certainly did not make a career for himself. Still, the final lecture that he gave at the College, in July 1939, and, in October, the last set of letters addressed to the members of *Acéphale* nonetheless give us the impression that here is someone who gave a potlatch, and not only was it not returned, but nobody came to receive it; nobody bought a ticket to the show; he got not The Gift but the shaft.

Was this all out of bitterness, resignation, lack of interest, discovery of mystic experiences? In this divestment from the will to be recognized Bataille was to compose (insofar as it is possible to speak of "composition" here) what became the three volumes of the *Somme Athéologique* (Atheological Summa). "A book? without the slightest possibility of screaming when a reader touches me with a vaselined paw."[33] "The one who writes with his blood does not want to be *read*? . . . Do not read me: I do not want to be covered with elusions."[34] "I am laughing too deeply not to remain in obscurity." In July 1940, after having made the decision to add a third part to *Le Coupable* (The Guilty), he notes: "I would like it to be barely acces-

30. Bataille, posthumous notes for *L'Expérience intérieure*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 423.
31. Bataille, quoted in *The College of Sociology (1937–39)*, p. 90.
32. Ibid., pp. 16 and 15.
33. Bataille, posthumous notes for *L'Expérience intérieure*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5, p. 437.
34. Ibid., p. 448.

sible. I want for the first two parts, that they themselves do not fall into the hands of those whom they will not make ill."[35] "I myself have friends, readers. I cannot think of them without gnashing my teeth, I hate them (I am *ashamed* of them). Whoever reads me, now, must take it from me that he is responsible for, among other things, an utter and overwhelming moral foundering."[36]

This is the point at which recognition divides in two. If Nietzsche (and, we shall see, Hegel in his own way) was not recognized, there is a reason for that. There is a direct relationship between the subject matter and its reception, between what Bataille himself recognized and the fact that he himself was not recognized, or at least that he did not have the sense of being so. What he had recognized was unacknowledgeable, something that communication cannot take on, both because it resists communication (does not want to communicate itself) and because communication—or, at least, communication reduced to exchange—cannot lend itself to it. Recognition, for Bataille, has two mutually exclusive meanings. More than a struggle to the death for recognition, there is, in him, a struggle for the recognition of recognition; a struggle to make recognized what he recognized; to share what was unacknowledgeable in what he had recognized. Thus, in the lecture of February 5, 1938, in which he placed the project for the College under the combined auspices of Hegel and Mauss, he writes: "I consider the act of recognizing what this heart of our existence really is to be a decisive act in human development. In other words, I believe that nothing is more important for us than that we recognize that we are bound and sworn to that which horrifies us most, that which provokes our most intense disgust."[37] A few lines later, he brings up again "man's recognition of himself, which I have described as the basic object of my endeavor . . . "[38] It is not here a matter of making oneself recognized (as an individual subject) by others, by one's equals, by society, but rather it is a matter of self-recognition (as a human being), a recognition that is not social, public, but intimate, inner, articulating "self-consciousness" and "not-knowing" in a way that announces the articulation of the "Know thyself" with the "I know that I know nothing" of the short-lived Socratic College of 1943.

But why is it that one recognition is condemned to repel the other? To answer this question, we must go beyond the simple grammatical level, the opposition of the active (to recognize) and the passive (to be recognized), and we must ask ourselves first why Bataille speaks of "*reconnaître* (to recognize)" rather than of "*connaître* (to know/cognize)" as that which is really the human heart. The fact that knowledge/cognition, unlike recognition, is itself not linked in any way with a

35. Bataille, posthumous notes for *L'Expérience intérieure*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5, p. 532.
36. Ibid., p. 478.
37. Bataille, "Attraction and Repulsion II: Social Structure" in *The College of Sociology (1937–39)*, p. 114.
38. Ibid., p. 115.

connotation of decision clearly has to be taken into consideration. Recognition involves a commitment. But also, as in the case of the suspect who finally recognizes his crime, to re-cognize is to admit to oneself that which one had refused to know/cognize, i.e., to see that which one did not want to see. The human heart does not allow itself to be easily approached. Inner experience is never a site of cognition, but a site on which one is always in a state of re-cognition. In order to gain access to its cognition, it is necessary to conquer (to overcome) all sorts of resistances that themselves resist recognition. The human heart is also that which is for us the object of our most basic repulsion, "that which horrifies us most, that which provokes our most intense disgust."[39]

It is in this context that Bataille brings up Hegel, in connection with a recognition that is not the one for which self-consciousnesses engage in a struggle to the death in the famous chapter of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Bataille interposes Hegel through a biographical detail. Hegel has "penetrated deeply at least into our dark regions," attaching "a very great importance to what I describe as the heart of our existence." Hegel recognized, in his way, that which is the heart of human existence. But this recognition was itself to be covered up and concealed by his system. He himself recoiled before this recognition (the beast in the jungle), the experience of which had traumatic consequences for him. "Hegel indeed recounted how, for several years, he had been terrified by the truth as his mind portrayed it to him, and how he thought he was going mad." "For him the basis of human specificity is *negativity*, which is to say, destructive action."[40] The entire Hegelian system would thus be a resistance to this founding experience; it would be a resistance to the identity of self-consciousness and sacrificial experience. At the heart of human experience there is not, as there is for Freud, the enigma of incest; neither is there, as there is for Mauss, the enigma of the gift, but rather there is the enigma, as vertiginous as it is attractive, of sacrifice (of the *conatus* or, one might say, of the sacrificial retro-*conatus*): the enigma of "that which forced men to kill religiously their fellow men"; "for lack of an answer to this, all men have remained in ignorance of that which they are."[41] At the heart of human experience are the dice that life was forced to roll with death, this sort of negative, inverse *conatus*; a sacrificial retro-*conatus*.

Bataille evidently takes an indulgent pleasure in using this biographical detail, a detail that almost made of Hegel the philosophical equivalent of the *fous littéraires* ("literary madmen") on whom Bataille's friend Raymond Queneau was at the time conducting research in the *terrae incognitae* of the Bibliothèque

39. Bataille, "Attraction and Repulsion II: Social Structure," in *The College of Sociology (1937–39)*, p. 114.
40. Ibid., p. 116.
41. Bataille, "La Limite de l'utile," p. 264.

Nationale. As Queneau put it, this was the fraternity of writers whose lucubrations "never found the slightest echo, were never recognized as being of any value, even by a single other person."[42] Queneau and Bataille, at the beginning of the 1930s, must have often worried that they too might belong to that fraternity. Would *amor fati* (in the absence of the ideal) imply here the sending (or, for Queneau, the publishing) of a message that would not be received, that would be simply deposited, legally, on the obscure shelves of the world's memory whence to radiate never again, nevermore? Such would have been the case for Hegel if Kojève had not come along. "*The Phenomenology of Spirit* was not itself recognized as recognizing negativity."[43]

—Translation by Nicholas Huckle

42. Raymond Queneau, in *Les Enfants du limon*, reproduced in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Bibl. de la Pléiade, 2002), p. 1592.
43. Bataille, "Attraction and Repulsion II: Social Structure» in *The College of Sociology*, p. 117.

Complexio Oppositorum: Hugo Ball and Carl Schmitt*

TREVOR STARK

On November 22, 1923, Emmy Hennings received an ecstatic letter from Hugo Ball, her husband and fellow founder of Zurich Dada, describing his "constant immersion in jurisprudence":

> For months, I have studied the writings of Professor Schmitt, of Bonn. He is more important for Germany than the entirety of the Rhineland, with its carbon mines included. Rarely have I read a philosophy with as much passion as his, and a philosophy of law at that! A great triumph for the German language and for legality. He seems to me even more precise than Kant, and rigorous like a Great Spanish Inquisitor when it comes to ideas.[1]

This testimonial of the high esteem in which the erstwhile Dadaist held Carl Schmitt, the German political philosopher and future legal adviser to the Nazis, is one of many traces of a short but intense intellectual and personal relationship that began in Munich in 1919 and led to Ball's essay "Carl Schmitt's Political Theology" (1924).[2] This text, appearing in English for the first time in this issue of *October*, is of capital importance for several reasons: not only does it constitute one of the earliest and most profound analyses of Schmitt's philosophical work, but the essay's "eschatological, Catholic" orientation casts an oblique and defamiliarizing light on the legacies of two of the Weimar period's most enigmatic and crucial figures.[3]

* Thanks are due to Joseph Koerner and Noah Feldman, whose seminar on Carl Schmitt sparked this essay. I am particularly grateful to Koerner for his invaluable advice on the essay, and to my fellow participants in the seminar, from whom I learned a great deal. I owe many thanks to Hal Foster, who conceived of this cluster dedicated to Ball and Schmitt, and to Matthew Vollgraff. Daniel Zolli, Aaron Wile, and Samuel Johnson deserve acknowledgement for their attentive critical reading.

1. Hugo Ball, "357. An Emmy Ball [22 November 1923]," in *Hugo Ball: Briefe*, vol. 1, *1904–1923*, ed. Gerhard Schaub and Ernst Teubner (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003), p. 472. Translations from German and French are my own unless otherwise noted.

2. Little is known of this first meeting, but Schmitt recalls that they discussed Léon Bloy. See André Doremus, "La théologie politique de Carl Schmitt vue par Hugo Ball en 1924," *Les Études Philosophiques* 68 (2004), p. 58.

3. Originally published as Ball, "Carl Schmitts Politische Theologie," *Hochland* 21 (April–September 1924), pp. 263–86. References are to the translation that appears in this issue, which will henceforth be cited parenthetically as CSPT.

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Schmitt himself was evidently struck by Ball's piece, later describing it as "a brilliant essay with great appeal, of a sort that I scarcely encountered again in all my life. . . . An unusual essay in all regards, from the point of view of style as of content."[4] The article sparked a correspondence and prompted Schmitt and his wife to visit Ball and Hennings at their home in Sorengo, Switzerland, from August 19 to September 9, 1924.[5] During their time together, Schmitt asked Ball to write a new introduction to his *Political Romanticism* (1919), and the two discussed Ball's plans to revise his political tract *Critique of the German Intelligentsia* (1919) in light of his Catholic conversion.[6] Although, for reasons to be discussed, Ball never completed the introduction and would break off contact with Schmitt within a year, he could write Schmitt on November 19, 1924, "I vividly remember our evening in Sorengo; I still know it word for word."[7]

Many decades later, Schmitt continued to reflect on the significance of his meeting with Ball. On March 22, 1971, Ernst Forsthoff mailed Schmitt, his former professor, a review that he had written of a recent German reprint of Ball's *Critique*, which expurgated many of the text's most extreme passages and carefully sanitized its anti-Semitism, a fact that long delayed full recognition of this disturbing aspect of Ball's worldview.[8] In his review, Forsthoff mentioned the relationship between Schmitt and Ball, calling it a "mysterious episode."[9] Schmitt wrote back to Forsthoff thanking him for his review of the "pseudo-edition" of Ball's text and noted: "Ball is the founder of Dadaism and therefore also of Surrealism, i.e., the first, in the field of aesthetics, to rightly attack, to desperately protest against, the *Terror-Charakter* of modern 'reality.'"[10] Evidently, for Schmitt, his friendship with Ball was no mystery, for they shared a common enemy: modern "reality," a terrible counterfeit set into quotation marks. Forsthoff's reference to the "mysterious episode" provoked Schmitt to inscribe a marginal note on his copy of the review, later discovered by Ellen Kennedy among his papers: "A discussion very much in need of suppl¬mentation. Ball means more in my life than an episode."[11]

4. Joachim Schickel, "Gespräch über Hugo Ball (1970)," in *Gespräch mit Carl Schmitt* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1993), pp. 31–56, 92–163. Cited and translated into French by Doremus, "La théologie politique de Carl Schmitt," p. 57.
5. See *Ball: Briefe*, vol. 3, *Kommentar*, p. 440.
6. Ball recounted these details in an unsent letter to Schmitt: Ball, "465. An Carl Schmitt [January 27, 1925]," in *Ball: Briefe*, vol. 2, *1923–1927*, p. 110. See also Ellen Kennedy, "Carl Schmitt und Hugo Ball. Ein Beitrag zum Thema 'politischer Expressionismus,'" *Zeitschrift für Politik* 35, n. 2 (1988), pp. 143–62.
7. Ball, "445. An Carl Schmitt [November 19, 1924]," in *Ball: Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 88.
8. Carl Schmitt and Ernst Forsthoff, *Ernst Forsthoff Carl Schmitt Briefwechsel, 1926–1974*, ed. Angela Reinthal, Dorothee Mußgnug, and Reinhard Mußgnug (Berlin: Academie Verlag, 2007), p. 519. On the censorship of Ball's *Critique* in the first postwar reprint, published in Munich, 1970, by Rogner & Bernhard, see Anson Rabinbach, "The Inverted Nationalism of Hugo Ball's *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*," in Ball, *The Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, trans. Brian Harris (New York: Columbia University, 1999), pp. xxxv–xxxvi, note 1.
9. Forsthoff, quoted in Kennedy, "Carl Schmitt und Hugo Ball," p. 160.
10. Schmitt, *Ernst Forsthoff Carl Schmitt Briefwechsel*, p. 323.
11. Schmitt, quoted in Kennedy, "Carl Schmitt und Hugo Ball," p. 160.

Hugo Ball. 1916.
Swiss Literary Archives (SLA),
Bern. Literary estate of Hugo Ball.

Such supplementation still lacking, this episode has remained a historical curiosity, largely unfathomable to scholars of the Weimar period.[12] In the now substantial body of art-historical literature on Ball, his engagement with Schmitt has mostly been ignored as an unfortunate lapse with little bearing on the crucial Dada years. Likewise, scholars of Schmitt tend to regard the consummate political conservative's dalliance with Ball—"this extravagant bohemian, Dadaist convert to Catholicism"—with mild embarrassment, when it merits mention at all.[13] The scholarly silence on the Ball-Schmitt encounter has the benefit of leaving the sedimented striations of politico-aesthetic positions in Weimar more or less undisturbed: Schmitt's utmost seriousness as a thinker of Realpolitik is uncontaminated by Ball's apparent eccentricity, and the radicality of Ball's Dada sound poetry and performances is sealed off from his troubling political and theological commitments.

The historical legacies of Schmitt and Ball have neatly diverged, with each accorded a secure and separate place in the established narratives of European intellectual life during the tumultuous years between the First World War and the fatal collapse of the Weimar Republic. Our subject is the remainder of this division: the fact of their relationship, the depth of their shared presuppositions, and, above all, the hopes that they placed in their association. In dialogue with Schmitt, Ball slips from his place in the opposition of the "historical avant-garde" and the *retour à l'ordre*, acting as a bewildering *entre-deux*. His abandonment of the perceived nihilism of Zurich Dada for the security of moral tradition and political authority might seem a paradigmatic instance of the return to order.[14] However, unlike the artists who withdrew from the epistemological and political critique of the avant-garde for quietism and classicist pastiche in painting, Ball's turn to orthodoxy and authoritarianism took the form of a flight *from* the aesthetic in the name of a newly committed politicization. Further, in his unique interpretation of Schmitt's political theology, Ball believed that he had found a theory of representation that would unify his political, aesthetic, and metaphysical convictions, one that would supersede and realize the Dadaist dialectic of irrational revolt against a rationalistic age.

Tracing Ball and Schmitt's trajectories from 1916 to their meeting in 1924, this essay treats their affinity, to borrow Jacob Taubes's phrase, as a "ticking time bomb that comprehensively shatters our preconceptions regarding the intellectual history of the Weimar period."[15]

12. Significant exceptions are Ellen Kennedy's important essay, among the first and best investigations of Ball and Schmitt's association, and a more recent essay by André Doremus (both cited above).
13. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso Books, 2000), p. 270, ft. 16.
14. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *October* 16 (Spring 1981), pp. 39–68.
15. Taubes was referring to the long-suppressed correspondence between Schmitt and Walter Benjamin. Jacob Taubes, *To Carl Schmitt: Letters and Reflections*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University, 2013), p. 16.

Carl Schmitt. 1926.
© Carl-Schmitt-Nachlaß.

The Artist and the Sickness of the Time

Since May 1915, Ball, a German national, had been living a marginal existence in Zurich under a false identity to escape the war and the consequent political and intellectual censorship in Germany. There he played piano for a vaudeville group, published poetry, continued work on projected studies of Nietzsche and Bakunin, and began a correspondence with Filippo Tommaso Marinetti; at the same time, he and Hennings slipped in and out of homelessness and imprisonment and experienced a despair that culminated in Ball's attempt at suicide in October 1915.[16] Following his recovery, which Ball described as a process of "discard[ing] the Ego like a coat full of holes," his diaries evince a growing sense of "giddy horror at the nothingness of what former generations called humanity" and the conviction that in the face of the "mechanistic age" that had led to the trenches of World War I, "aesthetic production becomes a prescribed course" (FT 49). The minimal autonomy of the artistic sphere, like Zurich itself—"a birdcage surrounded by roaring lions"—provided, for Ball, an arena within which to resist the rationalizing and intellectualizing tendencies of the time, which fostered abstract idealism in philosophy, the collusion of religious and military authority, and the progressive encroachment of the "legal mechanism" into all sectors of social life (FT 34). With the foundation of the Cabaret Voltaire and Zurich Dada in February 1916, Ball put into practice his conviction that "all living art will be irrational, primitive, and complex; it will speak a secret language and leave behind documents not of edification, but of paradox" (FT 49).

The extent to which this embrace of paradox determined Ball's worldview is illustrated by a postcard that he sent to his fellow Dadaist Tristan Tzara from Vira-Magadino on July 31, 1916.[17] The postcard is printed with what is undoubtedly the most well-known document of Zurich Dada's ephemeral activities: the famous photograph of Ball's first performance of the *Verse ohne Worte*, or poems without words, held at the Cabaret Voltaire the month prior, on June 23, 1916. It shows Ball dressed in a "cubist costume" made by himself and Marcel Janco, complete with a cardboard cape, reflective blue cylinders as legs, robotic or crustacean claws, and a striped "witch-doctor's hat" (FT 71). He stands stiffly before two music stands, restricted by the tubular forms of his costume. The indurate restraint of Ball's dress contrasts sharply with other experiments in avant-garde costume that applied the Cubist idiom of multiplied and faceted chromatic planes to clothing as a means of implying a dynamic body being ecstatically propelled into an uncertain

16. The broad strokes of Ball's biography are given by John Elderfield in his introduction to Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, ed. John Elderfield, trans. Ann Raimes (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), p. xix. All subsequent references to Ball's diary will be noted parenthetically as FT. See also the excellent essay on Zurich Dada by Leah Dickerman in *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005), pp. 19–44.

17. This postcard is in the Fonds Tristan Tzara (TZR C 286), Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Université de Paris, and published as "93. An Tristan Tzara [31 Juli 1916]," in *Ball: Briefe*, vol. 1, p. 117.

future.[18] In Ball's costume, instead, this most modern aesthetic not only rendered its wearer immobile and mechanical, it also mimed the ancient ritual garments of the shaman, priest, and mystic.

The very existence of the postcard, produced so soon after the event, indicates a desire, shared between the two Dadaists, to memorialize the performance. Yet Ball's brief note to Tzara on the reverse seems written from another world. It describes a small church in which Ball and Hennings were living, near the fifteenth-century sanctuary of the Madonna del Sasso, overlooking Lake Maggiore. "Vira-Magadino is more beautiful than Zurich, Dada, and all related topics," Ball wrote, and recounted preaching to the fish in the lake, listening to the "terrifying" church bells, and singing "*quanto è bella, quanto è nobile*" as he read Dostoyevsky.[19] The split between the image on the front, one of the most momentous instances of Dada's destructive revolt, and the note on the back, describing an immersion in an atmosphere of spiritual withdrawal, manifests, almost materializes, the irresolvable ambivalence that characterizes Ball's contribution to the history of avant-garde art.

When the stage lights hit him that night in Zurich, Ball read a manifesto proclaiming that the redemption of language would involve the abandonment of all conventions of human speech and writing, a plunge into the mystical depths of the word: "We must return to the innermost alchemy of the word, we must even give up the word too, to keep for poetry its last and holiest refuge. We must give up writing secondhand: that is, accepting words (to say nothing of sentences) that are not newly invented for our own use" (FT 71). Following this, Ball began reciting his *Lautgedichte*, or sound poems, in which language was reduced to the smallest phonetic element—the phoneme—and restructured from that base into verses, wholly stripped of conventional linguistic signification, based on rhythmic and sonic rather than semantic or syntactical relations.[20] "*Gadji beri bimba glandridi laula lonni cadori/gadjama gramma berida bimbala glandri galassassa laulitalomini*," he intoned, the phonetic shards splitting, combining, and metastasizing with frenetic speed and intensity. After finishing his poem, the lights went out and he was carried off the stage, trembling, "like a magical bishop" (FT 71).

In his journal, Ball described this performance in the language of theological revelation, confirming the tension between the modern and the ancient, the pro-

18. One thinks, for example, of the anti-"passéist" fashion imagined by Giacomo Balla in his "Futurist Manifesto of Men's Clothing" (1913), in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio (New York: Viking Press, 1972), pp. 132–34. More ambiguous temporal orientations were proposed in Picasso's costumes for Erik Satie's *Parade*, 1917, and Sonia Delaunay's costumes for Tristan Tzara's *Coeur à gaz*, 1923. On *Parade*, see Jeffrey Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp, and Avant-Gardism* (New Haven: Yale University, 1994), pp. 165–254.

19. Ball, *Ball: Briefe*, vol. 1, p. 117.

20. T. J. Demos has contributed greatly to our understanding of Zurich Dada's language and performance, especially in relation to the conditions of exile. See T. J. Demos, "Zurich Dada: The Aesthetics of Exile," in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005), pp. 6–29, and Demos, "Circulations: In and Around Zurich Dada," *October* 105 (Summer 2003), pp. 147–58.

fane and the spiritual, that were evident in the postcard and in his costume.[21] He wrote,

> [M]y voice had no choice but to take on the ancient cadence of priestly lamentation, that style of liturgical singing that wails in all the Catholic churches of East and West . . . . I began to chant my vowel sequences in a church style like a recitative . . . . For a moment it seemed as if there were a pale, bewildered face in my cubist mask, that half-frightened, half-curious face of a ten-year-old boy, trembling and hanging avidly on the priest's words in the requiem and high masses in his home parish (FT 71).

Experiencing avant-garde negativity taken to its limits, Ball discovered himself carried back to a place of origin both personal and theological, rooted in the rituals and metaphysical promises of his childhood church. This potential for nihilism to reverse into messianism, for aesthetic materialism to reveal a theological core, is by no means an inevitable consequence of Dada's work on the signifier, as evinced by the varied implications of Tzara's simultaneous poems, Richard Huelsenbeck's rhythmic poetic primitivism, Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate*, and Raoul Hausmann's typographic experiments, to name only a few. Neither, however, can Ball's revelation that the techniques of the avant-garde and those of religious ritual were oriented toward the same end be dismissed as a deviation from the heroically secularizing impulse of modernism.[22] Rather, Ball's work shows how the avant-garde's challenge to the signifying value of the word and the ordering function of syntax implied a dialectic between destruction and redemption.

The tension indicates the place of the Dada phonetic poem within the parameters established by Stéphane Mallarmé in the last decades of the nineteenth century.[23] In his quest for a poetry irreducible to the norms of instrumental communication, one conceived of as the "exception to everything," Mallarmé chiseled away at the representational function of language; in his words, "I created my work only by elimination. . . . Destruction was my Béatrice."[24] This work of negation led

21. Hennings claimed in her 1946 prologue to Ball's diaries that in Zurich, "the rebel already has something in him of the devout believer" and that his diaries evinced an inexorable "way to God" (FT lv).

22. Jeffrey Schnapp contends that "the avant-garde's radical rhetorics of demolition have a built-in tendency to find themselves entwined within the familiar patterns of apophatic mysticism." See Jeffrey Schnapp, "Bad Dada (Evola)," in *The Dada Seminars*, p. 36.

23. Zurich Dada's debt to Mallarméan poetics cannot be adequately addressed here. Suffice it to say that Ball himself recited Mallarmé at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 (Ball, *Briefe,* Band III, pp. 96, 106) and that the "*note pour les bourgeois*" written by Tzara for the "simultaneous poem" *L'admiral cherche une maison à louer* (1916) stated that the Dada experiments with language followed the "typographic reform" initiated by Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1897). In 1924, Ball also wrote a poem entitled "Mallarmés Blumen" and mentions working on a translation of Mallarmé in his daybook: see Ball, *Gedichte*, ed. Eckhard Faul (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007), pp. 162, 290.

24. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Music and Letters," in *Divagations*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2009), p. 186. Mallarmé, *Correspondance complète, 1862–1871* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 348–49.

Mallarmé to his discovery of the void, or *le Néant*, during what has come to be known as his "Crise de Tournon" of 1866. This void, described in his letters and mobilized in his poetry, has dual implications that are vital for understanding Ball's work, insofar as for Mallarmé it referred simultaneously to the nonexistence of God ("that old and evil plumage, happily struck down") and the "deficiency" of language stemming from the arbitrariness of the signifier ("languages imperfect insofar as they are many; the absolute one is lacking").[25] Proceeding from this void, Mallarmé progressively exacerbated the rift between words and their senses, eventually inventing a neologism determined by the strictures of meter and rhyme in his "Sonnet en –yx" (1887), first titled "Sonnet Allegorical of Itself" and begun in 1868. In this refractive poem, which describes a constellation of stars through a casement window reflected in a mirror in an empty room, the interior scene and its objects dissipate into versified sound as language's descriptive or semantic function is sacrificed by the poet: "On the credenzas in the empty salon: no *ptyx*/Abolished bauble of sonorous inanity."[26] *Ptyx*, a Mallarméan *hapax legomenon*, is a word that literally means nothing: It stands in for the generative absence at the source of language and the world: "The intimate correlation between Poetry and the Universe."[27]

While Mallarmé dreamt that a poetics dedicated to the void would provide the secular foundation for new forms of sociality and public ritual, Ball's reduction of human communication to asignifying matter constituted a terrified response to the annihilating nightmare of a materialistic universe that had abandoned God.[28] Ball concurred with Mallarmé's insight that the "death of God" would imply the word's lack of divinity, but conceived this condition as the result of a historical process of profanation at the hands of techno-rationalist society's "modern necrophilia": "The word has been abandoned; it used to dwell among us. The word has become commodity . . . [and] has lost all dignity" (FT 26). In a 1917 essay on Kandinsky, Ball described the destruction of all the former safeguards of human value, from the holiness of the word to the notion that Man was created in God's image:

> God is dead. A world disintegrated . . . . There are no . . . foundations any more—they have all been blown up . . . . Man lost his divine countenance, became matter, chance, an aggregate, animal, the lunatic prod-

25. Mallarmé, *Correspondance complète*, p. 342 and Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse," in *Divagations*, p. 205.
26. Mallarmé, "Ses pures ongles . . . ," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1945), p. 68.
27. Mallarmé, *Correspondance complète*, p. 366.
28. This dimension of Mallarmé's thought culminated in his notes for "Le Livre," a utopian book that would disperse the singularity of authorship and the instrumentality of communication through the collective performance of an infinitely iterable text. Jacques Scherer, *Le "Livre" de Mallarmé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

> uct of thoughts quivering abruptly and ineffectually. . . . Man, stripped of the illusion of godliness, became ordinary, no more interesting than a stone (FT 223–24).

The oscillation between the melancholic and the exultant in Ball's Dada writing shows the horror he felt at the thought of a world governed by instrumental reason without access to the traditions that had once sustained human community. But it also demonstrates an eschatological conviction that the spiritual redemption of a world of debased matter could be achieved only upon ashes.

The *Verse ohne Worte* are structures of deep ambivalence, riven by Ball's desire to evoke both destruction and creation—negation and replenishment—to reflect the terrible "nothingness" of the age and to provide a language for its transcendence. Seen from one angle, Ball's Dada poetry conceived the annihilation of the word as a mimetic project, mirroring the shock of modernity and the erosion of all stable grounds of meaning. Hal Foster has aptly described this as the "immunological" dimension of Dada, in which art absorbed at the level of form what Ball called the "sickness of the time," exemplified by the irrational destruction of life in the war.[29] In this sense, the Dadaist anti-aesthetic refused the conception of art as a space of sublimation, where the antagonisms and degradations of the age would find their illusory resolution. Instead, art would have no recourse but to the irrational, to the sardonic pantomime in which "the horror of our time, the paralyzing background of events, is made visible" (FT 65).

Seen from another angle, however, Ball just as often described his poetic work as an attempt to overcome the founding deficiency of language noted by Mallarmé and to regain an immediate and direct link between the word and the world. By the time of his performance at the Cabaret Voltaire, Ball had begun to conceive of his poems as being constructed not of words but of composite "word images" that have "driven the plasticity of the word to the point where it can scarcely be equaled" (FT 67). The "word image," he wrote, would achieve its "holiness" by disintegrating the rational and disciplinary laws of human language: "We have loaded the word with strengths and energies that helped us to rediscover the evangelical concept of the 'word' (*logos*) as a magical complex image" (FT 68). In a diary entry from June 13, 1916, Ball compared the Dadaists to a Gnostic sect and described a process of aesthetic sacrifice and reincarnation: "The word and the image are one. Painter and poet belong together. Christ is image and word. The word and the image are crucified" (FT 66). Evidently, the union of opposites that Ball sought to achieve in his poetry—reflection/replenishment, destruction/cre-

29. Hal Foster, "Dada Mime," *October* 105 (Summer 2003), p. 170. See Ball's 1926 essay "Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit," in Ball, *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp. 102–49.

ation, novelty/restoration, word/image—was further from a Hegelian model of contradiction and sublation, and closer to the Christian notion of redemption, symbolized by the Crucifixion: As with the sacrifice of God-become-man, who died to redeem humanity's original sin, the word would have to be abnegated in order to achieve a divine language unifying signifier and signified.

