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**Towards a Rhetorical Ethos: Refractions of Classical Rhetoric in
Literary, Cultural, and Political Theory**

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Abstract

In this thesis I attempt to facilitate a fluid conversation between the ‘rhetorical turn’ in literary and critical theory, and the burgeoning historical interest in rhetoric in fields such as Classical and Renaissance intellectual history. I take issue with those empirical histories of rhetoric that tend to rehearse a canon of programmatic treatises from Aristotle to Cicero and Quintilian, identifying the historical significance of rhetorical practice with the explicit statements of its canonical authors.

I argue, rather, that the historiography of rhetoric requires a genealogy from the perspective of its influence on the present and the complex sensibility and multiple orientations it has inspired in its adherents. Evoking critics, philosophers, and political theorists such as Jena Romantics, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Hannah Arendt as case studies, I argue that the public orientation of the rhetorical tradition has survived in the ambivalent *conceptual persona* of the orator or rhetor, inspiring a model of the intellectual as possessing a complex ethos and eclectic cultural competence. I argue that in the discourse of these theorists of modernity, the rhetor as communicator survives as a paradoxical possibility, an ethic of civic engagement and social intervention *and* a solitary, ‘untimely’ and transcendent figure beholden to no ideological standard or normative cultural code.

I argue that the uncertain tonality of the modern figure of the rhetor reactivates the ambiguity of classical rhetoricians such as the Sophists who situate rhetoric somewhere between a mature and responsible social practice and a magical and subversive power of deception, the art of an arch-individualist. I conclude by suggesting that the recent formalist moment in literary theory and post-structuralism, with its advocacy of critical rhetoric, can be historically situated as revisiting the somewhat discontinuous ‘elements’ of rhetoric as a public-intellectual tradition.

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This thesis, although a conversation with other thinkers and their ideas, is my own contribution to the historiography and critical theory of rhetoric.

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Introduction: Rhetoric as Ethos and Paideia

Is rhetoric an intellectual faculty, a science of persuasion, an art of speaking well, or a means of literary composition?

George Kennedy¹

The historiography of rhetoric has reached a critical juncture, while the body of ‘theory’ that advocates rhetoric’s philosophical and analytical importance is uneasy, hesitant. This thesis attempts to facilitate a more fluid conversation between historiographical and theoretical interest in classical and post-classical rhetoric. I argue that post-classical rhetoric has transmitted to modern critical thought a varied *ethos* that alternates between tonalities material and transcendental, prudent and dynamic, inclusive and elitist. My thesis examines the way in which the ambiguities of the rhetorical legacy appeal to iconoclastic thinkers and their conception of critical representation, intellectual conduct, and the vitality of the public sphere. I argue that rhetoric appeals to a strand of critical thinkers as a demand for the intellectual to *communicate* in complex ways, to exhibit not merely ideas but the resources of acculturation, to enact an affect-imbued ethos or persona as the exemplary power of a discursive model, rather than a doctrine or orthodoxy.

My focus in this thesis is upon the discursive *tendencies* of rhetoric, the complex sensibility of rhetorically motivated thinkers. I suggest that in its origins and transmission, rhetorical modes of thinking evoke contradiction and paradox. I discuss how rhetorically exuberant texts are torn between a narrowly instructive mode and a far more generous exhibition of a *paideia*. By *paideia*, I refer to a continuing rhetorical fascination with the breadth of acculturation and depth of cultural knowledge that should inform the cultural

¹ George A. Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient and Modern Times, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1980, 3.

competence of the orator or rhetor, those whose art is persuasion, eloquence, heightened communication.

For rhetoric offers both intensive modes of critical analysis and extensive displays of cultural resources. By intensive I talk of rhetoric as a determinate sociability with defined pedagogical aims, and by extensive I talk of a rhetoric chaotically eclectic and confused by its own enthusiasm for linguistic possibilities. Rhetoric's sensibility, as bodied forth in the texts I discuss, often shuttles between these intensive and extensive registers, between what Friedrich Schlegel calls 'enthusiasm and irony'. By *paideia*, then, I refer to the way in which an intensive pedagogical aim can generate an extensive dissemination of orientations that surge forth in rhetorically cognizant texts, from Aristotle to Cicero and Erasmus.

I suggest that in its polysemic evocation of the possibilities of critical communication, rhetoric has been a powerful source of ideas for thinkers in and of modernity, from Friedrich Schlegel to Nietzsche and Hannah Arendt. These thinkers desire a more pluralist and subtle critical imagination, an ethos capable of celebrating its own confusions and contradictions. Rhetoric, I argue, offers such thinkers a release from the tyranny of the sovereign will and its concomitant model of reason as linear and apodictic. Rhetoric promises the reinscription of the intellectual in the teeming fluidities of life and thought. I argue in this thesis that rhetoric is neither a cultural nor individualistic ideal but a heuristic idea of the complex interdependent relationship between thought and cultural situation. I shall discuss this interdependency in terms of 'rhetorical acculturation' or the critical appeal of a 'rhetorical culture'. Rhetoric situates or places thought like no other art, yet this intensive drive is attended by the paradoxical possibilities of transcendence such 'interestedness' provides.

By a rhetorical ethos I refer throughout this thesis to a sensibility discernible in rhetorically influenced intellectuals that wavers between prudential aims and creative excess. I argue that this rhetorical sensibility is in turn often folded into the celebration of critical personae, encouraging a vision of the intellectual as a fertile cultural medium, pregnant with cultural materials. I argue that the figure of the rhetor that inspires thinkers like Friedrich Schlegel and Nietzsche is both intensive and extensive, an active social medium and an uncertain prophet of new values, a creator, an innovator.

The rhetorical *ethos* my thesis is concerned with responds feelingly to cultural exigencies and is greatly moved by circumambient stimuli. Yet the critical appeal of rhetoric is at the same time its capacity to transcend the given, its 'untimeliness' in Nietzsche's sense. As an *ethos*, rhetoric is material and sociable, but it is not normative. The rhetoric I speak of militates against convention and complacency. It is a pedagogy but not a didacticism or restrictive morality. By rhetoric, I talk in this thesis simultaneously of a reflective philosophy and grainy praxis. I discuss a tradition with a prehistory and later influence which is polymorphous and ethically varied, never authoritative or single-minded.

This thesis is not a history with a period focus. It is an investigation into the kind of sensibility and interests rhetoric has bequeathed as a challenging legacy and gift to critical thought, a sensibility more narrowly focused disquisitions on rhetoric fail to analyse in all its manifold influence. I organise this thesis as a genealogy of classical rhetoric and its later critical evocation, a genealogy that takes the quandaries and divergent interpretations of the present as a necessary starting point. In the argument over whether rhetoric is a pragmatic critical mode or a transgressive speculative medium, the key to unfolding rhetoric's complex evolution and liminal status lies in its relationship to modernity. I argue from rhetoric's present uncertainties and dilemmas. I shall always talk of rhetoric as perplexing in its ethical mien and programmatic implications, neither a datum of history nor separable from its historical accumulation of a rich and varied sensibility.

In the 'pragmatic' school of thought propounded by Richard Rorty, rhetoric's recovery is cathected to an urbane, comfortable, post-foundational philosophical disposition. Following the relaxed post-epistemic Sophists, the pragmatism of Rorty and Stanley Fish is the mode of a self-reflexive interpretative community aware of the limitations of all claims to knowledge and certainty. Pragmatic rhetoric embraces a variety of persuasive cultural media and perspectival forms in its 'conversational' ideal, it does not attempt a misguided foundational epistemological inquiry, essentialising questions as to who we are and how we know. Pragmatic rhetoric is a public-intellectual stance, repudiating the metaphysical and esoteric, inheriting a Ciceronian disdain for academic *otium* in favour of public activity or *negotium*.

On the other hand, in its poststructuralist guise, as elaborated most forcefully by Paul de Man and in the deconstructive readings of Jacques Derrida, rhetorical analysis is a speculative project, a form of irony, self-resistance and textual self-difference. Ideally, for de Man and Derrida and deconstruction and poststructuralism more generally, a rhetorical reading reveals abyssal tensions between linguistic form and intended content, it leaves us wondering about received notions of historicity and intentionality. Such rhetorical reading will distress the scholarly comforts of extra-textual reference, representation, and meaning, complicating rather than enabling critical consensus.

My thesis suggests that such critical forks in the affective mien of rhetoric have historical significance. Rhetoric has always welcomed multiple sensibilities. Rhetoric is often the critical promise of immanence, a sign of intellectual longing to rejoin the vitality and enriching plurality of cultural habitats and their quotidian semiotics. The rhetor acts enjoin and acts on arts of communication rather than wasting time on the kinds of otiose reflection that are secluded from the pressing material needs of this world. Yet rhetoric has also historically manifested itself as an adventure of thought, a stylistic self-protection, and a celebration of dilemma, paradox, ludic digression, arts of self-fashioning whose relationships to social responsibility are far more tenuous. Rhetoric is always already this double promise, of a transformative critical practice rubbing against the grain of modishness and conformity, of critical languages not merely reactive but creative. My thesis suggests that rhetoric has always subsisted as this in-between, this neither here nor there, generative and historically influential in unpredictable ways.

The Historiography of Rhetoric

Despite a surge in scholarly interest over the last thirty years, the historiography of classical rhetoric tends to essentialise rhetoric, demarcating its boundaries according to projections of intentionality and disciplinarity. Too often, histories of classical rhetoric rehearse the legitimising self-representations of canonical rhetorical theorists from Aristotle to Cicero and Quintilian, without rigorously questioning whether the programmatic features of rhetoric have been the most effective means of its survival into our own time. My thesis suggests that no discussion of rhetoric as merely intensive, a

focused pedagogy and pleasant social ideal, can adequately convey its appeal to thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche, desirous of evoking a fluid and contradictory model of critical discourse.

Let us take a prominent recent example, George A. Kennedy's A New History of Classical Rhetoric (1994). Kennedy wishes to discuss a 'classical metarhetoric', a 'standard body of knowledge' set forth in Greek and Latin rhetorical treatises that, once fully developed, remained 'unaltered in its essential features'.² Divorcing rhetoric from its cultural field and sensible dimension in favour of outlining an episteme allows essentialising gestures such as: 'Invention, arrangement, and style are the three most important parts of classical rhetoric'.³ Kennedy infelicitously reduces classical rhetoric to the theoretical divisions of rhetorical treatises. Sticking closely to the theoretical self-representation of Cicero and Quintilian, Kennedy ignores the complex question of whether rhetoric's pedagogical practices and cultural effects can be characterised as univocal and unambiguous.

In Brian Vickers' In Defense of Rhetoric (1988) classical rhetoric emerges as an uplifting social ideal, a worthy humanist tradition.⁴ Vickers discusses Aristotle's Rhetoric in terms of its 'remarkably open-minded spirit of enquiry', suggesting that as 'originally conceived' rhetoric is intimately concerned with every aspect of human life.⁵ Vickers is comfortable with the Cicero/Quintilian notion of the orator as a culture hero, that the rhetorician needs to know 'above all about life', showing how 'widely rhetoric can be conceived'.⁶ Establishing a myth of origins for rhetoric in its civilising breadth of cultural purpose, Vickers' appreciation of a rhetorical unity is further exemplified in his discussion of rhetoric's medieval 'fragmentation', thankfully recuperated by its Renaissance 'reintegration'.⁷ Despite commending classical rhetoric's 'openness', competing models of its influence and significance receive remarkably short shrift. Modern analytical

² George A. Kennedy, A New History of Classical Rhetoric, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1994, 6.

³ Kennedy, A New History of Classical Rhetoric, 6.

⁴ Brian Vickers, In Defense of Rhetoric, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988.

⁵ Vickers, 23.

⁶ Vickers, 25.

⁷ See Vickers, chapters 4 and 5.

rhetoricians invoking semiological and deconstructive methodologies are harshly denounced, for ‘fragmenting’ rhetoric and subordinating it to an ‘alien’ critical enterprise, a strange criticism given that Vickers acclaims rhetoric’s adaptability to any and all critical enterprises.⁸ In particular, Vickers frowns on any attempt to suggest that rhetoric permits a certain inconsistency and ethical duplexity, harshly criticising Paul de Man for neither accepting rhetoric as an ‘historical reality’ nor a ‘coherent system of communication’.⁹

Indeed there is a plethora of historical works on classical rhetoric wary of any suggestion of originary uncertainty and ambivalence in classical rhetoric. A recurrent historiographical attempt to establish an intellectually worthy rhetorical theory can be found in Thomas Cole’s asseveration in The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece (1991) that there is a ‘discipline’ of rhetoric arising from its philosophical elaboration in the fourth century BCE:

... orientation towards a communicational goal *distinguishes* rhetoric from the type of verbal virtuosity in which the exploration or display of the resources of a given medium becomes an end in itself (my italics).¹⁰

I argue to the contrary that the question of rhetoric's self-referential virtuosity and performative display, its extensive enthusiasms and divergence from stated aims, should not be sequestered as marginal to its operation and effects. Rhetoric’s influence and appeal cannot be reduced to intensive teleologies. I would also take issue with Thomas Sloane's reductive rendering of classical rhetoric as a model of sociable good will, that a particular road to truth, a mode of pro-con argumentation, is at the very core of rhetoric's 'conceptual identity'.¹¹ Sloane talks warmly of Cicero's harmonious desire to 'unite knowledge and practice, thinking and speaking', projecting a model of classical and Renaissance rhetoric as a beneficent conciliation of *ratio* and *oratio*, reason and eloquence.¹²

⁸ Vickers, 447.

⁹ Vickers, 470.

¹⁰ Thomas Cole, The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1991, preface, ix.

¹¹ Thomas O. Sloane, On the Contrary: The Protocol of Traditional Rhetoric, The Catholic University of America Press, 1997, 5.

¹² Sloane, 45.

Even sophisticated literary-critical practitioners of rhetorical theory such as Victoria Kahn desire to cathect classical rhetoric to a determinate morality and social purpose, evoking a tradition that acts beneficently on Renaissance humanism. In Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance (1985) Kahn argues that the Ciceronian persona of the eloquent orator as a ‘good man’ or *vir bonus*, the rhetor as nurturer of a robust civil society, inspired Quattrocento humanism, its literary-critical ideals and ethical mien. Kahn suggests that from Aristotle to Cicero, ‘prudence’, a standard of public decorum and socially motivated reflection and interpretation, was the driving force of classical rhetoric and its early Renaissance influence.¹³

This originary model of rhetoric as a prudential pedagogy and civil propaedeutic leaves Kahn in some difficulties, however, when she confronts the greater skepticism of later humanists such as Erasmus, Montaigne, and Hobbes. Kahn gestures towards de Man and concedes that the self-referential doubts of humanism, its skeptical denial of theoretical comprehension, may be an ‘allegory of the tensions constitutive of humanism from the very beginning’.¹⁴ Kahn recognises that idiosyncratic humanists such as Desiderius Erasmus pose thorny issues for the project of historicising rhetoric. Erasmus’s explicit pedagogical aims would seem to be that of a prudential rhetoric, the desire to educate readers to acts of sociable judgment in their own lives, promoting rhetoric in its traditional guise as a civil-science. Kahn nevertheless concedes that a de Manian notion of rhetorical undecidability is applicable to Erasmus, whose *De Copia* is both ‘eclectic’ and ‘chaotic’, its pedagogical focus undercut by the latent irony of its profuse examples.¹⁵ Kahn, however, quickly recuperates an intentionalist model of Erasmian rhetoric, claiming that Erasmus’s ‘resistance to theory’, that is, to theoretical comprehension, is owing to his

¹³ Victoria Kahn, Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1985, 36.