In Ball's Dada poetry, extremes touch: An inheritor of Mallarmé's poetic materialism reaches for the divine logos; the Cabaret Voltaire, the locus in exile of the political and artistic avant-gardes, is imagined as the site of high Mass; and what Walter Benjamin called the "uselessness . . . [for] contemplative immersion" of Dadaist language[30] becomes the departure point for a conception of the artist as "administrator of the *vita contemplativa*" (FT 104). These contradictions would only intensify as Ball abandoned Dada in the name of politicization and religious conversion, and discovered the thought of Carl Schmitt.

Romantic Indecision

In 1916, Carl Schmitt shared Ball's diagnosis—if not his prescriptions—regarding a world dominated by a process of secularization that had reduced all the "higher values" to mere technical categories. During the war years, Schmitt was not yet the counterrevolutionary theoretician of sovereignty that he was to become; rather, he moved in Expressionist circles in Munich while stationed there as a non-combatant sergeant. Immersing himself in the artistic and intellectual climate of the cafés, even publishing Expressionistic texts, Schmitt seems to have shown little patriotic enthusiasm for the German war effort and little indication of the right-wing politics that he would develop in the Weimar years.[31]

The same year that Ball first took the stage at the Cabaret Voltaire, Schmitt published a monograph on the Expressionist writer Theodor Däubler's epic poem "Nordlicht" and proposed a politically ambiguous critique of secular reason's forward march that had much in common with Ball's abhorrence of "modern necrophilia." In a passage worth quoting at length, Schmitt wrote,

> This age has characterized itself as the capitalistic, mechanistic, relativistic age, as the age of transport, of organization. Indeed, business does seem to be its trademark, business as the superbly functioning means to some pathetic or senseless end, the universal priority of the

30. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 4, *1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2003), p. 266.

31. In fact, Schmitt, as Gopal Balakrishnan puts it, demonstrated "an almost abnormal indifference to the national cause . . . for someone who was neither on the Left nor a pacifist." Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p. 17. As late as 1918, Schmitt would publish a literary piece in the journal *Summa*, which also published Ernst Bloch and Robert Musil. See Horst Bredekamp, "From Walter Benjamin to Carl Schmitt, via Thomas Hobbes," *Critical Inquiry* 25, n. 2 (Winter 1999), p. 251.

> means over the end. . . . The achievement of vast, material wealth, which arose from the general preoccupation with means and calculation, was strange. Men have become poor devils; "they know everything and believe nothing.". . . They wanted heaven here on earth, in Berlin, Paris, or New York, a heaven with swimming facilities, automobiles, and club chairs, a heaven in which the holy book would be the timetable. . . . After all, the most important and last things had already been secularized. Right had become might; loyalty, calculability; truth, generally acknowledged correctness; beauty, good taste; Christianity, a pacifist organization. A general substitution and forgery of values dominated their souls. A sublimely differentiated usefulness and harmfulness took the place of the distinction between good and evil. The confounding was horrific.[32]

In this early text, Schmitt formulated a critique of bourgeois rationalism and secularism in terms parallel to those of Ball's Dadaist critique of language. For Schmitt, as for Ball, language itself had been subjected to a process of laicization, in which the words that once embodied supra-human values (right, loyalty, truth, God, good, evil) were drained of their substance, remaining in general use as secular ciphers for a disavowed theological content. Both Ball and Schmitt, then, set themselves in the starkest possible contrast against the backdrop of a world conceived as "a tabula rasa" of "scientific, technical, industrial progress," as Schmitt would later put it.[33]

The perhaps surprising fact that Schmitt's 1916 attack on the bourgeoisie as the heralds of an "age of security" should at times begin to resemble the proclamations of Zurich Dada is evidence of the extreme variety of political and aesthetic positions that could be grouped in these years under the aegis of what Georg Lukács would dub "Romantic anti-capitalism."[34] As described by Michael Löwy in an important series of texts on this phenomenon, "The essential characteristic of Romantic anti-capitalism is a thorough critique of modern industrial (bourgeois) civilization (including the process of production and work) in the name of certain pre-capitalist social and cultural values."[35] Romanticism, for Löwy, is less a particu-

32. Schmitt, *Theodor Däublers 'Nordlicht.' Drei Studien über die Elemente, den Geist und die Aktualität des Werkes* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1991), pp. 63–65. Cited and translated in Heinrich Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction Between Political Theology and Political Philosophy*, trans. Marcus Brainard (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), pp. 2–3.

33. Schmitt, *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of Any Political Theology*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), pp. 128–30.

34. Schmitt, quoted in Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt*, p. 4. According to Michael Löwy, Lukács first uses the term in a 1931 essay on Dostoyevsky, "Über den Dostojevski Nachlass," *Moskauer Rundschau* (March 22, 1931). Michael Löwy, "Naphta or Settembrini? Lukács and Romantic Anticapitalism," *New German Critique* 42 (Autumn 1987), p. 23.

35. Löwy, "The Romantic and the Marxist Critique of Modern Civilization," *Theory and Society* 16, n. 6 (November 1987), p. 891. See also Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University, 2001).

lar artistic or literary movement than a worldview born from and set in opposition to capitalist modernity, and one that attained a particular intensity in the Weimar years. The Romantic anti-capitalist cast of mind is defined above all by the opposition of "*Gemeinschaft*, the old organic community of direct social relations, to *Gesellschaft*, the mechanical and artificial aggregate of people around utilitarian aims," and could be just as attractive to conservatives as to utopians.[36] Löwy cites the circle around Max Weber in the 1910s—which included Ernst Bloch, Lukács, and, tangentially, Schmitt—as a paradigmatic instance of the way in which the critique of the "disenchantment of the world" or the "quantification of life" gave rise to a variegated set of political stances.[37]

Ball's horror at the disintegration of all "foundations" and the consequent loss of "Man['s] . . . divine countenance" can be thought in relation not only to Schmitt's critique of bourgeois society, "which annihilates the individual such that he does not even feel his nullification," but also to Lukács' Marxist critique of reification, wherein "the relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity.'"[38] This is not to imply the equivalence or equality of these diametrically opposed political stances; only to suggest that the rejection of capitalist rationalization in these years was divided and did not necessarily imply a Marxist position. Indeed, Romantic anti-capitalism, as described by Löwy, held in tension two antinomic "streams": a utopian and revolutionary stream and a conservative and reactionary stream.[39]

If the Romantic critique of capitalism was inherently split in these years, so too was the critique of Romanticism by repentant ex-Romantics. While orthodox Communists, following Lukács' recantations of the Stalinist period, conceived Romanticism as a regressive tendency leading to fascism, the Romantic phenomenon was also condemned from the right, most notably by Schmitt.[40] In fact, Romanticism

36. Löwy, "The Romantic and the Marxist Critique," p. 892.

37. Although never formally Weber's student, Schmitt likely attended his Munich lectures on science and politics in the late 1910s. In addition, as Jacob Taubes notes, Schmitt's "onslaught on liberal modernity," *Political Theology*, was originally published as part of two *Festschriften* for Max Weber: *Hauptprobleme der Soziologie* (1923), ed. Melchor Palyi, and *Archiv für Rechts- und Wirtschaftsphilosophie*, vol. 16 (1922); see Taubes, *To Carl Schmitt*, p. 4. Thanks to Matthew Vollgraff for this information. Regarding Schmitt, Lukács, and Weber, see John P. McCormick, "Transcending Weber's Categories of Modernity? The Early Lukács and Schmitt on the Rationalization Thesis," *New German Critique* 75 (Autumn 1998), p. 133–77.

38. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), p. 83.

39. Löwy, "Naphta or Settembrini?," p. 18. For Löwy, Marxism is similarly split between a progressivist "cold stream" of "alienated productivism," finding its apogee in Stalin, and a "warm stream" that preserves the Romantic celebration of creativity *within* the Marxist ambit. Löwy, "The Romantic and the Marxist Critique," pp. 900–01.

40. In 1933, Lukács criticized *History and Class Consciousness* as dangerously idealist: "As a follower of Simmel and Dilthey, as a friend of Max Weber and Emil Lask, as an enthusiastic reader of Stefan George and Rilke, I myself lived all the evolution described here. . . . I had to see several friends of my youth, sincere and convinced romantic anticapitalists, carried away in the tempest of fascism." Cited in Löwy, "Naphta or Settembrini?," p. 24. In 1952, Lukács would assimilate Romanticism to a prehistory of Nazism in his book *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981).

first appeared as an enemy in Lukács' work in his surprisingly positive 1928 review of Schmitt's recently reissued *Political Romanticism.*[41] In this book, Schmitt implicitly renounced the positions staked out in his Däubler book and purged his thought of its brief infatuation with Expressionism. Seeking, as Gopal Balakrishnan puts it, "to break the clammy grip of aestheticism on his imagination and style," Schmitt took special aim at Romanticism's seemingly infinite political capaciousness, its capacity to accommodate—sometimes in the same figure—both political radicalism and conservatism, religious mysticism and libertarian individualism.[42]

In his review, Lukács argued that Schmitt's book had rightly gained an audience among opponents of the "current Romantic fashion" for its diagnosis of an "overgrowth of the aesthetic principle [which] not only . . . renders any political opinion impossible," but which also has "devastating effects . . . on the aesthetic itself."[43] While noting Schmitt's insufficient understanding of class, Lukács concurred with his argument that Romanticism's incoherence was the result of its filtering of politics through aesthetics.[44] It is striking that for Lukács, as for Schmitt, the critique of Romanticism as an aesthetic flight from the rigors of political commitment coincided with, if not precipitated, their respective moments of ultimate political decision. Lukács reconciled with Stalin the year of his review, and, with *Political Romanticism,* Schmitt definitively rooted his critique of the bureaucratization of life within the conservative counterrevolutionary tradition, constructing a canon of reactionary thinkers including Juan Donoso Cortés, Louis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald, and Joseph de Maistre, the importance of which would only grow in his subsequent trilogy *On Dictatorship* (1921), *Political Theology* (1922), and *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923).

With *Political Romanticism* in 1919, Schmitt was concerned not only to rescue these conservative thinkers from their ill-deserved reputations as Romantics but also to offer a critical account of "the structure of the Romantic spirit." Romanticism, for Schmitt, was not simply a historically bounded aesthetic movement, nor could its character be distilled from a list of its component parts or themes—Schmitt sardonically listed "the Middle Ages, chivalry, the feudal aristocracy, and old castles" among "cherished Romantic objects."[45] Even less could the Romantic firmly be associated with the political left or right, as it did not consti-

41. Lukács, "Carl Schmitt: Politische Romantik," in *Werke, Band 2: Frühschriften II: Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1968), pp. 695–96; quoted in Löwy, "Naphta or Settembrini?," p. 22, note 13.

42. Balakrishnan, *The Enemy,* p. 21.

43. Lukács, "Carl Schmitt: Politische Romantik," p. 695.

44. For Lukács, Schmitt's "bourgeoisie" was a "pale and empty generality" in comparison with the Marxist analysis of Romanticism as a product of "the inner stratification of the German bourgeoisie of the period." Ibid.

45. Schmitt, *Political Romanticism,* trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), p. 9. References to *Political Romanticism* will henceforth be noted parenthetically in the text as PR.

tute a political stance. Rather, the Romantic move par excellence was precisely to avoid the political decision through a process of aestheticization or poeticization, pretending to have resolved any number of concrete contradictions by transposing them to a higher sphere. Therefore, the two words of Schmitt's title in fact constitute an oppositional dyad: The Romantic subject can aestheticize politics, but in its essence Romanticism is the deferral of the political.

Against his own Romantic anti-capitalist reading of Däubler three years prior, Schmitt argued that the Romantic imagination was not, as typically conceived, a form of resistance to the processes of rationalization and secularization that culminated in capitalism; rather, bourgeois disenchantment and calculation produced Romanticism as a by-product. In Schmitt's historical schema, Romanticism was merely the most degraded symptom of secular progress, whereby "the highest and most certain reality of traditional metaphysics, the transcendent God, was eliminated" (PR 58). Lacking, or rather having voluntarily destroyed "the ultimate point of legitimization in historical reality," which is to say the God of classical metaphysics, the bourgeois class and its Romantic culture rushed to replace the absent absolute with any number of surrogates (PR 58).

Schmitt invented the epithet "subjectified occasionalism" to describe the structure of Romanticism and its place in this historical narrative. If Malebranche's metaphysics posited an "occasionalism" in which the world and its contents were merely the occasion for God's productivity, and "bourgeois" philosophies such as Hegelianism progressively replaced the "superindividual validity" of the divine with the secular "demiurges" of the People and History, the Romantic spirit completed this process by placing creative individuality at the center of the world (PR 59). In the Romantic imaginary, all political conflicts and historical events became mere *occasions* for subjective and aesthetic productivity, through which the either/or decision at the heart of politics could be avoided through the aesthetic modes of harmonizing, ironizing, balancing, and digressing. Thus, for Schmitt, Romanticism was the aesthetic complement to bourgeois parliamentary democracy, which abjured the difficult political decision in favor of the "endless conversation":

> The distinctive character of Romantic occasionalism is that it subjectifies the main factor of the occasionalist system: God. In the liberal bourgeois world, the detached, isolated, and emancipated individual becomes the middle point, the court of last resort, the absolute. . . . Psychologically and historically, Romanticism is a product of bourgeois security (PR 99).

In *Political Romanticism*, in other words, the aesthetic was no longer a site of potential criticism against, or at least a refuge from, the profane world of calculation, security, and mechanism. Instead, it was merely another manifestation of the counterfeiting and weakening of metaphysical categories. To aestheticize something,

according to Schmitt, was not only to secularize but ultimately to privatize the object of one's attention. The "absolutization of art" proclaimed in Romanticism, then, coincided with an absolutization of the emancipated ego that Schmitt identified as one of the key precepts of bourgeois ideology. The stakes of Schmitt's opposition to Romanticism and to the aesthetic as such found their ultimate expression in a passage from *The Concept of the Political* (1927). There he imagined a world in which bourgeois liberalism successfully replaced the authentic political decision—epitomized by the friend/enemy distinction—with democratic deliberation and discussion.[46] This would result in a society with "neither politics nor state, but culture, civilization, economics, morality, law, art, entertainment, and so on."[47] The liberal vision of a world without enemies, where all political distinctions become mere differences of opinion or taste, was therefore not only a world without politics; it was by extension a world without "seriousness"—of any reason to kill or be killed. Within Schmitt's thought, the aesthetic in itself—particularly the Romantic dream of the aesthetic transformation of the world—represented the substitution of the individual subject for God and the infinite deferral of politics in favor of a proliferation of merely "interesting" differences.[48] Aesthetic liberation only garnished the apolitical world of the *clase discutidora*, the bourgeois "discussing class," who, Schmitt acerbically noted, would answer the question "Christ or Barabbas?" with "a proposal to adjourn or appoint a commission of investigation."[49]

The Path of Social Productivity

On July 14, 1916, at the "first public dada soirée" in Zurich's Waag Hall, Ball performed his *Lautgedichte* and read a manifesto satirizing the aspirations of Dada to become "a new tendency in art" and mocking "Dada literature, dada bourgeoisie . . . Dada world war without end, dada revolution without beginning" (FT

46. Schmitt's attempt in *The Concept of the Political* to establish the friend-enemy distinction as the foundation of the political as such will not occupy us in this essay, nor, generally, will the work Schmitt published after Ball's essay. For an excellent recent discussion of this issue in the wider context of Schmitt's thought, see Tracy B. Strong, "Carl Schmitt and the Exceptional Sovereign," in *Politics without Vision: Thinking without a Banister in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012), pp. 218–62.

47. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 53. As Leo Strauss notes, the "and so on" somewhat disingenuously glosses over the fact that art and entertainment are the *finis ultimus* of the series. Leo Strauss, "Notes on Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*," in ibid., p. 116.

48. Schmitt writes, "A world in which the possibility of war is utterly eliminated, a completely pacified globe, would be a world without the distinction of friend and enemy and hence a world without politics." Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 35.

49. The term *clase discutidora* comes from Spanish conservative and counterrevolutionary Donoso Cortés. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), p. 62. Henceforth quoted parenthetically as PT.

220).[50] This was conceived as "a thinly disguised break with friends." And evidently, Ball recalled, the friends "felt so too" (FT 73). While Ball would continue to participate in Tzara's "Galerie Dada" until May 1917, the grounds were already firmly prepared for his split from the avant-garde. In August 1916, Tzara sent Ball a critique of the Dada journal *Cabaret Voltaire* by Henri Guilbeaux, in which the latter argued, "One must fight this periodical because it is a symptom of artistic and literary disintegration—parallel to the disorganization of contemporary society."[51] In a remarkable letter, Ball wrote back to Tzara the next month, agreeing with Guilbeaux's diagnosis: "He is quite right. The Cabaret Voltaire is useless, bad, decadent, militarist. . . . No more 'blasphemy,' no more 'irony' (that is filthy, vulgar), no more satire (who has the right to do so?), no more 'intelligentsia.' . . . Enough of it! *Écrasez*!"[52]

Almost immediately after he descended the stage of the Cabaret Voltaire, Ball began to reconsider his view of Dada as an attempt to prepare the ground for a re-divinization of the word, of matter, and of the human through the total embrace of the irrational in art.[53] One could say that Ball came increasingly to see an irresolvable contradiction between the "immunological" and the redemptive halves of his Dada project. For Ball, Dada had fallen prey to the "superstition" that the critique of morality could serve the moral "elevation of Man" and that the critique of reason would lead directly to the "irrational, foolish-sublime, inexhaustible miracle of life" (FT 79). In short, faced with the collapse of the "false structure" erected by secular reason, Ball could no longer accept Dada's Nietzschean "transvaluation of all values" and sought to "move away as far as possible, into tradition . . . into the supernatural" (FT 82).

Just as decisive for his exit from Dada were Ball's growing dissatisfaction with the aesthetic critique of modernity and his vertiginous sense of the gap between the epistemological challenges put forward in art and the sociopolitical order within which all culture was comfortably ensconced. With Romantic malaise, he despaired, "Where is the path that links . . . the most outlandish dream to the most banal reality? Where is the path of social productivity for this

50. That Ball repeated his "magic bishop" performance was established in Philip Mann, "Hugo Ball and the 'Magic Bishop' Episode: A Reconsideration," *New German Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 43–52. See also Debbie Lewer, "Hugo Ball, Iconoclasm, and the Origins of Dada in Zurich," *Oxford Art Journal* 32, no.1 (March 2009), p. 29.

51. Quoted in Philip Mann, *Hugo Ball: An Intellectual Biography* (London: University of London, Institute of Germanic Studies, 1987), p. 92. Guilbeaux, an anarchist anti-modernist, had earlier advanced a similar argument in his critique of Picasso: "What [Picasso] offers us today accentuates the intentional distortions, which sometimes reach the level of the grotesque, the ugly." See Guilbeaux, "'Exposition Pablo Picasso (Vollard, rue Laffitte),' *Les Hommes du Jour* (7 January, 1911)," in *A Cubism Reader*, ed. Patricia Leighten and Mark Antliff (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), p. 94.

52. Ball, "104. An Tristan Tzara [September 27, 1916]," in *Ball: Briefe*, vol. 1, pp. 128–29.

53. Ball's posthumously published "fantastic novel" *Tenderenda the Fantast*, composed between 1914 and 1920, offers another document of this transition. See Jeffrey Schnapp's illuminating introduction to Jonathan Hammer, *Ball and Hammer* (New Haven: Yale, 2002), pp. 1–21.

art? . . . My artistic and political studies seem to be at variance with each other" (FT 100). By the time that Ball and Hennings moved to Bern in September 1917, Ball's melancholy gave way to commitment: "I am actually on the point of sacrificing the aesthete to politics" (FT 133). He mostly abandoned his cultural endeavors—although he continued to speculate on aesthetics in his journal—and began to work as a political journalist, writing for the antiwar and pro-Entente newspaper the *Freie Zeitung* with peers such as Ernst Bloch, Hermann Hesse, and Carl von Ossietzky.[54]

In the best account of Ball's phase as a journalist, Anson Rabinbach notes that what linked Ball to the politics of the *Freie Zeitung* was a simultaneous insistence on German war guilt and a philosophical atmosphere that was "entirely chiliastic and apocalyptic."[55] These concerns brought him especially close both to his "utopian friend" Bloch and to his neighbor Walter Benjamin, introduced to one another by Ball in April 1919 (FT 145).[56] In these years, Bloch shared with Ball, whom he dubbed a "Christian Bakuninist," a violent opposition to German patriotism, support for the Western allies, interest in theology and utopian anarchism, and resistance to communism (temporary in Bloch's case).[57] Gershom Scholem recalls that Benjamin, for his part, spoke frequently of visits to Ball's home and was evidently impressed with this curious figure, "an extreme republican but not a Socialist or a Communist . . . a fanatical hater of everything Prussian."[58] In fact, Scholem argues that the impetus for Benjamin's turn to Marxism in these years was his experience of Ball and Bloch's intense commitment to fusing philosophical-theological speculation with political action.[59] However, if Ball's theological politics could exist for a short time in a productive tension with the Jewish messianism of Bloch and Benjamin, the insurmountable differences between their positions exploded into view with the publication of his first book. Indeed, Scholem remembers, "Toward the end of winter Benjamin gave me a thick, passionate pamphlet entitled *Zur Kritik der Deutschen*

54. Mann writes that there has been speculation that the *Freie Zeitung* was a propaganda organ funded by the Triple Entente states. In 1976, Bloch described himself and his colleagues at the newspaper as "bribed dogs" and "traitors for money." Cited in Mann, *Hugo Ball*, p. 111. Rabinbach cautions that although the newspaper's politics were pro-Entente, the evidence for these allegations is largely circumstantial. See Rabinbach, "Inverted Nationalism," p. xvi.

55. Ibid.

56. Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* (New York: New York Review, 2003), p. 97.

57. Rabinbach, "Inverted Nationalism," pp. xvi–xvii. See also Rabinbach, "Between Apocalypse and Enlightenment: Benjamin, Bloch, and Modern German-Jewish Messianism," in *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals Between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), pp. 27–65.

58. Scholem, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 96.

59. Ibid., p. 98.

Intelligenz. It impressed both of us with the acuity of its hatred, but other parts of it . . . only made us shake our heads."[60]

Begun in 1917 and published on the same day that the Freikorps murdered the Spartakus League's leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, *Critique of the German Intelligentsia* was a violent denunciation of the war and the culmination of Ball's activity as a political journalist. An attempt to establish Germany's guilt for the devastation of World War I, Ball's text ranged from splenetic expressions of anti-bourgeois sentiment to violent attacks on Marxist economism, from critiques of Protestant theology to anti-Semitic tirades, from a discourse on Bakunin to a plea for a Christian spiritual elite to reverse the decline of German culture into materialism. While the text was prescient for its recognition of the threat posed by Germany's refusal to face up to its role in the "Great War" and its retreat into nationalistic fantasy, Ball based his analysis on the presumed existence of a secret alignment of Prussian militarism, Protestant and Jewish theology, and German Idealist philosophy. The "Satanic Power" of the German war machine, "attempting to conquer the world from that home base," was the instrument of a Jewish-Prussian conspiracy "seeking to subjugate Europe and the world, and bent on the universal destruction of religion and morals," against which the only recourse would be to incorporate Germany into a league of European nations led by a Christian hierarchy.[61]

Like Schmitt, who situated the "ultimate roots" of an "individualistically disintegrated society . . . in the private priesthood," Ball traced the crisis of contemporary Germany back to the Protestant Reformation (PR 20).[62] However, with more brazenness than Schmitt would permit himself before he joined the Nazi party on May 1, 1933—at the urging of Martin Heidegger, it should be noted[63]—Ball claimed that Jewish theology was the driving force behind the Reformation's negative consequences and, ultimately, behind those of modernity in general. In Ball's bizarre theological narrative, the Judaicization of Christianity had already begun with Saint Paul, who "introduced that sanguine reconciliation between the Old and the New Testaments . . . [thereby] subjugating the Christian rebel (crucified by oppressors) to the ancient god of the Jews" (CGI 32). Consequently, Luther's emphasis on "the priesthood of all believers" led to a "superstitious idolatry of a text," thus collapsing Christianity back into the "Jewish tradition." "This choice signaled endless obscurity" for Ball, as "each person became a theologian" (CGI 30–31). The *Critique*'s mad historical-theological

60. Ibid., p. 96.
61. Ball, *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, pp. 19, 1–2. Henceforth, CGI in parentheses.
62. On Ball and the Reformation, see the important essay by Debbie Lewer "Hugo Ball, Iconoclasm, and the Origins of Dada in Zurich," pp. 17–35.
63. Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p. 181.

schema can be summarized in Ball's syllogism, "Luther derived from Paul the Jewish *défaitismus* of morals" (CGI 33).

Ball's anti-Semitism, as Rabinbach and Brian Harris demonstrated, was no mere personal defect or eccentricity that could be imagined to exist apart from the *Critique*'s core argument against the war.[64] Indeed, Ball peppered his text with denials of personal anti-Semitism precisely at the moments when the book degenerated into a diatribe against "the German-Jewish conspiracy to destroy morality."[65] It is clear that the figure of the Jew was the structuring enemy of Ball's entire political theory, embodying the processes of secularization and rationalization in all their forms: "Rabbi Paul" reverses Christ's sacrifice by preserving the God of the Old Testament; Luther delivers Christianity to a Jewish "idolatry" of the word; Hegel authors a "Talmudic dialectic"; and Bolshevism perpetrates a "vengeful Jewish terrorism" (CGI 13). In paranoid words that would fit comfortably in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and were excised from the 1970 edition, Ball wrote:

> It must be admitted that the exploitative and mercantilistic tradition does have a more profound hold on the Jewish mind than even Jews are aware of. Not to be underestimated either is the broader view of the Jewish race, wherein it is not the achievement of the individual that is decisive but the result to which his conspiratorial work often leads generations later. The individual sacrifices himself for the Jewish ideal. The individual may be revolutionary; he can seem to betray his race, but developments will show that he was responsible to it alone (CGI 145).

Here, in concentrated form, is the structure of anti-Semitism: the construction of the Jew as a phantasmic screen onto which can be projected any tendency deemed harmful or negative (in Ball's case, materialism as such), and the conviction that the essence of "the Jew" is not to be found in any particular individual but rather in a supra-individual conspiracy to advance the "race" as a whole. Conceived as such, the threat of the Jew to the anti-Semite is at its most acute precisely at the moment when the anti-Semitic stereotype seems to collapse. An individual Jew who opposes exploitation or mercantilism is in fact the most convincing and dangerous evidence for the existence of a Jewish conspiracy to advance exploitation in the name of mercantilism. For in seeming to "betray his

64. See Harris's edition of the *Critique* and his dissertation "Hugo Ball's Critique of the German Mind: Notes to Hugo Ball's *Zur Kritik der Deutschen Intelligenz*" (University of Texas at Austin, 1979).

65. Ball wrote, for example, "It is not my intention to fuel the fires of anti-Semitism....I would count myself fortunate indeed to be of equal service to social, Jewish, and German emancipation" (CGI 142). Elderfield notes that Ball first encountered anti-Semitic ideas while writing his unfinished book on Nietzsche in Heidelberg in 1907–8, and "had an operation to straighten his nose after having been mistakenly taken for a Jew" (FT xvi).

race," a "revolutionary" Jew such as Marx actually confirmed the nature of the Jewish mentality, where the interests of the individual are suppressed in favor of the advancement of the group.[66]

According to Ball, "a new hierarchy" was needed to combat the trifecta of Protestantism, German nationalism, and Judaism, which had conspired to destroy morality and authentic religion in favor of economistic materialism (CGI 20). Only the assertion of divine authority over the secular world could offer a stable ground for renewal. It alone could achieve

> a spiritual and moral society with invisible graduations capable once again of gaining the upper hand over the Satanism of a profanity composed of vestigial fabrications and formulae, a profanity that at this moment celebrates its hideous orgy of death (CGI 20).

In contradiction to his avowed hatred of theocracy and support for democracy, Ball imagined an intellectual-spiritual Christian elite that could oppose the deadly rationality of the economic worldview and unite Europe under its enlightened rule.[67] Echoing Schmitt's "Christ or Barabbas," Ball concluded,

> If you hold the . . . view that welfare, freedom, and independence of the individual—not the *exploitation* of the world—is the meaning of this life, then you cannot expect much from a Prussianized Europe operating under Jewish directive, and will have to propose this alternative: Christ or Jehovah (CGI 144).

With his conversion to Roman Catholicism, Ball believed he had found a path to overcome the Romantic juxtaposition of mutually exclusive political and

66. As Rabinbach establishes, Ball's anti-Semitism was already on display by November 1918, when he published an editorial in the *Freie Zeitung* that imagined a "purified nation" and raved against "anational Israelites" (CGI xxvi). This editorial led to Bloch's resignation from the paper the following month and put a severe strain on their relationship. Bloch recalled, "I wrote Ball immediately that this sort of anti-Semitism is scandalous, no matter how he means it," and noted elsewhere, "Ball knows full well . . . that I am a completely racially conscious Jew, and that I am proud of my old, secretive people, and that I am, in my best aspects, at home in Jewish blood and the great religious tradition of my people" (CGI xxvi).