¹⁴ Kahn, 27.

¹⁵ Victoria Kahn, ‘Humanism and the Resistance to Theory’, in Patricia Parker and David Quint, eds, Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986, 378-9. In a recent analysis of the many ‘personae’ adopted by Erasmus, David W. Baker points to an alternative interpretation of Erasmian rhetoric: Erasmus advocated the ‘Silenus’ figure, ugly on the outside but beautiful in soul, as a mask to protect the rhetor from the public gaze, for it would be imprudent for all linguistic strategies or senses to be displayed to the vulgar multitude. Baker suggests that Erasmus’s rhetoric allows for a pathos of distance on behalf of the individual as well as prudential civic responsibility. We shall encounter both intellectual desiderata in Nietzsche and Hannah Arendt. See D.W. Baker, Divulging Utopia: Radical Humanism in 16th Century England, University of Massachusetts Press, Boston, 1999, 31, 37.

pedagogical call for ‘judgment and use’ rather than ‘slavish imitation’, allowing insight into his ‘reformist pedagogical program’.¹⁶

It is unsurprising that the historiography of rhetoric shows symptoms of anxiety, when it confronts an influential strand of recent literary theory, the puzzling and disturbing version of rhetoric left us by Paul de Man. The following analysis suggests that the discontinuous elements of de Man’s critical personae have a strong relationship to ideals of a non-sovereign, pluralist discursiveness promulgated by rhetorical theorists since antiquity. I argue that de Man’s ‘rhetoricism’ is by no means ahistorical or anti-historical, but a prism on the complexities of the rhetorical legacy itself.

The Cultural Politics of Literary Theory

I suggest that the hesitant state of current historiography on the tradition of post-classical rhetoric, as it attempts to cope both with its historically vigorous public ethos and complex textual ruses, is symptomatic of the slowly filtering drop of poison introduced into historical enquiry by the work of Paul de Man. With a disconcerting silent laughter, de Man in Allegories of Reading (1979) discussed worthy attempts to render rhetorical performance as an explicit theme of analysis:

behind the recent interest in writing and reading as potentially effective public speech acts, stands a highly respectable moral imperative that strives to reconcile the internal, formal, private structures of literary language with their external, referential, and public effects.¹⁷

In de Man’s evocation of the state of the disciplines in his famous ‘resistance to theory’ essay, ‘literary theory’ has become a legitimate concern of philosophy and history, but it cannot be ‘assimilated’ to them, either factually or theoretically. Literary theory, argues de Man, adds a subversive element of unpredictability, enacting itself as something of a ‘wild card in the serious game of the theoretical disciplines’.¹⁸ A rebel without an explicit cause,

¹⁶ Kahn, ‘Humanism and the Resistance to Theory’, 379, 382.

¹⁷ Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1979, 3.

¹⁸ Paul de Man, ‘The Resistance to Theory’ (first publ. 1982) in Paul de Man, The Resistance to Theory, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, 8.

theory inveighs against the ‘serene methodological self-assurance’ of the middle-brow disciplinary practitioner in literary criticism, philosophy, and history. These disciplinarians, as it were, are those who insist on ‘forcing ... upon us’ a ‘system of historical periodization’, who read texts through normative cultural codes and attempt to keep the rhetorical dimension of discourse ‘in its place’ as a mere adjunct, a ‘mere ornament within the semantic function’.¹⁹ As a critique of so called aesthetic ideologies and their correlatives in authoritarian political ideals, the locale of rhetorical reading for de Man is to be supra-institutional, a publicly interested perspective from which to critique the investments of knowledge production. As a critical persona, the rhetor wishes to provide a generous, extensive propaedeutic for social transformation: ‘It turns out that in these innocent-looking didactic exercises we are in fact playing for very sizeable stakes’.²⁰

What is discomfiting about de Manian literary theory is its ambiguous register, its disturbing unwholesomeness. De Manian readings seem to offer an optimistically transgressive form of ‘ideology critique’ and a correlative figuration and self-positioning within a left pluralist imagination: literary theory as a ‘wild card’ opposing itself to a complacent establishment ‘serenity’ that ‘forces itself upon us’; militating against the weight of tradition in the form of historicist ‘periodization’; critiquing the bourgeois illusion of literature’s ‘aesthetic’ function; an almost feminist rejection of the masculinist rendering of rhetorical language as mere ‘ornament’.

Yet de Man’s rhetorical readings seem equally determined to crush the ‘resistance’ they advocate in the name of an all-consuming masculinist impersonality, a functionalisation of reading disdainful of perspectival difference, a frightening doppelgänger of the publicly active de Man:

It turns out that the resistance to theory is in fact a resistance to reading, a resistance that is perhaps at its most effective, in contemporary studies, in the methodologies that call themselves theories of reading but nevertheless avoid the function they claim as their object.²¹

¹⁹ De Man, ‘The Resistance to Theory’, 12, 14.

²⁰ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 15.

²¹ De Man, ‘The Resistance to Theory’, 15.

A discourse of inevitability and remorseless fatality that seeks to crush all attempted evasions is the most prominent feature of this dry, impersonal, politically and culturally apathetic de Man. Here a reactive and conservative rhetorical formalism asserts its claims: the social and political critique of ‘contemporary’, that is, fashionable, literary studies is renounced as a delusive and hypocritical idealism, echoing a resonant shibboleth of the post-1960s right. Moreover the metaphors of affective rebellion and the open and transgressive mode of ideology critique are dismissively shattered when de Man suggests that any notion of rhetoric as a generous praxis of civic communication makes ‘no allowance for modes of persuasion which are no less rhetorical and no less at work in literary texts, but which are of the order of persuasion by *proof* rather than persuasion by seduction’.²²

The *mise en scène* of de Man’s rhetorical analytic would seem to shift decisively from a pluralist and transgressive intervention in the public realm towards the insular positivism of the specialised male scholar fearful of the siren of a feminised mass culture:

Technically correct rhetorical readings may be boring, monotonous, predictable, and unpleasant, but they are *irrefutable*. They are totalising (and potentially *totalitarian*).²³

Indeed the depoliticising effects of rhetorical reading permit de Manian analysis an identification with an entirely different imaginary, both fascist and pathological:

... with the critical cat so far out of the bag ... one can no longer ignore its existence, those who refuse the crime of theoretical *ruthlessness* can no longer hope to gain a good conscience. Neither, of course, can the theorists – but, then, they never laid claim to it in the first place.²⁴

The displacement of reading and its effects from the independent critical mind onto a totalitarian ur-spirit or ‘they’ would seem to vitiate any possibility of understanding rhetoric as providing space for critical interest in the sociology and historicity of rhetoric, its relation to gender, class, and the materiality of power. As Azade Seyhan argues of de

²² De Man, ‘The Resistance to Theory’, 18.

²³ De Man, ‘The Resistance to Theory’, 19. The italics are mine.

²⁴ Paul de Man, ‘The Return to Philology’ (1982), in de Man, The Resistance to Theory, 26. The italics are mine.

Manian deconstruction, ‘as a mere diagnostic insight, it lacks any ... conceptual mechanism to ... differentiate the various ideological underpinnings of discourses controlled by the contingencies of temporality and alterity’. Seyhan asks of de Man’s rhetorical mystification of authors like Nietzsche: ‘what does the identification of a rhetorical strategy patched together from different writings and divorced from the philosophical and historical context of the text contribute to a critical understanding of Nietzsche’s work?’²⁵

As Zhang Longxi points out, when allegory as a particular rhetorical device or trope tends to dissolve completely in the universal applicability of its name, ‘it is difficult indeed impossible to talk about allegory as a particular strategy or phenomenon with its own history and historicity’.²⁶ Formerly faithful disciples of de Man such as Barbara Johnson now gloomily reinvent his significance, conceding that ‘he did nothing to unseat the traditional white male author from his hiding place behind the impersonality of the universal subject, the subject supposed to be without gender, race, or history’.²⁷ The critical promise of de Manian rhetoric is now widely perceived as ahistorical sterility. Criticism seeks to escape de Man’s claustrophobic construction of rhetoric, his fetid garden of stony aporias, his prison house of language.

A Sociology of Deconstructive Rhetoric

John Guillory’s influential reading of the institutionalisation of de Manian ‘rhetoricism’ is symptomatic of deconstruction’s malaise. Guillory criticises de Man’s evocation of the rhetorical dimension of texts, both for its predictable simulation of undecidability and its totalising and determinist emphasis on the epistemology of tropes as the undoing of all reference. Guillory highlights the danger, voiced by Derrida, of

²⁵ Azade Seyhan, Representation and its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992, 20 and 150.

²⁶ Zhang Longxi, ‘Historicising the Postmodern Allegory’, Texas Studies in Literature and Language, vol. 36, no. 2, 1994, 217. See, for example, de Man’s most famous critical essay and manifesto, ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’ (1969), where de Man argues that in allegory, rendered as the ‘painful knowledge’ of temporal difference rather than identification with nature, romantic literature finds its ‘true voice’. Reprinted in Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight, second edition, Routledge, London, 1993, 207.

²⁷ Barbara Johnson, ‘Poison or Remedy? Paul de Man as Pharmakon’, *Colloquium Helveticum*, vol.11/12, 1990, 7-20.

‘rhetoricism as another logocentrism’.²⁸ He argues that de Man’s ‘rhetoricism’ is both an analytic method stressing technical ‘rigour’ and the aura of a charismatic ‘master theorist’, indeed that the ‘charismatic persona of the master theorist is the vehicle for the dissemination of theory’ (179). In an insightful discussion influenced by the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, Guillory discusses the ‘discursive operations’ by which de Man promoted rhetorical reading as a means of engendering institutional cultural-capital. De Man’s rhetoricism is an institutionally motivated tactic, a successful design to ‘seed the profession with his disciples’ (178).

Guillory suggests that de Manian rhetoricism is a ‘project of displacement’ that colonises other disciplines while deploying their terminology: disciplines such as linguistics (the trope as an always aberrant ‘signifier’), semiology, psycho-analysis (a discourse, displaced onto linguistic agency, of ‘transference’ and ‘resistance’), and feminist and Marxist discourses (ideology critique) (194). Guillory argues that by positing rhetoric as literature’s ‘transhistorical essence’, de Man’s version of rhetorical reading, the ‘epistemology of tropes’, a ‘rigorously iterable technical procedure’ in his words, evacuates rhetoric as an historical discourse and an art that has specific social loci: in classical times public arenas such as the law court and forum (214, 232, 262). For Guillory and many contemporary readers, de Man’s epistemological version of rhetoric is tantamount to an ahistorical travesty of the classical, labile, public locus of rhetorical pedagogy and oratorical praxis (247).

Guillory’s telling point is that de Man is a conventional thinker whose rhetoric has an ‘early modern’ distaste for the contamination of epistemology by the historically contingent and discursive aspects of persuasion (220). Devoid of any discussion of the role of contingency, alterity, and power in the formation of rhetorical tropes, de Man secures the ‘routinization’ of his methodology by cathecting it to the ‘truth’ of the master teacher (243).

Guillory has a by now familiar critique to make of the cultural politics of de Manian literary theory, which he sees as primarily conservative in its defense of the traditional canon, but with an opportunistic veneer of radical pretension. Guillory suggests that

²⁸ John Guillory, *The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1994, 180.

equating ‘literature’ in its most paradigmatic instances with self-undoing rhetorical tropes has the effect of ‘removing the ground of the traditional syllabus of literary study without at the same time moving beyond the category of the literary’ (215). Or: ‘theory, in finding rhetoric, refinds literature’ (180).

Guillory argues that de Manian rhetoricism ultimately ‘functionalises’ literary criticism as a specialist technical activity interested only in the ‘institutional autonomy’ of criticism rather than any political function for the literary critic. In the bleak and dystopian imaginary, without past or future, engendered by de Man’s rhetoricisation of literature, rhetoric has been ‘refunctioned’ by the same ‘technobureaucratic conditions’ responsible for the social marginality of literary criticism. The emergence of rhetoric as the avatar of literary critical method merely culminates literature’s decline as a form of high bourgeois cultural capital, de Man’s universal pretensions but the pathos of a passing moment of post-political despair (264). Once the ideal of a civic discourse, de Manian rhetoric is its own mocking parody, derailing rhetoric’s possible role as a situational propaedeutic, a contingent discursive form.

I think the most damning charge that has been levelled at de Man’s reinscription of rhetoric as a method and a pedagogy is that de Man actively sought to limit the rich *paideia* of classical and Renaissance rhetoric, which advocated a broad humanistic education, a ‘thick’ socio-cultural awareness (to loosely borrow Clifford Geertz’s anthropological term), an extensive interest in behavioural characteristics and psychological types.

Yet de Man’s ironic revisiting of a rhetorical pedagogy continues to haunt classical rhetoric’s historical inquiry and philosophical elaboration today.

I want to make a double gesture of my own in this thesis on the problem of de Man’s rhetoricism, the import of the rhetorical analysis, pedagogical recommendations, and philosophical speculation he has left us. Firstly I want to make it clear that the de Manian moment of high theory and the derivative and highly formalistic reading practices it exercised in his disciples has passed as the signature orientation of literary theory. I consider the accusations of canonical conservatism, ahistorical universalism, reductive logocentrism and apoliticism to be just and vitally necessary criticisms of de Man’s critical methodology. However, I also think there are good reasons to consider de Manian rhetoricism more creatively, as an irritant and internal other, a *pharmakon*, both poison and

therapy, for those interested in the critical exploration of rhetoric in fields as diverse as literary criticism, intellectual history, philosophy, media theory, and sociology. I propose an elaboration of de Man as a fragmented assemblage of critical personae rather than a sovereign master thinker intent on a redaction of rhetoric's public locale. I suggest that the many imaginaries inhabited by de Manian rhetoric provide resources for its historical and theoretical exploration.

I propose to disturb the current near consensus that de Man replaces a publicly effective and historically varied rhetorical theory and praxis with a narrow formalist methodology. In what follows, I argue that de Man both theorises and performatively enacts the rhetorical legacy as bequeathing an ambiguous and often contradictory *ethos* that has no single locus or investment. In his reading practices and projections of textuality, de Man's multiple *ethos* moves between affective registers, at times technically dry, on other occasions openly discursive, a project moving between the highly normative and the eccentric. By theatricalising a rhetorical ethos, the diacritical de Man I speak of is at once public figure and solitary specialist, personless and personable, resistant to and excelling in received forms of erudition and cultural competence, derisory towards and deeply invested in historical awareness, utilitarian and relativist.

I argue, then, for an informed model of de Man's critical presence, not as the elitist high theorist with malign intent, but as a discontinuous, paradoxical critical *ethos* that opens onto the shrouded origins and polyvalent provenance of rhetoric. In de Man one witnesses the mysterious legacy of the Sophists, the moral enigma of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the mixed register of Cicero. In terms of de Man's pedagogy, I think it time to rethink the *paideia*, the critical training and polymathic education, evoked by de Manian rhetorical reading in all its myriad curiosities and positionings. Like rhetoricians before him, from Aristotle to Cicero and Erasmus, de Man's evocation of rhetoric seeks to theorise and instruct, but it is also informed by a fertile energy, a desire to enact and display critical resources, genres of arguments, explications of sense and nonsense. I argue that de Man renews a Ciceronian *copia*, an extensive principle of abundance that exceeds all philosophical and moral paradigms, a subaltern yet powerful animus within rhetorical thought. In de Man's qualitative mix of situational focus and extensive desires, we

rediscover rhetoric's perplexing lack of a guiding foundational principle or single line of development.

De Man: Ethos and Paideia

We should consider that de Man's evocation of rhetorical reading veers unstably between different modes. There is the rhetorician as a technical pragmatist who treats the text as an internal structure in need of impersonal and purely immanent reading (criticism as a 'function'). There is, however, an alternative theme, a conscious inheriting of a genealogy of generalist intellectuals vitally interested in rhetoric, including Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Walter Benjamin. On the one hand, suggests de Man, the textual critic pays detailed, immanent attention to the facticity of the text before one; here rhetorical reading offers a heterodox empiricism without reference to normative interpretative codes like genre, period, or presumptions of univocal authorial intention. Yet mere empiricism and methodological naiveté won't do, so one harks back to a critical tradition that emphasised rhetoric as an insight into the social dramaturgy and instability of representation, a perennial weapon against metaphysics and positivism. Here one situates oneself as reinventing subaltern intellectual histories, one's provocative anti-historical gesture is revealed as a necessary yet only temporary qualification of a broader critical animus.²⁹

²⁹ In de Man's groundbreaking manifesto 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', the recovery of rhetoric is tied to subverting the now dominant post-Romantic emphasis on the symbol and its protection of an intentional relationship between experience and its object. Here de Man praises contemporary trends in criticism, including the recent translation into English of Walter Benjamin's *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928) (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*), a 'rediscovery and reinterpretation of the allegorical emblematic style of the baroque'. Works like Benjamin's are salutary according to de Man because they allow for the 'possibility of a rhetoric' that would no longer be normative or descriptive, raising the 'question of the intentionality of rhetorical figures' (188). Given that Benjamin's reading of the baroque is by no means formalistic, celebrating the baroque's febrile and unwitting assault on normative poetics, and its polymorphic inheritance of the colourful spectrum of Pagan allegory, de Man's 'non-intentional rhetorical figures' would seem to include particular and historical aesthetic forms, as well as various 'personae'.

For instance, strenuously arguing against anachronistic projections of a symbolist poetics, de Man derides later editors of Friedrich Schlegel for substituting the term symbolic when Schlegel claimed 'alle Schönheit ist Allegorie' in his 'Gespräch über die Poesie' (190). Friedrich Schlegel was well known for his love of the motley Pagan gods subtending classical aesthetics. Schlegel advocated an aesthetic and mode of critique that was digressive and enigmatic to itself, alternating between enthusiasm and irony, the material and the sublime. Elsewhere in the essay de Man will associate allegory with the self-divisions of ironic consciousness, a kind of performance, a rendering oneself as stupid that generates 'self-duplication' and/or 'self-multiplication'. De Man then evokes forms of comedy allowing such split consciousness, particularly

While de Man's formalist statements about 'reading' might explicitly call into question our ability to historically thematise literary texts, in his reading practices de Man often parodies the transcendental pretensions of authors and translates their texts into the incidental and discontinuous characteristics of their culture, the narrative poetics, affective registers, and visceral 'tastes' of their age.³⁰

Consider de Man commenting on Condillac's failed attempt in *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746) to separate conceptual abstractions from figurative uses of language, the frivolity of mere metaphor:

The story is like the plot of a Gothic novel in which someone compulsively manufactures a monster on which he then becomes totally dependent and does not have the power to kill. Condillac (who, after all, went down in the anecdotal history of philosophy as the inventor of a mechanical statue able to smell roses) bears a close resemblance to Ann Radcliffe or Mary Shelley.³¹

Or consider de Man's rhetorical re-description of the interplay of the Kantian faculties in the Critique of Judgment, imbricating Kant's thought with the aesthetic proclivity of eighteenth century texts towards anthropomorphised dialogue and dramatic narrative:

For one thing, instead of being an argument, it is a story, a dramatised scene of the mind in action. The faculties of reason and imagination are personified, or anthropomorphised, like the five squabbling faculties hilariously staged by Diderot in the *Lettre sur les sourds et les muets*.... What could it possibly mean, in analytic terms, that the imagination sacrifices itself, like Antigone or Iphigenia – for one can

praising the Italian *commedia dell'arte* and English pantomime (212, 213). We are not far here from Friedrich Schlegel's evocation of the pantomimic philosopher, whose mood rises infinitely above all limitations, but whose social performance is that of the mimic style of an averagely gifted Italian *buffo* (Friedrich Schlegel, Philosophical Fragments, trans. Peter Firchow, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1991, Critical Fragment 42). Hence allegory is a non-intentional figure or persona within the tradition de Man critically activates, brilliantly stupid, situated and transcendental, essentially paradoxical.

Moreover it should be kept in mind that what for de Man initially distinguishes allegory from symbol, and complicates its referentiality, is its historicity - de Man pointing to the complex literary and emblematic inheritance of allegorical gardens in Rousseau and Daniel Defoe (202-4). If de Man's evocation of allegory essentialises the pathos, the 'painful' knowledge, of an allegorical language constituted in temporal difference, he nevertheless remarks an historical interest in allegory as a non-intentional figure that disrupts normative and volitional projections of aesthetics and critical practice. Our discussion of de Man's later interest in allegory as a 'discursive mode' indicates that de Man's evocation of allegory is not ahistorical, nor reductive of allegory to the principal vehicle of an epistemology of tropes.

³⁰ As nuanced and incisive a reading as Guillory's is, it seems content to determine the historical significance and sociological positioning of de Man's rhetorical method according to his more explicit and programmatic theoretical statements; a suppler and more holistic reading of the complex positioning of de Man's praxis of rhetorical reading is indicated.

³¹ Paul de Man, 'The Epistemology of Metaphor' (1978), in Paul de Man, Aesthetic Ideology, The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, 44.

only imagine this shrewd and admirable imagination as the feminine heroine of a tragedy – for the sake of reason?³²

De Man's rhetorically imaginative reading revels in an irruption of social dramaturgy and contingent arabesque into a cautious philosophical representation; in de Man's reading, a transcendental philosophical inquiry is momentarily transformed into other sociolects and the overall *positioning* of the text, its orientation to the world, is transmuted into something other, a non-intentional figure yet to be recognised by canonical representations of Kant's sovereign intentionality:

The performative power of language can be called positional, which differs considerably from conventional as well from 'creatively' (or, in the technical sense, intentionally) constitutive.³³

When it comes to textuality, existence precedes essence, the energy and relational field of language, the many unwitting gestures it is capable of, resists premature circumscription as perlocutionary 'deed' or autochthonous, constitutive 'genius'. For de Man, then, rhetorical reading requires a dual sensibility. The reader needs to be urbane and worldly, recognising the manifold contingent characteristics and genres of representation, and this requires a deep cultural competence and intensive focus. Yet such readings would also suggest a capacity for enchantment, for momentary digressions from serious intent; the reader is like an extemporising *buffo* figure *suspending* the linearity and conventional duration of an argument, with an extensive sensitivity to odd detail and fractured logics.³⁴

³² Paul de Man, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant' (1983) in *Aesthetic Ideology*, 86-7.

³³ De Man, 'The Resistance to Theory', 19.

³⁴ My reading of de Man's evocation of the 'enchancing' possibilities of rhetorical reading engages with Jane Bennett's valorisation of enchantment as both a refreshing and fertilising possibility of encounter and a psychical disposition. Bennett describes enchantment as involving a meeting with something 'that you did not expect and are not fully prepared to engage', both a pleasurable feeling of being charmed by the novel encounter and an *unheimlich* (uncanny) feeling of being 'torn out of one's default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition'. Like de Man, Bennett is keen to creatively revisit the imaginary of Kantian reason, arguing that 'in Kant's world, reason possesses a fabulous degree of forceful and creative power' by reference to the mysterious quality of the supersensible. Bennett, alert to Kant's rhetorical, if not explicit, attachment to divine mysteries, identifies reason as the 'first wonder in a Kantian world', giving us a 'prospect, not an explanation'. Likewise the effect of de Man's readings is often to interrupt explanatory monologism in favour of a text's more diffuse and aesthetically prospective moments. See Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 2001, 5, 42, 43.

When it comes to the *paideia*, the knowledges and orientation to history and society that provide a model for intellectual conduct, de Man evokes the rhetorician as a mixed type, positionally uncertain, a critical persona both enthusiastic and ironic, without definitive locale or apodictic methodology. As a dense *ethos* that does not know itself and its wants, the rhetorician cannot place himself within an authoritative tradition, an essence, a model of good will, definitively sociable. It is for these reasons that de Man problematises 'rhetoric' as an historical term, drawing attention to 'the gap that becomes apparent in the pedagogical history of the term'. For de Man, rhetoric is neither an unbridled post-epistemological celebration of discursive performance nor a sound analytical school of thought. It is an uneasy movement between these possibilities. In a somewhat cryptic asseveration that I think is by no means detrimental to historical investigation, de Man proclaims rhetoric as 'a *text*' that does not know what it is doing, neither activity nor episteme, whose motivations and ethical import are therefore unclear.³⁵

My thesis argues that attention to the complex ethos and positional uncertainties of rhetorically imbued texts allows a reconfiguring of intellectual history, an alertness to extensive discursive tendencies and critical intensities that stand in an oblique relation to explicit representation and conventional notions of intellectual identity and sovereignty. As an example of the kind of reconfiguration I'm suggesting, witness the intriguing conception of intellectual history proposed by de Man in *Allegories of Reading*:

on the one hand, in Plato for example and again at crucial moments in the history of philosophy (Nietzsche being one of them), rhetoric becomes the ground for the furthest-reaching speculations conceivable to the mind; on the other hand ... it is the humble and not-quite-respectable handmaiden of ... oratory. Nietzsche ... points out this discrepancy ... with examples taken from Plato and elsewhere.³⁶

I agree with de Man that investigating the influence of rhetoric upon the history of ideas can greatly affect our image of thinking and the stimuli that animate and orient it.

De Man suggests that in the oeuvre of Plato and later thinkers like Kant and Nietzsche, the demands placed by rhetorical acculturation upon their language continually displaces the *pathos* of idealism, its lofty sentiments, in favour of a rhetorical *ethos*, an

³⁵ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 131.

³⁶ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 130.

ethical tonality. For de Man, ethics or 'ethicity' as he calls it, arises not from a sovereign will or determinate morality, but from the 'structural interference' of distinct value systems, the positional 'confusion' inherent in language, which de Man describes as a 'discursive mode'. The discursive mode of a rhetorical thinker can never issue from a single, theistic transcendental imperative, it is always produced in a 'confusion' of analysis and performance, indication and extensive gestures. Such a discursive mode is always imbricated in a multiplicity of orientations.³⁷

I would further suggest that de Man has an historical sense of a rhetorical culture in mind when he advocates the ethical potential of a 'non-intentional' rhetorical mode. Here de Man can be seen as reprising the rich classical milieu which demanded that the intellectual communicate through a sophisticated exhibition of forms, a culture inhabited by Plato and idealised by Nietzsche; in such a culture ideas were necessarily modified and affected by a variety of stimuli, inflecting a non-monotheistic, Pagan *paideia* into the texture of philosophical thought. A rhetorical culture, educated in the manifest pleasures of rhetorical arts, demands the display of a critical ethos of address, thereby ensuring even the would-be idealist possesses a worldly orientation.

As in the insistent theatricality and rhetorical displays of Plato's works which converge on the paradoxical ethos of Socrates, rhetorically influenced texts play a confused game of fort...da, now here, now there, with the world they find themselves in. Far from an intentional figure, the rhetorically influenced Plato both embraces and rejects cultural conventions, despising and emulating his rivals, the Sophists, and finding that his insistently pluralist acculturation conflicts with the theistic purity of universal ideals he would advocate. Rhetoricised thinkers cannot say what they mean, and may not know themselves, their interiority fragmented by the formal demands of cultural performativity. This thesis contends that de Man follows a long list of thinkers from Friedrich Schlegel to Hannah Arendt who have prized rhetoric as a subaltern approach to literary and intellectual history.

The dynamic ethicity of the rhetor these thinkers sought was an alternative to a repressively moralistic and univocal model of thinking, a model abstracting thought from

³⁷ De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 206.

the inconsistencies of existence, a projection divorcing the imbricated contingencies of form from a pure ideational content. I seek to reposition de Man as the latest in a genealogy of thinkers who have valorised the rhetorical intellectual as a creatively confused 'mixed type', a non-intentional 'figure' that promotes the necessity of a varied *paideia* or cultivation in intellectual formation.

The Origins of Rhetoric

In this thesis I argue for the origins of classical rhetoric as, in Hannah Arendt's terms, 'crystallising' a variety of contradictory elements, a multiplicity of affective positions and critical desires. Arendt's idea, which she applied to thinking about the disparate origins of twentieth century totalitarianism, was in direct conversation with Walter Benjamin's 'epistemo-critical prologue' to the Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels (Origin of the German Mourning Play (1928) and his other writings on the philosophy of history. Benjamin argued that historians should not assume that they can recount an historical narrative like the 'beads of a rosary'. Instead historical thought should imaginatively 'grasp the constellation', the complex configuration of historical conditions which 'one's own era formed with a definite earlier one'. For something can only become historical 'posthumously', once it is *represented*, illuminated from the pregnant time of the present, the 'time of the now'.³⁸ I argue that this conception of historical imagination is particularly applicable to a rhetorical tradition whose public function and cultural effects are largely lost to us, recoverable only through an imaginatively projective genealogy that begins from the affective drives engendering rhetoric's present critical resurgence.