67. Mann writes, "Ball can be seen relinquishing both the radical Modernist critique of culture and revolutionary remedies and espousing a conservative ideology which, rejecting the present age as fallen and decadent, looks backward to an idealized Golden Age and forward to a future Utopia when the Golden Age will be re-established." Mann, *Hugo Ball*, p. 110. Rabinbach disputes the characterization of Ball's text as "conservative," arguing that in 1919, Ball was still "a republican radical for whom the Rights of Man and democracy are not incompatible with Christian anarchism and revolutionary Gnosticism" (CGI xxiii).

theological positions that he soon came to recognize in the *Critique*.[68] In a diary entry dated August 9, 1920, following his permanent retreat to Sorengo with Hennings, Ball reflected on the politically consolidating effect of his conversion: "There is only one power that measures up to the disintegrating tradition: Catholicism. Not the prewar and wartime Catholicism, but a new, deeper, integral Catholicism that will not be intimidated, that scorns advantages, that knows Satan and defends right whatever the cost" (FT 193). Ball worked through his vision of political Catholicism most fully in his review of Schmitt's *Political Theology* from 1924, which also represented a drastic reformulation of the relationship between rationalization and the irrational that had consumed him since the Dada years.

In passages with great autobiographical resonance, Ball devoted a significant portion of his review to *Political Romanticism*. The Romantics believed, Ball wrote, that "the bounds of the hitherto mechanistic age should be blasted open, and the otherworldly speculations of spiritual revolution be transplanted onto the solid ground of reality" (CSPT 70). However, the Romantic lacked any practical means to achieve this transplantation into reality save the degraded form of "subjectified occasionalism" that set aesthetic productivity against "the demonic world." "And so the genius, attired as a dandy or a rebel," Ball proclaimed with self-flagellating irony, "glosses over the hollow bankruptcy of culture and feels himself to be the refuge of all higher life" (CSPT 68). The value placed by Romantics on individual creativity replicated "the general interchange and confusion of concepts, a boundless promiscuity of words and values" characteristic of modernity's fragmentation of experience and tradition (CSPT 69).[69] In the end, the "Romantics' attempt to explode the rational mechanism of its day"—a description closer to Dada than to Schlegel—invariably led to political deadlock, little more than "illusions of a fantasized primitivity" (CSPT 72).

Situating Schmitt in "an age that worships nothing, that fights or mocks ideology," Ball contended that he offered a coherent *Weltanschauung* to oppose Romantic indecision and the legitimation crisis incurred by secularization (CSPT 66), that he was an "ideologist" fit to counter the preeminence of what G.K. Chesterton called "the practical man": "A practical man means a man accustomed to mere daily practice, to the way things commonly work. When things will not work, you must have the thinker, the man who has some doctrine about

68. As early as June 5, 1919, Ball regretted the book's political eclecticism, noting, "I tried to link the different European slogans of yesterday and today and thus committed the patriotic mistake of wishing to see them all realized in Germany in a single attempt" (FT 166).

69. In this sense, Ball's diagnosis accords with John McCormick's description of Romanticism's paradoxically mimetic relationship to rationalization: "Activity that drains concrete specificity from the actual world so that it may manipulate its components, rationalization, is mirrored by activity that endlessly imputes a random concrete specificity to aspects of that world in a subjective scheme of manipulation, Romanticism." McCormick, "Transcending Weber's Categories of Modernity?," p. 147.

why they work at all" (CSPT 65). Through this citation of the orthodox Catholic writer, Ball cut directly to Schmitt's core philosophical conviction, which united his politics and his theology: "The exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything" (PT 15). For Schmitt, "whether the extreme exception can be banished from the world is not a juristic question. Whether one has confidence and hope that it can be eliminated depends on philosophical, especially on philosophical-historical or metaphysical, convictions" (PT 7).

In Schmitt's metaphysical claim that the exception manifested the absolute, Ball perceived the outlines of a "Catholic (universal) physiognomy" and proceeded to read the entirety of Schmitt's legal and political philosophy as a Christian theory of representation (CSPT 65). Ball claimed that while "by no means is Schmitt already a theologian and Roman Catholic from his first steps . . . [his] results are achieved incrementally from logical consequences" (CSPT 68). In other words, Ball argued that Schmitt's thought implied a rational apology for the Church—that, almost despite itself, Schmitt's work was immanently driven toward Catholicism. While this claim may seem idiosyncratic to a contemporary reader most familiar with Schmitt's reception as a realist critic of liberal democracy, Schmitt himself recognized in 1970 that Ball's review brought to light submerged aspects of his thought: "Hugo Ball, who did not belong to the professional class (for he was neither a professional theologian nor a professional jurist), was the only one who paid attention . . . and he did not gloss over the details of the discussion. His essay . . . strikes the critical reader even today."[70]

Schmitt's primary concern in the late 1910s and '20s was, in Ball's words, to inquire "into the actual application of law so as to arrive, following the facts, at its ultimate and decisive form" (CSPT 67). Seeking to ascertain the ultimate point of derivation of legal order and state power, Schmitt engaged in a long-standing debate with the normative legal theory proposed by neo-Kantian positivists such as Hans Kelsen, who sought to strip the law of its subjective elements in order to arrive at "the impersonal validity of an impersonal norm" (PT 29). For Kelsen, a state's authority derived from—and was legitimized by—its constitution, i.e., an impersonal system of norms ideally forming a logical unity.[71] For Schmitt, conversely, state power necessarily existed prior to legal order, the former being in fact the sole assurance of the latter's existence. Schmitt thus characterized legal scholars such as Kelsen in terms similar to Chesterton's "practical man," as singularly useless in moments when the law and the state faced an existential threat from within (civil war or insurrection) or

70. Schmitt, *Political Theology II*, p. 143, note 6.
71. See the discussion of the regulative force of legal norms in Hans Kelsen, *Pure Theory of Law*, trans. Max Knight (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), pp. 30–50.

from without (attack from a foreign enemy).[72] In such states of emergency throughout history, Schmitt argued, the only means to secure the continued existence of the law lay paradoxically in its temporary suspension through the absolute exercise of state power.[73] An analysis of these situations led Schmitt to the famous dictum of *Political Theology*, "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (PT 5). The sovereign not only decides what constitutes a state of exception and when one is to be put in place but, more important, secures the very possibility for a "normal situation" to exist at all. Therefore, Schmitt argued, the legal order's point of origin was not in norms established through rational consensus but in the absolute exercise of sovereign authority: *auctoritas, non veritas facit legem* (authority, not truth, makes the law).[74]

Formalizing his critique of Romantic indecision, Schmitt concluded that the point of ascription of the law, that is, its foundation and the force of its application, lay in a personal decision and not in an impersonal norm. Ball described this aspect of Schmitt's thought as a "vigorous personalism" absolutely opposed to the objectivity of scholars like Kelsen, "whose impersonal and anonymous physiognomy excludes almost any independent consciousness" (CSPT 85). Ball summarized Schmitt's argument thus: "Law is present where decisions are made; where there is decision without appeal, there is the sovereign; and where the sovereign's decisions transpire is the state of exception" (CSPT 83). Indeed, Schmitt, delighting in the philosophical parallax, posited that the decision, "if looked at normatively," "emanates from nothingness. . . . Ascription is not achieved with the aid of a norm; it happens the other way around" (PT 32). The state of exception reveals the paradox at the core of legal order: that the force of the law is based on nothing but lawless authority, that it emanates from a point of "anomie" within the law itself, as Giorgio Agamben puts it.[75] Therefore, the state of exception is what Schmitt called a *Grenzbegriff* or "borderline concept," which he characterized as being "not a vague concept, but one pertaining to the outermost sphere" (PT 5).

72. In his preface to *Political Theology*, written in November 1933, Schmitt described Kelsen's legal theory as "degenerate" (read: Jewish) (PT 3). Indeed, Schmitt's anti-Semitism during the Third Reich was based on his opposition to the Jew as a figure devoted to the norm, incapable of conceiving of the state of exception: "There are peoples who exist only in 'the Law,' without soil, without a state, without a church; to them, normative thought is the only rational juristic thought, and any other mode of thinking is inconceivable, mystical, fantastic, or laughable." Quoted in Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p. 206.

73. Canonical examples of such cases include the USA Patriot Act of 2001, Lincoln's suspension of *habeus corpus* during the American Civil War, and the Weimar Republic's infamous article 48, which allowed the President to revoke civil freedoms in cases of emergency. See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), pp. 1–31.

74. As Schmitt claimed, "What characterizes an exception is principally unlimited authority, which means the suspension of the entire existing order. In such a situation, it is clear that the state remains, whereas law recedes" (PT 12).

75. In Agamben's formulation, the "force-of-law in Schmitt's thought "is certainly something like a mystical element, or rather a *fictio* by means of which law seeks to annex anomie itself." Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 39.

This limit-concept that secured the law's conditions of possibility but remained "wholly other" to the law represented, for Schmitt, the moment when "the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition" (PT 15).

The groundlessness of the law, Ball asserted, did not have "just a juristic significance, but a universal one" (CSPT 79). "What is demonstrated" in Schmitt's theory of the exception, Ball wrote, is the "spontaneous emergence of the divine into the chaos of history, one could say: the political miracle" (CSPT 76). Indeed, Schmitt insisted that the exception was the structural correlate within the political sphere to the concept of the miracle in theology (PT 36). Further, in opposition to the secularizing drive of the legal positivists, Schmitt famously claimed, "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" (PT 37). More than simply describing the result of a historical process of secularization, the political-theological analogy, for Schmitt, implied a fundamental isomorphism between the sovereign decision that rests on *nothing*, underivable from the norm, and the authority of God, which transcends all worldly law. In his lectures on Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, the eminent sociologist and philosopher Jacob Taubes reflects on his decades-long study of and correspondence with Schmitt and argues that "secularization is thus not a positive concept for Schmitt. On the contrary, to him it is the devil. His objection is: the law of the state doesn't understand itself." This, Taubes writes, "is why castles are built that on the day of the true emergency collapse into nothing."[76]

Ball's essay, as Taubes acknowledged, was one of the first to discern the melancholia underlying Schmitt's theses on secularization.[77] Schmitt's core struggle, in Ball's view, was to establish a concrete point of contact between the rational world of politics and statecraft and the "higher irrational values" of theology (CSPT 67). To accomplish what Schmitt described as the "goal of all philosophical endeavor—to reach the irrational philosophically" would involve the rational discovery of actually existing forms that would incarnate the irrational exception in the world (PR 67, CSPT 72). This is why Ball characterized Schmitt as "a rationalist in questions of state" but an "irrationalist" "in theological questions" (CSPT 80). To clarify this seeming contradiction, Ball identified in all of Schmitt's work "the opposition of *ratio* and the irrational" (CSPT 77). Following Schmitt, Ball employed the Latin term *ratio* to signify

76. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University, 2004), p. 64–66. More recently, Tracy B. Strong has argued that Schmitt conceived secularization as "a hollowing out of political concepts," resulting in the loss of "the element of transcendence." For Strong, "[political concepts] thus no longer have, as it were, the force and strength that they had earlier and are unable to resist the dynamics of technology. The consequence of Schmitt's notion of secularization is to try and restore to the concepts of sovereignty and political authority in a secular age the quality that they had earlier." Strong, *Politics without Vision*, pp. 240–41.

77. Ball's essay on Schmitt was first republished in Taubes, ed. *Der Fürst dieser Welt: Carl Schmitt und die Folgen.* (Munich: W. Fink, 1983), pp. 100–15.

"not only 'reason' [*Vernunft*] but also 'explanation,' 'measure,' 'law,' and 'method,'" and thereby to avoid any confusion with the "mechanical conception of the world" (CSPT 79). Likewise, Ball specified two meanings of the irrational: the "non-rational and the supra-rational." The first applied to the "artificial irrationalism" of the Romantic or the Dadaist, who abstractly negated the mechanistic age through a flight into unreason. The supra-rational, conversely, referred to the precinct of theology, "the world of inspiration and revelation, the canonic and sacramental world" (CSPT 79). "The unity of Schmitt's work," Ball wrote, "rests on his explication of the relations of reason [*Vernunftsbeziehungen*] to the supra-rational, which is the principle that gives it form [*Formprinzip*]" (CSPT 85). In this principle, Ball identified the shared structure of each of the great concepts of Schmitt's work. The sovereign, the decision, and the state of exception are instances in which the superior and underivable force of the supra-rational erupts within the rational, practical, and "normal" world, thereby lending it coherence and form.

Schmitt's emphasis on the union of the *ratio* and the supra-rational, as Ball demonstrated, allowed him to set his political theory against two opposed enemies: the rationalist and the irrationalist political-theological deviations. In the first camp, Schmitt located Kelsen's normativism, Marxism, and capitalism, which were united in their drive to abolish "higher irrational values" by founding their worldviews on putatively apolitical mechanisms (whether scientific norms, economic-historical laws, or the profit imperative). The second camp was the "irrationalist" deviation, which insisted on the direct and immediate force of the exception, irreducible to any formalization or institutionalization.

This latter model, which found its strongest historical representatives in the anarchism of Proudhon and Bakunin, presented a philosophical and political problem to both Schmitt and Ball that could not easily be dispelled. Anarchism had exerted a major influence on Ball's thought, running from his Proudhonian opposition to the discipline of the word in Dada all the way to his still often-favorable citations of Bakunin as an opponent of Marx in the *Critique* (FT 22). For Ball, against the mechanistic rationalism of Marxism, anarchism based itself upon a metaphysical idea—it was, indeed, the moment when "negation erupted into metaphysics" (HBCS 5). Schmitt, likewise, took anarchism seriously as a genuine political idea, dedicating the final chapter of *Political Theology* to distinguishing the counterrevolutionary theorists Bonald, de Maistre, and Donoso Cortés from the anarchist tradition of Babeuf, Bakunin, and Kropotkin. For Schmitt, "Bakunin, the greatest anarchist of the nineteenth century, [was] in theory the theologian of the antitheological and in practice the dictator of an antidictatorship" (PT 66). Against Marx, who tended to appear as a rationalistic "schoolmaster," the "intellectual significance" of Bakunin rested on an authentic, if ultimately negative, "conception of life" (PT 64).[78] Heinrich Meier, in fact, argues that Schmitt derived the concept of political theology directly from his

78. Schmitt, *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), p. 70.

engagement with Bakunin.[79] For Bakunin, as for Schmitt, all worldly power derived its authority from an analogy with divine power; however, denying the existence of God, Bakunin attacked the legitimacy of the state's superiority over its citizens. Schmitt identified Bakunin's anarchism as an atheist political theology and raised it over and above weaker secularizations of metaphysics as the "true enemy of all traditional concepts of Western European culture."[80]

By the early 1920s, Ball and Schmitt regarded the French theorist of militant syndicalism Georges Sorel as the thinker who embodied the consequences of Bakunin's inverted political theology in its most potent and threatening form. Explicated in *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908), Sorel's theory of the proletarian general strike was categorized by Schmitt as an "irrationalist theory of the direct use of force."[81] Opposed to the institutionalization of working-class *élan* in the workers' state, Sorel conferred an absolute positive value to the rupture opened by proletarian violence that did not find its *telos* in the seizure of state power; rather, it suspended the existing order in its entirety. Sorel wrote, "In the total ruin of institutions and of morals there remains something which is powerful, new, and intact, and it is that which constitutes, properly speaking, the soul of the revolutionary proletariat."[82] In what Schmitt identified as an inheritance from Bergson, Sorel located a mythic "creative force" (*force créatrice*) in the pure destructive violence of the proletariat, which, Schmitt generously noted, was "certainly not refuted by the fact that Bergson has become *passé*."[83] Therefore, unlike Marxism-Leninism's technical-rational garb, Sorel's writing offered "a theory of direct, active decision," and therefore qualified as a legitimate enemy in Schmitt's view.[84] The creative opening of the general strike—in which the direct and unmediated life of the people surged forth and abolished the norm—did indeed mirror the structure of the exception. It was precisely against this danger of an anomic exception that would not find its way back to the law that Schmitt developed the formal principle of the sovereign decision.[85]

79. In Meier's words, "What is nothing but a man-made fiction for the atheistic anarchist, is God-given reality for the political theologian." See Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt*, pp. 7–10.
80. Cited in ibid., p. 7.
81. Schmitt, *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, p. 65.
82. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T. E. Hulme (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1915), p. 295. Sorel embodies many of the contradictory and troubling characteristics of Romantic anticapitalism, with a personal trajectory encompassing anarcho-syndicalism and dalliances with the *Action Française*. Without using the term "Romantic," Alice Yaeger Kaplan points toward the aestheticizing quality of Sorel's writing, noting that "we are, in *Reflections on Violence*, always one step away from the problem of direct political action and firmly immersed in the problem of recognizing and mythologizing politically influential actions or events." Kaplan, "Slogan Text: Sorel," in *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986), p. 62.
83. Schmitt, *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, p. 66. Cited by Ball in CSPT 79.
84. Schmitt, *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, p. 68.
85. Walter Benjamin's great essay "Critique of Violence" (1921) offered another contemporaneous response to Sorel, one that, according to Agamben, Schmitt likely read (Agamben, *State of Exception*, pp. 52–53). Like Schmitt, Benjamin contended that Sorel touched "not merely on a cultur-

If the anarchist and the counterrevolutionary traditions both accepted the mythic power of the exception, their divergent attitudes toward it were rooted, according to Ball and Schmitt, in opposed conceptions of human nature. Sorel's faith in the redemptive force of the popular will placed him in a lineage—one stretching from Rousseau and the Jacobins to Proudhon and Kropotkin—that considered "man, the people, the proletariat, and even the *Lumpenproletariat*" to be "naturally good—indeed, [to be] the very salvation of the world" (CSPT 78). Conversely, Schmitt and Ball placed themselves in the tradition of a Catholic philosophy of the state that ranged from Bonald to Donoso Cortés and was driven by the faith that humanity, tainted by original sin, was "by nature vile, fallen, bestial, rabble (rather than frail, ignorant, weak, and in need of emancipation)" (CSPT 77). Politically, Ball and Schmitt recognized that the first tradition implied popular sovereignty and self-government, while the second led to absolutism and dictatorship. Ball and Schmitt, therefore, recast the political struggle between anarchism and authoritarianism in terms of a metaphysical or theological war. In Ball's words, "The opposition inscribed Satanism on its flag; with the thesis that 'man is good,' they fight for the destruction of ideology. The ideologists, and especially Cortés, fight for metaphysics under the banner of God, with the axiom that 'man is worse than a reptile'" (CSPT 78).

Figuring Authority

In a judgment that runs counter to most present-day assessments, Ball argued that Schmitt's drive to reach the irrational philosophically found its most convincing and elegant expression in his essay *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923). In this text, Schmitt argued that the Catholic Church was not only a historical model of reconciliation between state and religious orders; it was also home to a mythic power that could uniquely oppose both the rationalist (i.e., bourgeois and state socialist) and the irrationalist (i.e., anarchist) deviations from authentic political form. The great strength of Catholicism was that it did not consider the rational and the irrational dualistically. On the one hand, the Church was not a

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al-historical truth, but also on a metaphysical truth" when he situated the origin of law in violence and authority, rather than in justice or in the norms established by positivist legal philosophy. Departing from Sorel, Benjamin sought a *just* form of violence that would be irreducible to the dual forms of legal violence (law-making violence and law-preserving violence), which he qualifies as pernicious forms of "mythic violence." It is perhaps on the question of myth that one could begin to distinguish Benjamin's "divine violence" from Sorel's myth of the "general strike" and Schmitt's sovereign decision. Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, *1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2002), pp. 236–52. On the distinction between law and justice in Benjamin's essay, see Agamben, pp. 52–64, and Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: the 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. Mary Quaintance, *Cardozo Law Review* 11, no. 5–6 (1990), pp. 920–1045. Regarding Benjamin and Schmitt, see Samuel Weber, "Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt," in *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2008), pp. 176–94.

"therapeutic" space of irrational consolation that would render it "the desired complement of capitalism—a hygienic institution for enduring the rigors of competition" (something, that is to say, like aesthetics).[86] On the other hand, Schmitt noted that those who critique Catholicism as a "misuse of Christianity because it mechanizes religion into a soulless formality" were disproved by the recurring fact that "Protestants return in Romantic flight to the Catholic Church seeking salvation from the soullessness of a rationalistic and mechanistic age" (RCPF 11).

With typical polemical verve, Schmitt contended that while partisans of the "anti-Roman temper" long pointed to the seeming political eclecticism or opportunism of Catholicism (with liberal and conservative wings, administrative and spiritualist tendencies, alternatively typified by accommodation and intransigence), they had scarcely begun to grasp Catholicism's ability to hold opposites in its sway. Indeed, Schmitt affirmed that the Church was above all a "complex of opposites, a *complexio oppositorum*" (RCPF 7). Unlike the synthesizing movement of the dialectic, which raised antitheses to a "higher third" and thereby neutralized them, Schmitt conceived the Catholic *complexio oppositorum* as nurturing the agonistic tension of political contradictions by embracing them under a higher—indeed, universal—authority.[87]

The Catholic *complexio* was most potently manifest in its mediation between the *ratio* and the supra-rational, precisely the opposition that Ball identified throughout Schmitt's work. Far from merely being an agent of spiritual irrationalism, the Church had also been a force for the advancement of the *ratio*, a duality epitomized by the figure of the Pope. The Pope, for Schmitt, "is truly the most astounding *complexio oppositorum*": an autocratic monarch, elected by an aristocracy of cardinals, "regardless of his birth or stature," to represent God on Earth (RCPF 14, 7). Indeed, the Pope embodied the *complexio* in personal form, uniting the higher irrationality of God with a specifically juridical and institutional body, which legitimized the sovereign decision. "Culminating with the most precise dogmatism and a will to decision . . . in the doctrine of papal infallibility," Schmitt wrote, "the political power of Catholicism rests neither on economic nor on military means, but rather on the absolute realization of authority . . . a concrete personal representation of a concrete personality" (RCPF 18). In his review, Ball argued that Schmitt had discovered that "the sovereign dictator can only be legitimated within the Church" and found in Catholicism a concrete point of contact between divine and earthly authority (CSPT 82).

The novelty of Schmitt's position in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* was to have conceived this rational realization of supra-rational authority as a problem

86. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 11–12. Henceforth parenthetically referred to as RCPF.

87. For an excellent discussion of the *complexio*'s anti-dialectical character and its implications for political philosophy more broadly, see Michael Marder, "Carl Schmitt's 'Cosmopolitan Restaurant': Culture, Multiculturalism, and *Complexio Oppositorum*," *Telos* 142 (Spring 2008), p. 30.

of representation and figuration.[88] "Those are the basic concepts around which the Latin Carl Schmitt arranges his work," Ball wrote, "and which, true to his antithesis, he employs in the relation of *ratio* to *repraesentatio*: a Scholastic theme in concretely modern garb" (CSPT 89). Schmitt's anti-dialectical solution to this "Scholastic" problem would run as follows: Catholicism's political value is epitomized by its status as a *complexio oppositorum*, able to unite even the antithesis between the *ratio* and the supra-rational; however, to avoid rationalizing this opposition by sublating it, Catholicism proposes a "strict realization of the principle of representation" whereby the supra-individual authority of Christ is incarnated in the personal figure of the Pope, representing the divine within the rational arena of politics and providing the source of its legitimacy (RCPF 8). Therefore, Ball noted, Schmitt's "inclination to the absolute" was to lead "in its final consequence not to an abstraction that conditions everything—be it God, form, authority, or whatever else—but rather to the Pope as the absolute person, who represents a once more concrete world of irrational persons and values that cannot be compassed by logic" (CSPT 67).

Ball's essay ends by highlighting in Schmitt's concept of Catholic representation what could be called a figurative politics, a displaced aesthetic theory. Throughout *Roman Catholicism*, Schmitt implied that the legitimacy of a given society's artistic forms, its very capacity to create meaningful images of itself, was secured—through something like a conservative model of superstructural reflection—by the legitimacy of that society's forms of political representation. This was why the Catholic mode of representation was the authentic enemy to "the mechanistic world of big cities, whose stone, iron, and glass structures lie on the face of the earth like colossal Cubist configurations" (RCPF 10). Concurring with this view, Ball stated that the enemies of Catholicism, from Marx to Bakunin, from the bourgeois financier to the legal positivist, were "equally hostile to political responsibility and to artistic form. . . . They are directed against metaphysical dignity and against the heroism of man. . . . What these adversaries have in common is an aversion to the rational formative power of the absolute" (CSPT 91). The Cubist fragmentation of figurative representation in art was a natural complement to bourgeois society's disorganization and its political animus against the "personal," exemplified by legal normativism's drive to replace the sovereign decision with the impersonal norm. Conversely, the inhuman banality of Communist culture reflected its substitution of class and the economy for God according to the rational laws of history.[89] Against both these tendencies, the Catholic

88. Discussing representation in relation to publicness, Jürgen Habermas refers to Schmitt's concept of representation as the embodied "aura" of authority. Habermas also cites Schmitt's sardonic observation in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* that the Church "no longer represents anything except representation itself." Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 7–8; p. 252, notes 12, 14. I am grateful to Samuel Johnson for alerting me to this passage.

89. Schmitt sneered that Communism was "so little capable of creating an image that even the Russian Soviet Republic found no other symbol for its badge of rule than the hammer and sickle" (RCPF 22).

Church was "the sole surviving contemporary example of the medieval capacity to create representative figures" (RCPF 19). In the formalization of absolute power in the person of the Pope, Schmitt contended, Catholicism presented a model in which "representation invests the representative person with a special dignity": "[Representation] is home to the political idea of Catholicism and its capacity to embody the great trinity of form: the aesthetic form of art; the juridical form of law; finally, the glorious achievement of a world historical form of power" (RCPF 21). To reinstate the Pope as the absolute sovereign, "representing the absent, ecstatic, irrational person of Christ," would by extension be to mend "the bond between Church and the creative arts [that] has been broken" (RCPF 22).

It is above all this promise of an organic reconciliation between aesthetic, theological, and political form under the aegis of a Catholic imperium that accounts for Ball's great investment in Schmitt's work. For Schmitt, however, the case for Catholic dictatorship was just one contingent solution to the problem of securing the "normative guidance of human social life," and one that he would very soon abandon (RCPF 12).[90] Schmitt's commitment to Catholicism fluctuated radically throughout his life, but what remained was his guiding conviction that "there is no politics without authority and no authority without an ethos of belief" (PT 17). Indeed, Schmitt's valorization of "representation" (whether artistic or political) is at times difficult to distinguish from a general recourse to the politically galvanizing power of myth. The consequences of this politics of myth were evident, a decade prior to Schmitt's enthusiastic support for Hitler, in the case for Italian Fascism formulated in *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1923), published soon after *Roman Catholicism.* In opposition to both the irrationalist myth of the general strike in Sorel and the mythic techno-rationalism of Marxism, Schmitt argued in this text that Mussolini, rather than the Pope, could act as the vehicle of a myth powerful enough to secure absolute authority and generate popular enthusiasm.[91] Schmitt favorably cited Mussolini's speech from his 1922 march on Rome, in which the dictator proclaimed, "We have created a myth, this myth is a belief, a noble enthusiasm; it does not need to be a reality, it is a striving and a hope, belief and courage. Our myth is the nation, the great nation which we want to make into a concrete reality

90. Balakrishnan states that shortly after the publication of *Roman Catholicism and Political Form,* Schmitt had already rejected the book's two main arguments: first, that "the secular state and the Church should be joined in a partnership in which the former had direct power and the latter indirect authority," and, second, that Catholicism could offer "an authority claiming universal jurisdiction." Balakrishnan, pp. 63–64.

91. Ball does not cite this text in his review, and this silence is interesting. Although it is possible he had simply not read it by the time he drafted his piece, the inventory of his library in the Swiss Literary Archives shows that he owned two copies of the 1923 edition of *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy,* along with all of Schmitt's major books since *Political Romanticism.* See the Hennings-Ball Nachlaß inventory: http://ead.nb.admin.ch/html/hennings-ball.html (accessed October 7, 2013).

for ourselves."[92] Schmitt's own moments of political decision revealed that while he conceived of political theology as a means to protect the law and the state from illegitimate existential threats, in practice it provided the transcendental ground of legitimation for the boundless exercise of power in a total state. The mythic guarantee of political form was as accessible in Roman Catholicism as it was in Italian Fascism and the Nazi *Führerprinzip.*

For Ball, conversely, Catholicism was not merely a politically expedient myth that could be replaced, depending on circumstances, by any myth whatsoever, whether that of national destiny or that of blood and soil. Even the actually existing institutions for political Catholicism in Germany, such as the Catholic Zentrum Partei, were hopelessly compromised in Ball's eyes. The rift between Schmitt's authoritarian realism and Ball's intransigent idealism evidently came into sharp focus during their encounter in Sorengo of August 1924. Schmitt recalled feeling surprise and dismay at Ball's resigned indifference to the current state of German politics: "We didn't speak at all about political matters. One would have thought that he would be interested in the situation in Germany. Catholicism in Germany was suddenly the ruling party.... He saw nothing. He was absent. He thought of something else. He was totally absent."[93]

Nevertheless, Schmitt proposed that Ball draft a new introduction to *Political Romanticism,* and Ball asked Schmitt for advice regarding a hard-line Catholic revision of the *Critique* that he intended to publish under the title *The Consequences of the Reformation.* Schmitt strongly advised him not to publish this book, judging that it would harm Ball's reputation, and even offered to pay the equivalent of the publisher's advance if he withdrew his manuscript.[94] When Ball finally did publish *The Consequences of the Reformation* later that year, against Schmitt's counsel, he was deeply affected by a particularly brutal review that appeared in the Catholic *Augsburger Postzeitung* by the political scientist Waldemar Gurian, then one of Schmitt's students.[95] Ball became convinced that Schmitt had orchestrated the negative review, and wrote him a letter (that remained unsent) noting that the critique, by an "insignificant young man . . . contained facts and opinions that go back to your conversations with me."[96] Ball felt that the review was "devastating,

92. Cited in Schmitt, *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy,* p. 76. For a discussion of Schmitt and Mussolini in relation to representation and myth, see Victoria Kahn, "Hamlet or Hecuba: Carl Schmitt's Decision," *Representation* 83 (Summer 2003), pp. 67–96.

93. Cited in Kennedy, "Carl Schmitt and Hugo Ball," p. 145.

94. Ball, "465. An Carl Schmitt [27 January 1925]," in *Ball: Briefe,* vol. 1, p. 110. See also Kennedy, "Carl Schmitt and Hugo Ball," p. 144.

95. Ibid,, p. 110. On Gurian, see Hannah Arendt, "The Personality of Waldemar Gurian," *The Review of Politics* 17, no. 1 (January 1955), pp. 33–42. It bears noting that Schmitt's relationship with Gurian, a Russian-born Jew, became antagonistic following the latter's exile during the Third Reich. Balakrishnan writes, "Gurian's articles in Swiss newspapers...sought to discredit Schmitt in the eyes of the party by pointing out his past affiliations with the Centre Party, his previously close relationship with many Jews, and his essentially opportunistic nature. . . . Schmitt's enemies within Germany seized upon these disclosures, as Gurian had hoped they would." Balakrishnan, *The Enemy,* p. 204.

96. Ball, "474. An Carl Schmitt, [11 Februar 1925]," in *Ball: Briefe,* vol. 2, p. 120.

not only for my book but for myself" and asked Schmitt for an explanation, emphasizing that he cared less about bad reviews than he did about their friendship.[97] Finally, rather than send the letter, Ball simply cut ties with Schmitt—a severance that greatly pained the jurist.[98] In a passage from the *Glossarium*, a series of notes intended for posthumous publication, written between 1947 and 1951, after his internment by the Allies, Schmitt recorded his disappointment regarding the squandered intellectual union with Ball, and emphasized again that it was above all the political form of Catholicism that they shared:

> That is the secret key word of my entire spiritual and public existence: the struggle for the peculiarly Catholic sharpening (against the neutralizers, the aesthetic idlers, against the abortionists, body-burners, and pacifists). Here on this path of Catholic sharpening . . . they all kept away from me, even Hugo Ball.[99]

Ball continued to keep his distance from Schmitt until his death in 1927, and he certainly did not complete his promised preface to *Political Romanticism.* When the reprint of this book appeared in 1925, it was Schmitt himself who introduced it, with a short essay dated September 1924—which is to say, the month of his return from Sorengo. It is hard not to read the unmistakable mark of his encounter with Ball in every line of this text, especially in those dedicated to the degeneracy of modern art after Romanticism. In words that could pass for the acrid recollections of a repentant Dadaist, Schmitt described "a time that, in the pregnant sense, is no longer capable of representation," and "an art without works, at least without works in a grand style, without representation. . . . sympathetically appropriating all forms in a tumultuous disorder" (PR 14–15). One passage in particular is striking for its almost exact correspondence with Ball's account of his lapse into a "cadence of priestly lamentation" in the Cabaret Voltaire:

> In modern society, the artist, at least in relation to his public, sociologically avails himself of certain functions of the priest, often in a comically deformed manner, and turns a stream of emotions that belong to the priest onto the genius of his own private person; . . . a poetry arises that lives off cultic and liturgical aftereffects and reminisces that it squanders away into the profane (PR 18).

97. Ibid., p. 121.

98. Ball did however send Gurian a chilling note: "On the basis of what achievements and with what passport were you allowed to write in one of the first Catholic newspapers in Germany...? If Professor Schmitt has informed me correctly, you are a young gentleman from his seminar, and not even German, but Russian. A sense of propriety and responsibility...should prohibit you from contributing reviews of any new German publications." Ball, "473. An Waldemar Gurian [11 Februar 1925]," in ibid., p. 119.

99. Schmitt, *Glossarium: Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947–1951* (Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 1991), p. 165. Cited and translated in Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt*, p. 70, note 7.

Doubtlessly informed by his weeks in Sorengo, Schmitt offered the figure of the "magical bishop"—here demoted to the status of a comically deformed priest—as the ultimate representative of modern art's grotesque privatization of the divine. For Schmitt and Ball, in conceiving art as the privileged other to quantification and mechanization, as a sphere for the preservation of irrational impulses exiled from the rationalistic world, the "Romantic" dream of an autonomous art in fact merely mirrored the secularization and profanation of the higher *ratio*. In a nightmarish inversion of Mallarmé's atheistic ode to the "Sumptuosity of the Void," Ball and Schmitt described an art that, once severed from the authentic principles of form that could represent the absolute in the world, was little more than a nihilistic charisma.[100]

Ball and Schmitt were therefore joined in their profound ambivalence toward the aesthetic. On the one hand, art was in their view a mere symptom of disenchantment, and pronouncements of art's "absolutization" only intensified the appearance of morbidity. On the other hand, Schmitt's thought, for all its violent animus against "aesthetic idlers," ultimately advanced a theory of representation that was deeply attractive to Ball, a legitimizing principle of form that would reconcile politics, law, and culture. This duality attained a supremely disquieting force in Ball's "return to order" and is a likely cause for art history's failure to recognize it as such. For Ball manifested in distorted form the characteristics of two normally opposed tendencies that stemmed from the perceived exhaustion of avant-garde autocritique in the interwar years: first, the attempt to realize directly in everyday life the utopian hopes of the avant-garde through the rush from aesthetic negation to political praxis; and, second, the various returns to the supremacy of figurative representation. Ball's embrace of the "Pope as absolute person" was simultaneously neither and both, a *complexio oppositorum* seeking to reinstate the principle of representation to a world that had abandoned God in metaphysics, the sovereign in politics, and "the heroism of man" in art. In Ball's flight from aesthetics to politics to theology, the perennial avant-garde slogan of the "end of art" paradoxically led to the aestheticization of politics and the figuration of authority.

100. At the same time as his friend Henri Cazalis was writing his *Livre du Néant*, Mallarmé planned a work entitled *La Somptuosité du Néant*. See the letter to Cazalis dated April 3, 1870, in Mallarmé, *Correspondance complète*, p. 470.

Carl Schmitt's Political Theology*

HUGO BALL

I.

Carl Schmitt ranks among the few German savants who are equal to the professional dangers of a teaching chair in the present era. I do not hesitate to suggest that he has taken and established for himself the type of the new German savant. If the writings of this remarkable professor (not to say confessor) served only towards the recognition and study of its author's catholic (universal) physiognomy, that alone would be enough to assure him a preeminent status. In a fine essay, "On Ideals," Chesterton says that the remediation of our confused and desperate age in no way requires the great "practical man" who is clamored for the world over, but rather the great ideologist. "A practical man means a man accustomed to mere daily practice, to the way things commonly work. When things do not work, you must have the thinker, the man who has some doctrine about why they work at all. It is wrong to fiddle while Rome is burning; but it is quite right to study the theory of hydraulics while Rome is burning."[1] Carl Schmitt belongs to those who "study the theory of hydraulics." He is an ideologist of rare conviction, and indeed it's safe to say that he will restore to this word a new prestige, which among Germans has carried a pejorative meaning since Bismarck.[2]

* This essay first appeared in *Hochland* 21, issue 2 (April–September 1924), pp. 263–86. Reprinted in *Der Fürst dieser Welt: Carl Schmitt und die Folgen*, ed. Jacob Taubes (Munich: W. Fink, 1983), pp. 100–15; and subsequently in Hugo Ball, *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit: Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Hans Burkhard Schlichting (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp. 303–43. Except for note 55, Schmitt did not include references in his original version; they have been added here by the translator and coordinated wherever possible with extant English translations.

1. G. K. Chesterton's essay "Wanted: An Unpractical Man," in *What's Wrong with the World?* (London, 1913), appeared in German as "Von den Idealen," *Summa* 4 (1918), pp. 32–47. *Summa* was a Catholic journal edited by the writer Franz Blei, a mutual acquaintance of Ball and Schmitt, both of whom had published in its pages.

2. In a diary entry dated Sept. 15, 1915, Ball writes: "Once upon a time in the heart of Europe there was a land that seemed to have a perfect breeding ground ready for an unselfish ideology. Germany will never be forgiven for ending this dream. Bismarck was the one who performed the most thoroughgoing elimination of ideologies in Germany. All the disappointment must be directed at him. He has done ideology a bad turn in the rest of the world too." Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, ed. John Elderfield (New York: Viking, 1976) p. 27.

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What characterizes the ideologist? How does the ideologist come to be an ideologist? He possesses a personal, almost private system, and he wants to make it last. He classifies all the facts of life and arranges the wealth of his experience around the fundamental conviction that life is dominated by ideas; that life cannot be ordered and structured upon existing conditions, but only upon the basis of free and absolute insights that themselves exert a determining power over things—on the basis, finally, of ideas. The exaltation and obstinacy of this conviction is what constitutes the ideologist's greatness. In an age that worships nothing, that fights or mocks ideology—in such an age the ideologist will be forced to prove his ground. Before he knows it, he will become a politician and finally a theologian. One could say that the last hope of our age lies sealed in its abortionistic inclinations. Be that as it may: in Carl Schmitt's work, ideology finds one of its fiercest, most fervent defenders. His point of departure is law, jurisprudence; he is a professor of law in Bonn. His first writings deal with *Guilt and Forms of Guilt* (1910), with *Law and Judgment* (1912).[3] But one already finds a transition to political philosophy (*The Value of the State and the Meaning of the Individual*, 1914).[4] There is no law outside of the state, and there is no state outside the law. Accordingly, there is no just person who does not recognize the state as the closest instance of the idea (*Political Romanticism*, 1919, published by Duncker & Humblot, as are his subsequent works).[5] In his later writings, the question of instances expands into the question of the final determinative authority and form, with which the juristic interpretation of a "political theology" comes to its conclusion.

II.

The singularity of this savant is that he is not only aware of the unique difficulties facing the ideologist, but actually structures his work in all its references and consequences starting precisely from this problem and from this experience. He experiences his epoch in the conscious form of his talent. This gives his writings their rare consistency and that allure of universal cohesion that they offer. Schmitt follows his innate juridical inclination, not to say his formal disposition, to its final conditioning cause, with an uncommon dialectical force and an equally extraordinary strength of expression. The result shows the intertwinement of the question of law with all sociological and ideological instances. One could also say that since the idea of law [*Rechtsidee*] was once conferred upon him, he seeks to give duration to the concrete fact; he elevates the imparted gift to its highest possi-

3. *Über Schuld und Schuldarten. Eine terminologische Untersuchung* (1910); *Gesetz und Urteil. Eine Untersuchung zum Problem der Rechtspraxis* (1912).
4. *Der Wert des Staates und die Bedeutung des Einzelnen* (1914).
5. *Politische Romantik* (1919). *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form* (1923) is an exception; it was published by Jakob Hegner, Hellerau.

ble value. He doesn't just want to recognize the idea of law, but to represent it wherever possible, to be its personal incarnation.[6] This is thought of in a Catholic manner, eschatologically, and it leads to a discussion of the issues of dictatorship and representation in his most recent writings.

However, his characteristic propensity for the absolute is by no means directed towards abstractions as it is with the great master system-builders of the Baroque and Enlightenment, but is instead attuned to the concrete. It leads in its final consequence not to an abstraction that conditions everything—be it God, form, authority, or whatever else—but rather to the Pope as the absolute person, who represents a once more concrete world of irrational persons and values that cannot be compassed by logic. Like any old Kantian, Schmitt proceeds from *a priori* concepts, i.e., from his ideology of law. But he is not content to define and interrelate these concepts for their own sake; his method is different. He seeks to identify his legal concepts progressively in existing states and furthermore to locate them in tradition according to their ultimate connections and associations with all other higher categories (philosophy, art, theology).

As a sociologist for whom no significant detail of life, near or far, eludes notice, Schmitt inquires everywhere into the actual application of law so as to arrive, following the facts, at its ultimate and decisive form. He does not advance an ideal state or utopia, nor does he play the pre-tuned chimes of a system. The framework of final instances that at length reveals itself to him is an organism, not a machine; a free-floating planetarium, not an imposed construction. It is a testament to this work's complete lack of sentimentality that not even the loftiest of feelings serves as its point of departure. Morality begins with assured legal concepts; these embrace all higher irrational values *de facto* within their reason. The juristic sphere, in Schmitt's interpretation, is the rational form of the presence of ideas [*rationale Präsenzform der Ideen*].

III.

Compare the work of Schmitt to that of his forebears, and its distinctive character becomes apparent. Bonald and de Maistre as well as Donoso Cortés hailed from Catholic nations during a time when the ideological world picture had been shaken to its foundations, to be sure, but was neither shattered nor utterly devastated.[7] Their starting point is a stable legal structure that finds

6. In a diary entry dated February 21, 1919, Ball writes: "To practice politics means to realize ideas. The politician and the ideologist are opposite types. The former modifies the idea, the latter sets it in motion, always thwarting practical endeavors. But they complement each other; for ideas that are ideas for their own sake, without constant attempts to bring them to fruition or without tests of their social worth, would not succeed to any measurable extent, and so would not exist at all for society. The only politics worthy of the ideologist is perhaps the realization of his idea with his own body and in his own life." Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, p. 162.

7. Louis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald (1754–1840), French royalist statesman and political thinker. Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), French absolutist political philosopher and diplomat. Juan Donoso Cortés (1809–1853), Spanish conservative writer and diplomat.

robust support for existence in the monarchical Restoration for Bonald and de Maistre, and for Cortés in the Counter-Reformation tradition of his Spanish homeland. The theological state is contested but not yet destroyed; it still gives daily proof of its vital force. The opposition of faith and knowledge, in howsoever critical a form, dominates the minds of men. But it is only here and now that the lost faith wants to be recovered and newly exalted. Scholasticism and its rationalistic posterity were able to construct systems born from the ubiquity of an axiom, which held their multifarious arguments together around an unshaken axis. But ever since negation erupted into metaphysics with Proudhon and Bakunin, the center of the old legality was demolished, and unity had to be reclaimed along new lines.[8] The rejection of authority was the mark of the last vaunted philosophy of our time. Towards this philosophy, the individual person himself has become dubious, as has the sense and value of any confession. Machinery is all-powerful; a demonic world feigns life and harmony without even possessing a single soul, to say nothing of spiritual or hieratic order. And so the genius, attired as a dandy or a rebel, glosses over the hollow bankruptcy of culture and feels himself to be the refuge of all higher life.

In his interest in the complex of Romanticism, Schmitt also makes a sacrifice to this situation. The character of the genius reaches into the blind, antinomian, and instinctive depths of nature as much as it also reaches into the supra-rational sphere of the religious world. Disentanglement from the norms of a petrified society gives even the illegal instincts a certain rationale. The mortal enemy of Romanticism—whom Schmitt proves himself to be on occasion—combats in it the irrational danger of his own creative foundation. His writings all appear dedicated to its purification, as their organic character suggests. By no means is Schmitt already a theologian and Roman Catholic from his first steps. His work develops through sufferings not just of a technical nature, in a colorful succession of grim diatribe and objective inquiry, of defining dictate and artful apology. Its results are achieved incrementally from logical consequences; a chorus of parallel and overlapping voices attends its conception. A certain aphoristic flair accentuates his isolation, but there is a world separating Schmitt from the dangers of remote individualism. The social nature of legal concepts ensures that his work is tethered constantly to a norm, and the basic form from which his system develops emerges more clearly and incisively with each new work. The irrational foundation of a great personality and his age is freed from the bonds of nature and from ecstasy, and transferred completely into the concept.

8. Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin (1814–1876), Russian revolutionary activist and anarchist philosopher. Between 1915 and 1918, Ball worked on a massive "Bakunin breviary" that was never completed.

IV.

Political Romanticism is the first of Schmitt's writings to appear before a public composed not solely of specialists. Here his uncommon command of form undertakes to reduce the *pseudologia phantastica* [fantastic pseudo-logic] of Romanticism to political norms. The general interchange and confusion of concepts, a boundless promiscuity of words and values is not only characteristic of Romanticism; it has become, since Romanticism, the common property of cultivated society. A mystical-aesthetic-spiritualistic conviction rages on, one which Troeltsch in 1912 could still describe as the secret religion of the educated classes in modern Protestant Germany.[9] Schmitt's way of thinking, by contrast, focuses on what is disquieting and journalistic; he can find little of interest in nebulous generalities. There, one encounters every form of prevarication; here, the strict will to overcome. There, all of the symptoms of a disease of the will; here, a caustic, inquisitorial intellect. A jurist who could lecture on grammar clears up the confusions of an extravagant genius cult. The Romantic Proteus finds himself in a straitjacket of logic. Romanticism's language-surrogates receive an articulation that can hardly be excelled.

The theme appears restricted. The pamphlet does not apply to Romanticism in general, but to political Romanticism—and then only to German Romanticism, and really only to Adam Müller.[10] An entire province has been fenced off, one could say, to hunt a hare. It would also be easy to think that Schmitt is referring here to something that, strictly speaking, does not exist. But his superiority triumphs precisely in the logical ensnarement of this most imaginary of themes, carried out with a formidable art of definition, of distinction, of methodical registers. It then becomes clear that Adam Müller is perhaps the most factitious and idiosyncratic exponent of what is called the politics or theology of Romanticism. He employs a large number of philosophical, aesthetic, political, and theological arguments in such a way as to compromise each individual discipline with the exception of rhetoric. Of the involved parties, Schmitt is most interested in the politico-theological engineers of that time, the Catholic theologians of state in the era of the Reformation. At the beginning of his career, Nietzsche attacked David Strauss as a "*Bildungsphilister*" [cultured philistine], in whose figure he lambasted

9. "This religious Romanticism, together with the aesthetic differentiation and the mysticism which is connected with the philosophical idea of Immanence, is the source of that which the modern German Protestant of the educated classes can really assimilate—his understanding of religion in general. This is the secret religion of the educated classes." Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), p. 749. In *Political Romanticism*, Schmitt coins the blanket term "romantic-mystical-aesthetic-spiritual Protestantism" to describe the same phenomenon. See Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), p. 112.

10. Adam Müller (1779–1829), German Romantic philosopher and political economist.

the critical platitudes of his day.[11] Schmitt attacks the "theologian of state" Adam Müller, in whom he hounds the ingenious hypocrisy of liberalism to its death. But rigor of style alone is not what makes this brochure unique amidst the haziness of a new Teutonic literature.

Well beyond his Romantic subject, one is interested in the author's personal inquiry; his breakdown of the history of ideas; the literature that he mobilizes; and the abyss into which the glory of Romanticism crashes with a shrill clank. Adam Müller, whom one not so long ago could call a solitary political thinker, dissipates in a colorful flash like a soap bubble; but the breeze that effected this augurs an oncoming thundercloud. The "incompatibility of the Romantic with any moral, legal, or political standard" may or may not be a new discovery.[12] But the standard that Schmitt imposes is itself thoroughly new in its elements and of the highest interest. The points of attack offered by Romanticism go back to Malebranche and Descartes, and extend forward into the present day. The assessment of this considerable and complex subject must offer the most valuable insights into the inner physiognomy of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries.

V.

The Romantics, Schmitt says, promised a new religion, a new gospel, a new form of genius. Yet none of their manifestations in ordinary reality enjoyed anything like a *forum externum.*[13] Adam Müller in particular wanted to revive the failed project of the French Revolution and lead it to its conclusion, to give a new content to the words religion, philosophy, nature and art. The bounds of the hitherto mechanistic age should be blasted open and the otherworldly speculations of spiritual revolution transplanted onto the solid ground of reality. In this respect, Müller relates to Burke, Bonald, and de Maistre, who took sides against the French Revolution in an original way. But he himself can find no directly moral pathos, only a sensualistic one. His book *On the Necessity of a Theological Foundation for All Political Science* never moves beyond the imaginary figures of an empty eloquence, a game played with other people's property, a lyrical philosophy of the state.[14] The most important sources of political vitality—the faith in justice and outrage against injustice—do not exist for him. In his aesthetic attitude, as in his way of arguing arbitrarily against norms, lies "the distinction from all political irrationalism, fundamentally

11. "David Strauss: The Confessor and the Writer," the first of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations,* was written in 1873. In this polemic against the erstwhile Hegelian theologian Strauss, Nietzsche condemned the cultural pretensions of the Prussian bourgeoisie in general.

12. Schmitt, *Political Romanticism,* p. 127; translation modified.

13. *Forum externum* a term in canon law for a public ecclesiastical tribunal subject to human law, as opposed to the judgment of the Church (*forum internum*).

14. Adam Müller, *Von der Notwendigkeit einer theologischen Grundlage der gesamten Staatswissenschaften und der Staatswirtschaft insbesondere* (Leipzig, 1820).

mystical or religious in origin, and where the fabric of arguments, which it can no longer renounce, emanate from a political activity."[15]

Political irrationalism: here we have the decisive word for Romanticism and also for Schmitt. With Descartes commence the convulsions of ancient ontological thought and the relegation of reality to a subjective and internal process, to thinking rather than to objects in the external world. Modern philosophy is governed by a schism between thought and being, concept and reality, mind and nature, subject and object, which was not eliminated even by Kant's transcendental solution; "it did not restore the reality of the external world to the thinking mind. That is because for Kant, the objectivity of thought lies in the consideration that thought moves in objectively valid forms. The essence of empirical reality, the thing in itself, is not a possible object of comprehension at all."[16] Irrationality, obscurity, and the secret of existence are henceforward sought after in a constant vacillation between subjective thought and empirical reality. The whole confusion dates from this depreciation, both human and material, of an ancient theological problem. Fichte attempts to dispel the conflict with an absolute ego; Romanticism wants to fix the same problem through the conscious and contrived heteronomy of the genius.[17] "The highest and most certain reality of traditional metaphysics," writes Schmitt, "the transcendent God, was eliminated. More important than the controversy of the philosophers was the question of who assumed his functions as the highest and most certain reality, and thus as the ultimate point of legitimation in historical reality."[18] Two new worldly realities appear and impose a new ontology. Entirely irrational if considered through the lens of eighteenth-century logic, but objective and evident in their supra-individual importance, they govern mankind's thought *in realitate* like two new demiurges. One is community, the revolutionary demiurge manifested in the various forms of the people, society, humanity; its omnipotence is proclaimed by Rousseau's *Contrat social.* The other, conservative demiurge is history. Romanticism tries to ascribe an irrational meaning to both demiurges.

Romanticism entered the scene with limitless promises of a new creation, with tremendous possibilities that it aimed to oppose to the potency of those two new realities. The Romantic seeks to maintain the role of a world-producing ego; nonetheless he becomes entrapped in the contradictions that arise from the presence of two realities independent of his will, and superior to his subjectivity. He starts to stake the non-objectified potentiality as the higher category; he tries to thwart all rational argumentation. In a flight from antitheses, he tirelessly creates a new alibi. In the attempt to redeem the irrationality of the person and the irra-

15. Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, p. 160.
16. Ibid., p. 52. The preceding two sentences are also taken, nearly unaltered, from Schmitt's text.
17. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), German Idealist philosopher who founded the beginnings of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, or "Doctrine of Science," on the self-positing of an absolute ego [*absolutes Ich*].
18. Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, p. 58.

tionality of the age, he lapses into a sentimental pointillism of the momentary or, just as soon, into the illusions of a fantasized primitivity. Sometimes the medium of the numinous is the simple peasant, sometimes it is the "undetermined child," or the paradisiacal idyll of nature. But only in the Church, after renouncing all subjectivity, does the Romantic find what he was looking for: "a vast, irrational community, a world-historical tradition, and the personal God of traditional metaphysics."[19] But with this, one ceases to be Romantic.

The Romantic's attempt to explode the rational mechanism of his day failed on two counts: first because Romanticism declined to take a decisive stand in the battle of ideas, and then because it imagined it could claim the role of world-creator even against reality. The final judgment reads: there is no arguing away the fact "that the person who argues employs a rational, and not an irrational, faculty. Intellectual intuition, a genial flight of fancy, or any other intuitive process might also be mentioned by means of which special insights not accessible to the mere understanding (in Schlegel's terminology: to mere reason) were to be obtained. But as long as there were pretensions to a philosophical system, the contradiction within the system could not be overcome. As long as, in the manner of Romanticism, fragments and aphorisms were to mediate the results of intuitive activity, however, this amounted to nothing more than an appeal to the same activity on the part of like-minded souls; in other words, an appeal to the romantic community. The goal of all philosophical endeavor—to reach the irrational philosophically—was not attained. In a special form, the new reality, society, had prevailed over the Romantics and had forced them to appeal to it."[20]

VI.

I should now like to show the link to Schmitt's *Political Theology* of 1922. The two books relate to one another roughly as the *Critique of Pure Reason* relates to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and not just because their titles are congruent with one another. When it comes down to it, the entire investigation of *Political Romanticism* was undertaken in order to protect the great political theologians Burke, Bonald, and de Maistre from any superficial confusion with *adaptateurs* and pseudo-politicians like Adam Müller and Friedrich Schlegel. In the fourth chapter of his *Political Theology*, Schmitt expressly follows up on the outcomes of his Romanticism book, with a complementary investigation into the systems of Bonald, de Maistre, and Donoso Cortés. The former two were already much discussed in *Political Romanticism*, which worked to demonstrate the repudiation of Romanticism in their particular attitude to the problem of reality. The experiments of Romanticism, by contrast, illustrated precisely what should be avoided if one wants

19. Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, p. 65.
20. Ibid., p. 67; translation modified.

to save and represent the irrational, freedom, and the numinous. The Church appeared as the sole solution to these Romantic efforts. *Political Theology* is thus the consequence of the path suggested by the Romantics themselves. The juridical definitions of this book, to which I shall return, serve to resolve the conflict whose contradictions led to Romanticism's collapse. The Catholic theologians of state (whose achievement will be discussed presently) relate to the political Romantics as the practical example of an actualization does to a theoretical experiment that fails in spite of everything.

Those are the thematic points of comparison. What dialectically unites both of these writings is the following: in Schmitt's analysis of Romantic concepts of reality, there arose the capital importance of the concept of decision. The Romantic is someone who in the realm of facts prefers not to decide, who even fabricates a philosophy of the irrational out of indecision. Conversely, the Catholic theologians of state de Maistre, Bonald, and Donoso Cortés, "who are called Romantics in Germany because they were conservative or reactionary and idealized the conditions of the Middle Ages," base their systems directly on the concept of the decision, and, who knows, perhaps the decision contains the whole problem of form in general. [21] One original idea is specific to the German Romantics: the eternal conversation. By contrast, wherever the Catholic philosophy of the nineteenth century expressed itself in intellectual activity, "it expressed the idea in one form or another that there was now a great alternative that no longer allowed of synthesis. Everyone formulated a big either/or, the rigor of which sounded more like dictatorship than everlasting conversation."[22]

Bonald, the founder of traditionalism, was far removed from the idea of an everlasting evolution that progresses of its own accord. His faith in tradition never yields to anything like Schelling's philosophy of nature, Adam Müller's mixture of opposites, or Hegel's belief in history. For him, humanity is a herd of blind men led by a blind man, groping his way forward with a cane; tradition offers the only possibility of finding that content that the faith of men is capable of accepting metaphysically. The antitheses and distinctions that earned him the name of a Scholastic contain moral disjunctions—and not polarities in the sense of Schelling's philosophy of nature, which reveal "points of indifference," or merely dialectical negations of the historical process. He feels himself constantly between two abysses, between being and nothingness. But these are contrasts between good and evil, God and the devil, between which (according to Schmitt) "an either-or exists in the sense of a life and death struggle."[23] For de Maistre, the Church's value lies in its final decision without appeal. The words "'infallibility"' and "'sover-

21. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p. 53.
22. Ibid., pp. 53–54. Ball omits the middle sentence of the passage: "No medium exists, said Cardinal Newman, between catholicity and atheism."
23. Ibid., p. 55. Quotation marks notwithstanding, the entire passage from the beginning of the paragraph is a selective, but nearly identical, paraphrase of Schmitt's text, pp. 54–55.

eignty"' are for him "*parfaitement synonymes*" [perfectly synonymous]. He declares authority as such to be good once it exists; the important point is that there is no higher authority overlooking the decision.[24] With Cortés the typical picture is the bloody decisive battle that has flared up today between Catholicism and atheist socialism. According to Cortés, it is characteristic of bourgeois liberalism not to make a decision in this battle but instead to begin a discussion. He straightforwardly defined the bourgeoisie (Schmitt: Romanticism) as a "discussing class," *una clasa discutidora.* "It has thus been sentenced," adds the interpreter, and it now becomes clear why Schmitt made it his business in *Political Romanticism* to investigate the liberal-Romantic philosophy.[25]

Does there exist a reality at all without decision? Can one understand reality by any means other than analysis and judgment? In the place of objectification, the Romantic substituted narcissistic self-reflection. Neither cosmos, faith, people, nor history interested him in their own right. The state as a Romantic object, and culture, conviction, religion itself as Romantic objects: this corresponds to the Romantic-liberal view of things. All the same, even the most dissolute Romantic cannot forego decision. Faced with choices, he must also decide for himself. He decides in favor of the "higher third," a synthesis that recognizes both sides of an opposition and, with a fictitious superiority, leads them to a compromise. It is this abominable method, popularized by Hegel, of compromising between good and evil, yes and no, that has become the root of all of the evils of the nineteenth century, a method which Ernest Hello wrote about in his prodigious book *Philosophy and Atheism*: "If affirmation and negation are effectively identical, all doctrines become equivalent and indifferent. This is the radical and immense error so fundamental to our century; this is the mother of negation; this is that absolute doubt which is the very absence of philosophy, touted as the absolute philosophy."[26]

In the second section of chapter 2 of *Political Romanticism*, Schmitt traces the metaphysical provenance of this "synthetic" form of the decision, and thus arrives at Romanticism's "occasionalistic structure." Descartes is the supreme instance of this way of thinking. Proceeding from the argument that I exist because I think, he distinguished between internal and external, soul and body, *res cogitans* and *res extensa.* This gave rise to the challenge of reconciling the two, or of explaining the interaction of soul and body. The occasionalistic solution adopted by the systems of Géraud de Cordemoy, Geulincx, and Malebranche essentially entailed that God, the higher third, represents the synthesis of the expressions of the soul and body: all of mundane, finite reality is nothing but an occasion for God's activity, the only

24. The preceding passage is a condensed selection of excerpts from Schmitt, *Political Theology,* pp. 55–56.

25. The discussion of Cortés is a patchwork of citations from ibid., p. 59.

26. In French in the original. Ernest Hello (1828–1885), French Catholic philosopher and critic; his *Philosophie et Athéisme* was published in 1888. Schmitt also references Hello in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form,* trans. G. L. Ulmen (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 33.

real efficacy and true cause.[27] Now in Romanticism, God's place is supplanted by the subjectivity of the genius, who in an analogous manner perceives the external world as an occasion for his superior, synthesizing productivity. The opposition between the sexes becomes suspended in the "total human being"; the opposition between individuals in the higher organism, in the state or the people; the discord between states in the higher organization, the Church.[28] What counts as the true and higher reality is that which has the power not to resolve oppositions, but to paralyze them. Thus Adam Müller begins with a doctrine of oppositions that repudiates any absolute identity, and proclaims as his final principle a kind of "antithetical synthesis" which is nothing but opposition. Schlegel ranks Malebranche above even Descartes; Müller follows suit; and Novalis constantly cites occasionalism in his fragments.[29] The goal was to overcome the dead, mechanical rationalism of the eighteenth century. But the political and cultural danger of this philosophy set in when, instead of siding with a party, they abandoned the very opposition between legitimism and liberalism and left its resolution to God alone. As the essence of things is ever being sought in a different sphere from the one to which it belongs, speculation becomes a continuous pole-vaulting from one domain to the next. The worst is that the Romantic lays claim to an identity with the Creator that he cannot sustain. A fatal aversion to all personal activity leads to a theology in which God's own personality is annulled and to a politics in which conviction is indifference.