This thesis's methodology parallels Benjamin's historiography of aesthetics in arguing that rhetoric needs to be historicised as an often discontinuous multiplicity of 'ideas'. These ideas are best explained as the 'extreme example of a form or genre' and as such do not enter into the 'history of literature' as a conventional poetics or intentional

³⁸ Quoted in Seyla Benhabib, The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks California, 1996, 64 and 96, n.8. The quotation is taken from Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Note A as appended to the English edition, edited in English by Hannah Arendt.

subject.³⁹ It is of great moment that Benjamin's methodological insights into a 'discursive mode' that has proved invisible to historicist representation are themselves drawn from a bombastically rhetorical artistic form, the florid declamations and figurative excess of seventeenth century German baroque drama.

In this neo-Senecan rhetorical form, Benjamin discovered, in de Man's terms, a linguistic 'confusion', a dynamic ethnicity that continued to display contradictory value systems. Such a form, Benjamin argues, would like to be tragedy but tends towards opera and melodrama. The baroque drama articulates a rhetorical ethos whose love of the artificial mechanisms of declamatory language nevertheless betrays a yearning for simple nature, sight, sound, and touch; a form whose immanent allegorical obsessions with the emblems of a post-lapsarian world might still redeem an homogenous, empty conception of historical time. In the baroque rhetorical form, Benjamin found non-intentional tendencies, ethical exigencies and linguistic dispositions irreducible to the transcendental imperative of a genre or poetics. Benjamin followed classical thinkers like Tacitus in describing a rhetoric whose tenor and purpose is confused by its vigorous acculturation: 'breadth of culture is an ornament that tells of itself even when one is not making a point of it: it comes prominently into view where you would least expect it.'⁴⁰ I follow Benjamin in finding methodological impetus in the description of a rhetorical ethos that exhibits an extensive *paideia*, a reservoir of polymathic energies and acculturated desires.

This thesis argues that the origins of rhetoric are founded in ambiguity, for they are differential, uncertain in disposition. I argue that one finds traces of this originary fragmentation of purpose in Aristotle's Rhetoric, partially a redaction of previous discourses on the art of speaking, including Sophistic rhetorical theory. Here Aristotle would seem to define rhetoric as an art or discursive power (*dunamis*) that affords rational demonstrative 'proofs' or *enthymemes* according to probability, rather than the certainty of pure logic. Early in his Rhetoric, Aristotle assures us that rhetoric is a counterpart to dialectics, a practical reasoning without primary interest in affect, sociology or audience

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', The Origin of German Tragic Drama, trans. John Osborne, Verso, London, 1996, 38.

⁴⁰ Tacitus, 'A Dialogue on Oratory' (around 101 AD), in Agricola, Germania, Dialogus, trans. M. Hutton, W. Peterson, Harvard University Press, Suffolk, 2000, 32:2, 317.

psychology: 'for the proofs alone are intrinsic to the art (of speaking) and all other features merely ancillary'.⁴¹

In later sections however, Aristotle's Rhetoric consistently subverts this ontology of rhetoric as a pragmatic, utilitarian pedagogy. In lengthy and exuberant chapters with barely a hint of moral overtones, Aristotle discusses the range of human emotions, their differential social characteristics, and the astonishing plurality of argumentative commonplaces that rhetoric, as the art of invention, can afford. His allusions range wildly from myth and Homeric epic, to fables, folkloric maxims, popular sayings, philosophical proverbs, and a pleasurable evocation of fallacious arguments, the ruses and trickeries of a tactical and deceptive language.⁴² In Aristotle, prudential *phronesis*, rhetoric as a mode of practical reasoning, confronts a more archaic *paideia* with roots in the trickeries and deceptions of the Pagan gods, the ambivalent power of language or *logos* for both good and evil ends, and the ancient enjoyment of spoken language as theatre, agonistic struggle. Aristotle's Rhetoric and the dynamic instability of its *ethos*, its movement from worthy rationalist strictures to the ludic enjoyment of a pluralist propaedeutic, bears significant marks of the polysemic Sophists, figures of both social progress and the corruption of traditional norms, variously philosophers and charlatans, utilitarians and relativists, the personae of a non-intentional rhetoric.

I follow Bakhtin in attempting to recover rhetoric's complex generic memory through an awareness of its pre-history and evolving social context:

Always preserved in a genre are undying elements of the archaic. True, these *archaic* elements are only preserved in it thanks to their constant *renewal*, which is to say, their contemporization. A genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously.⁴³

Following the suggestive thinking of William Connolly, I argue that the historiography of rhetoric is still encumbered by a secularist ideal of meaningful publicity, of those discourses that can be properly disseminated into the public sphere, tending to degrade

⁴¹ Aristotle, The Art of Rhetoric, trans. H.C. Lawson-Tancred, Penguin Books, London, 1991, 1:1, 66, 67.

⁴² Aristotle, The Art of Rhetoric, sections six, seven, and eight on emotion, character, and common topics, see particularly 2:24, 'Illusory Topics'.

⁴³ Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984, 106.

myth, theological structures of feeling, legend, and ‘folkloric energies’ into the private domain.⁴⁴ I suggest that the theory of rhetoric should study its accumulation of dispositions from its emergence in a multiple and discontinuous pre-history that includes the non-volitional ethics of Paganism, the ambivalent attitude towards persuasive language and aesthetic deception in Greek thought, and the mixed personae of the first rhetors, the Presocratics.

A rhetorical *ethos* recognises that ideas alone cannot ethicise human behaviour or generate critical practices. Rather the historiography of rhetoric needs to be alert to the creative densities and unvoicable energies of particular cultural moments.⁴⁵ As Connolly argues, it is time to confront the anxiety that treats ‘recognition, common sense, and the upright character of thought as if they were apodictic’, the true historical conditions of the intellect.⁴⁶

I follow the political theorist Jane Bennett when she inflects the Nietzschean/Foucauldian elaboration of genealogical investigation with a respect for and curiosity about the enigmas, mysteries, and passions of thought, acknowledged as imaginative, sentient, and instinctive in unpredictable ways.⁴⁷ I think the historical practice of rhetoric, which has a tendency to project beyond its limited rationale towards the ludic and fantastical, is amenable to Bennett’s theorisation of a ‘genealogical idealism’ alert to the extensive power of hopes, dreams, enchantments, illusions, elements of fantasy, as the very condition of a dynamic rhetorical ethos, a critical mien.⁴⁸

Approach

My approach in this thesis is to read the rhetorical tradition through what Deleuze and Guattari have called ‘conceptual personae’, those thought-figures like Dostoevsky’s

⁴⁴ William E. Connolly, Why I am not a Secularist, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999, 21.

⁴⁵ William E. Connolly, The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection on the Politics of Morality, Sage Publications, Newbury Park Cal., 1993, 89.

⁴⁶ William E. Connolly, ‘Refashioning the Secular’ in What’s Left of Theory? New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory, ed. Judith Butler, John Guillory, Kendall Thomas, Routledge, New York, 2000, 183.

⁴⁷ Jane Bennett, Thoreau’s Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks Cal., 1994, 111.

⁴⁸ Bennett, Thoreau’s Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild, 111.

‘idiot’ who capture paradoxical orientations and lived manifestations in ways resistant to easy interpretation and historicist thematisation. A rhetorical ethos embraces ‘conceptual personae’, just as Aristotle as a rhetorician longed to exhibit a heady and expansive *paideia*, for here ‘I am no longer myself but thought’s aptitude for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places’.⁴⁹ I argue that in its historical evolution the figure of the rhetor reveals ‘possibilities of life’ and ‘modes of existence’, and this immanent longing exists in productive tension with more programmatic imperatives.⁵⁰

I discuss the complex genealogy of the ‘orator’ or ‘rhetor’ as both idealised citizen and archaic trickster-figure and superhuman magician. Such personae are at once imbricated in the aspirations of their culture, yet perpetually homeless, enigmatic. I seek to discover in the rhetorical tradition a transmission of instincts and, in Connolly’s terms, ‘infrasensible’ registers, characteristics of rhetoric real in their ‘effectivity but not actual in (their) availability’. Such registers are not self-sufficient, they are too multiple and ‘finely meshed’ to be captured in the ‘coarse nets of explicit identity, conscious representation, and public appearance’.⁵¹ One such characteristic of rhetorical thought I refer to continually in the work of Friedrich Schlegel, Nietzsche, and Hannah Arendt is a ‘copious’ drive to exhibit a rich *paideia* of affective and psychological characteristics, to combine overt pedagogical instruction with more subtle forms of critical acculturation, a need to, in Connolly’s terms, honour a ‘variety of moral sources and metaphysical orientations’.⁵²

Thesis

I organise this thesis in two sections, a discussion of the pre-history and classical evolution of rhetorical personae, and an evocation of the resumption of the personae of the rhetor in modernity. I discuss the impact of rhetoric’s ambivalent ethos upon a particular

⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson, Verso, London, 1994, 64.

⁵⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 73.

⁵¹ Connolly, ‘Refashioning the Secular’, 181.

⁵² Connolly, ‘Refashioning the Secular’, 180.

desire for critical and aesthetic representation as a non-intentional discursive mode, an image of thought I trace from early German Romanticism through to the political theory of Hannah Arendt.

In chapters one and two, I attempt to recover a more archaic sense of *logos* as a rhetorical interest in the way the positional power of language can generate a critical and ethical orientation. I call attention to Hesiod's *Theogeny*, and the genealogy of polymorphous ethical forces it evokes, as a pre-text for the emergence of rhetorical personae. I argue that throughout its evolutions rhetoric remains cathected to a pluralist Pagan imagination and a generous conception of ethical value.

In chapter three, I discuss the first rhetorical conceptual personae, the Presocratic figures of Thales and Heraclitus. I suggest that they crystallise in secularised form the fragmented narratives and ethical ambivalence of Greek Paganism. I discuss the figure of Heraclitus as emblematic of the multiple positionings of *logismos*, a linguistic power that Heraclitus evokes as both a rational mode of explanation and universal comprehension and an extensive *paideia*, a situational sensitivity to mythic powers and archaic forces. I suggest that Heraclitus evokes *logismos* as a medial point between different cultural exigencies, such as lawful restraint and transcendental freedoms, rational optimism and mystical concessions to fate.

In my fourth chapter, I discuss the sociological and anthropological narratives of the Presocratics, a forerunner of the *mythos* of rhetoric as a civilising force. I draw attention to the anthropological narrative ascribed principally to the Presocratic and rhetorician Democritus. I suggest that Democritus offers a dualistic vision of how linguistic representation should function in a dynamic society. Language, Democritus argues, should both be rooted in a material environment and its ethical exigencies, while providing the means for transforming conventional assumptions and generating *paradoxical* values. Language is rhetorical because it is both situated and transcendental, intensive and extensive. I suggest that Democritus will imbue the rhetorical notion of representation with pragmatic *and* creative functions.

In chapter five I discuss the first generation of Sophists, who I take to inaugurate rhetoric as a theoretically explicit tradition, but whose legend and divergent structures of feeling will continue to complicate the rhetorical project up until the present day. I assess

the diverse representations, the very different moralities and actions attributed to the Sophists, rendered as both tricksters and heroic citizens. In Protagoras, arguably a humanist, relativist, pragmatist, skeptic, and utilitarian, I seek a proto-persona for the complex rhetorical sensibility we inherit from Renaissance thinkers such as Erasmus.

In chapters six, seven, and eight, I turn my attention to the early German Romantics or Frühromantiks, and Friedrich Schlegel's recommendation of a 'materialist rhetoric', as a polymathic public-intellectual ethos and critical method. I evoke the paradoxes of this term, both situated and sublime in orientation, material and ideal. I discuss Friedrich Schlegel's parallel conception of 'Witz' or higher wit as a form of vigorous partisanship that demands philosophy intensively reflect on its cultural investments, its situation and locality. Complementing this cultural materialism, I argue, the materialist rhetoric of Witz also seeks to restore an extensive *paideia*, to enlarge the imaginative capacities and affective possibilities of critical discourse.

I argue for the early German Romantics as avatars of a non-intentional rhetoric, a discursive mode torn between the impossibility and necessity of complete communication, between the relishing of cultural habitat and a taste for the sublime. In particular I discuss Friedrich Schlegel's theory of the Romantic novel as both ironic and sociably enthusiastic, a combination of desiderata, a rhetorical ethos influential in the thought of Nietzsche and Arendt.

In chapters nine and ten I move on to discuss Nietzsche's projection of the intellectual as a 'higher' rhetorical persona, as exemplified in his evocation of the 'untimely' Schopenhauer in Untimely Meditations. In Schopenhauer, Nietzsche repudiates philistine expediency but also calls for a thinker imbricated in the fluid energies of lived existence. Nietzsche would have the intellectual as a contrast of form and content, a 'mixed type' imbued with partisan polemical worldliness and a simultaneous beatific utopianism, transcending sectarian divisions. I discuss Nietzsche's Schopenhauerian thought-figure as reinventing the rhetor's dynamic ethicity, their contradictory values, torn between worldly imperatives and untimely longings.

In the following chapter I discuss Nietzsche's lectures and essays on classical rhetorical theory. Here Nietzsche renders rhetoric as an art and discourse capable of re-introducing those 'middle-degrees' of thought and critical praxis so often missed by a

conceptual language that lurches towards binarised conceptual polarities and shallow universalisms. I argue that for Nietzsche rhetoric was a liminal ethos, a relationship between the sincere and the artistic requiring extensive cultivation.

Finally, I discuss Hannah Arendt's political theory as inspired by a rhetorical conception of political action. I discuss Arendt's notion of a political ethos that combines vigorous activity with theoretical sobriety. I argue that Arendt evokes the value of pluralist cultural milieux and an affect-imbued ethos in her discussion of the formation of Gotthold Lessing and Rosa Luxemburg's political *modus vivendi*. I conclude with a discussion of how literary, cultural, and political theory can converse by renewing a dynamic rhetorical ethos and extensive *paideia* for the life of critique.

Chapter One: The Myth to Logos Thesis

Logos, the language of 'reason', is frequently said to have emerged in the philosophical discourse of the Greek Presocratic natural philosophers. Here I explore the 'myth to *logos*' narrative commonly used to characterise this emergence, and offer a critique of that thesis. My purpose, in this chapter, is to suggest an alternative approach: I argue that the Greek signifier *logos* needs to be historically situated in sociological and aesthetic terms rather than assumed to be a self-evident antecedent to Enlightenment ideals of rationality and objectivity. I ponder why histories of philosophy tend to equate *logos*, a term that first emerges in ancient Greece, with epistemology, a universal language of reasoned analysis and objective explanation that is secular, present to itself, and teleological in orientation.