VII.

The artificial irrationalism of Romanticism stands in contradiction to reality; but according to Schmitt's clear-cut doctrine, reality is identical with the decision. How then does the decision—reality—relate, not to feigned irrationality, but to true irrationality? How does jurisprudence relate to the supreme authority? By pronouncing the two new realities (community and history) to be demiurges, Schmitt condemns them as blind, irrational creators, as demonic values. Their rule (if this word is understood in its Gnostic sense) rests on a conjunction of suprasensible and material powers, on a shadowy deception whose effects must inexorably lead, and have led, to catastrophes.[30] In his inquiry into the irrational,

27. Géraud de Cordemoy (1626–1684), Arnold Geulincx (1624–1669), and Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), rationalist philosophers in the Cartesian tradition, all of whom argued for occasionalism. See Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, p. 86.

28. Paraphrase of ibid., p. 88.

29. Novalis, pseudonym of Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg (1772–1801), German Romantic poet and philosopher.

30. According to Hans Jonas, the Gnostic demiurges, named Archons, "collectively rule over the world, and each individually in his sphere is a warder of the cosmic prison. . . . As guardian of his sphere, each Archon bars the passage of the souls that seek to ascend after death, in order to prevent their escape from the world and their return to God. The Archons are also the creators of the world, except where this role is reserved for their leader, who then has the name of *demiurge* (the world-artificer in Plato's *Timaeus*) and is often painted with the distorted features of the Old Testament God." Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 43–44.

Schmitt too follows the development of community and history, but for him they serve only as a substrate of the decision. Far from believing in the rationality of the material processes of history, or likewise in an immanent evolution towards increasingly superior forms, Schmitt has little regard for the Hegelian world-spirit or for the Marxist laws of economy. In such doctrines of history and society, he sees nothing but heresies, which for their part never cease to remain the objects of an evolutionary-historical consideration. Man understood as an "instrument of reason that develops in a dialectical process" is not Schmitt's concern. He is after metaphysical freedom, which is identical with metaphysical reality.

In his book *Dictatorship* (1921), which develops the political concept of *ratio*, he is so little convinced of the notion that reason develops continually out of the course of history that he discusses the French Revolution before the English Revolution, and *pouvoir constituant* [constituent power] prior to Cromwell's dictatorship.[31] And more decisively still: Cromwell's dictatorship, which can hardly be fathomed using the categories of reason, appears to him to be the proper and superior reason in spite of all rationalistic systems. The idea that facts depend on the will of God finds scant purchase in this system. Instead, what it teaches seems to be a spontaneous emergence of the divine into the chaos of history, the political miracle, one might say, the transgression of the laws of nature by the sovereign person. This results in the opposition of *ratio* to the irrational, which dominates Schmitt's work in the most diverse forms.

VIII.

In the era of Neoplatonism, this antithesis entered for the first time into the seminal debate that split the position of the Church from that of antiquity on crucial points. For Proclus and Dionysius Areopagita, reason and unreason are nearly identical with the opposition of good and evil, god and demon, creator and demiurge.[32] Superior reason is whatever is good; evil is what opposes reason: what is spiritless, inordinate, and mired in matter; an attitude without distance from one's own time. But the concept of *malum* in that eschatologically oriented age was in no way evaluated as damning or moralistic. "Evil" is only an inferior state of nature, a

31. *Die Diktatur: Von den Anfängen des modernen Souveränitätsgedankens bis zum proletarischen Klassenkampf* (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1921).

32. Proclus (412–485), Hellenistic philosopher whose work represents the pinnacle of Neoplatonic thought in late antiquity. Dionysius Areopagita (also known as Pseudo-Dionysius or Pseudo-Denys), sixth-century mystical theologian and Neoplatonic philosopher. His pseudepigraphal writings attained great influence in the Middle Ages and count among the foundational texts of Christian mysticism. Until the Renaissance, they were believed to have been written by the eponymous judge of the Areopagus, whose conversion by the apostle Paul is described in Acts 17:34. Ball devoted the central chapter of his *Byzantine Christianity* (1923) to Dionysius, arguing that his works on celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies reconciled individual mystical experience with a political form of institutional organization.

defect; a lack of insight, force, or impetus; it is a confusion of the will, a susceptibility to the influence of the physical passions. Thus the opposition of *ratio* and the irrational in the ancient era is also the opposition of rest and movement, of duration and time, of immortality and death, of absolute and contingent. It is in this form that the antithesis is transmitted from Dionysius to Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus. Yet already by the time of the pre-Scholastics, the moralizing interpretation of the concept of evil seems to have prevailed in practice if not in theory. (Influence of the Augustinian tradition.)[33] Whereas in the Oriental [i.e., Byzantine—*Tr.*] conception one was evil if one believed in death rather than believing in Christ, from the newer standpoint one is evil if one shirks the dictates of a rationalism that had for some time already ceased to be ecclesiastical.

The classical philosophers of the state, from Machiavelli to Hobbes up to de Maistre and Cortés, continue to see through the eyes of Thomas Aquinas, viewing the unrepresented people as an irrational entity that must be commanded by *ratio* and guided by it. But even so, these thinkers made claims for the antithesis at a time when the *ratio* of sovereigns and constitutions had long been led by the private interests of the ruling houses and classes. This bears emphasis for two reasons. First, because it is demonstrable that the moralistic vulgarization of the concept of *malum* is accompanied by a corresponding decline in the grandeur of the dictatorship of reason [*Vernunftdiktatur*] and of *ratio* itself; and second, because for Schmitt, following Cortés, this antithesis acquires a dogmatic severity that, in a political context, is not exactly scrupulous. The conviction that man is by nature vile, fallen, bestial rabble (rather than frail, ignorant, weak, and in need of emancipation)—this is the position of the Renaissance artists of statecraft and of the absolutism that succeeds it. It justifies their estimation of the unorganized mass of men as a malignant material to be domineered, against which all means are authorized.[34] In turn, the domestic opposition responds with a rancorous campaign against the putative dictatorship of rationalistic chiefs of state and constitutions, and credits the people *vice versa* with an instinctive goodness, reason, order, and ultimately the right to self-dictatorship.

Schmitt's position is the Latin one. Still more decisively than Bonald and de Maistre, he separates the "irrational" elements (nation and history) from reason. He even turns against the quasi-rationalistic state, the enlightened legalism that, because of its defection from theological authority, Schmitt defines as the state of exception. On just one point does he hold a bias: For him the moralistic theses on the nature of man (whether he is evil by nature or good by nature) become, in all their questionable extremity, the criterion of every doctrine of state he encounters. If Mably, Rousseau, and anarchists from Babeuf to Kropotkin hold that man,

33. In contradistinction to the Neoplatonic understanding of evil as an outcome of material nature, Augustine's definition of evil as "privation of good" helped to transform it into a moral category.

34. As Schmitt notes, the postlapsarian anthropology propounded by Cortés was far more extreme than the position of the Church itself; see *Political Theology*, p. 57.

the people, the proletariat, and even the *Lumpenproletariat* is naturally good—indeed, for the very salvation of the world—and if they are therefore irrationalists, then all *rational* minds, above all the Catholic philosophers of the state, declare with growing vehemence that man is blind, confused, depraved, and despicable.[35] Towards the end of *Political Theology*, where Schmitt develops the counterrevolutionary ideas of Donoso Cortés, the opposition of axioms is flagrantly illustrated in the antagonism between Cortés and Proudhon. The opposition inscribed Satanism on its flag; with the thesis that "man is good," they fight for the destruction of ideology. The ideologists, and especially Cortés, fight for metaphysics under the banner of God, with the axiom that "man is worse than a reptile."

The doctrine of man's depravity can hardly be surpassed in the apodictic form expressed by Cortés. His contempt for man knew no limits: man's blind reason, his weak will, and the ridiculous vitality of his carnal longings appeared to him so pitiable that all words in every human language do not suffice to express the complete lowness of this creature.[36] Schmitt emphasizes (and this counts equally *pro domo*) that Cortés wants to be understood here not *dogmatikos* but *antithetikos*, as a consequence of his opposition to the era.[37] Still, he concedes that legal despotism is what initially gives rise to the opposition's embitterment; he also makes reference to the conciliatory position of the Council of Trent, which would accord with an emancipatory, rather than oppressive, politics.[38] But when the author in his later writings treats the position that man is naturally good as an "anarchist doctrine," this shortcut sacrifices an element of the more clement truth to formal stringency. He can henceforth also identify the anarchic and irrational. Dostoyevsky's natural saints take on the scent of dynamite, and Sorel's proposal for irrational reform appears laughable in comparison with the *ratio* of the Church.

The dispute with Sorel (in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*) takes up considerable space, given Schmitt's characteristic concision.[39] Georges Sorel sought to see the crisis of Catholic thought in a new alliance of the Church with "irrationalism."[40]

35. Gabriel Bonnot Abbé de Mably (1709–1785), French philosopher and political writer who advocated the elimination of private property and the equality of men. François-Noël Babeuf (1760–1797), French journalist and radical agitator for proto-communistic ideals; he was executed for his leading role in the extremist Conspiracy of the Equals during the French Revolution. Prince Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin (1842–1921), influential Russian anarcho-communist and theorist of mutual aid.

36. This sentence is a direct citation from Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 58.

37. Ibid., p. 57: "When [Cortés] spoke of the natural evil of man, he polemicized against atheist anarchism and its axiom of the good man; he meant *agonikos* [arguing in pursuit of a political aim] and not *dogmatikos* [explicating a dogmatic position]." The change from *agonikos* to *antithetikos* is Ball's, as is the new spirit of resistance it implies.

38. Schmitt writes that "the dogma of Original Sin promulgated by the Council of Trent … asserts not absolute worthlessness but only distortion, opacity, or injury and leaves open the possibility of the natural good." Ibid., p. 57.

39. Georges Sorel (1847–1922), French revolutionary syndicalist and "irrationalist" philosopher who exercised an ideological influence over both communist and fascist movements. His writings stressed the importance of myth in politics and defended the use of violence as a means to revolutionary ends.

40. This sentence is a direct quotation from Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 12.

Here again the people are deemed "irrational," and specifically the people of the syndicates, the rebellious proletariat to whom Sorel ascribes a *force créatrice* [creative force]. For Schmitt and Cortés, it would be just as well to propose that the Church sign a pact with the devil himself. Schmitt's statements on this point are most illuminating. He concedes that in the nineteenth century, the Church was reinvigorated by every conceivable form of opposition to the Enlightenment and to rationalism. He mentions the converts from various traditionalist, mystical, and Romantic tendencies, and also a certain internal discontentedness within the Church concerning traditional apologetics, which many find to be merely spurious argumentation. He cannot, however, accord a fundamental importance to the irrational opposition, since the representatives of this movement proceed from scientific rationalism and fail to see that at the root of Catholic argumentation there lies a special way of thinking, the burden of proof for which is a specific juridical logic and whose focus of interest is the normative guidance of social life.[41] Irrationalism may combat the abstract state and the mechanical conception of the world—it may combat the "mathematical mythology"—but it does not affect the *ratio* of the Church.

IX.

In fact, the irrational can mean two things: the non-rational and the supra-rational. In the state, the opposition of *ratio* to the irrational always relates to the ordering of the unpredictable material out of which the state is made [*Staatsmateriel*], which must be handled with great care. It relates to the masses of people abandoned to their own intuitions, which are predominantly spontaneous impulses of the will, most often material in their origins and in their aims. In theology, this opposition points to the relation of the legal and the institutional to the inspirations of a superior, creative, spiritual order; it denotes their relation to the numinous, holy, and miraculous, to revelation. The Gnostic and Neoplatonic systems acknowledge various degrees of mediation, which bind the supra-rational first cause [*Urgrund*] to rational categories, to the stages of the hierarchy. For Dionysius Areopagita, God is the primal sun that draws all levels of being, even the most material, into its orbit so as to penetrate them. He does this not out of duty or logic, but lovingly and irrationally. The angels who proclaim the "law" of this penetration, who thus give the *ratio* of the commandments, stand in a deductive relationship to this first cause, at a distance from it. Furthermore, in this philosophico-theological system which had an immeasurable influence on Scholasticism and medieval thinking in general, the heavenly kingdom is founded in ecstacy, meaning the supra-rational, the irrational. The world of inspiration and revelation, the canonic and sacramental world, the very Church itself, precisely in its hierarchical constitution, represents a supernatural and supra-rational organism. Only through interpretation does this world become rational, that is, clear in its relation to its temporal, material state,

41. This passage paraphrases Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism,* p. 12.

which is devoid of reason. The *sacrificium intellectus* [sacrifice of the intellect] that the Church demands for its dogmas, miracles, and sacraments marks the point where, at all times, there appears postulated the inferiority of the powers of reason in the face of the incomprehensible.

This having been said, I see with Schmitt the rationality of the Church in its relationship to the "state," and I would characterize Schmitt himself as a rationalist in questions of the state. In theological questions, however, he is an irrationalist. Without anticipating what is to follow, I can add that Schmitt gets the rational force with which he analyzes and apprehends the pseudo-rationalistic state precisely from the irrational majesty of the grandeur of the Church, and from its juridical norms. But one could easily find a contradiction in Schmitt's writings, inasmuch as the system's theological form is not present from the outset; it does not arise from a firmly anchored faith but ensues from its consequences. While faith and theology are gained in his work by deductive coups and swift advances, they are nevertheless only attained in the course of his work's creation. His first writings appear to have originated, or at least to have been conceived, outside the Church; the unique heuristic style discernible in his sociological method points to this. His far-reaching contempt for traditional legality is likewise "irrational" at its origin, but this is the irrationality of the organic and of genius. Hence the difficulty of envisioning it as a system, a difficulty that vanishes only with his two latest works, *Political Theology* and *Roman Catholicism and Political Form.*

Of Schmitt's writings, *Dictatorship* (1921) is the one that leads its author to recognize his problem and to freedom. In his attempts here to grasp the juridical forms of the *reformatio,* Schmitt makes discoveries that will be decisive for his following works as well as his theology. Since Machiavelli, the pseudo-rational state of nature [*Naturstaat*] appears as a revolt against the *plein pouvoir* [absolute power] of the religious sovereign, as a state of exception. In a diagnosis (given reference in the notes) of the concept of law from Thomas Aquinas to Montesquieu and Kant, one continually discovers, in the most diverse constitutions and doctrines of the state, the word "dictatorship." According to Thomas Aquinas, law is a *dictamen practicae rationis* [a dictate of practical reason].[42] For Locke, what occurs in the state is what "calm reason and conscience dictate."[43] The Massachusetts *Declaration of the Rights of Man* (1780) presents in Article 2 the concept of the "dictates of his own conscience." New Hampshire affirms the unalienable right to worship God "according to the dictates of his own conscience and reason," and even Kant speaks of the "*dictamen rationis* " [dictate of reason]. For the entire absolutist and Jacobin periods, to rule meant to establish or maintain a "dictatorship of reason," over the *incondita et confusa turba* [the disordered and confused multitude]. It is characteristic of the dictator himself that, whether he takes power as commissary or by his own authority, he is always issued (either by a foreign sovereignty or by

42. Schmitt, *Die Diktatur,* p. 10, note 2.
43. This and the following two citations are in English in the original.

his own) the mandate to reform, to reestablish the conditions of law after the chaos into which the state had fallen.

One cannot mistake a certain confusion in this most extensive of Schmitt's works, and it is interesting enough to find out why. It is supposed to determine the juridical forms of the *reformatio*, but the problem arises that the *reformatio* presupposes an absolute sovereign, the Pope as principal [*Auftraggeber*]; hence what is commonly called reform can by no means be vindicated as a revolt against the religious sovereign. An opposition is introduced between commissarial and sovereign dictatorship, but it is untenable in the form that Schmitt presents. It just permits one to recognize the point where the author turns from the naturally irrational to the theologically irrational. The papally appointed dictator of the Middle Ages is an executive commissary [*Aktionskommissar*]. He suspends existing rights in order to restore the broken condition of the law and the state. Insofar as restoration and *reformatio* have proceeded since the Middle Ages from a constituted organ—be it Pope or prince—one could call the commissariat a rational dictatorship. But an irrational dictatorship would result if according to Schmitt's definition "even someone who has no constituted post but is only *a deo excitatus* [called by God] eliminates the established order," such that one is confronted with a disintegration of all social forms for the sake of their restoration at a higher level.[44] One need only ask oneself in what sense, political or theological, this dictatorship is irrational; or, in a word, whether and to what degree anything like an irrational politics can exist.

The *homo a deo excitatus* to whom Schmitt refers is a figure familiar from the writings of the Protestant monarchomachs; all the same, Schmitt only cites by name one example of this kind of individual sovereignty at the center of the new nature of state: Cromwell.[45] "The Puritan Revolution was the most conspicuous example of a rupture in the continuity of the existing order of state."[46] But was Cromwell a sovereign dictator, fully born out of freedom, or was he rather a usurper who knew that when he invoked God his soldiers would support him? Now, for the characteristics of sovereignty that Schmitt enumerates in *Political Theology* (1922): "Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception."[47] The state of exception consists in "the suspension of the entire existing order."[48] In its absolute form, the exceptional case occurs "when a situation in which legal prescriptions can be valid must first be brought about."[49] Also important is the proposition that sovereignty is "not a monopoly of constraint or domination, but a monopoly of decision."[50] These are its rational characteristics. When it comes to its irrational foundations, however,

44. See Schmitt, *Die Diktatur*, chap. 4.
45. The monarchomachs ("those who fight against the monarch") were French Protestant theorists of the late 16th century who challenged absolutism and religious persecution.
46. Schmitt, *Die Diktatur*, p. 131.
47. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 5.
48. Ibid., p. 12.
49. Ibid., p. 13.
50. Paraphrase of ibid.

Schmitt makes clear that he is interested solely in the exception, in the extreme case; since in the exception "the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition."[51] To paraphrase, one could say that there are situations in history where life is so fatally tied and gagged that no legal solution any longer seems possible. The stream of life then flows back in all its profusion to the source and imposes its right [*Recht*] according to higher laws. Life attains its right according to a superior mode and means, an eternal principle that provides guidance even in threatening times and against all of the approbations of state and law. It is the given historical situation for the emergence of the saint, or, to stay in the domain of the political, of the *homo a deo excitatus*. A miracle must take place, and the miracle will again be believed.

But how do miracles and politics relate to one another? Are there political saints, *homines a deo excitati*, who direct mercantile and martial campaigns? Can the irrational govern the politics of a state by direct intervention? Is a sovereign dictatorship at all possible inside the state? Cromwell is without doubt a usurper, were it only for his vociferous opposition to the Church. To be sure, he acted on irrational motives; he saw the source of his authority in God, and did not predicate his sovereignty on the people, as did the radical democracies of his time. He leaves no doubt about the fact that, before God, any terrestrial authority becomes merely relative or fades away. But physical power supported him as he spoke, and not the miraculous. He was favored by fortuitous commercial contracts, not divine visions and inspirations. *Enfin*, he is a heretic. Never will he become canonical; he was no sovereign. By consequence, it must be said that in this book Schmitt still believes in a sovereignty outside of the Church. But as a Roman Catholic one must adhere to the principle that nothing within the domain of politics can be founded on the irrational except a commissarial dictatorship, in which an instrument, under the command of an irrational power, establishes the higher intentions mandated into effect by rational means. The *homo a deo excitatus*, or the saint in the Puritan and German conception of the Reformation, is a rebel who believes not in the prince of peace but in the god of war, and who exploits the wealth of the nation to confirm his political mission. So long as a universal faith does not prevail, the saint and the affairs of the state exclude each other. The irrational can never come into direct relation with the state. That is the sense of the Church *qua* institution, and also of commissarial dictatorship. The sovereign dictator can only be legitimated within the Church.

51. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 15.

X.

Any effort to apply the antithesis analogously to the relation between commissarial and sovereign dictatorship was doomed to fail so long as Schmitt believed (as in *Dictatorship*) in the supra-rational, ecstatic power of an individual enemy of the Church, and in an individually founded sovereignty. In *Dictatorship*, Schmitt still succumbs to the views and interests of material irrationalists à la Sorel, against whom he will later crusade with such vehemence. Certain anti-mechanistic instincts betray themselves here, reflecting his modern point of departure. But this does not impact the fact that the concrete opposition of commissarial and sovereign consists, if anything, only in the relationship of the papal executive commissary to his principal. By the same token, Schmitt can define surprising new characteristics of sovereignty but is incapable of demonstrating plausibly how the emergence of a *homo a deo excitatus* detached from the Church—or even, as in the case of Cromwell, in the most intense contradictions with it—should be possible without leading *in praxi* to a confusion of all legal and moral concepts.

Now, in *Political Theology*, which appears one year later, he resumes the analysis of the concept of sovereignty, and this work (as the title already announces) transposes the concept of sovereignty exclusively into the domain of theology. That sovereignty is not "a monopoly of constraint or domination, but a monopoly of decision" guarantees this turn and rules out any further misunderstandings. The aforementioned authority to suspend the law now appears as one of the characteristics of sovereignty. This authority can only be due in essence to a spiritual power that is superior to politics, that exerts a law superior to political law. When Schmitt refers to Bodin's *Vraies remarques de souveraineté* (chap. 10 of book 1 of the *République*) and describes it as Bodin's achievement and success to have introduced decision into the concept of sovereignty, one recalls that Bodin was really only familiar with a commissarial dictatorship (which presupposes the principal's sovereignty) and not with a sovereign dictatorship.[52] At the time only the Pope exercised a sovereign dictatorship, which was delegated to him by the councils and which he still exercises *de facto* to this day. One can debate (and it has long been debated) whether this dictatorship is

52. "In defining a dictatorship, Schmitt's starting point was Bodin's distinction between sovereignty and dictatorship. 'Sovereignty,' according to Bodin, 'is the absolute and perpetual power of a republic which the Latins call *maiestatem* . . . ' and which is exercised either by the people or the prince. The dictator, on the other hand, is 'neither prince, nor sovereign magistrate . . . ,' but one who holds a commission from the sovereign to accomplish certain tasks, such as 'to wage war,' 'reform the state,' and similar assignments. The dictator's powers are neither absolute nor perpetual." George Schwab, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1970), p. 30.

justly founded, and in what sense. That is the problem of the churches' striving for union.

In *Dictatorship*, Schmitt's own personalism became a danger to him, much as the concept of the "legitimate usurper" became dangerous to de Maistre. But the conceptual tour de force of this book [i.e., *Political Theology*], its comprehensive scientific accomplishment, seems to reveal things to him in a new and humbler light. He now connects the problem of sovereignty to the form of law [*Rechtsform*] in general, and rules out any individual solution of the kind the book on dictatorship held possible. That would only be the case if the individual coincided with the supreme ideological authority, which cannot be maintained for Cromwell, Münzer, Mazzini, or other individual attempts to establish a dictatorship outside the Church.[53]

The concept of personality in Schmitt's oeuvre takes on a greater importance with each new work. I have already pointed out the degree to which the scientific problem and the personal problem are linked for this ideologist. Who seeks to give longevity to his own person must be mindful of the identity of his expressions. The dignity and value of the person cannot be maintained otherwise. If this conviction coincides with a propensity for the absolute and the definitive, then one encounters the religious personality that aspires to an "eternal life," to immortality, to a sublime existence beyond death and chance. I called this attitude eschatological, Catholic, and I would like to refer anyone looking to know more to a little-known book by the Spaniard Miguel de Unamuno.[54] The relation of the person to reality and to the beyond, or, following Schmitt, to the state and to form of law, practically makes up the substance of *Political Theology*. A dictatorship is unthinkable without a determining personality, and equally unthinkable without a representation of dignity and value. Just as there is no form, or indeed any reality, without decision, so no decision is possible without a person who decides. According to Schmitt, the personality cannot be thought apart from the absolute juristic form: "In the proper meaning of the subject lies the problem of the juristic form."[55]

In chapter 2 of *Political Theology*, the author enters into a disputation with recent German philosophy of law concerning the problem of form. A vigorous personalism spells out the distance separating Schmitt's system from the system of the

53. Thomas Münzer (1489–1525), proto-socialistic Protestant theologian and leader of revolutionary uprisings during the Peasants' War. Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872), Italian publicist, politician, and revolutionary patriot, instrumental in the national unification of Italy.

54. Miguel de Unamuno, "L'essence du catholicisme," chap. 4 in *Le sentiment tragique de la vie* (Paris, 1917). [Note in the original.]

55. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 35.

present, whose impersonal and anonymous physiognomy excludes almost any independent consciousness. Kelsen's teaching, whereby the state is itself the legal order, can as little agree with Schmitt's theological insight as Krabbe's, in which the abstract state is itself the sovereign. "The legal interest is not the highest interest"; that of the metaphysical person is for him superior.[56] Erich Kaufmann's *Critique of the Neo-Kantian Philosophy of Law* (and of its sterile abstractions) appears to be "the sole expression of a new, spiritual intensity."[57] Instead of epistemological shadow-boxing, Kaufmann delivers a philosophy of history. He follows the given facts rather than letting abstractions gain the upper hand. He puts the state, and not the law, at the center of his critical reflections. Neo-Kantianism, imprisoned by its own conceptual patchworks, cannot hold back life's assaults. Kaufmann cautions against the temptation to violate the last remnants of irrationality that have escaped rational formulation; yet here again "'irrational"' signifies the forces of life in general, and not the reasons [*Gründe*] of *ratio.* Thus Kaufmann's critique also concludes with the problem of the supreme form, without it becoming clear what this form finally consists of.

Schmitt has the advantage over his predecessors of his Catholic education and his passionately ideological temperament. He makes a powerful repudiation of the objective and impersonal abstract conception of form (Kelsen, Krabbe, Preuss), which places an anonymous, formalistic authority at the beginning of things.[58] Law is present where decisions are made; where there is a decision without appeal, there is the sovereign; and where the sovereign's decisions transpire, there is the state of exception. These are clear and extremely vivid definitions, which, with the author's stylistic quality, have not only a juristic significance but a universal one. If the philosopher's special task is to create tensions within the intellectual economy [*Denkwirtschaft*] of his time, then what Schmitt calls up here is a crisis in the concepts of sovereignty, one which must not be underestimated: for "all tendencies of modern constitutional development point toward eliminating the sovereign in this (theological and ideological) sense."[59]

56. A paraphrase of Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 24.

57. Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1922), p. 27; the English translation omits this passage. Erich Kaufmann (1880–1972), leading Weimar-era jurist whose work combated then-dominant trends toward legal positivism. His *Kritik der neukantischen Rechtsphilosophie* appeared in 1921.

58. Hans Kelsen (1881–1973), jurist and legal philosopher who advanced a positivistic theory of "pure law" based on impersonal norms; Kelsen was one of Schmitt's most sustained intellectual adversaries. Hugo Krabbe (1857–1936), Dutch public lawyer. Hugo Preuss (1860–1925), German constitutional lawyer and political theorist most renowned for having drafted the constitution of the Weimar Republic.

59. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 7; the parenthetical insertion is Ball's.

XI.

Still lacking, however, is the most essential element of legal form: its universally binding force. What qualifies Schmitt's doctrine of law as political theology is his idiosyncratic introduction and implementation of a masterfully applied analogy between political and theological norms, between theology and jurisprudence. His investigations into the history of ideas reveal the remarkable fact that the constitutional [*staatsrechtlichen*] constructions of the legislators correspond in each case to the metaphysical constructions of the philosophers. This "law," this analogy, attains in Schmitt's hands the virtue of an infallible method wherever he is concerned with developing the sense of a political doctrine, just as much as of a superior metaphysical notion. Descartes and Leibniz were already aware of the existence of such an analogy. *Merito partitionis nostrae exemplus*, said the latter, *a theologia ad jurisprudentiam transtulimus, quia mira utriusque facultatis similitude.* ["We have deservedly transferred the model of our division from theology to jurisprudence because the similarity of these two disciplines is astonishing."][60] With Schmitt, this analogy, which had hitherto only served historical knowledge, leads finally to the definition of theology as the supreme form of jurisprudence, insofar as all of its concepts develop within theology and proceed from it. "All significant concepts of the modern theory of state," the third chapter of *Political Theology* states, "are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts."[61]

What is the "sociological consideration of legal concepts"? It is the endeavor to trace the historical forms of legal concepts back to their origin, and from there to draw conclusions concerning the absolute juridical form. It is the attempt to reach the absolute starting not from the abstract, but from historical activity. To this end, a sociology of legal concepts calls for a "consistent and radical ideology."[62] Except that an ideology is employed concretely and seeks to make its way through historical material; it proceeds from historical configurations and manifestations. The philosopher who employs such a sociology owes his results to a "radical conceptualization, a consistent thinking that is pushed into metaphysics and theology."[63] The analogy in question is the instrument of such sociological

60. G. W. Leibniz, *Nova methodus docendi discendique juris* (1667), sections 4 and 5; quoted in Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 37.
61. Ibid., p. 36.
62. Ibid., p. 42.
63. Ibid., p. 46.

observation, and indeed its most distinguished instrument. With this analogy, the philosopher penetrates the systems that present themselves to him; he construes and conceives them by way of this analogy. The question of the facts and structure of a system always boils down to the question of what conscious or unconscious theology rules over it. One has not understood a system, an epoch, until one has discovered the god or the idol in which it places its faith and trust. The language of God, theology, is the highest concept not only of jurisprudence but also of art, politics, the person, even of number and time.

Beside the antithesis of *ratio* and irrational, the juridico-theological analogy is the most important structural principle of Schmitt's writings. Upon closer inspection, however, both of these principles turn out to be one and the same: for theology relates to jurisprudence—as Leibniz's *partitio nostra* also shows—as the irrational in its higher sense relates to *ratio.* In this context too, Schmitt follows up on findings from his 1919 *Political Romanticism.* It was there that he first mentioned and utilized the analogy. *Dictatorship* marked a wrong turn, or perhaps it was written prior to the book on Romanticism.[64] In *Dictatorship,* the antithesis did not agree with the analogy, leading to a confusion of basic concepts. The unity of Schmitt's work rests on his explication of the relations of reason [*Vernunftsbeziehungen*] to the supra-rational, which is the principle that gives it form [*Formprinzip*]. These same relations accurately reflect the relations of jurisprudence to theology, and not (as in *Dictatorship*) the relations of jurisprudence to the arbitrariness of an usurpation.

I would not want to neglect to cite briefly some examples of the analogy. In *Political Romanticism,* Schmitt shows why the typical Romantic is incapable of comprehending reality [*Wirklichkeit*]. He is unable to do this because he sees the highest conceptual reality [*Realität*], God, replaced by two pseudo-realities, community and history, which he mistakes for real authorities. The Romantic, the genius of his day whose task it would be to comprehend the age and give it form, sees himself faced with the total impossibility of doing this task justice. He is condemned to impotence, to endless discussion, to a floundering rhetoric. He seeks his freedom in skeptical or ironic consent, in cheap sophisms. He is capable neither of deciding nor of realizing the problem, since for him the highest concept, the reality of God, is destroyed. But this is why Schmitt for his part can grasp Romanticism so exceptionally, since its political situation leads him to its metaphysical and theological structure, wherein the conflicts of this movement open onto a universal plurality.

Another example is taken from *Dictatorship.* The metaphysics of Descartes taught that God has only a *volonté générale* [general will], and that His nature is

64. There is no evidence to support this chronology; it is likely a result of wishful thinking.

alien to all particulars. The legislation of Rousseau stipulates analogously that the individual must renounce all of his particular rights for the sake of the *volonté générale* (as the criterion of the state's omnipotence), which returns their rights to them under the form of the general law. Rousseau defines the concept of the legislator itself in such a way that its activity corresponds approximately to the occasionalistic causes that appear in Malebranche's metaphysical series as the *lois générales* initiated by God. But from the laws of nature as elaborated by Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz, there already ensue Holbach's "laws of economic development," to which the state is supposed to submit itself.[65]

In Schmitt's most recent work, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, one finds the concluding proposition that a mechanistic age can only ever represent the supreme being beyond things as the general motor, as the operator and installer of the cosmic machine.[66] In the same work, one is also confronted with his pivotal assessment of religion in modern European society as a religion of private affairs and private property.

XII.

It is continually surprising how much the typically Thomist style of posing questions lives on in Schmitt, or takes on new life. That medieval system, entirely turned toward experience, defended the irrationality of dogmas by showing that their supra-rationality need not be contrary to reason, or even unreasonable. It used all strengths of the *ancilla philosophia* to define the ties linking the supra-rational and reason, theology and philosophy, holy and profane.[67] In *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* as well, the issue of *ratio* is at the center of the configuration, a very artful configuration that is so successful that the scientific question flows, even stylistically, into the theological secret. The very title introduces the oppositional pairing of theology and politics noted above; only now the opposition has been elevated to the sphere of the absolute, where theology gives rise to a "Roman Catholicism" and politics to a "Political Form." To say it straightaway, this is also the other opposition between irrational and rational, with the radical intensification that both parts of the antithesis are transferred into theology, insofar as the rational power to give form [*Formkraft*] to politics is credited to "Roman Catholicism." In other words, the Roman Church safeguards irrationality and is

65. Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723–1789), French-German Enlightenment philosopher; a radical materialist and atheist, he viewed the universe as being governed by mechanistic laws rather than through divine intervention.

66. See Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 13.

67. A typical Scholastic formula, *ancilla philosophia theologiae* translates as "philosophy is the handmaiden of theology."

able to make its imprint on rational forms of the material state, which it apprehends and unifies according to norms.

Ratio, in Latin, means not only "reason" [*Vernunft*] but also "explanation," "measure," "law," and "method." *Ratio* is by and large the mode of comportment of one thing or person to another, the explanation of the nature of a phenomenon; and the word moreover carries the general meaning of "arrangement" [*Einrichtung*]. In the end, reason can only understand what announces itself to it, and one could therefore say that the *ratio* of the Church is bound to revelation above and to the state below. Having said this, *ratio* by its nature presupposes the concept of *repraesentatio*, which—to linger for a moment on this grammatical pedantry—denotes making something present [*Vergegenwärtigung*] through its figurative likeness, and which by nature embraces objects of a nonfigurative, ideological, irrational order. Those are the basic concepts around which the Latin Carl Schmitt arranges his work and which, true to his antithesis, he employs in the relation of *ratio* to *repraesentatio*: a Scholastic theme in concretely modern garb.

That this sociology inevitably leads to Roman Catholicism is no surprise, given the retrospective aims of this method. All concepts of legislative power and metaphysics that have appeared in the course of European history over the last centuries and that have gained influence over the formation of society trace back to the medieval supremacy of the Roman Church—and demonstrate furthermore that this Church is, as Schmitt says, "the consummate agency of the juridical spirit and the true heir of Roman jurisprudence."[68] It has been its specific vocation to determine the relationship of supra-rational intelligence to the state, ever since Peter's successors assumed the office of bridge construction from the ancient Roman *pontifex maximus*. Not that there was no Roman law outside the Church, but, just as the Greek Areopagus was the most supreme authority of both cult and law, so too was the ancient Roman *pontifex maximus*, and so is the Christian pontiff.[69]

Ratio is the bridge that links the concrete God to the concrete people, and not, as in the work of the so-called rationalists, the bridge from a skeptical and abstract philosophy to a demonic reality. *Ratio* calls for faith in the reality of God; it postulates a representation, a concretization [*Vergegenwärtigung*] of this faith. The rationalism of the Church resides, according to Schmitt, "in institutions," in a "specific, formal superiority over the matter of human life."[70] Catholic argumentation is based on "a particular mode of thinking whose method of proof is a specific

68. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, p. 18.
69. The Areopagus was the highest legislative council and judicial court of ancient Athens.
70. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, p. 8.

juridical logic and whose focus of interest is the normative guidance of human social life," and this formal characteristic of Roman Catholicism "is based on a strict realization of the principle of representation."[71] The Pope is not the supreme prophet, but rather the deputy, the Vicar of Christ; he represents the absent, ecstatic, irrational person of Christ; he represents the community of saints (absent in ecstasy), the body of Christ, the Church. "In such distinctions" (not prophet, but deputy), says Schmitt, "lie the rational creative power of the Church." In representation lies its will to take responsibility and public form—in opposition to all religions for which conviction is a private affair.[72]

In Roman Catholicism, Schmitt locates the political, juridical form, indeed the ideological form *sine qua non*, and with this he guarantees all the higher categories of European civilization. The formal relations have already been made clear; but the position that Schmitt attributes to the Roman Church, with regard to its content, is explained by its power of representation. "It represents the *civitas humana*. It represents in every moment the historical connection to the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. It represents the person of Christ himself," with all of the attributes, one could add, that the Creed gives him, among which the juridical attributes take a decisive place.[73] For according to the Creed, Christ suffers under Pontius Pilate, meaning that the irrational person suffers under politics.[74] And following the Creed, Christ comes to judge the quick and the dead: the *irrationalia* and the *rationalia*, if one may interpret with [Francis] Bacon of Verulam under the living, theology, and under the dead, philosophy.

It is not by chance that Schmitt defends the living eschatology of some modern Catholics (Veuillot, Bloy, Cortés, Robert Hughes [*sic*] Benson) against Sorel.[75] Here he also could have referenced above all the canonizations and beatifications of recent decades, in which the "mythological" vitality contested by Sorel finds its

71. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism*, pp. 12 and 8. The second quoted passage reads in full: "This formal character of Roman Catholicism is based on a strict realization of the principle of representation, the particularity of which is most evident in its antithesis to the economic-technical thinking dominant today."

72. In a diary entry dated July 31, 1920, Ball writes: "The great, universal blow against rationalism and dialectics, against the cult of knowledge and abstractions, is: the incarnation. Ideas and symbols have become flesh in the divine-human person; they have suffered and bled in and with the person, they have been crucified. It is no longer just the intellect but the whole person that is representative of the spiritual heaven . . ." Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, p. 192.

73. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 19.

74. Ball refers here to the Apostles' Creed: *passus sub Pontio Pilato.*

75. Louis Veuillot (1813–1883), French journalist and zealous proponent of Ultramontanism, a religious philosophy stressing the absolute authority of the Pope. Léon Bloy (1846–1917), choleric French author and Roman Catholic convert who elected a lifestyle of destitution and ardent faith. Robert Hugh Benson (1871–1914), English novelist, essayist, and former Anglican priest, who converted to Catholicism in 1903.

canonical expression. Eschatology is most closely connected to questions of representation as Schmitt treats them. The *repraesentatio* originates in the aspiration towards permanence and finality; Unamuno in his philosophy of the irrational declares the "*soif d'immortalité*" [thirst for immortality] that shapes representation to be the authentic discovery of Christianity and Catholicism. "*Quid ad aeternitatem?* [What is this to eternity?] This is the capital question. . . . The specifically Catholic religious quality is immortalization and not justification in the Protestant mode."[76] Institutional representation is the actualization of immortality, of permanence. It gives Roman Catholicism that "pathos of authority" that Schmitt describes as its political power, that dignity and superiority over political and social contingency. It can therefore become, at any time, the source of a new right [*Recht*], since any new political constellation can only obtain its law and measure from the absolute. Permanence, where it is represented, decides; for (to speak with Unamuno) "what is of greater, of more sovereign, utility than the immortality of the soul?"[77] And so the representative forms of Roman Catholicism also contain that pathos of decision that Schmitt described in his earlier writings as "sovereign dictatorship." This world of the representative is what gives the Church its power in three major respects: "the aesthetic form of art; the juridical form of law; finally, the glorious achievement of a world-historical form of power."[78]

Those impulses that inspire "anti-Roman temper," however, reveal themselves consequently to be enemies of the norm, equally hostile to political responsibility and to artistic form.[79] For whatever reason, these forces try to challenge the *ratio* of the Church, to evade or sublate it in a "higher third term"; they are directed against metaphysical dignity and against the heroism of man. They drive toward despotism, or an uncontrollable mysticism, or the negation of authority. Objectors may, like Rudolf Sohm, see in the juristic nature of the Church their own fall from grace, or may experience with Dostoyevsky a shudder of horror and terror before law and authority.[80] They may, like the Freemasons, attack this supernatural institution as inhuman; or they may desire, like Bakunin and Marx, to dispose with ideology itself. What these adversaries have in common is an aversion to the rational formative power of the absolute. But Schmitt counters that this power demonstrates its humanity precisely inasmuch as it can only assert its supra-

76. English translation from Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton: Princeton University, 1972), pp. 73 and 75.
77. Ibid., p. 83.
78. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 21.
79. Ibid., p. 3.
80. Rudolf Sohm (1841–1917), German Protestant jurist and historian of law who maintained the irreconcilability of ecclesiastical law with secular law. He is the unstated target of Schmitt's *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*.

rational values and render them visible through their concrete realization and self-representation. All of those adversaries of the Church play into the hands of the modern state of consumption, hostile to form and norm alike, however little they may intend such a fatal alliance, which they anxiously struggle to evade by whatever sophisms. In contrast, it is the great significance of the Church that it also invites those to whom it addresses its representation, be it the isolated individual or the state as the formalized collectivity of individuals.

With this, we have returned to our point of departure: the ideologist's opposition to the mechanized consumption of the modern age. The capitalist industrial state of today, as well as the socialist state of tomorrow, know or recognize neither form nor representation; they lack even the power of a language of their own. They are founded on vacuous and nonexistent needs; their fatalistic objective is a self-governing and self-regulating flow of economic processes. But no personal, political, ideological, or rational connection is possible with an automaton. As long as this state persists in its astonishing fervor against reason, it can hardly be interested in any mediation of supra-rational values. But the Church can wait. "*Sub specie* of its duration that outlives everything else, it will be the *complexio* of all that survives."[81]

— Translation by Matthew Vollgraff

81. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism*, p. 38; translation modified. The concept of *complexio oppositorum* derives from Schmitt: "The Catholic Church is a complex of opposites, a *complexio oppositorum*. There appears to be no antithesis it does not embrace." Ibid., p. 7.

Afterword: Hugo Ball's Theology

MATTHEW VOLLGRAFF

In 1970, the jurist, ex-Nazi, and perennial *cause célèbre* Carl Schmitt was interviewed about his relationship to Hugo Ball. "Hugo Ball," he reflected, "encountered a kind of brother in me. We both came from very Catholic families; and then we were dragged into the Wilhelmine age and had to see how we'd find our place. Each of us achieved this in our own way. This is how I explain the otherwise inexplicable enthusiasm of his essay."[1] The essay in question is "Carl Schmitt's Political Theology," published in 1924 and translated into English here for the first time. Ball's review was one of the first-ever published examinations of Schmitt's work, one that even today reveals new aspects of his theologico-political theory.

A former Dadaist turned Catholic oblate, Ball saw in Schmitt not just a commanding juridical intelligence but also a new Christian philosopher, "great and expansive like a Scholastic."[2] That was a term that Schmitt had applied to himself once before, in his 1917 essay "The Visibility of the Church: A Scholastic Consideration," published in the journal *Summa*—where Ball, fresh from his break with Dada, had likely read it. There, in language one might call esoteric, Schmitt first addressed the perennial problem that would inform Ball's review: namely, how to square divine authority with secular law.

To those for whom the Church's institutional presence in the world conflicted with the eschatological tenets of Christian faith, Schmitt answered that "the visibility of the Church is based on something invisible. . . . There is no invisible Church that is not visible and no visible Church that is not invisible. Thus the Church can be *in* but not *of* this world."[3] Evidence of this text's profound effect on Ball can be seen in his own *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, published two years later. "We do not believe in the visible church," he proclaims, "we believe in an invisible Church; whoever wants to fight in its battles is a member. We believe in a

1. Joachim Schickel, "Gespräch über Hugo Ball" (1970), in *Gespräche mit Carl Schmitt* (Berlin: Merve, 1993), p. 33. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
2. Hugo Ball, *Briefe 1911–1927*, ed. Annemarie Schütt-Hennings (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1957), p. 171.
3. Carl Schmitt, "The Visibility of the Church," in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 51–52.

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holy Christian revolution and in the *unio mystica* of the freed world."[4] It is possible that Schmitt's "Scholastic" treatise even encouraged Ball on the path to his re-conversion in 1920; and when his engagement with the jurist's work intensified in the autumn of 1923, it was already tinged with a sense of profound personal significance and identification.

The appearance of *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* that same year seemed, moreover, to cement Schmitt's reputation as a Catholic ideologist of consequence. In this vigorous defense of ecclesiastical involvement in political life, he argued for the Church as a superior institutional power among nations, one that embodied the continuity of an imperial order: "The Church is the consummate agency of the judicial spirit and the true heir of Roman jurisprudence."[5]

Meanwhile, 1923 also saw the publication of Hugo Ball's second book, *Byzantine Christianity*, a magisterial hagiography of three Eastern ascetics and mystics that sociologist and philosopher Jacob Taubes has called "one of the really powerful works in the German language."[6] It is a work of scintillating spiritual depth, written in a style that is at once lyrical and scholarly, and is as far in spirit from Schmitt's Rome as Byzantium itself. For whereas Schmitt extols the "political power of Catholicism" as its "absolute realization of authority,"[7] finding in the Pope's vicarious sovereignty the metaphysical root of all political representation, Ball dwells instead on paragons of abnegation such as John Climacus and Simeon Stylites; he is concerned with individuals whose ecstatic devotion binds them to a higher, hieratic order.

Thus if Ball had a political theology of his own, it took as its point of departure not the sovereign but the saint. Against the "archaic ideal of the hero that has been reborn in Germany," he opposed the precedents of his Byzantine saints, in hopes that these pneumatic heroes might ultimately inspire individuals to abandon worldly values and return to the Church.[8] The aim was the same as it had been in 1919, "a holy Christian revolution and in the *unio mystica* of the freed world," but this revolution no longer relied upon material expedients; on the contrary, Ball's religious militancy was itself a form of politics by other means.

A case in point is his interpretation of the Neoplatonic theologian Dionysius Areopagita, which is the theme of the core chapter of *Byzantine Christianity*. The writings of Pseudo-Dionysius (as the apocryphal author is otherwise known) depict a sacred, all-encompassing hierarchy bridging heaven and earth by infinitesimal

4. Hugo Ball, *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, trans. Brian Harris (New York: Columbia University, 1993), p. 95.
5. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, p. 18.
6. Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford, CA: Stanford, University, 2004), p. 65.
7. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, p. 18.
8. Hugo Ball, "Notizen zum Versuch eines Vorwortes für das 'Byzantinische Christentum,'" in *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit: Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Hans Burkhard Schlichting (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), p. 301.

degrees, at whose center "the highest priests and the lowest angels converge."[9] The institutional structure of the terrestrial Church figures accordingly as the earthly realization of a divinely revealed order. Kurt Flasch observes that for Ball, Pseudo-Dionysius's "central idea of the hierarchy seemed to unite mystical individualism with the system of Roman law; it appeared to allow the integration of anarchism."[10] Or, to put it differently, it provided him with a conceptual schema whereby the political could be definitively subsumed into the theological. Giorgio Agamben has commented that "the central idea that runs throughout the Dionysian corpus is that what is sacred and divine is hierarchically ordered, and its barely disguised strategy aims . . . at the sacralization of power. . . . Hugo Ball was the first to grasp the true nature of the Pseudo-Dionysian angelology."[11]

Ball recognized a rather different "sacralization of power" at work in the double-edged Schmittian thesis that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."[12] For while the analogy locates the originary forms of political (or institutional) power in a higher, inaccessible sphere, once it has been unmoored from its religious foundation the axiom invites the danger of sacralizing power per se, of apotheosizing the sovereign. This is the kernel of Ball's critique of Carl Schmitt's "political theology," understood in the general sense. In his 1921 work *Dictatorship*, Schmitt readily credited the Puritan revolutionary Oliver Cromwell with the establishment of a sovereign dictatorship; despite his defiance of the Church, he is likened to a *homo a deo excitatus*, a man called by God. Ball bristles at this, rejoining that "the sovereign dictator can only be legitimated within the Church."[13] The Pope distributes temporal power to worldly rulers; it cannot be taken by force. Schmitt's philosophy consequently threatened to sanction a form of Caesaropapism, wherein the secular sovereign forcibly arrogates to himself the Church's spiritual authority.

By the time Ball's review was published, Schmitt had already retracted the position taken in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* and suspended religious theory from juridicial practice.[14] Only thus could his thinking have remained viable in the service of extreme-nationalistic ideology. In a diary entry from 1924, Ball bitterly rejected Schmitt's ideas of dictatorship as exaggerated and destructive, benefiting only "the Prussian restoration and the politics of revenge. . . . The same

9. Hugo Ball, *Byzantinische Christentum: Drei Heiligenleben* (Munich: Duncker und Humblot, 1923), p. 245.

10. Kurt Flasch, "Von der 'Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz' zu Dionysius Areopagita," in *Dionysius DADA Areopagita: Hugo Ball und die Kritik der Moderne*, ed. Bernd Wacker (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1996), p. 128.

11. Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University), pp. 153 and 156.

12. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago), p. 36.

13. Hugo Ball, "Carl Schmitt's Political Theology," in this volume, pp. 63–84.

14. It bears mentioning here that Schmitt was officially excommunicated from the Church in 1926, for reasons having to do with his remarriage.

is true for his detestation of the ideas of 1789. His judgment of human rights is unjust and unobjective."[15] (Somewhat more problematic is the charge that Schmitt's doctrine would not genuinely promote the appearance of Catholic dictatorship in Germany.)

And yet, despite the schism that ultimately ensued, there is also evidence that these two men influenced one another more than has been supposed. In a letter written two months after Ball's death, Schmitt made the enigmatic confession that "I have never lost sight of him. In my *Concept of the Political*, every line is directed toward him."[16] Indeed Schmitt, who had once described Ball as a modern Simeon Stylites, may well have had him in mind when he wrote in his last book:

> Countless church fathers and canonical teachers, martyrs and saints throughout the ages have passionately engaged in the political struggles of their time because of their Christian convictions. Even the journey into the desert or the climbing of the stylite's pillar can become a political demonstration, depending on the issue. As, from the secular point of view, the potential ubiquity of the political emerges in ever new forms, so, from the spiritual point of view, the ubiquity of the theological emerges in ever new forms.[17]

15. Cited in Julian Schütt, "Hugo Balls 'Zweites Tagebuch': Ein Hinweis," in *DADA Dionysius Areopagita*, p. 272.

16. Bernd Wacker, "Vor einigen Jahren kam einmal ein Professor aus Bonn . . . : Der Briefwechsel Carl Schmitt / Hugo Ball," in ibid., p. 239.

17. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of Any Political Theology*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (London: Polity, 2008), pp. 83–84. For Schmitt's description of Ball, see Schickel, "Gespräch über Hugo Ball," p. 58.

The Sound of *The Birds**

RICHARD ALLEN

Having attacked people at a gas station, setting off a conflagration, birds begin to gather over Bodega Bay, accompanied by an electronic hum that sounds like the grinding of two large stones or perhaps like the wind. This electronic hum recurs at the film's conclusion, as we anxiously wait to see whether the Brenner family and Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) will make their escape from their besieged homestead. Hitchcock himself described this electronic hum as a "brooding silence" that "should give us the feeling of a waiting mass."[1] The sound epitomizes the experimental quality of the soundtrack of *The Birds* (1963). The sound accompanies the birds and is caused by their presence but is not quite of the birds, at least not the natural creatures we are familiar with. It suggests their objective presence yet evokes something alien, something larger than, or beyond, nature. Furthermore, if we follow Hitchcock's train of thought, there is a subjective aspect to this sound, as if it is colored with anxiety and expresses the internal "noise" that a fearful, acutely sensitive, self-consciously sentient listener might "hear."

It is well known that Hitchcock did not use a conventional film score for the film, and sourced or diegetic music is heard only twice. Melanie Daniels plays Debussy's *Arabesque No. 1* when she is invited to stay at the Brenner house for dinner, and later the children at the school sing the nonsense song "Risseldy Rosseldy" just before the birds attack. The rest of the soundtrack consists of dialogue and other human noises, and sound effects. Prominent among the sound effects are the sounds of the birds themselves, which were created on an electronic instrument called the Mixturtrautonium, devised and played by

* Thanks to Steve Rawle for the invitation to present at the Hitchcock and Herrmann Conference (2011). This essay will appear in *Partners in Suspense: Critical Essays on Alfred Hitchcock and Bernard Herrmann*, Kevin Donnelly and Steve Rawle eds. (Manchester: Manchester University, forthcoming). Thanks to Hector Rodriguez and Steve Fore for their comments on this paper when I presented it at the School of Creative Media, Hong Kong, and to Allen Weiss for bibliographic suggestions. I am grateful to Jack Sullivan for alerting me to the existence of Hitchcock's notes on the film and giving me access to his copy. Special thanks to David Barratt for creating the sound graphs for this paper and sharing his wisdom about sound design.

1. http://www.hitchcockwiki.com/wiki/Interview:_Alfred_Hitchcock_and_François_Truffaut_(Aug/1962) (accessed October 13, 2013).

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Oskar Sala. The Mixturtrautonium was a more sophisticated, "solid state" version of an older valve instrument called the Trautonium, invented in 1929 by Sala's mentor, Friedrich Trautwein.

In this paper, I shall explore the role of electronic sound in *The Birds*. My goal is primarily a critical one: to evaluate exactly how we are to understand the nature of Hitchcock's aesthetic experiment and to assess the role played by electronically composed sound effects in the director's overall conception of the work. For Hitchcock, stylistic innovation was always tied to technological innovation, and his readiness to use electronically composed sound effects in *The Birds* should be seen against the background of his self-conscious effort, in the wake of his critical lionization by the journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, to make a film that pushed the boundaries of his art. His embrace of electronic sound can be seen as part of the particularly open mind-set with which he approached the production of the film, one that allowed for the self-conscious emulation of the strategies and techniques of Italian art cinema.[2] However, I think we should be careful not to read too much into the electronic nature of the electronically produced sounds in the film, as some critics have done, following Truffaut's widely cited remark that the sound effects function like a score. It is instructive in this context that Hitchcock did not initially intend to use an electronic score; he only decided to use it when he was contacted by Sala's collaborator, American composer Remi Gassmann, during the production of the film. Thus, I shall argue that while Hitchcock's use of electronic sound is certainly experimental in the sense that it is pushing the boundaries of how sound is used and conceived in cinema, it is mistaken to think that Hitchcock used the electronic sound in *The Birds* primarily because it was electronic. Rather, Hitchcock enthusiastically embraced electronic sound because it allowed him to create the dense layering of sound effects that he wanted for the film, one that anticipates modern sound design. The purpose served by electronic sound in this respect is not fundamentally different from the purposes that underlie Hitchcock's approach to sound design in other works: the electronic soundtrack of *The Birds* serves to augment and enhance the representational and expressive possibilities of sound in film.

Musique concrète or Sound Effects, Histories, and Contexts

On April 18, 1962, when *The Birds* was already well into production, Gassmann got in touch with Hitchcock at the suggestion of Saul Bass and advised him that the bird sounds he wished to create in the film could be made on Sala's instrument, the Mixturtrautonium. In 1959, Gassmann had visited Sala in his studio in Berlin and they had collaborated in writing an electronic ballet score that premiered at the

2. For a detailed investigation of Hitchcock's approach to filming *The Birds*, see Bill Krohn, *Hitchcock at Work* (London: Phaidon, 2000), pp. 236–63. On the influence of art cinema, see Richard Allen, "Hitchcock and the Wandering Woman: The Influence of Italian Art Cinema on *The Birds*," *Hitchcock Annual* 18 (2013), pp. 149–94.

Berlin Festival in 1960 and was subsequently picked up by the New York City Ballet for a new work entitled *Electronics* that premiered in 1961.[3] Gassmann clearly saw the opportunity for creative collaboration on a soundtrack with a celebrated director on a major film. "For the first time," Gassmann wrote to Hitchcock,

> We have at our disposal, through electronic generation, what has aptly been called "the totality of the acoustical." Familiar sounds—from common noise to music and esoteric effects—as well as an almost limitless supply of completely unfamiliar sounds, can now be electronically produced, controlled, and utilized for film purposes.[4]

For a director who enthusiastically embraced new technology and approached the filmmaking process with meticulous care, the opportunity to create a soundtrack in this manner must have been immensely appealing, and at the end of the year, Bernard Herrmann, who is credited as sound consultant on *The Birds*, made a trip to Berlin, along with Hitchcock and his editor George Tomasini, in order to oversee the creation and spotting of the electronic-sound elements created on Sala's machine. James Wierzbicki's detailed research on the origins of the soundtrack makes clear that the main composer of the sounds was Sala himself, with Gassmann's role restricted to coming up with the idea, successfully pitching it to Hitchcock, and acting as the production manager for the project.