I argue that the rationalist determination of *logos* offers a helpful insight into the 'imaginary', the affective investments and mental geography of post-Enlightenment

reason, its desires and repressions. I hope to synthesise some interesting revisionist critiques of the ‘myth to *logos*’ narrative in order to construct an alternative sense of *logos* as polysemic, a constellation of themes and meditations that forms the historical pre-text for classical rhetoric’s ambivalent ethical tonality and its promotion of an extensive *paideia* with archaic roots. I seek to suggest a rhetorical version of *logos* as a discourse that has deep affinities with mythic narratives, cultural memory, thematic eclecticism, and ethical pluralism.

The Progressivist Myth of Origins

The Platonic-Aristotelian redaction of *logos* inaugurates a critical tradition I will term *progressivist*, premised on the assumption that the explanatory mode of *logos* represents a decisive break with myth as both an erroneous epistemology and an historically superseded manifestation of a benighted culture. A recent collection of essays, edited by Richard Buxton, has usefully labelled this historicist teleology the 'From Myth to Reason' thesis, which suggests that the advent of Greek rationality represents a decisive break with mythic fabrications.⁵³ This thesis has had a profound influence on historical accounts that seek to detail the emergence of the detached, truly philosophical animus in Western thought. It is a narrative of foundations that has premised its progressivist narrative upon the rejection of myth as a valid mode of reasoning and philosophical interrogation.

Myth or *muthos* has been widely regarded as an assemblage of traditional or sacred narratives, a sociomorphic projection of communal values and collective memory for the primary purpose of social reproduction. This *homeostatic* understanding of myth as functionally preserving social equilibrium has been strengthened by anthropological shibboleths about the primitive and fantastical mentalities of oral, pre-logical cultures. Primitive awe and wonder in the face of overwhelming natural forces discharges itself in Pagan idolatry. In his influential book From Mythos to Logos (1940) Wilhelm Nestle extends this idea by opposing myth and logical thought as two different forms of

⁵³ Richard Buxton (ed.), From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999.

consciousness or 'mental life'. Mythical thought is imagistic and involuntary, creating through the unconscious, while logical thought is conceptual and intentional, analysing and synthesising by means of consciousness.⁵⁴

J.P. Vernant suggests that representations of the significance of *logos*' emergence have long been imbricated in the ideal of Western modernity as critical and transcendental, upholding the reflexive value of argued demonstration as opposed to the inflexibility of traditional narrative exposition. Whereas oral myth relies on formula and repetition, as in the Homeric epithet, written composition is combinatory, varied, and adaptable, enabling a more rigorous, nuanced, and recursive analysis of conceptual material. If the argumentative structure of *logos* is imbued with readerly literate prose qualities, analytical and cognitively demanding, the poetic exuberance of oral narration implies a ceremonial rehearsal of affective communion, a theatricality that the critical *logos* wisely foregoes.⁵⁵

For adherents of the progressivist thesis, *logos* is paradigmatically non-mimetic of sensible forms, it does not invite emotional participation, it appeals to the individual's critical intelligence, reciprocally fashioning the independent rational subject. According to progressivist accounts, *logos* is an indicator of the democratising force of literacy and civic rationality; as written law, for example, it must explain and account for itself in the public sphere, suggesting logical criteria for its instantiation. C. Jan Swearingen suggests that the rise of literacy in ancient Greece enabled an experimental 'logosophical discourse directed at finding, defining, testing, and proving concepts rather than at representing events'. *Logos* differentiates itself from an oral noetic economy or mindset which is 'held in place' by mnemonic devices such as rhythm, song, and narrative formulae, and is therefore heavily reliant on mimetic repetition. Only by such differentiation can *logos* be conceptualised as the principle by which one makes 'independently true statements', placing a premium on innovation, interrogation, skepticism, analysis, debate, but also on standards of authority and proof.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Wilhelm Nestle, From Mythos to Logos: The Self-Development of Greek Thought from Homer to the Sophists and Socrates, Stuttgart, 1940. Quoted in Glenn W. Most, 'From Logos to Mythos', in From Myth to Reason? 27.

⁵⁵ J.P. Vernant, Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece, trans. Janet Lloyd, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1981.

⁵⁶ C. Jan Swearingen, Rhetoric and Irony: Western Literacy and Western Lies, Oxford University Press, New York, 1991, 38.

For the ‘from myth to *logos*’ adherents, it is of great moment that the literate *logos* replaces an oral, musical *paideia* or pedagogy based on sung verse and dance. Swearingen argues that the static sensuousness of the *paideia* is now supplanted by the ‘analytic spirit’ and ‘dissecting eye’ of logocentric reasoning, the objectivising videological animus promoted by the visual patterns of letters and words.⁵⁷

As a foil for a *logos* coterminous with the post-Enlightenment ideal of analytical objectivity, participatory rationality and epistemic universality, it is unsurprising that *muthos* has been relegated to the circumstantial, the particular, and the subjective by historians of early Greek philosophy. While *logos* is the mature power of modernist self-presence and conceptual identity in thought, confident and prospective in its interrogations, *muthos* is evoked as a childish past which promotes fears of atavistic regression and stasis: ‘The transition from myth to science consists in stripping off the historical, in rejecting chronological narration, and in reflecting upon the Unchangeable. The first science was obviously an investigation of nature’.⁵⁸

I would argue that the progressivist valorising of *logos* only serves to render it paradoxically mythical, ironically invested in a heroic *narrative*, that of *logos*’ patricide against its mythic ancestry and its subsequent dominion over other discursive registers; here the primitive and chthonic other, myth, remains a necessary foil for rationality’s proselytising violence. I think this is symptomatic of the contradictions of the post-Enlightenment rationalist imaginary, unable to assert its universal claims without betraying desires, anxieties, and libidinal projections. Rationality, identified with the assertive presentism of conceptual prose, has been denuded by historians of philosophy of the narrative and figurative confusions generated by affect and imagination.

The historicist claims of the ‘myth to *logos*’ thesis rest on an anthropomorphised and heroic narrative of domination and elision; the narrative projects a mythic violence that the rational calm of the *logos* would seem to exclude.⁵⁹ Rationalism is an imaginary

⁵⁷ Swearingen, *Rhetoric and Irony*, 41-4.

⁵⁸ W. Windelband, *History of Ancient Philosophy* (1899), Dover Publications, New York, 1956, 36.

⁵⁹ Cf. V. Tejera, *Rewriting the History of Ancient Greek Philosophy*, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1997, 64: ‘The revival of mathematics in the sixteenth century, and the triumph of physical science in the seventeenth...prepared the way for the assimilation of rationality to merely theoretical reason and the separation of imagination and affectivity from rationality... (which) has impoverished our understanding of

of exclusion, and rhetoric's appeal in the present critical landscape is as a challenging alternative to rationalist constructions of critical discourse.

I now discuss two prominent exponents of the 'myth to *logos*' thesis, evoking the cultural biases and anachronistic assumptions that inform their model of critical discourse. By a close textual reading of the metaphorical logic implicit in their accounts of the emergence of Western epistemology, I indicate that there can be no neutral model of critical representation, but only historically contingent projections of the powers and imperatives that it will serve.

Barnes: The Colonial Adventure of the Presocratic Logos

In his introduction to a prominent English language translation of the Presocratic fragments, Jonathan Barnes argues that the Presocratic theorists, beginning with Thales of Miletus, should be regarded as *phusikoi*, physicists, observers ('students') of nature. Barnes delimits the epistemic terrain of the Presocratics as the 'study of nature'.⁶⁰ *Phusikoi* is an Aristotelian term suggesting a kind of proto-physicist, a student of causes and effects in natural phenomena. Barnes, following the Aristotle of the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, is concerned with determining the purview of the Presocratics as primarily materialists and proto-scientists. We learn that although 'there are ethical and logical parts to some of their works ... their chief interest was physics'.⁶¹ Aristotle was influential in canonising the Presocratics as the first philosophers of physical causality, speculators on the origin or *arche* of the universe, and the material processes that animate it, its nature or *phusis*.⁶² By thus 'naturalising' the terminology of the Presocratics, post-Aristotelian histories of philosophy will continue to determine the Presocratic *logos* as a universally

the reflectiveness of art...' One might speculate on the basis of the mythically supremacist imaginary I have evoked, that aesthetic projections and narrative schemas are irremediable aspects of thought, at their most dangerous when unaccompanied by formal reflection.

⁶⁰ Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1987, 13.

⁶¹ Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 13

⁶² Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 13.

applicable, cognitively motivated language of phenomenal explanation and taxonomy appropriate to a delimitable field of research and investigation.⁶³

Barnes argues that Aristotle was correct in demarcating the fictive 'mythologists' from the Presocratics as the first naturalistic 'philosophers', despite superficial similarities between Presocratic accounts and poetic/mythological narratives of the nature and origin of the universe, such as Hesiod's *Theogeny* (15, 16). Barnes suggests that 'philosophy', apparently an unproblematic category, owes its origin to that 'special way' of looking at the world, 'the scientific or rational way' (17). For Barnes, the history of the emergence of Greek philosophy is a creation story, 'the history of the conceptual understanding of explanatory schemes', requiring an abstract terminology which 'had to be invented' (18).

What interests me in this account of the unique historical significance of the Presocratics, their contemporary exceptionalism, is a post-Aristotelian idea of the method by which conceptual reason, as self-originating and 'self-enclosed', develops its symbolic capital. Reason develops its particular purchase by dispensing with a mythical and aestheticised lexicon, establishing its autarkic credentials. This achievement is the work of 'the intellectual adventurers of early Greece', the 'heroes of this book', 'men of genius' (14, 16). Exploring the etymological derivation of certain key explanatory terms in Presocratic thought, Barnes indicates the progressive achievements of their 'scientific struggle' as a task of pioneering exploration, simultaneously requiring the erasure of fictive modes of understanding (18).

It is noteworthy, Barnes reminds us, that Presocratic thinkers such as Heraclitus chose to designate the universe, the totality of what is, by the noun *kosmos*. Derived from a verb which means 'to order', 'to arrange', 'to marshal', *kosmos* appears in Homer's *Iliad* referring to the Greek generals marshalling a host of troops for battle; it has the functional sense of an orderly arrangement. Also, in 'ordinary Greek' the term suggests an adornment ('cosmetic'), a pattern that beautifies and is pleasant to contemplate (19). By giving the term an 'essentially scientific aspect', the Presocratics ensured that the *kosmos* could now

⁶³ Barry Sandywell indexes the modern sense of *arche* as conceptual universality to the formation of specialised research institutes in stable locales like Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum, and to the emergence of more narrowly conceived scientific disciplines, focusing on cause and effect and natural laws. Sandywell, Presocratic Reflexivity: The Construction of Philosophical Discourse c. 600 - 450 BC, Logological Investigations Vol. 3, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, 93, 101, 130, 143.

be liberated from both practical and aesthetic contexts, and be understood as the ordered universe in its entirety, the sum of what is, a principle of universal explanation.

For Barnes, a rationalist vocabulary must make a conceptual and ontological leap beyond historical specificity and the vernacular constraints of 'normal conversation'. The ontological potential of the abstract noun necessitates a transcendence of socio-historical context, of performative usages and contextual functions. The rational lexicon or *logos* aims to suppress any linguistic trace of the subject of enunciation and its indigenous social environment.

The language of reason must forget a certain density of memory, affective impressions and cultural usages in order to proceed in the 'brave new world' of Presocratic rational thought (16). As the allusion attests, a metaphorical logic of colonisation is operative in Barnes's account, requiring both a narrative of original foundations and an exploitation of pre-existent cultural knowledges. One could also argue that a colonial 'adventure' informs Barnes's narrative of the emergence of the philosophical concept of *arche*, originally a Greek word for an office or magistracy. Barnes suggests that the Presocratic physicists, focussed on the demands of cosmological explanation, drew upon the polyvalent sense of the term in vernacular usage to conceptualise the *arche* or origin of the universe as both a principle of commencement and a continuing mode of governance and order. An example would be Thales' famous doctrine that the earth and its atmosphere both originates in and continues by the condensation and rarefaction of water: hence water and its associated processes is the earth's *arche* as both origin and *primum mobile*, the earth's *phusis*.

Barnes sees little reason to question whether this tropological 'turning' of such terms entirely superseded their contextual, legal, and ethical applications for the Presocratics. He does not ask how a word with a cultural resonance of practical governance (*archon* – leader, king) was put to the purely theoretical task of creating omnipotent, universal knowledge, without discursive remainder. Barnes does not ask how the Presocratics' radical tropological leap from the customary to the abstract was received by a contemporary audience alert to diverse codifications. It seems that the colonising/progressivist imaginary of *logos* hesitates to admit the value of inter-idiomatic reciprocity. This is the case even when a term's philological history seems to suggest such

an acknowledgment, or at least further inquiry into its lexical and grammatical transformations during this period, the sixth and fifth century BCE.

If Barnes is little interested in the possible activation of idiomatic senses in key Presocratic terms, it might be because the Presocratic *logos* should ideally guarantee a cognitive profit for its expenditures. For Barnes, Presocratic explanations are 'economical' in their terminology, using few terms and assuming few 'unknowns', certainly rejecting theological interventions into the workings of nature. Presocratic rationalisations, its *logoi*, are '*internal*: they explain the universe from within, in terms of its own constituent features' (17). The sixth century BCE philosopher Anaximenes, for example, explains the thermodynamics of matter and the formation of the human soul in terms of a single material element, air (17).

Given that the natural world exhibits an 'extraordinary variety' of phenomena and events, it is apparently imperative 'that the variety must be reduced to order, and the order made simple – for that is the way to intelligibility'. It is this 'desire to explain as much as possible in terms of as little as possible', which informs 'both...ancient and ... modern endeavours' (18). Barnes's historicism, his celebration in the Presocratics of an efficacious rationalism anticipating the modern Western episteme, reproduces the received sociology of what must constitute Enlightenment, an encyclopedic, secularising enthusiasm for taxonomy and rational explanation. Barnes's portrait is redolent of bourgeois triumphalism, evoking the Presocratics as confident individualists, utilitarians, expansive colonialists, and universal humanists. Before questioning these anachronistic projections I will discuss Eric Havelock's more detailed sociological and materialist account of the Presocratics' 'linguistic task', which also relates the Presocratic achievement to the values of Western culture.

Havelock: The Austere Task of *logos*

Eric A. Havelock, an influential scholar of Presocratic thought, offers a detailed materialist and sociological explanation for the emergence of rational thought in sixth-

century Greece.⁶⁴ Havelock dispenses with Barnes' reification of individual heroics and constructs a narrative that interleaves the emergence of the philosophical attitude with a social transformation that includes the beginnings, in the Greek city-states, of the rule of civic law and the rise of literacy. Havelock recognises that Presocratic thinkers such as Heraclitus and Parmenides never classed themselves as 'philosophers', a term that only became extant in the work of Plato. For Havelock Presocratic ideas are less a definite school of thought, more a group of thinkers united by a particular animus, a kind of moral fervour.