Hitchcock's innovative use of electronic sound in *The Birds* lies at the convergence of two developments in twentieth-century electronic music: musique concrète and electronic music. Musique concrète, or "concrete music," was pioneered by composer Pierre Schaeffer, who in 1951 founded the Groupe de recherche de musique concrète with the engineer Jacques Poullin and the composer and percussionist Pierre Henry at the studios of Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF). The group was dedicated both to creating musical works out of recorded sounds and to exploiting and augmenting the transformation of the source sound inherent in the recording process itself. It was Schaeffer who (following Jérome Peignot) coined the term *acousmatique* (acousmatic), borrowing a concept from Pythagoras, to mean "a sound that one hears without seeing the causes behind it," which was later made famous by film-sound theorist Michel Chion.[5] Schaeffer was interested in abstracting sounds from their sources in order that they might be heard as pure sounds. The studio initially worked with microphones, variable record players, a mixing desk, filters, and mechanical reverberation devices that, carefully used, allowed a range of effects that became associated with more advanced electronic equipment: playing sound at a different

3. James Wierzbicki, "Shrieks, Flutters, Vocal Curtains: Electronic Sound/Electronic Music in Hitchcock's *The Birds*," *Music and the Moving Image* 1:2 (2008), pp. 14–15.
4. Gassmann, letter to Hitchcock, April 18, 1962, folder 1, box 19, Remi Gassmann papers, University of California, Irvine.
5. Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 91–99; Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University, 1994), pp. 71–73.

speed, looping sound, extracting small sound segments, and filtering that eliminates frequencies in such a way as to preserve the source sound but may render it unrecognizable as such. Tape recording added to these effects the possibility of cutting and editing, superimposition, and multitrack recording. Many composers of the period, both young and established, came to work at the group's purpose-built music studio, including Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Edgard Varèse, and Arthur Honegger.[6]

The term "electronic music" refers not to a type of music but to music created by electronic means. The first purely electronic sound device, a forerunner of the modern synthesizer, was the Theremin, invented around 1919 by Leo Theremin, which was performed by moving one's hand in the vicinity of the instrument in a manner that created not only pitches but glissandi (movement between pitches). The ondes Martenot created in 1928 by Maurice Martenot, and widely heard in the theme to *Star Trek*, extended the principles of the Theremin, allowing controlled glissandi. The original Trautonium, first exhibited in the 1930s, had a fingerboard that consisted of a resistance wire that was positioned over a metal rail marked with the chromatic scale and hooked up to a neon-tube oscillator, an electrical circuit capable of producing a repetitive signal, that was in turn connected to an amplifier. By pressing the wire, the performer touched the rail, completed the circuit, and created a sound. Established and emerging composers alike worked with the Theremin (Dmitri Shostakovitch, Bohuslav Martinu, Percy Grainger), the ondes Martenot (Messiaen, Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Boulez, Varèse), and the Trautonium (Paul Hindemith, Harald Genzmer, and others). A modified version of the Trautonium, the Monochord, was installed in the first electronic-music studio, which was established at the Westdeutscher Runfunk, Cologne, in 1951 under the directorship of Herbert Eimert. Its first broadcast in 1954, included compositions by Eimert himself, Henri Pousseur, Stockhausen, Karel Goeyverts, and Paul Gredinger.[7]

Initially, the philosophy and practice of musique concrète were sharply distinguished from those of the proponents of electronic music in Germany. While the rationale of musique concrète was to abstract sounds from their sources, the aim of electronic music was to create compositions by purely electronic means. However, in practice the distinction was hard to maintain since the sound manipulations that Schaeffer wished to make—which involved reverb, filtering, pitch manipulation, and looping—were not only readily achievable but actually enhanced by electronic means, and sounds created by the manipulation of source sounds were found to be

6. See Reginald Smith Brindle, *The New Music: The Avant-Garde Since 1945*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University, 1987), pp. 99–103.

7. See David Cope, *New Directions in Music*, 5th ed. (Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown, 1989), pp. 211–218; and Thomas B. Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1985), pp. 28–54. For a more technical analysis of the different forms of electronic instrument, see Hugh Davis, "Electronic Instruments: Classifications and Mechanisms," in *Music and Technology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Hans Joachim Braun (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2002), pp. 43–58.

not readily discriminable from sounds created by purely electronic means. Eventually, Schaeffer incorporated electronic equipment into his studio.

As Philip Brophy points out, abstracted from the image, the organization and layering of the sounds from the birds make them sound like a musique concrète composition.[8] However, at the same time, the way in which they were created is in fact reminiscent of electronic music, as the soundtrack was not, pace Brophy, created by the electronic manipulation of the taped sound of birds. In his interview with Truffaut, which Hitchcock conducted during the summer of 1962, the British director speaks enthusiastically of combining natural and electronic sounds with reference to creating the noise of a truck that sounds like a human cry. The published interview suggests that is in fact what took place: "We were really experimenting there by taking real sounds and then stylizing them so that we derived more drama from them than we normally do."[9] In the recorded interview, however, it becomes clear that Hitchcock is only speaking of his hope that this will be accomplished; in the final film, while the sound and movement of the truck are arguably expressive of Lydia's anguish, the intended electronic distortion of the truck's sound to mimic a human cry is not to be heard. In the recording of the interview, Hitchcock also expresses a desire to augment electronically the natural bird sounds in the final bird attack in the attic. And the published interview seems to confirm this: "We inserted the sound of wings, but we stylized them so as to create greater intensity."[10] However, as the cue sheets in the Gassmann archive—as well as Sala's own testimony, as uncovered by Wierzbicki—make clear, aside from the sounds of the birds in the early sequence in the pet shop, all the sounds of and made by the birds (plus certain other sound effects) were created on Sala's machine.[11] Nevertheless, it still may be possible that other sound effects used in the film were created by electronic manipulation of actual sounds in the manner that Hitchcock suggests. For example, in the sequence where the children are being pursued by the birds that seem to emanate from the same schoolhouse that the children have just left, a child turns to face the onrushing birds and screams, her voice sounding very much as if it has been processed electronically.

Ultimately, from the standpoint of the listener, the distinction between the bird sounds being sourced electronic sound and their being unsourced is less important than most of them having been electronically produced so as to have a referential relationship to the presence of birds. However, any interpretation of the role of electronic sound in the film as made by or associated with the birds themselves is complicated by the fact that Hitchcock used sound in four different

8. Philip Brophy, "*The Birds*: The Triumph of Noise Over Music," (accessed October 25, 2013, http://www.philipbrophy.com/projects/sncnm/Birds.html. First published in *Essays in Sound 4*, ed. Alessio Cavallaro et al. (Sydney: Contemporary Sound Arts, 1999).
9. Francois Truffaut with Helen G. Scott, *Hitchcock*, revised edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 296.
10. Ibid., p. 297.
11. Remi Gassmann papers, box 39, folder 1.

ways. In the first approach, electronic sound takes on the character and quality of something that, while it is associated with birds, has no clear naturalistic referent, such as the aforementioned electronic hum. In the second, not always easily distinguishable from the first, the sounds of the birds are rendered as flutters, squawks, and screeches. In the third, the sound of objects that the birds strike, such as panes of glass and wooden doors, are mimed. In the fourth, electronic sound is also used to render sound effects associated with human beings. This is particularly true of the sequence portraying the massive bird attack on the Brenner house, near the conclusion of the film. Presumably because this sequence required substantial bird soundeffects but had little in the way of visual special-effects work (the birds being largely offscreen), Hitchcock sent this reel (reel 12) via Gassmann to Sala to work on over the summer of 1962 prior to sending the other significant reels of film. Sala returned reel 12 to Hitchcock with an electronic rendition not only of the bird sounds and bird-associated effects but also of all the noises made by the humans beings in the sequence, most noticeably the sounds made by Mitch Brenner (Rod Taylor) as he moves logs of wood onto the fire, blocks a door with a coat stand, and bangs it in with nails to prevent the birds from knocking it down.

The Birds was not the first film to use electronic instruments in crafting sound design. Composers with whom Hitchcock had worked had already used the Theremin to add an eerie or discordant atmosphere to film orchestration: Franz Waxman in *Rebecca* (1939) and Miklós Rósa in *Spellbound* (1945), *The Lost Weekend* (1945), and *The Red House* (1947). Most salient here is Bernard Herrmann's use of the Theremin in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) to motivate the sound of science fiction following its use by Ferde Grofé and Kurt Neuman in their score for *Rocketship X-M* (1950). Herrmann's score for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* called for not only two high and low Theremins but also an electric violin and an electric bass. For the scene in which the alien Klattu stops electric power worldwide, Herrmann created a montage of electronic sounds. Steven Smith has revealed that "after recording a long cue of brass and vibraphone dissonances, Herrmann augmented the piece with music tracks played backwards." He then completed this sound with "the process of oscillator testing, usually used to set studio sound levels."[12] Furthermore, in the tradition of electronic sci-fi, the electronic soundtrack of *Forbidden Planet* (1956) is a particularly important precursor to *The Birds*. The score was written by avant-garde composers Louis and Bebe Barron, its production outsourced to their studio, and the result seamlessly combined electronic musical accompaniment with sounds that are sourced in the film.[13] The soundtrack for *The Birds* thus belongs not

12. Steven Smith, *A Heart at Fire's Center: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), p 165.

13. See James Wierzbicki, *Forbidden Planet* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 2005). This book provides a comprehensive history and analysis of the making of this score, as well as a survey of its precursors.

only to a general history of electronic film music but, more specifically, to the established association of the electronic score with the evocation of the strange, dreamlike, exotic, and discordant.

Oskar Sala went into business as a specialist composer of electronic sound effects and scores on his Trautonium, and before *The Birds* he had scored over 100 movies, including numerous industrial films and a mixed bag of feature films such as Erich Kobler's *Snow White and Red Rose* (1955), Veit Harlan's last film *Das Dritte Geschlecht* (*Bewildered Youth*, 1957), Rolf Thiele's *Das Madchen Rosemarie* (*Rosemary*, 1958), and Fritz Lang's *Das Indische Grabmal* (*The Tomb of Love*, 1959), the second installment of his Indian epic. Gassmann thus introduced to Hitchcock someone who was very familiar with working with the medium of film and ideally suited to the task of producing a rich texture of bird sounds for the film.[14]

Given the affinities of *The Birds'* soundtrack with musique concrète and Sala's background as a composer of electronic scores—as well as the fact that sounds that Sala created on his machine were used in place of a conventional score in the film—it might seem appropriate to analyze the film as providing a self-contained score. This is the motivation for Wierzbicki's ingenious breakdown of a fifty-five-second segment from the scene of the bird attack on the Brenner household, in which he organizes the soundtrack into "pure sounds" that are labeled according to their aural contours as chirps, yelps, barks, flutters, wooden knocks, strangle sounds, and breaking glass, each with its own mark. He then and plots them together with volume markings and a rough ordering of pitch into something that resembles a musical stave.[15] Of course, it is possible with sufficient abstraction to analyze any soundtrack in this way and render it as a score. Furthermore, both the complexity of the soundtrack and the electronic origins of this particular sequence render the section particularly amenable to this kind of analysis. Yet it seems to me that to conceive the soundtrack in this way as a piece of musique concrète, an autonomous work of pure sound design, is to denature those sounds from the context in the film within which they are to be understood; namely, one in which they largely function as sound effects, with a quite specific denotative function, and thus as sounds that possess a very different status than a sound accompaniment does. In my own analysis, I wish to acknowledge the inherently mixed nature of these sounds—the way they both function as "aural objects" with their own sensory contours (partly indicated by musical notation), as bearers of narrative reference, and organize narrative information.

In his interview with Hitchcock, Truffaut also suggested that the soundtrack of *The Birds* functioned like a score: "There's no music, of course, but the bird sounds are worked out like a real musical score."[16] His published comments are

14. For a fuller list, see Hugh Davies, *International Electronic Music Catalogue* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968).
15. Wierzbicki, "Shrieks, Flutters, Vocal Curtains," pp. 22–26.
16. Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 295.

actually a response to something that Hitchcock said during the original interview. While the gist of these remarks is reproduced in the book, they are worth quoting in full because they provide a clearer sense of the analogy Hitchcock intended between the soundtrack of *The Birds* and a film score. Having stated that he wants Herrmann to supervise the soundtrack, Hitchcock continues:

> You often hear musicians, when they compose or they orchestrate, they talk of making sounds, which is what they really do. If you take several sections of an orchestra, and they play one note but they are all harmonizing with each other, it becomes a sound you see. Now I intend to use this sound for the whole of the picture. No music.[17]

At the same time, Herrmann stated that there was "no attempt to create a score by electronic means,"[18] and it is easy to see why. The bird sounds are clearly designed to be diegetically anchored and motivated as sounds that emanate from the world of the film; they have neither conceptual nor structural independence from the story and what is taking place within it. Herrmann conceived his task as one of "matching" the sounds created by Sala on the Trautonium to the visuals of the film, similar to the way in which Hitchcock added sound effects to all his pictures, although it is not clear how much of that "matching" was actually carried out by Herrmann himself. At any rate, Hitchcock's analogy is thus actually quite limited. It refers to the way in which the different bird sounds are organized and synthesized in *The Birds*. In the absence of music they function as the only organized element of sound.

The one place in the film where, arguably, the sound effects of the birds actually function like a movie score is the credit sequence, but it is the exception that proves the rule.[19] The electronic sounds in this sequence are distinctive because the credit sequence is a place where we would conventionally expect to hear music and instead we hear the electronically created bird sounds. They are also distinctive because of the way in which Hitchcock shoots the visuals. As the film opens, we see blue credits appear on a white background of sky, and as black shapes flit across the scene, the credits seem to be pecked into oblivion. Accompanying the fluttering are echoing squawks and screeches, but they are detached from what we see, as if sound had been added to the image to create a visual montage. The Hitchcock archive contains a detailed set of instructions by the director for the soundtrack of the film, dated October 23, 1962, which describes how sound should be used. Hitchcock's notes on this sequence hint at both the "abstraction" in the representation of the birds in

17. http://www.hitchcockwiki.com/wiki/Interview:_Alfred_Hitchcock_and_François_Truffaut_(Aug/1962) (accessed October 13, 2013).
18. Smith, *A Heart at Fire's Center*, p. 254.
19. See also Brophy, "*The Birds*: The Triumph of Noise Over Music," p. 7.

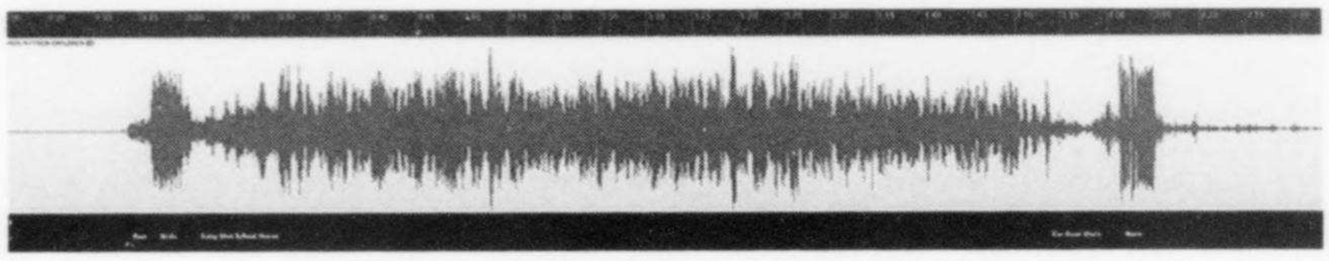
this sequence and his awareness that the bird sounds here are replacing a conventional score:

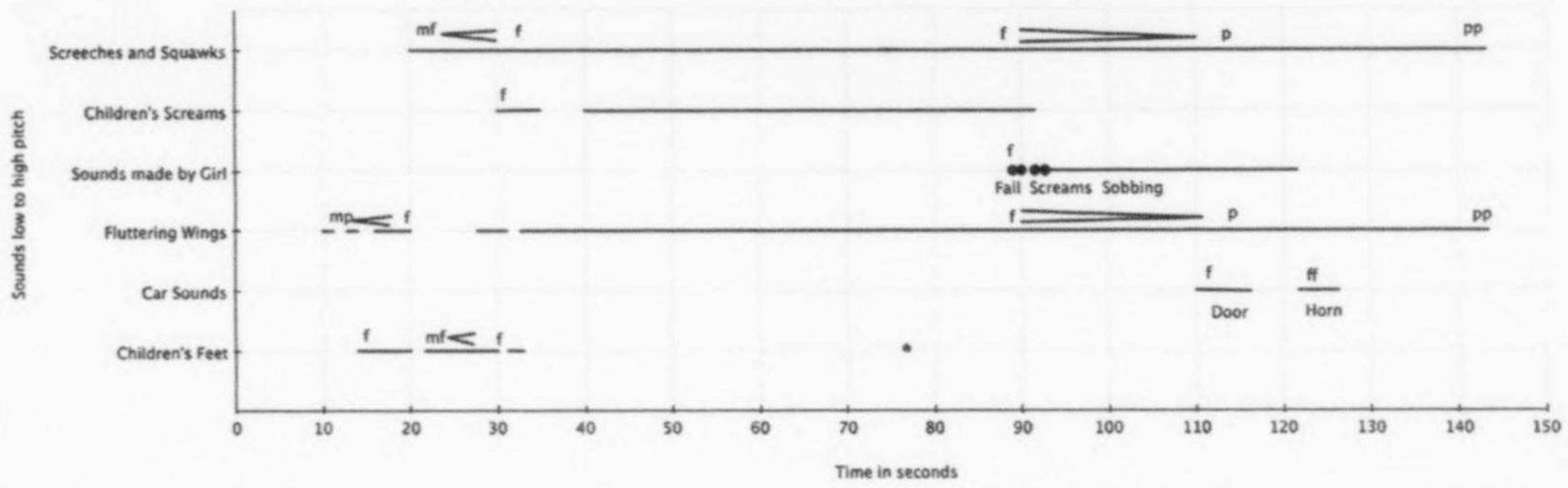
> Title backgrounds as will be seen behind the titles, we have silhouetted flying birds. These will vary in size, start in very close. In fact, so close that they will almost take on abstract forms. For the electronic sounds we could try just wing noises only with a variation of volume and a variation in the expression of it in terms of rhythm. We could also consider whether we have any bird sounds such as crow or gull sounds or their electronic equivalents, or a combination of both wing and bird cry sounds.
>
> Whatever sounds we have in behind the titles the question of volume should be carefully gone into in view of the fact that we are not using any music at all. So therefore in a sense the volume is a very important factor here.[20]

The Aural Orchestration of the Bird Attacks: Three Examples

In this section I shall analyze the nature and function of sound in three key bird-attack sequences from the film. In these scenes electronic and man-made sounds are densely layered and interwoven, and they illustrate a progressive escalation in the manner in which Hitchcock represents the auditory assault of the birds. Graphs provide illustrations of the soundtrack during the three bird attacks. The first graph illustrates the second attack on children as they leave the schoolhouse. The first attack on the children takes place at the party of Cathy Brenner (Veronica Cartwright); this second attack is a continuation and amplification of the first. The second graph charts the attack on Melanie, who is isolated in a glass phone booth, after the birds have caused the fire at the gas station. The third graph depicts the attack of the birds on the Brenner homestead, where Mitch (Rod Taylor), Lydia Brenner (Jessica Tandy), Melanie, and Cathy have been holed up in preparation for their assault. In the second of each graph pairing, I have broken down the sounds into their various component parts and tracked their duration and (very roughly) their volume and pitch. In the first of each pairing, I provide an accurate guide to the sound contour of the sequences where decibel levels are measured on a comparative scale, with the loudest sound registering as 100 percent and silence as zero. The charts are correlated with one another so that the overall sound contour of the sequence can be read in conjunction with the interrelationship and changes between the discrete sounds.

20. Hitchcock, "Background Sounds for the Birds," memo dated October 23, 1962, p. 5, folder 1, box 39, Remi Gassmann papers. An unmarked copy of this document is also contained in the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.





The birds attack the schoolchildren.

Hitchcock's written instructions for the schoolhouse attack sequence are quite precise. However, while they indicate that the sounds in the sequence are both electronic and natural, with particular reference to the natural sounds of the children singing "Risseldy Rosseldy" preceding the bird attack, they do not make clear the relationship between the bird attacks and the sounds made by the children in the attack sequence itself. Gassmann's cue sheets indicate an electronic score only for the bird attacks, but, as I have already mentioned, some of the children's screams appear to be electronically processed and, arguably, the sound of the children's feet are also either electronically created or processed. This is not simply an academic point, because a key effect of this sequence comes from the manner in which the bird sounds are entwined and embedded with human sounds and the manner in which they are made to sound at once like human sounds and distinct from them.

These are Hitchcock's instructions:

> We should have silence with an odd flapping or two of the wings because we assume the children will tiptoe out. Suddenly we hear the running feet of the children. Immediately there is a tremendous fluttering of wings as the crows rise. In the long shot we see the crows coming

> over the top of the schoolhouse and for the first time we hear the distant massing electronic sounds of growing anger as they descend upon the children [this latter phrase is underlined by Gassmann in his copy of Hitchcock's notes because he obviously recognized it as a key element in the dramatic tenor of the piece]. The sound increases now for the rest of the running sequence. We hear running feet, the odd screams of the children which should not be reduced by the croaking of the crows but should be continuous, but possibly not excessive so we do not get a monotonous humdrum all the time. All this continues until the distant screams of the children are heard going down the street, while Melanie picks up Michele and hurries her across to the station wagon. Once they are inside the wagon and the window is wound up, we hear the banging and flattening of wings and the groans all around the station wagon but with a reduced volume. Finally, the croaking dies away as do the screams of the children and Melanie drops her head on the wheel in complete silence.[21]

Although Hitchcock does not make it explicit, his insistence that we not first see the children but hear the running of their feet followed by the flapping of wings suggests the way he is seeking to build an aural parallel or counterpoint between the birds and the children. Because we don't initially see the children, we might easily take the sound we hear to be that of the birds taking flight, since the rumbling of feet is uncannily close to the flapping of bird wings and has a similar density or aural curtain effect. Furthermore, once the sequence of pursuit unfolds, we no longer hear the children running, though we see their running feet in a number of shots. So it is as if now their running is accompanied by the fluttering of the birds, or even as if, like the birds, they are "flying" down the hill. As the sequence unfolds, the children's screams are in dense counterpoint to the squawking of birds, rendering them bird-like. This parallel between the cries of the children and the squawks of the birds was already established in the attack on the party, where individuated children's cries and avian squawks are paralleled. In his notes on this earlier sequence, Hitchcock states: "It will be very necessary to watch that the screams of the children and the screams of the gulls do not sound the same."[22] Clearly, if the audience could not discern the source of the different sounds and they all blurred into a cacophony, the effect of the parallel between birds and children would be lost.

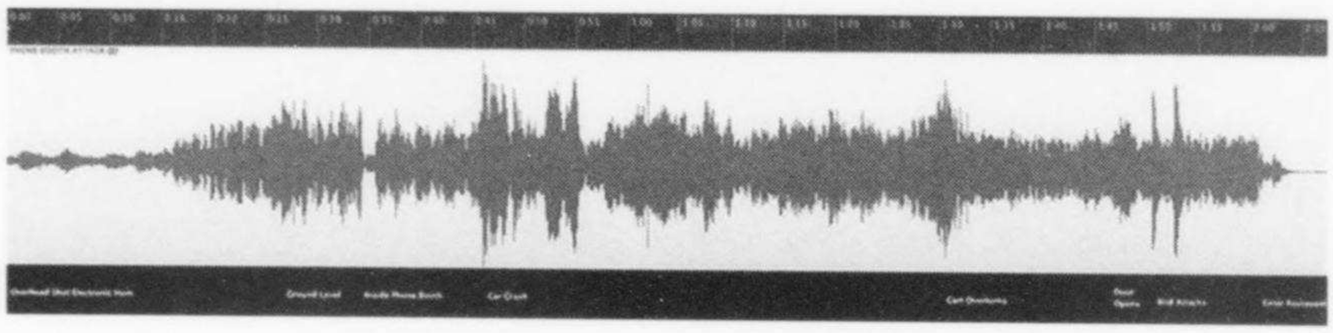
21. Hitchcock, "Background Sounds for the Birds," p. 5.
22. Ibid., p. 4.

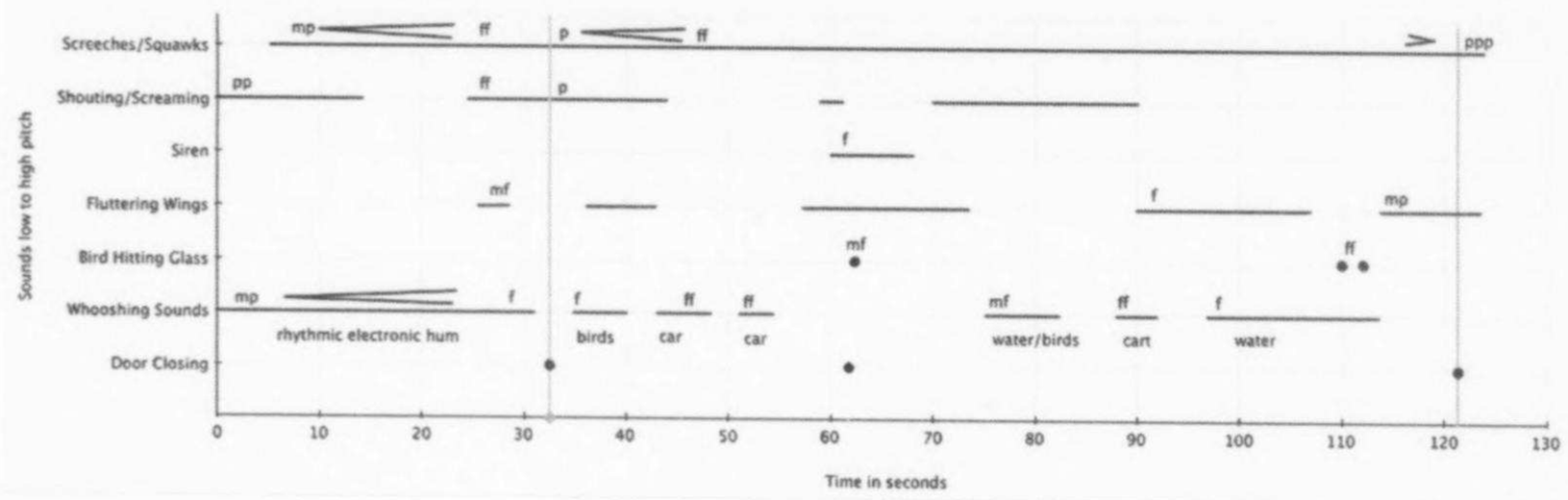
In this sequence, the aural counterpoint of squawks and screams is closely tied to the visual organization. Medium shots taken of the birds swooping down on the children from behind are interspersed with close-ups of birds pecking at the children from the front. Hitchcock follows this montage with three paired point-of-view shots and reaction shots of the birds attacking the children. This six-shot sequence is initiated by the piercing, electronically processed scream of a girl in a green sweater, followed by a point-of-view shot of the birds, in which their fluttering looming presence is emphasized over their shrieks. It should also be noted that the relationship between bird and child is further reinforced both through the jerky movements of Melanie and the children that parallel those of the birds, sometimes in sequences that are speeded up, and through the outline of birds that supervene upon and are juxtaposed with the faces of the children. Since bird-like cries seem to also issue from the children, and since bird and child are paralleled visually in the frame, the question arises as to whether the horrific birds are not something alien to the human, to which the humans are reacting, but something that inheres within the human, of which they are a part.

Through both volume and texture, the bird sounds in this sequence are clearly horrific, and yet, compared with what is to follow, the effects of the aural assault are somewhat mitigated. First, from the opening of the sequence at the jungle gym, the sounds of the birds are firmly anchored in their visual representation in a way that helps to reclaim our sense of the size and scale of what we hear and to relate it to what we see. Second, while the bird sounds are intense in this sequence, the human sounds are not ceded to the sounds of the birds but compete with them as the children seek to fight the birds off, although, to be sure, the children's screams also contribute to the overall sense of chaos. Third, while the subjective experiences of the bird attacks are individuated perceptually and aurally, we are not strongly aligned with a single character during the assault and Melanie herself, the adult, still seems relatively in control. When Melanie and the two girls finally find refuge in the car and we are restricted to what Hitchcock liked to call the "subjective viewpoint" as we look with Melanie at the birds pressing against the car window, the birds do not attack; the noise of the birds is reduced, and the sounds of the human world become differentiated from the bird sounds. Furthermore, Melanie successfully "fights back" with sound by tooting her horn—as much a symbolic gesture that seeks to blot out the bird noise with noise from a man-made machine as a cry for help.

The competition between bird- and man-made sounds continues to be developed during the bird attack on the gas station that concludes with the assault on Melanie in the phone booth. Here there is an intensification of auditory impingement and a kind of auditory conspiracy between bird sounds and man-made sounds. The phone-booth attack commences with the celebrated overhead shot of the birds looking down on Bodega Bay that renders the world

Alfred Hitchcock. The Birds. *1963*.