Havelock suggests that in contradistinction to most poets of their intermediate period of Greek history (6th century BCE), the Presocratics did not wish to please or entertain, 'only to instruct'.⁶⁵ The Presocratics were less self-invented in Barnes's terms than a manifestation of a profound cultural upheaval, the transition from oral to literate technologies of writing and documentation. Through this transition, the extraneous requirements of a successful narratological performance, such as the invocation of a muse, will be gradually supplanted by the efficacious rigour of prose assertion, its standardisation and accountability.⁶⁶

In an interesting anthropological excursus, Havelock claims that 'oral memory' can only accommodate a language that describes the acts of persons and the happening of events, it is 'unfriendly' to abstract and conceptual speech.⁶⁷ Havelock indicates that the oral reliance on narrative exposition means that myths can only describe what is in terms of its coming to be, offering the following narrative infelicity as an example:

Instead of stating that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, it prefers to say that 'the triangle stood firmly, its two legs astride the ground, stoutly defending its two right angles against the attack of the enemy'.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Eric A. Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', in Kevin Robb, ed., Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy, The Hegeler Institute, La Salle, Illinois, 1983, 12.

⁶⁵ Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 12,13.

⁶⁶ Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 12. Vernant paraphrases a similar line of argument, Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece, 207: the new *logos* represents the historical emergence of civic humanism, programming discussion and counterargument in the post-tribal *polis* of the city-state, its written form suggesting a recursive, rational attention to logical criteria for laws and decision making. *Logos* is no longer the exclusive gift of those who had eloquence, the epic poets and fabulist mythologists.

⁶⁷ Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 13.

⁶⁸ Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 13.

In Havelock's view, mythic speech or *mutho* is incapable of statements of definition, the basis of rational analysis and propositional logic. It seems that metaphorised myth, with its abundance of figures and syntactical qualifications, threatens the copula, the ontic power of the 'is'. *Muthos* explains the universe only mediately, in the 'guise of stories that represent it as the work of agents: that is, gods.'⁶⁹ In contrast to the familiar communal rehearsals of oral narrative, when thought is committed to writing the *logos* is rendered as an artifact, an object 'separate from the describer's own consciousness'. Literacy affords the historical opportunity and generates the rational desire to make the object explicit, to 'tie it down' as a system or structure instead of a series of events issuing from the mouth of a poet or muse.⁷⁰ To enact itself, logocentric discourse will eschew performative exuberance, the theatricality of genre and ceremony, and the contextual *mise en scène* that genre and performance usually entail. For Havelock, the subject of reason needs to be appropriately individualised, her/his explorations divorced from collective mediations.

A specular or narcissistic moment is envisaged in Havelock's originary *mise en scène* of literate discovery. Now the emergent Western cognitive subject recognises its individual substantiality as reciprocal with the power to present an object to itself without mediation. In some awe, the Western subject of reason becomes truly cognizant of its environment, and is released from the narcissistic auto-identification of myth. The cognitive subject becomes aware, in its maturity, of the 'external world', as if for the first time.⁷¹ Once again, Havelock's attempt to narrate the distinctive emergence of a rational language lapses into a mythic creation story. Havelock evokes the Presocratic rationalist imaginary according to the value of the modern scientific worldview: phenomenologically open ended, innocent, transcending the given, and intentional, redolent of Edmund Husserl's idea of the temporal 'now', separable from past and future, which anchors epistemological self-presence.

Havelock argues that only on the basis of ancient Greece's technological and social development and the psychological awakening it enabled, did the Presocratics conceive a

⁶⁹ Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 13.

⁷⁰ Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 15.

⁷¹ Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 15.

conceptual and linguistic 'task'. Rationality presupposes a phenomenological transformation from mythic passivity; it is the intentional development of a language of being. How was this ontological vocabulary to be achieved? As in Barnes' account, the lexicon of Homer and Hesiod, context-dependent and historically particular, will need to be 'stretched and extended' by the ingenious Presocratics, enabling a 'cosmic' rather than a 'particular' reference.⁷²

Havelock suggests that while the traditional 'storehouse' language of *muthos* is constrained by its own contextual immanence, its contingent dependence on particular stories and poetic images, the permanence of writing in the form of legal and political codifications suggests a socio-historical evolution towards the flexible appreciation of abstract values. The advent in the fifth century BCE of a detached, experimental interest in the ontological scope of grammar established the preconditions for propositional statements to be distinguished from mythical formulae. Havelock cathects this propositional linguistic capacity to the formation of new desires, in particular the Presocratics' philosophical monism, their inquiries into ultimate causes, the idea of the unity of the many in the One. Julius M. Moravesik succinctly describes this transition from localizable *muthos* to the transcendental desire of *logos* as the passage from immanent myth to philosophical 'speculation'.⁷³

For Havelock, the literate *logos* is faced with a stern but sure and achievable task: to instruct the masses, misled by the aesthetic excitations of the oral *paedeia*, in a version of intelligence which is austere, rigorous, and self-denying, enacting the lonely journey 'from story to statement', from affective communion to solitary reflection.⁷⁴ Havelock proposes Heraclitus as an exemplary figure of the new logocentrism, enframing his apothegmatic sayings as a proselytising conversion of idolatrous pluralisms: 'Intelligence consists in listening not to me but to the statement (*logos*) and then to concur-in-stating that all (things) are one' (B50).⁷⁵

⁷² Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 21.

⁷³ Julius M. Moravesik, 'Heraclitean Concepts and Explanations', in Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy, 136.

⁷⁴ Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 12.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 23, my italics.

Havelock postulates that Heraclitus' reader/auditor is enjoined to follow the *ex cathedra* statement rather than the 'inspired voice of bard or muse', to begin to forget the concrete semiotics of a *paideia* of dance and song, of cultic ritual and performance. Knowledge must be divorced from cultural function. Intelligence and authority about the external world are to be recognised as distinct from the speaker who pronounces it, while that speaker is invested with an authority to utter critical truths on a basis which is heteronomously ontological and privately received, rather than sociable, rhetorical, and familiar. Heraclitus's radical source of moral authority, his attempt to morally purify a corrupt society, is similar to the radical purifying messianic desires of the Jewish prophets. Knowledge is a monotheism. Havelock's Heraclitus offers *Logos* as a monotheistic experience of the total environment, a sense of the unifying power behind all being.

Havelock is confident that the Heraclitean critique of the ignorance of his contemporaries is directed towards transforming a blighted moral economy, an oral habitus. Heraclitus must redress 'oral habit as well as oral speech', a mentality which is experiential and 'active', but not 'reflective'. The stakes are high, for to 'accept and absorb the new language and mental habits of *logos* is to accept a new way of life'.⁷⁶ In Havelock's emplotment of the emergence of post-mythical critical agency, Heraclitus' proselytising desire for conversion must vehemently oppose his pedagogical rivals and their demagogical effect on mob opinion, and this explains his polemical tirades against the demotic mood:

What sense or wit is theirs? They are persuaded by the bards of the people and take the talking crowd to be their instructor not knowing that the majority are no good whereas the good are few (B104).⁷⁷

For Havelock's Heraclitus, *logos* would appear to sound an elite commitment to rational discussion and civic virtue, instantiating rationality as a permanent bulwark against seductive rhetorics. Havelock quotes Heraclitus's *logos* as promoting constitutional law as a protection against the dangerous vacillations of the popular mood:

⁷⁶ Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 17.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 16.

It is necessary to be a follower of the combinatory/common (*xynus*). My statement (*logos*) is combinatory/common, but most live as though possessing an intelligence private to themselves (B2).⁷⁸

We can summarise by discussing certain, representative features of Havelock's rationalist imaginary, the role reason is to play within a socius of complex forces. Havelock imagines Heraclitus' instructive *logos* as a necessary stage in the epistemological, legal, and moral progress of the West in its movement beyond the oral/nomadic stage of human civilisation. *Logos* is that providential task for philosophical language that unites stable governance with intellectual dynamism, objective detachment with inquisitive desire. Rationality is founded upon the Western literate *paideia* and its legal and political codifications, literate objectivity taken as the propaedeutic of independent, rational modes of scrutiny.

In Moira Gatens's terms, the Presocratics' philosophico-linguistic project, as evoked by Havelock, is to inaugurate a masculinist public sphere where men engage in rational and transformative activity, as opposed to the natural and instinctive realm of mythopoeisis.⁷⁹ For both Barnes and Havelock, the 'natural' language of myth, although inferior, subtends and services abstract thought. Presocratic language *is what it ought to be* according to liberal-capitalist imperatives, a masculinist activity supported by a hypostatized nature, an eternal feminine.⁸⁰

I repeat that it is a narrative axis alone, a mythic creation story, which guarantees this desired continuity between ancient Greek and post-Enlightenment models of intelligent language. For upon the continual invocation of this continuity hinges the Western project of reason and civilisation. The 'myth to logos' narrative is informed by discourses ranging from the utilitarian and productivist, androcentrism, colonialism, and the modern desire to police disciplinary boundaries. Enlightenment secularism is called upon, but so is the comforting ethical framework of Judeo-Christian monotheism and its

⁷⁸ Quoted in Havelock, 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics', 17.

⁷⁹ Moira Gatens, Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, 43.

⁸⁰ For Barnes and Havelock, 'myth' is analogous to the immanent sphere of female activity understood as a reflex of innate instincts: 'Women's traditional work is seen to follow automatically from her *being* whereas men's work necessarily involves *doing*, that is, involves rational activity', Gatens, 33.

purifying ethical tasks. We might say that the rationalist imaginary has discontinuous 'mythemes'.

The next section discusses recent intellectual histories that attempt philologically to recover the polyvalent idiolect, the field of cultural usages and mythico-historical evocations, that imbricated Presocratic terminology. I try to give a sense of a Presocratic intellectual discourse that adapts itself to the vitality of its ambient popular culture, its religious, political and performative codes, while forming an idea of how critical discourse is to displace and transcend the conventional. I suggest that this mixture of popular embeddedness and critical resourcefulness enables an environment in which rhetorical theory, practice, and desire will flourish.

A Philological Perspective on the Presocratics

In the last twenty years there has arisen a postmodern suspicion towards 'meta-narratives', a doubting of anthropological approaches to myth and oral societies, an interdisciplinary and post-colonial interrogation of the discursive and material violence implicit in Western rationality, and a growing interest in different forms of critical expression. The current critical climate has promulgated a revisionist interest in dismantling the subordination of *muthos* to *logos*, or at least greatly complicating their historical relationship. Glenn Most has suggested that investigations into myth must be freed from rationalist and romantic projections. Myth has been imagined as a transmitted body of stories, suited to material requirements and usually *localisable* in a particular historical context, hence accessible to the sociological gaze. Or mythologies have been studied as the vanished numinous quality of the 'mythic', attributable to the aura of a people's lost religious identity, reassuringly prehistoric and without the arbitrary conditioning of ideology.⁸¹ The critical wheel has turned on these condescending trivialisations, and a more pluralistic idea of Greek reason has emerged which suggests

⁸¹ Glenn W. Most, 'From Logos to Mythos' in Buxton, *From Myth to Reason?* 44.

that mythical narratives have their own rich and complex logic(s) and are capable of generating speculative compartments and subtle philosophies of self and world.⁸²

In a later chapter, I reinscribe mythical narratology as a valid discursive alternative to conceptual presence and univocal value. As a philosophy elaborated through multiple genealogies, Hesiod's *Theogeny* inculcates an awareness of persistent patterns of violence and concord, progress and cyclical repetition. As Richard Buxton argues, it is a text which insists on the trace of the past in the present, cumulatively indexing the *persistence* of opaque, chthonic powers and the irreducibility of fate, allegorising a law of eternal return, of perpetual madness and error to be juxtaposed with the benign civic justice and prosperity promised by the contemporary reign of Olympian Zeus. Humanity is to be positioned as a *medium* between the chthonic earthly realm and the blessed divinity of the gods, forever negotiating different moral codes, secular and divine, private and social. The mobile symbolism of narrative exposition, I will argue, lends myth a kind of diacritical or temporised coherence that should not be adjudged inferior to the assertive ontological presence of the philosophical concept.

In these terms the ancient Greek 'Enlightenment' of the Presocratics and later the Sophists should not be judged according to the more recent standard of rationalist aggression towards myth. Rather it can be conceived as a supple adaptation and codification of the philosophical pluralism inherent in polytheistic genealogies and the existential dilemmas of tragedy.

Questioning the historicist narrative of a logically motivated *logos*' erasure of mythic forms, Buxton asks for a rhetorical investigation into the differential and simultaneous usages of *logos* and *muthos* in their archaic and Hellenistic contexts: 'Would it not then be preferable, instead of speaking of a "shift", to think in terms of a constant to-ing and fro-ing between the mythical and the rational?'⁸³ Barry Sandywell, intrigued by the mythical matrix of early European theorising, suggests that the 'relationship between mythos and logos is a dialogical rather than a simply chronological or empirical-causal connection.... As a dialectical trope, '*mythos-logos*' symbolises the presence of conflict

⁸² Buxton, 'Introduction', in Buxton, From Myth to Reason? 8.

⁸³ Buxton, From Myth to Reason? 5.

and struggle at work in ancient Greek culture.’⁸⁴ Tejera suggests that the ‘literate revolution in Greece’ and the genealogy of its critical terminologies are a philological and historical, rather than philosophical, matter.⁸⁵

I would endorse Tejera and Sandywell’s suggestion that philosophical appropriations of Presocratic thought, deeply invested in the ‘myth to logos’ thesis, have tended anachronistically to naturalise their terminology, following Aristotle in translating terms such as *arche* and *phusis* as purely material and physical principles of causality and development. By drawing attention to specific semantic contexts, philological investigation promises to re-ambiguate Greek concepts, restoring their discursive usages and their historical relationship to the dialogical language of Greek mythology, in particular the cosmogonic speculations of Hesiod.

In his sociological study Presocratic Reflexivity Sandywell offers an alternative genealogy of *arche*. We know, says Sandywell, that Aristotle’s term ‘*arche*’ was a later interpretive construct superimposed upon a more Archaic expression: ‘However complex, *arche* did not, in either everyday or poetic usage, have the meaning of “causality” or the first term of a causal sequence in the modern sense of these terms.’ Sandywell suggests that the ‘causal’ meaning was a later innovation, popularised by the philosophical texts of Democritus, Plato, and Aristotle.⁸⁶ Before gaining a more abstract significance in the fourth century BCE, *arche* would seem to have encompassed a far less determinate semantic cluster invoking the notion of a secure foundation or starting point for a family, dynasty, or polis, the gods often providing the sense of the eternal *arche* of the human order, the indestructible, immutable, and eternal order of things (143). *Arche* was also an organic metaphor, the source, origin, or root of things that exist; the *arche* of a plant lies in the soil from which it is nourished (142).

One should not, therefore, necessarily associate *arche* with the rather ‘thin’ conception of cause and rational sequence, but assume a varied cultural inflection, of *arche* as a divine or animate ‘matrix’, a sense that becomes relevant when we discuss Hesiod’s

⁸⁴ Barry Sandywell, The Beginnings of European Theorizing: Reflexivity in the Archaic Age, Logological Investigations Vol. 2, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, 29.

⁸⁵ Tejera, Rewriting the History of Ancient Greek Philosophy, 27.

⁸⁶ Barry Sandywell, Presocratic Reflexivity, 93, 143.

Theogeny (147). *Arche* is also a commonplace trope for commencing an action, making something begin, generating something in quotidian contexts (143). Sandywell suggests that *arche* for the ancient Greeks often intimated both the origin and first cause of human societies, their customs and laws, so by extension it suggested power, sovereignty, and domination. The human embodiment of a ruling principle, a ruler, leader, king or tyrant was known as an *archeon* or *archon* (144). As a symbol of authority, *arche* shades into older or pre-*polis* notions of the authority vested in customary rules and tribal ways, or *themis* (145). Hence debates around the term, such as attempts to modernise its significance or challenge one of its particular determinations, suggested *social* and *political* struggles for legitimation and symbolic capital. Any transformation of the term's significance into more abstract domains such as philosophical principles of causality would need to operate by analogy, thereby reactivating an ongoing social drama about legitimate power, sovereignty and ruling principles, a conversation which it could not refuse to take part in (145). Alert to the possible reactivation of vernacular codes in Presocratic terminology, Sandywell suggests that 'we can anticipate a great deal of semantic overlap between the idioms of myth, epic poetry, and the early experiments in philosophical abstraction' (142).

Sandywell also critiques the Aristotelian standardisation of the semantic polysemy of *phusis* for the purposes of metaphysical inquiry. Sandywell explores the pre-metaphysical purchase of *phusis*, a term whose contemporary significance is the objective analysis of the structure and dynamic principles of 'physical nature' (147). As Sandywell argues, the objective, physicalist viewpoint was unavailable to early Greek thinkers, who would have relied on the older Homeric sense of the word as an everyday term for birth, growth, and development, something's natural course or immanent organisation, that which makes things what they are, their peculiar dynamic (147). *Phusis* is a trajectory of something's natural growth and functioning; even when hidden, *phusis* has the natural power to manifest itself or come into the light. It is a general term for one's status in society, one's family genealogy, high or low birth, underlining the traditional pre-democratic system of *arête*, innate and inherited virtue based on aristocratic lineage (148, 149). Invoking a sense of 'character' and 'disposition', Socrates speaks of the noble and philosophical *phuseos* of Theaetetus, his characteristic disposition to wonder (*thaumazein*) and question; *phuseos* speaks of what is proper to a particular nature, what constitutes the

often hidden essence of human beings, the ‘*phusis* that loves to hide’ (Heraclitus, B123) (151). Like *arche*, a site of social struggle, an ethical debate surrounds the invocation of *phusis*, which will frequently be opposed by the early Greek Cynics and Stoics to the corruption and artificiality of social laws (*nomos*) and mores.

Conclusion

My philological exercise queries the progressivist notion that the Presocratics bring an innocent perception to their inquiries, a familiarly modern, neutral, detached, objective mode of scientific observation. The Presocratics’ phenomenological innocence would be ideally unencumbered by social construction and history, an early exemplar of philosophical rigour according to the rationalist ideals of Barnes and Havelock. I’ve also cast some suspicion on their idealisation of Presocratic terminology as an intentional, instrumental language that can be opposed to the pre-conscious or ‘instinctive’ fabrications of myth. My philological reading presses for the structural acknowledgment that key Presocratic terms like *arche* and *phusis* must activate and adapt to existing religious and cultural themes and narratives and the rich critical explorations that they allow. As we shall see, thinkers like Anaximander, Empedocles, and Heraclitus continue to inscribe their cosmological and ethical understandings within a divine, mythical, and tragic *social dramaturgy*, reinventing the polytheistic drama of conflicting forces and paradoxical first principles and matrices. Presocratic language, prior to modern epistemic specialisation, is content to be sociomorphic and undifferentiated as to whether its inquiry is physicalist, ethical, or sociological. This language deploys a number of idioms and thematic frameworks in its discussion of cosmology and anthropology, rejecting the inert facticity of modern materialism. In the following chapter, I resume this philological spirit and give a careful and necessarily incomplete recontextualisation of *logos* as it functioned in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, as a *paradoxical medium*, inscribed within polytheistic and tragic philosophemes.

Chapter Two: The Historical Inflections of Logos

In this chapter I discuss the plurality of significations the word *logos* evoked for the ancient Greeks. I suggest that the ambiguities and dilemmas posed by *logos* are the matrix from which rhetoric's fascination with language's copious potentialities will develop. I will explore an equivocal *logos*, an understanding of language as therapy and poison, blindness and insight. I argue that rhetoric will occupy a healthy tradition of meta-linguistic discussion, arguing for language as a *medium* for social dialogue, a profligate power requiring an open-ended ethics.

In myth and its tragic interpretation, the desire for *logos*, for explanation, order, truth, imbricates the subject in conflicting forces, good and evil, rational investigation and magical transfiguration, secular humanism and religious pessimism. I suggest that in the ancient Greek milieu, *logos* invokes those 'conceptual personae' who embody its ambiguous power and ethical complexities, from Odysseus to Oedipus. In contradistinction to the 'economical' rationalist imaginary, I discuss a rhetorical ethos that forms itself from multiple nodes of interest, the rich potential of myth, narrative, aesthetic representation.

Recovering a Pre-Aristotelian Logos

I now discuss Barry Sandywell's suggestive inquiry into the polyvalency of *logos* in archaic and fifth and fourth century BCE Greek culture.⁸⁷ An abstract verbal noun, *logos* derives from the verb *legein*, one sense of which signifies to collect or gather together. This as yet undeterminable potential for articulation can certainly be rendered in the familiar terms of rationality, as a language of explanation, an account of the reason, cause, or principle of something; in geometry the *logos* of a figure would refer to its ratio, proportion, or rule, its regular arrangement or proportionate order. By the usual process of

⁸⁷ Sandywell, Presocratic Reflexivity: The Construction of Philosophical Discourse c. 600 - 450 BC, Logological Investigations Vol. 3, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, 240-50.

tropological abstraction, *logos* accrues a more conceptual significance, to give the *logos* for something in later Greek usage is to uncover its 'reason' or underlying structure.⁸⁸

By the early decades of the fifth-century BCE, on the threshold of the age of Plato and Aristotle, the words *logos* and *logike* are used in a general sense to register the presence of intelligible structure or 'form' in a subject matter. One of the central meanings of the term by the fourth century is as a synonym for the presence of 'reason' or 'rationality', elaborated in the writings and teachings of Aristotle and his school.⁸⁹ In Plato's metaphysics, *logos* suggests a meaningful, intelligent discourse, justifying its account of things, defending its version of what is by reason and argument, while assuming the dialogical context of an urbane, interactive exploration of opinions and beliefs.

Claude Calame offers a detailed account of the descriptive purchase of *logos* in Plato's dialogues. He suggests that in the dialogues *logos* is successively likened to discourse appropriate to promulgating opinion, to enumeration of the constituent elements of the object of opinion, and to formulation of its distinctive characteristics. This modality of characterisation is evidenced in the *Republic* where social hierarchy and its historical establishment in the form of an idealised city are worked out through the mediation of *logos*, as ratio and rule. The Platonic/Socratic *logos* which sifts through opinions and details essential characteristics is superseded by the restricted, formal definition offered by the Aristotle of the *Prior Analytics*: 'The syllogism (*sullogismos*) is a form of reasoning (*logos*) in which, certain things being posited, something other than those premises necessarily follows, by the mere fact of those premises.'⁹⁰

By the time of Aristotle, then, *logos* is coterminous with logic, the ontological criteria of rational discourse, it is synonymous now with the limits of intelligibility, instantiating what counts as knowledge and what does not.⁹¹ This brief genealogy suggests that it is only with the advent of Aristotelian metaphysics that *logos* as a mode of intelligence loses all reference to an interactive context of opinion formation and diffuse

⁸⁸ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 248.

⁸⁹ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 249.

⁹⁰ Claude Calame, 'The Rhetoric of *Muthos* and *Logos*: Forms of Figurative Discourse', in Buxton, *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, 124-5.

⁹¹ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 249.

dialogical processes.⁹² In the accounts of Barnes and Havelock we recognise the post-Aristotelian redaction of *logos* as ontology and logic, policing intelligible discourse, militating against its opposites.

By Aristotle *logos* has become primarily constitutive and efficacious, instituting categories, establishing identities and hierarchies of being through the medium of propositional thought, logical steps, and processes of ordering and enumeration.⁹³ In the usages of Plato and Aristotle, *logos* as explanatory utterance is opposed to the term *ergon*, an act or deed. This allows for the binarised dyad *logos/ergon*, the originating paradigm for the theory/practice polarity in Western thinking.

By the age of Plato and Aristotle, then, *logos* as theoretical comprehension can be opposed to empirical perception, essence and appearance part ways. The *logos* had been formalised, now indicating a language of essential ideas and metaphysical taxonomies.⁹⁴ My reading of Barnes and Havelock has indicated the extent to which histories of philosophy have continued to reproduce an instrumental, efficacious model of *logos* as the very ground of binary thinking and logical operations. Such a model, as Sandywell's investigations suggest, obscures the alternative semiotic resource of *logos*, as a material, performative power of language, a sensory and affectively imbued medium.

Sandywell reminds us that in archaic Greek usage, *logos* has a formal significance as a particular *genre* of utterance, enunciation. Dating from the age of Homer, *logos* might simply mean a speech, anything said or written. It pertains to the act of saying, from *legein*, to 'act' or 'say', a coherent, articulated utterance, story, narrative, or account of something. A *logos* is, according to this aspect of the term, the material form of any conceivable discourse; it is the voice, the word, that by which the thought is expressed, its relation to ideality can be suspended, discussed, explored. We turn to the language of fifth century tragedy for examples.

⁹² Cf. Gilles Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, trans. Mark Lester, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990, 259: 'In [Aristotle] the method of division takes on its traditional fascination with specification which it did not yet have in Plato'.

⁹³ Sandywell, Presocratic Reflexivity, 233.

⁹⁴ Sandywell, Presocratic Reflexivity, 248.

An Epic and Tragic Logos

Fifth century BCE tragedy provides many instances of the evocativeness of the signifier *logos*. In tragic contexts, *logos* enables reflections on a variety of dilemmas. *Logos* leads into the abyssal problem of the permanent uncertainty of mortal knowledge in the divine scheme of things, a favourite philosophical theme of the Hellenistic world. One functional consequence of this resilient idea of the Greeks is an emphasis on humanity's sentient vulnerability to the earthly embodiments of divine deception, the material power of persuasive eloquence, eternally sacralised in the figure of the goddess *Peitho* or Persuasion. Richard Enos suggests that by the Homeric age, the ambiguous power of persuasion and oral discourse was a subject of interrogation and philosophical dilemma, illustrated by Homer's constant exploration of the aesthetic power of oratorical speech.⁹⁵

Enos argues that Odysseus was a model of 'inventive language and deception' for Homer's early Greek audiences.⁹⁶ He is an ambivalent yet popular figure, a 'verbal magician' in W.J. Verdenius's terms, signifying ancient Greece's 'admiration for skilful deceit'.⁹⁷ He is guileful, a trickster figure, constantly transforming situations and deferring dire outcomes, warding off the voracious Cyclops with his play on the ambiguous term 'Nobody'. He is Odysseus the 'rhetor', expert in tactical deception, cunning stratagems, physical and linguistic disguise.⁹⁸ In other contexts of the Homeric epics, however, his persuasive skills are diplomatic, political, aimed at achieving collaboration and consensus; consider Odysseus's gentle persuasions to a sulking Achilles in book nine of *The Iliad*.

Odysseus also reinvents an older collective cultural function, that of the singer of epic tales, the master of the bewitching power of song – 'a minstrel who has been taught by the gods to sing words that bring delight to mortals, and everyone longs to hear him

⁹⁵ Richard Leo Enos, *Greek Rhetoric before Aristotle*, Waveland Press Inc., Prospect Heights, Illinois, 1993.

⁹⁶ Enos, *Greek Rhetoric before Aristotle*, 6.

⁹⁷ See W.J. Verdenius, 'Gorgias' Doctrine of Deception' in G.B. Kerferd, ed., *The Sophists and Their Legacy*, Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, Wiesbaden, 1981, 122,3.

⁹⁸ James Kastely points out how sinister Odyssean cunning could be for the ancient Greek world. In Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (409 BCE), Odysseus is portrayed as a master strategist, a fast talking cynical politician bent on conquering Philoctetes by guile, a representation typical of Euripidean tragedy as well. See James L. Kastely, *Rethinking the Rhetorical Tradition: From Plato to Postmodernism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997, 85.

when he sings' (*Od.* 17: 518-20). Skill in persuasion and its complex discursive qualities is ultimately a gift of the gods, themselves masters of deception like Zeus, Hermes, and Pallas Athena. Persuasive power imbues its possessor with sacred qualities, it is awesome, reverential, and therefore inspires fear and respect.⁹⁹

Analogous to the protean and metamorphic activities of the gods on earth, eloquent language has a fluent power of transformation. In the case of the Cyclops episode, language is capable of averting certain death by Odysseus's resourceful play on words; or consider Penelope's 'bewitching' words to her predatory suitors in *Od.* 18.282-3, a deception that delights the disguised, eavesdropping Odysseus.¹⁰⁰ Eloquent language, the affective power of appearances, will always be ascribed the capacity, both salutary and dangerous, to change the logic of a situation, to defer or transform a seemingly inevitable outcome, to miraculously alter the balance of power. Odysseus comments on the difference between brute force and an alternative set of values emanating from the distinctive, eternally improbable, powers of eloquent speech:

A man may be insignificant to look at but the god can grace his words with charm: people watch him with delight as he speaks unflinchingly with winning modesty. He stands out in the gathering and is stared at like a god when he passes through the town. Another may be as handsome as an immortal, yet quite deficient in the graceful arts of speech. (*Od.* 8:169-175).¹⁰¹

Persuasive discourse has an important pragmatic function, establishing collective agreement and civic discipline, protecting a public space for discourse and reflection. Odysseus holds the court of Alcinoos spellbound with the force of his storytelling: 'Odysseus' tale was finished. Held in the spell of his words they all remained still and silent throughout the shadowy hall' (*Od.* 13.1.ff.). Persuasion softens individual anger and ill-will, it reminds one of civic duties and customary law, inducing kindness; witness Priam's persuasive pathos as it leads to Achilles' noble, self-transcending surrendering of the body

⁹⁹ Barry Sandywell, *The Beginnings of European Theorizing: Reflexivity in the Archaic Age. Logological Investigations, Volume 2*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, 127.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Leo Enos, *Greek Rhetoric before Aristotle*, 6.