The birds attack Melanie in the phone booth.

of the human so insignificant. This literal realization of the bird's-eye view is accompanied by the extraordinary slowly pulsing low-frequency electronic hum that recurs at the film's conclusion. In fact, the hum is a constant low frequency that is overlaid by pulsing, rhythmic surges. These pulsing surges have a close affinity with other, louder, environmental sounds, many of them man-made, that serve to amplify and augment the auditory impingement upon the senses of both Melanie and the spectator: the whoosh of the flames,the whooshing jets of water from the firemen's hoses, and finally the careening out-of-control horse and cart that seem lifted directly from Hitchcock's childhood imagination or experience. In this way, in terms of the auditory landscape, high-pitched bird screeches and lower-pitched flutter curtains and whooshes now conspire with various man-made whooshes to drown out the shouts and cries of the human voice.

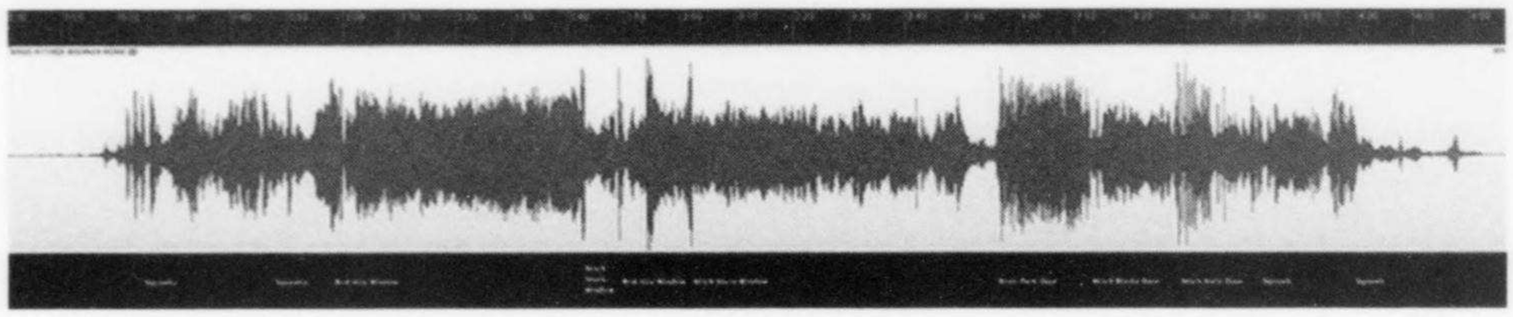
All of these environmental sounds are linked to an attack on Melanie Daniels's visual field. She is trapped like a bird in a cage, Hitchcock suggests, in a glass telephone booth, such that her view of the surrounding chaos serves as a surrogate for that of the cinema spectator. What might have been a source of refuge, as the car she entered in the previous sequence had been, becomes a chamber of horrors. She and the spectator are momentarily relieved from aural impingement as she enters the glass booth and closes the door (indicated on the graph by the first vertical line), but this enclosure only becomes a pretext to stage a frontal assault on her senses and those of the spectator. The assault culminates in a direct attack on the phone booth registered as loud, glass-shattering thuds. Melanie, it seems, has lost the battle of sound that had scarcely begun and is saved only by Mitch, who escorts her to the silent sanctuary of the Tides restaurant, where inhabitants cower in fear.

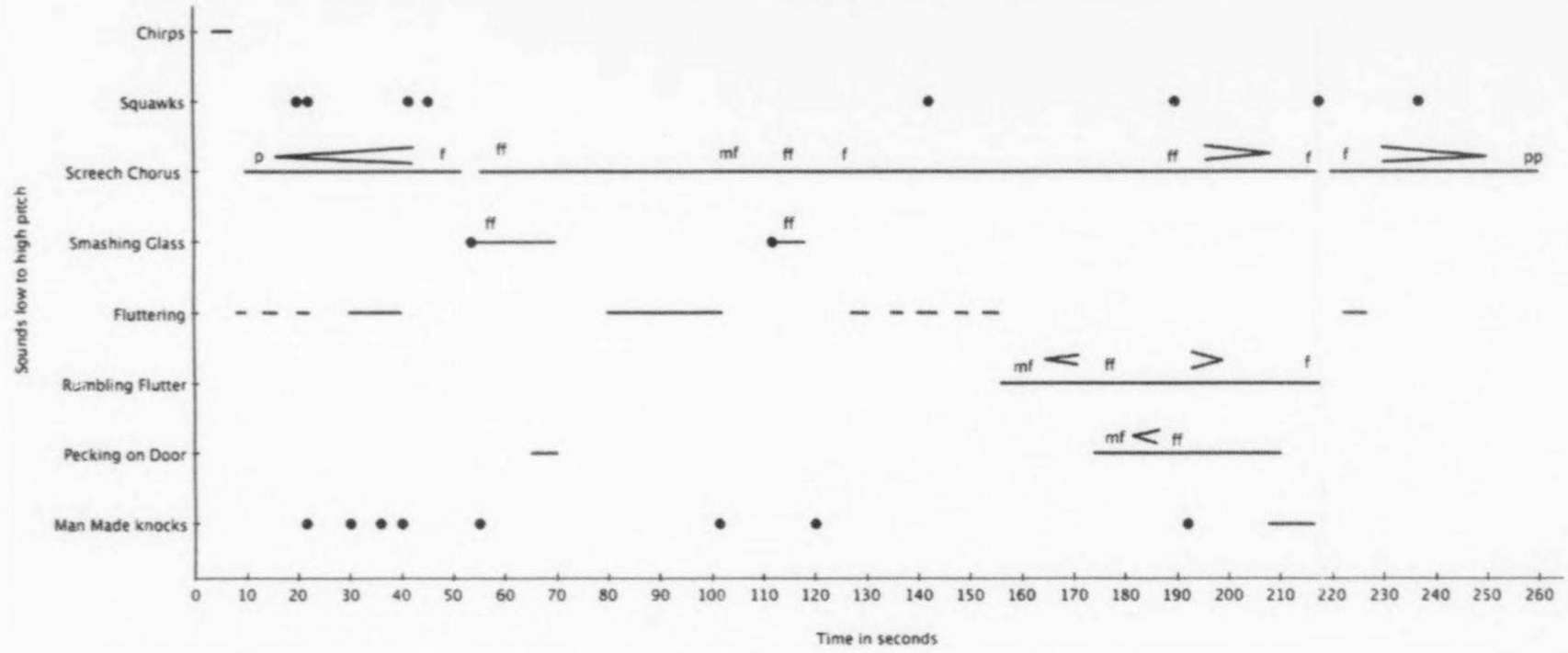
Hitchcock's notes on this sequence are much less detailed, but they do reveal, like his notes on the credit sequence, his concern that the volume of the soundtrack of *The Birds* be carefully proportioned and motivated relative to the spatial position and point of view of Melanie, and provide a profile and proportion to the overall arc of sound of the sequence. The volume rises when the birds appear, plateaus when Melanie seeks sanctuary, rises again when she loses that sanctuary, and finally lowers again once they reach the Tides restaurant and the birds become quiescent.

> Before the mass of gulls appear in this high shot we should begin to hear them o. s. [offscreen], faint but the volume growing. It should start to mount as we see the gulls appear in the f.g. [foreground] of our high shot and then increase as their numbers increase. The volume should increase until our screen is covered with descending gulls. This naturally should be all electronic. When we are below on the ground, we should increase our volume much more and then once Melanie is in the phone booth we should drop it only a little, just enough so that we do not lose impact [*sic*] of the screams of the birds but merely make the audience conscious that Melanie is enclosed. This volume should continue until she emerges and the volume should rise again until Mitch and Melanie get into the Tides Restaurant. Then it should drop considerably so we get a sense of being cut off from the outside.[23]

In the final attack on the Brenner house, the motif of aural assault, envelopment, and entrapment is dramatically intensified. The Brenner house, an enclosed space, might seem less likely to be penetrated than the glass of the phone booth, and therefore less of a trap than the cage of the phone booth. However, we experience it as far more confining, for now the fluttering of wings and the screeching of

23. Hitchcock, "Background Sounds for the Birds," p. 6.





The birds attack the Brenner homestead.

birds register as an unseen enemy. In this way, characters and spectators alike are free to imagine the monstrous dimension of the gathering horde, whose entire force seems to be expressed by the impact of a single bird that crashes against the glass of the window, its thud announcing the beginning of the attack. The invisibility of the source of the sound to the characters and the viewer-listener renders it acousmatic, in Michel Chion's sense of the term, a sound that exists offscreen, lacks a visual reference, and has the potential, as it does here, to seem all-enveloping and all-threatening.

As in the phone-booth sequence, we are closely aligned with Melanie and the Brenner family, who are trapped within the space, but now our emotions are also influenced by the emotional contagion of fright and panic created among the female characters, which helps to induce feelings of fear in the viewer. Predictable gender differentiation allows Hitchcock to represent both flight and fright responses to fear. While Melanie and Lydia recoil in mute horror, Mitch responds to the first bird by slamming closed the shutter and then combating subsequent pecking attacks by hammering, even more loudly, a coat stand to the door with nails. However, here Mitch's actions create no respite from the bird attacks, with the aural assault in particular pro-

ceeding without diminution in loudness or intensity. After he shutters up the window, an intense and unnerving rumbling sound augurs a further attack, one that comes in the form of a ferociously loud pecking on the door. When Mitch blocks the door to protect Melanie from the relentless assault, his action might seem to have caused the birds' attack to abate, were it not for our suspicion that, far from being defeated by Mitch, they have been called off by a lead bird whose squawk, which seems to a elicit a responding shriek, creates a momentary suspension of the sound of the birds, as a prelude to their departure.

As in the prior sequences, the aural assault crescendos, plateaus, and then abates, but in this segment the sounds that characterize the assault are more differentiated and undergo development. The initial screech of the birds changes in timbre as they approach and changes again when the assault on the house begins. The sound of shattering glass augments the grating texture of the birds' screeches. The fluttering and screeching sounds are further layered towards the conclusion of the assault, with the rhythmic pecking of the birds on wood accompanied by a low-frequency rumbling sound, which to my ear has an affinity with the sound that earlier accompanied the bird's-eye view but with a coarser-grained texture. This sound could be diegetically explained, perhaps in terms of the birds' pressing against the wood in numbers, but, again, it is really a noise that defies a straightforward diegetic explanation. Together with periodic, isolated squawks, a veritable symphony of bird sounds is created in this sequence.

The attack on the Brenner house lacks a detailed commentary from Hitchcock, presumably because the scene had been scored already by Sala and Gassmann in the "summer dub." One wonders, indeed, whether Hitchcock penned his detailed notes in order to wrest some control back from Sala and Gassmann, who had proved themselves so adept at creating the full soundtrack independently of his direction and supervision. The presence of the "summer dub" undoubtedly also helps to explain the complex layering of the electronic sounds, which combine the initial summer dub with the work that Sala did at the end of the year when Hitchcock and his team came to Berlin to work on the soundtrack. Gassmann uses the term "vocal curtain" to characterize the dense texture and blanket-like effect of the sound design, which, it should be noted, Hitchcock and his collaborators had created years before the idea of "sound design" was applied to Walter Murch's contribution to the soundscape of *Apocalypse Now.*

Electronic Sound and Aural Expressionism

There are two ways of understanding the role of electronic sound in *The Birds*: its nature as electronic noise and its use. I do not wish wholly to discount interpretation of the role of electronic sound in the film based upon its nature

as electronic music. Even as the bird sounds actually mimic the squawking and fluttering of birds, there is a recognizable electronic supplement to the sounds; the hisses, squeaks, and whooshes do not sound wholly naturalistic. However, as I have noted, in other places electronic sound is used just like any other sound effect in a film—for example, when electronic sound represents the birds smashing into glass or pecking at wood. Here electronic sound effectively mimics, in a manner that is precisely controlled, sounds that are more or less naturalistic, which here of course means not sounds that we actually could have heard but sounds that we expect or imagine that we would hear in such a situation. The audience of the film is clearly not intended to hear these as electronic sounds, but I do not believe the audience is intended to hear the sounds made by the birds primarily as electronic sounds either. All Hitchcock's comments on the film point to the fact that he turned to electronic sound to augment the expressive possibilities of sound creation and design. As he says in the Truffaut recordings: "If this electronic sound means anything it's going to give an extra use of dramatic device."[24] The main purpose of electronic sounds in *The Birds* is to be found in how those sounds are used.

Electronic sound affords amplification and intensification of the tone, timbre, and pitch of the bird noises. The screeches are high-pitched, piercing, and grating, and they combine with the low-pitched sound of flutters and rumbles. All this creates an aural assault on both character and spectator that is strange, intense, and unnerving. But while the sounds are highly singular, the soundtrack also represents the birds as a force that is much bigger than what can be represented visually. The birds are small creatures combined together, but their sound renders their massification into a singular screeching unit a monstrous entity. The monstrous quality is enhanced by a detachment of sounds from images: though individuated bird screeches may occasionally be represented visually, the actual screeching of the bird mass is unrepresentable in visual terms.

At the same time, the electronic sound has an expressive function that goes beyond the intensification and sharpening of sounds to discordant and disturbing levels. Of central importance to the way we hear the sound of the birds is the pervasive echo effect that characterizes their squawks and screeches. This echo effect is used quite generally to bestow a richer sound upon the electronic signal in electronically created music, but in the context of the electronic sounds of *The Birds* it takes on, together with the manipulation of volume, an expressive resonance that heightens the powerful sense of threat attached to these creatures, as if we perceive human fear or anxiety in the sound.

This expressive resonance is a function not of electronic sound per se but of the way that this sound is used, as can be seen by reflecting upon how Hitchcock

24. http://www.hitchcockwiki.com/wiki/Interview:_Alfred_Hitchcock_and_François_Truffaut_(Aug/1962) (accessed October 13, 2013).

achieves such an expressive use of sound in a context that is not dependent on electronic scoring. I am thinking of the celebrated scene where, unknown to Melanie, the birds gather on a jungle gym by the schoolhouse accompanied by a nursery rhyme, "Risseldy Rosseldy," sung by the schoolchildren. We are initially introduced to the children singing as Melanie goes to warn Annie, the schoolmistress, about the possibility of a bird attack. When Melanie leaves the school and sits down in front of the jungle gym, the sound of the children's voices is rendered offscreen. In one sense, this offscreen sound takes on the musical functions of a score. Insistent repetition of the same tune, the "mechanical" singing of the children, and the repetition even of the words of the song evoke a clockwork sense of rhythm that underscores the passage of time and serves to register the suspense that is created by the relentless build up of the birds. However, the children's voices are not a score; they are diegetic offscreen sounds. That they are relatively detached from their source and characterized by a sense of volume and an echo effect in the otherwise silent outside world creates, as Chion argues, a kind of acousmatic envelope.[25] We are focused in the scene most of all on Melanie's increasingly agitated movements; because we know, and she does not, that the birds gather behind her, her movements provide a mimetic cue for our own mounting sense of anxiety. Cutting between Melanie's agitation and the gathering of the birds, the sound of the children's voices appears to express her fear to the point where we might imagine that what is being represented here is a mental landscape, as if the song is in Melanie's head and that in her anxiety, as it is expressed in the song, she is actually conjuring the birds into being as an external projection of that anxiety. The children's song no longer seems simply an accompaniment to the birds, but now appears to be *of* the birds, as they too become a feature of her mental landscape. Of course, this is not what is literally depicted; the birds are real enough. But the sound provides an intensely expressive psychological layer to the scene, and in doing so, it deepens the audience's sense of unease about the impending bird attack.

The electronic sounds of *The Birds* share two important qualities with the sound in this sequence, as both feature heightened volume and, even more importantly, echo. The echo effect is relatively muted in the song "Risseldy Rosseldy," but in the electronic sounds of the birds it is much more pronounced. The schoolhouse sequence demonstrates how Hitchcock creates this effect elsewhere in the film in two ways: He filters our perception of intensified and augmented sound through the point of view of characters in the film, in particular Melanie, and he draws our attention to the sound of the birds by placing the sound offscreen, thereby enhancing the detachment between the visual representation of the birds and the sound of them. The two strategies cohere, for to the extent that the sound

25. Chion comments on the acousmatic nature of this sound and some of its functions in *Film, A Sound Art* (New York: Columbia University, 2009), pp. 165–71.

emanates from offscreen while we visually focus on the reactions and responses of Melanie, the sound of the birds seems to express her fears, especially as she begins to break down under the strain of the assault.

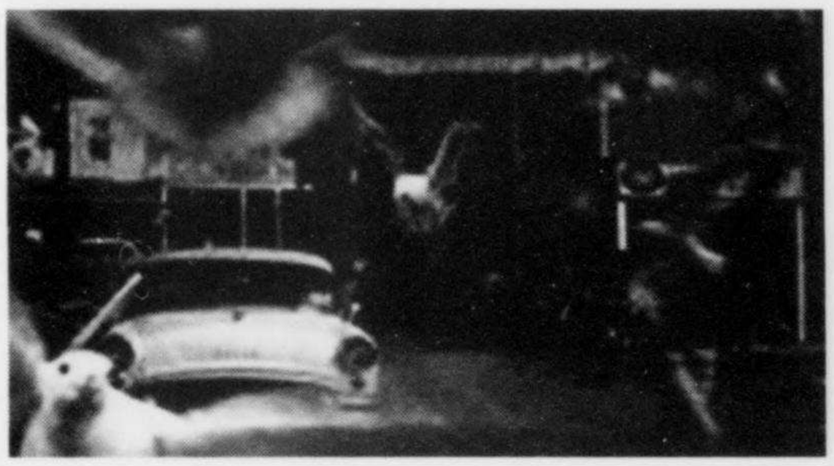
For example, at one point during the attack on the Brenner homestead, as Mitch battles with a seagull, we view Melanie in overhead shot as she gets up from her seat and presses back against the wall in terror. In a subsequent low-angle shot, she rolls against a crushed lampshade and across a wall to a fireplace with a look of panic. Accompanying her movement are the loudly echoing screeches and scratching sounds of birds that are wholly offscreen. The bird sounds, as Mitch's action makes clear, represent an objective threat, but as Melanie struggles mutely and helplessly in the face of this overwhelming aural assault, the sounds seem less an aspect of her objective environment than an expression of her mental anguish. Again, the point is not that they are really a mental projection but that the orchestration of

Melanie's responses to the birds as we hear the sounds cues us to perceive them as laden with her emotional distress.

The mental quality that is thereby attached to the sound of the birds is a refined and naturalized version of the more overtly expressionist techniques Hitchcock experimented with earlier in his career, the most well known of which is the celebrated knife scene in *Blackmail* (1929), where the heroine, Alice (Amy Ondra), upon hearing the word "knife" uttered several times, begins to obsess over the word in her imagination, and the ordinary sound of the word becomes amplified and distorted in a way that expresses her psychological state. The difference in *Blackmail* is that here the subjective nature of the expressionist technique is overt and overwhelms the representation in a manner that draws attention to itself. In *The Birds*, by contrast, Hitchcock's expressionist sound techniques are seamlessly integrated into the verisimilar world of the film. The dominant idiom is representational realism, into which expressive connotation is sewn.

The visual organization of the scenes of the bird attack at the phone booth and the Brenner house reinforce the expressionist interpretation of the sound of the birds. If the phone booth, where Melanie squirms in fear, is a cage, it is a particular kind of cage, a glass cage that allows her both to hear in slightly muted tones all hell breaking loose around her and to perceive various objects

coming towards her without actually hitting her. In an obvious way, she is looking outward upon and hearing the objective world around her. But two aspects of the scene are peculiar. First, everything in the scene seems directed towards her and staged for its impact upon her and by extension the film spectator. A runaway car and horse cart, hose water, and birds all bear down upon her, as if the whole world is conspiring against her. Second, the phone booth operates as a kind of screen upon which these events are presented like pictures, thereby analogizing Melanie's point of view to that of the film spectator. Because of this screen, Melanie is able to experience these events perceptually and aurally while nonetheless not feeling the full force of their tactile reality: Like the film spectator, she is removed from the space. For these reasons, it is possible to consider the events that she witnesses as a product of her mind's eye—the transparent phone booth functioning like the membrane of her consciousness upon which the events of the world are projected. The chaotic world around her appears as a



paranoid fantasy, a hallucinated world in which everything "out there" seems to exist only for the purpose of impinging upon and threatening the self. Opening the door threatens complete chaos and Melanie's destruction until Mitch rescues her. Again, I am not arguing that this is the way in which Hitchcock wants us to understand the film; rather, that in orchestrating the scene he sews in connotations of paranoia to augment the sense of anxiety attached to the character and to the experience of the spectator.

A similar argument could be made about another enclosed structure—the Brenner house. But here the absence of any physical representations of the birds,

save for the bird that breaks through a window and the beaks that attack Mitch's hand, creates a fantasy that is primarily aural in nature. I have already mentioned the idea that the sound of the birds, at the commencement of the sequence, suggests a concentrated force that is located entirely on the tip of the beak of the bird that smashes through the window, but in this context what more absurdly paranoid fantasy could one imagine? Of course, in this scene, along with a dramatization of Melanie and Lydia's sense of psychological impingement, we have Mitch heroically fighting the birds. As we have seen, the dual protagonists in this context allow for different kinds of emotional response to fear to be represented. However, Mitch's practical, action-oriented response can be considered as no more based in reality than Melanie's paranoid anxiety. For, if indeed these creatures, imaginary and impossible in their nature, are *not* a paranoid projection, Mitch's pragmatic, stolid heroism is equally instinctive and no more effective than Melanie's catatonic response; it is at best a brief postponement of doom and might even serve to perpetuate the antagonism. If anything, it is Melanie's distinctive, perhaps characteristically "feminine" kind of agency that saves the family. Throughout the film, Melanie has been unusually attuned to the presence of the birds, and when she hears something in the attic while the others are sleeping she exposes herself to the risk of the unknown, the risk indeed of self-annihilation, recognizing perhaps that they are a force whose nature requires a different kind of response, a wholescale giving of the self that is Christ-like in character.

By abandoning the use of a traditional score, which tends to bathe the world of the film in sound when protagonists are not speaking, *The Birds* uses sound in such a way as to highlight the expressive significance of muting and silence that often last for an uncomfortably extended period of time. The muting of the human voice can often be read as expressive of human impotence in the face of the birds' assault. Melanie, shut behind the closed window of the Tides restaurant, is unable to warn the man who is about to light a match because her voice is muted; again, her position in relationship to what she sees doubles for that of the spectator in the film, who, in Hitchcock's own description of the suspense situation, yearns to intervene in the story and rescue a character under threat but of course cannot. In a scene commented upon by Hitchcock in his conversations with Truffaut, the hysterical Lydia Brenner is rendered mute at the sight of the birds and emotes in silence. Later a hysterical muteness is collectively represented in the silent accusing stares at Melanie of the women who take refuge at the Tides restaurant as the departing birds are barely audible in the background. As Elizabeth Weis points out, silence also functions more specifically to create the anxiety associated with suspense in relationship to the birds themselves.[26] At the conclusion of the phone-booth attack, the protagonists walk up to the school in

26. Elizabeth Weis, *The Silent Scream: Alfred Hitchcock's Soundtrack* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1982), p. 140.

silence as they observe the now quiescent birds. The children's nonsense song underscores the silence of the birds as they gather on the jungle gym. In the attack on the Brenner house, the human beings cower in silence, waiting for the birds to come. In this way, the scoring of the bird sounds without musical accompaniment helps to amplify the expressive role of silence in articulating their menace.

What, then, of the role of the electronic sounds in and of themselves? I have suggested how much is achieved by electronic sounds irrespective of their specifically electronic nature, but I do not wish to discount the representational and expressive impact of the electronic sounds themselves. As I have suggested, while we associate the electronic-made sounds with the birds, there are moments when their electronic resonance is clearly audible, and this creates an uncanny and disconcertingly alien quality to the sound that we hear. This electronic supplement bestows upon the sound of the birds what I would characterize as an intrinsically offscreen or acousmatic quality; that is, even when we see the birds, the electronic sound, though it aurally embodies their presence, cannot simply be attributed to the source that is visually represented on-screen. This contributes further to our sense of the monstrous quality of the birds, ensuring that even when they are represented on-screen, they have a quality that goes beyond anything that could be actually represented or depicted. More specifically, this electronic resonance further augments the expressive, psychological valence of the sound. To my ears, the electronic hisses and whooshes are at their most heightened in the aforementioned scene when the cowering Melanie backs against the lampshade, evoking, at that moment, in their uncanny discordance less an external monster than a state of mind.

The association of the birds with electronic sounds in the film gives rise to a network of interpretative meanings and associations that links the birds not to nature but to sounds associated with electronic machines. The unnatural, pervasive, and insistent character of the electronic noises made by the birds connects them to something that sounds repetitive and relentless, like an electronic mechanism, something that expresses the unyielding and deadly quality of the birds. Hitchcock himself describes the menacing electronic hum that is associated with the birds as "like an engine that's purring."[27] The beating of the birds' wings, especially in the final assault on Melanie in the attic, has the sonic solidity and rhythmic pulsing of a machine, like a whirling helicopter blade. The electronic nature of the soundtrack lies, as Elizabeth Weis argues, at the center of a dense network of cross-references linking birds, machines, and humans. The opening of the film overlays the bird wings with "the almost imperceptible sound of a truck motor."[28] And we have already noted the relationship between bird sounds and machine, or machine-made, sounds, in the assault on the phone

27. Hitchcock, quoted in Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 297.
28. Weis, *The Silent Scream*, p. 143.

booth. Melanie noisily swoops down like a bird to Bodega in a sports car. The sounds of screeching tires and changing gears as she corners are visually associated with the swaying of the lovebirds in their cage. She continues her trajectory to the Brenner house in a boat accompanied by the putt-putt-putt of its noisy black engine, with which her head is uncannily doubled in the image at the moment of the first bird attack. Later in the film, the noise of Lydia's truck seems to give expression to the emotional state of Lydia upon her discovery of Dan Fawcett's peck-marked corpse in a way that she, reduced to muteness, cannot. Thus, as Weis concludes, birds sound like machines, humans sound like birds, and machines sound like both birds and people.

Weis also notes that we may associate this monstrous and deadly mechanization of nature with the filmmaking process itself. More precisely, it is associated with the visual and aural orchestration of the bird attacks that combines the electronic score with visual special effects. In the main, the shots depicting the bird attacks are sequences of what Hitchcock termed "pure cinema" (cinema without dialogue), which characteristically interrupts the flow of his stories and threatens to undermine the possibility of heterosexual coupling, reproduction, and futurity.[29] In *The Birds*, it is as if Hitchcock is ranging his mastery of the entire cinema machine, embodied in the relentless mechanistic avian assault, against the characters of his film. If, as Slavoj Zizek suggests, the naive or spontaneous viewer does not tend to link the attack of the birds to the psychology of the family, but awaits the onslaught of the bird attacks against "an undifferentiated tissue of everyday incidents," then *The Birds* becomes less a film about this family, and its continuation or not, than a film that takes the conventional melodrama of family renewal and subjects that mode of storytelling itself to an act of sabotage.[30] *The Birds*, then, appears as incipiently modernist, a work that stages the potential end of narrative cinema itself. In this context, the electronic soundtrack may be understood not only for is thematic and diegetic resonances that render bird noises machine-like (and vice versa), but also for its origins in musical modernism, with its abandonment of the octave and its relentless attack on melody, which is, as it were, the narrative of music. If the opportunity to use an electronic soundtrack came by chance, what better means could Hitchcock have had at his disposal for staging an assault upon storytelling in film?

29. See Lee Edelman, "Hitchcock's Future" in *Alfred Hitchcock Centenary Essays*, Richard Allen and Sam Ishii-Gonzalez eds. (London: BFI, 1999), pp. 239–62; and Richard Allen, *Hitchcock's Romantic Irony* (New York: Columbia University, 2007), pp 140–63.

30. Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 105–06.

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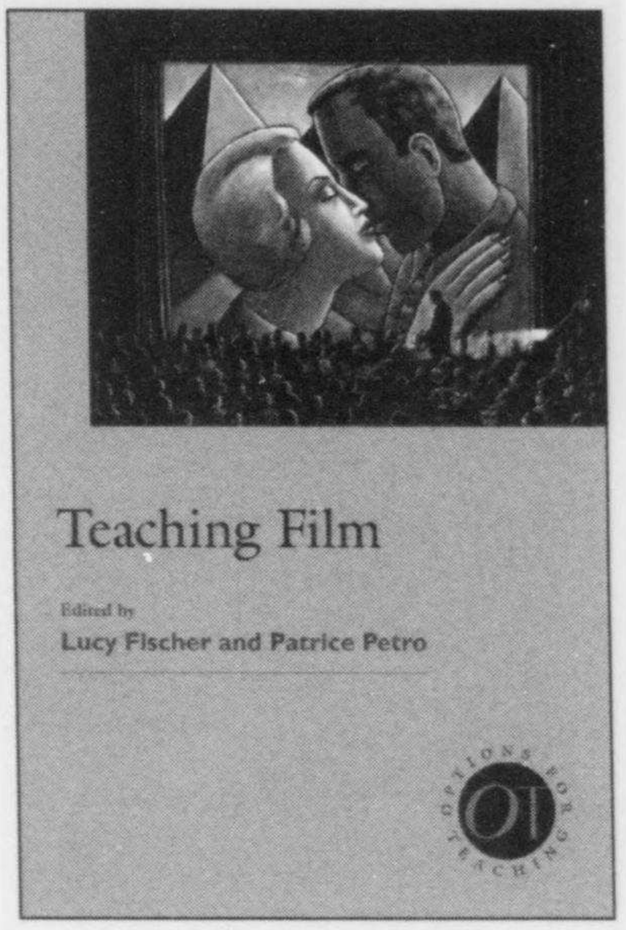

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