¹⁰¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. E.V. Rieu, Penguin Books, London, 1991.

of Hector.¹⁰² Persuasive power is a necessity, irreducible, hence sacred. In *The Iliad* the furious quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles in Book 1 is prompted by Agamemnon's lack of persuasive power. Sandywell comments that persuasion is a fundamental function of language in Homeric epic, possessing the power to 'bewitch' and 'transfigure' its audience for both transformative and conservative ends.¹⁰³

By critiquing the brute realities of power, the regimes of domination established by the forces of the obvious, given, and empirical, the nuances of *logos* already inspire humanist celebration in the Homeric age. Nonetheless it is suspected as a fatal possibility. For *logos* can act in inflammatory ways, igniting the senses and the libidinal urges of the imagination; so the young Euryalus replies to Odysseus's provocative criticisms by acknowledging the piercing power of speech to arouse destructive and competitive energies, even against one's best interests:

You have stirred me to anger with your inept remarks ... in spite of what I have gone through, I'll try my hands at the sports. For your words have stung me and put me on my mettle. (*The Odyssey* 8: 178-185).

Sandywell notes the ambivalent power of persuasion in *The Odyssey*. Odysseus, so often the practitioner of deceptive speech, nevertheless finds himself a prisoner on the island of Calypso, beguiled by her soft and bewitching words. The siren voice of persuasion will make Odysseus forget Ithaca, his homeland, and his wife Penelope (*Od.* 1.55-7).¹⁰⁴ *Logos* is multivalent. It protects civic traditions, but it is also the vanishing of memory and continuity, it portends a frightening year zero.

Logos appears in different fifth century BCE tragic plays as 'tales', 'deceptive words', 'words that cure the disordered mind', 'piercing words', 'pleas', it is therapy and poison, remedy and destruction. *Logos* is a pharmacological performative power, as Derrida argues with philological verve in 'Plato's Pharmacy':

¹⁰² Thomas Cole suggests that Odysseus, as a figure of persuasive oratory, was a model for the first rhetoricians or teachers of persuasive speech, the Sophists. For instance, Antisthenes appreciated the different ways that Odysseus says the same thing, depending on the character of his addressees. As we shall see, the rhetorical tradition appeals to a variety of mythopoetic models for its ideas, remaining an ecumenical tradition up until the present day. See Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1991, 58.

¹⁰³ Barry Sandywell, *The Beginnings of European Theorizing*, 125.

¹⁰⁴ Sandywell, *Beginnings of European Theorizing*, 125.

As a *pharmakon*, *logos* is at once good and bad; it is not at the outset governed exclusively by goodness or truth. [Before Plato's determination of *logos* as a structure or order] we are in the ambivalent, indeterminate space of the *pharmakon*, of that which in *logos* remains potency, potentiality ... is not yet the transparent language of knowledge.... one would have to speak of the 'irrationality' of living *logos*, of its spellbinding powers of enchantment, mesmerizing fascination, and alchemical transformation, which make it kin to witchcraft and magic.¹⁰⁵

Derrida suggests that before the Platonic-Aristotelian determination of *logos* as a univocal language of truth, one might comprehend *logos* as a kind of repertoire of qualities, dispositions, and effects. As I've argued, cultural personae who embody the persuasive power of language are less unified subjects than figures who activate a variety of traits, bringing the joys and dangers of the *logos* before a knowledgeable audience.¹⁰⁶ Derrida suggests of Socrates that he is persuasion's *pharmakological* power: 'Alternately and/or all at once, the Socratic *pharmakon* petrifies and vivifies, anaesthetizes and sensitises, appeases and anguishes.'¹⁰⁷

One will find the ambiguous potentiality of *logos* as a running theme of fifth century BCE tragedy. For in tragedy, humanity does not master its representation, rather language is symbiotic with errant trajectories, misunderstandings, perfidies, and dramatic ironies – 'it is I who will bring the criminal to light', says Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*. In the semiotics of tragedy, *logos* is the shocking language of revelation bringing about disastrous reversals of fortune. It is less the deliberative instrument of utilitarian activities, as the medium that discloses, over time, the complex configurations of destiny.¹⁰⁸ Without losing its valency of explanation, a tragic fashioning of *logos* emphasises its functioning as a catalyst of narrative reversal, of the unexpected. As a medium of explanation, *logos* retains an essential mystique, since it confronts human reason with the enigmatic intelligence of the divine.

¹⁰⁵ 'Plato's Pharmacy', in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, 115.

¹⁰⁶ See Plato's *Philebus* 58a: 'I often heard Gorgias say that the art of rhetoric differs from all other arts. Under its influence all things are willingly but not forcibly made slaves'. Quoted in Rosamund Kent Sprague, ed., *The Older Sophists*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia SC, 1972, B26, 39.

¹⁰⁷ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 119, n. 52.

¹⁰⁸ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 433.

As a potential reserve of themes, dilemmas, questions, *logos* activates a differential dramaturgy, a reflection on the discrepancies between appearance and reality, between the desires of mortals and the will of the gods. I follow Vernant's analysis of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Interviewing the prophet Tiresias, the tragic hero Oedipus finds himself at the precipice of the *logos*, this dangerous edge of speech, on the brink of a complete reversal of fortune. It is the gods, the fates, who send his words 'I will bring the criminal to light' back at him, deformed or twisted around.¹⁰⁹ According to Vernant, what the dramatic ironies of tragedy convey is that within the words men exchange there exist areas of opacity and incommunicability. Spectators to tragedy as well as the tragic protagonist himself or herself must become aware of the ambiguity of words, of meanings, and of the human condition.¹¹⁰ This *logos*, this appalling explanation, will ineluctably unfold the truth of Oedipus's past, with disastrous consequences.

Remember that it is Oedipus' *ethos*, his heroic concern for his adopted city, his persistence and acumen that has brought him into conversation with the empirically blind yet apophantic prophet Tiresias. It is Oedipus' uncompromising resolve and Tiresias' certain knowledge of his king's future doom, their discursive confrontation, which finally reveals the horrific truth of his own patricide to Oedipus. The dialogical process of gathering this shocking intelligence is of dramatic interest, for two orders of evaluation, rational and prophetic, the detective and the oracular, will need to combine, culminating in chiasmic reversals of fortune and substitutions of roles.

Oedipus is an exemplar of lucid and independent intelligence, a commanding detective figure. He is a figure of the *logos* as a medium of truth disclosure, as it involves accountability, ascribing responsibility for past deeds. Having solved the riddle of the sphinx to become the king of Thebes, he is confident in his power of investigation and disclosure, ready to reveal the unknown cause of Thebes' devastating plague. As Vernant and Vidal-Naquet suggest, Oedipus, an empiricist, has nothing but scorn for the supposed

¹⁰⁹ J.P. Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1981, 90.

¹¹⁰ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece*, 88.

insight of the aged diviner Tiresias, his eyes permanently closed to the light of the sun.¹¹¹ For Oedipus, knowledge is not a paradox.

As Vernant and Vidal-Naquet argue, Oedipus, in many ways exemplary of a newly confident modern man, must learn that *logos*, in oracular fashion, always delays revealing its full meanings. In tragedy, the oracle is always enigmatic but never lies. Far from offering empirical closure, an oracle affords maximum opportunity to err. To Oedipus' question, are Polypus and Merope my parents, Apollo will not answer, confirm, or satisfy, rather he provokes a catastrophic chain of events with his prediction: you will sleep with your mother and kill your father, a truth Oedipus is ultimately helpless to evade.¹¹²

Oedipus Rex encourages a recursive attention to the temporal repetitions of the riddling *logos*. For far from mastering the riddle of the Theban Sphinx, giving it the closure he had thought, Oedipus, it emerges, has unwittingly repeated the travesty of generational separation his seeming solution to the Sphinx's riddle had intimated. Oedipus has confused and collapsed the roles of child and husband, brother and father. The specification and division of *logos* has been mocked, parodied, confusion reigns. The tragic agent finds he's unable to arrest the expansive movement of oracular signification; rather, by the ordained will of the gods, his role in their theatre of the absurd has yet to unfold its full significance. Moreover, Oedipus's initially aggressive desire to overcome the discreet silence of Tiresias on the question of his genealogy suggests that there are mysteries that should be left untouched. The free will of the rational agent encounters the qualifying forces of deeper necessities, the power of *Ananke*, retribution, which the blind Tiresias recognised only too clearly.

The prophetic, riddling *logos* of the Apollonian oracle engenders the tortuous journey of Oedipus through both abomination and redemption, tormented and ultimately sublimated by a forbidden contact with the terrible light of the divine. Later, Oedipus will share the paradoxical gift of second sight with the prophet Tiresias he once despised. Now, as Vernant and Vidal-Naquet suggest, Oedipus is an *intermediary* between humanity and the gods, his very name a signifier of many fates. Oedipus' name is a riddle which suggests

¹¹¹ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece*, 92.

¹¹² Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece* 80.

the torsions of his destiny, an opposition of will and fate, human omniscience and chthonic destiny: 'The double meaning of Oedipus is to be found in the name itself, in the opposition between the first two syllables and the third, *Oida*; I know: this is one of the key words on the lips of Oedipus triumphant, of Oedipus the tyrant. *Pous*: foot: the mark stamped at birth on one whose destiny is to end up as he began, as one excluded like the wild beast whose *foot* makes it flee, whose *foot* isolates him from other men.... The whole of the tragedy of Oedipus seems to be contained in the play to which the riddle of his name lends itself.'¹¹³ Is Oedipus himself intelligible as a character, an *ethos*, without the complex which bears his name?¹¹⁴

Readings of the play such as Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 's argue for the dramatic temporality of expansive recognition, where the meaning of events in the light of a partial human understanding, and their true or divine significance, are palpably opposite and exclusive to each other. Tragedy announces a semiotics, a formation of *logos* as the site of a struggle between rational inquiry and fatal necessity, intention and complex structuration; *logos* points to a contestation or perpetual agon, between the city and its laws, and a bloody familial inheritance and the destiny it inscribes.¹¹⁵ Again, we should note that the explanatory power of *logos* is revealed in Greek tragedy through an unpredictable *process*, a clash of temperaments, drives, desires, in an environment of crisis, it is an explosive return of the repressed, and it creates worlds upside down.

Logos is a resource, not a substance. It is achingly, painfully full of significance, but it may be empty, ethereal. As Iocasta reminds her and Oedipus' similarly ill-starred son Eteocles, bent on preserving his monarchical power in Euripides' *Phoenissae* (Phoenician Women):

'Is admiration precious? It is an empty gain.
This wealth you long for – what advantage comes with it?
For a mere name (*logos*), it brings you endless trouble...
We hold in trust, as stewards, what belongs to the gods,
Who, when they will, in turn take from us what is theirs.

¹¹³ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece 92, 96-7.

¹¹⁴ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece 78.

¹¹⁵ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 92. 96-7. The name is fatal, it is material destiny, unfolding riddle, not instantiation, explanation. Consider Sophocles' *Antigone*, who defies her brother Creon, king of Thebes, by invoking a private code of justice, a *Dikê* of family loyalty, more ancient and fundamental than the legislation, the *nomoi*, of men and their civil laws.

(*Phoenissae* 550-55)¹¹⁶

One does not own *logos*, yet its mesmeric power of appearance promises the world. For *logos* is a structure of feeling, an impossible, transcendental desire that is the prerogative of the gods alone as Antigone reminds us:

Come, Nemesis,
Come, violent thunders of Zeus,
Come, white-hot lightnings!
When man's proud speech swells beyond measure,
You lay his boasting to rest.
(*Phoenissae* (190-95))

Euripidean tragedy emphasises in nominalist fashion that language is both promise and ultimate deception:

If men all shared on judgement of what's noble and wise,
All wordy quarrelling would vanish from the earth.
But as it is, there's no such thing as 'equal right'
Or 'justice'. These are words; in fact – they don't exist.
(*Phoenissae* 498-502)

The tragic chronotope problematises the dramatic ironies and deceptive immediacy of language, interrogating an earthly existence that is transient and cyclical. Human existence will always be situated between dual inheritances, divine powers of knowledge and deception, skepticism and hope. I will term this meta-theory of the fraught relationship between language and subjective volition, appearance and reality, as a tragic code that argues for the ever-present power of deception, by language, divine ordinance, and fatal inheritance, in the realm of mortal affairs. I now step further back in time and discuss the sixth century BCE *Theogony* of Hesiod. I seek to relate the ambiguous potentiality of *logos* to Hesiod's pluralist evocation of creative and critical principles, his genealogy of the paradoxical conditions of culture and civilisation.

Hesiod, Genealogy, Paideia

My reading of Hesiod's *Theogony* is interested in its genealogical form, and more particularly, the *paideia*, the fluid repertory of formative principles it presents as necessary

¹¹⁶ Euripides, *Orestes and Other Plays*, trans. Philip Vellacott, Penguin Books, London, 1972.

to the creation of civilisation, law, and artistic endeavour. I suggest that the abundant narrative episodes of the *Theogeny* encourage an appreciation of the many dispositions, contestations, and transformations necessary for a critical sociology. Hesiod's is a philosophy of 'complex assent', inscribing the manifold knowledges, experiences, and equivocal processes needed to engender the *logos*, *logismos*, as a socialised power of explanation.

Hesiod's *Theogeny* is a sequence of creation stories, telling of divine rivalries, familial violence, periodic convulsions of war and peace, of violent discord and prosperous monarchies. As we shall see, it implies a poetics of accumulation and iterative recurrence, demanding close attention to the complex web of relationships between the actors of its vast cosmological theatre. The imaginary world the *Theogeny* constructs is inhabited by natural powers, moral abstractions and psychic drives, and these hybrid figures constantly overlap and cross paths.

The *Theogeny*'s chronotope moves fluidly between the eternal time of the gods as cosmological first powers and a social drama of procreation and familial discord. Barry Sandywell suggests that Hesiod belonged to a pre-Aristotelian thought-world of Milesian cosmology soon to produce the speculative theories of Anaximander. Such a world was yet to demarcate physical and sociological observation, the ontic from the ethical. In constructing a cosmo-social chronotope, the Milesian Hesiod moved fluidly between idioms, evoking a 'self-differentiating pantheon of elemental forces, Gods, Titans, and suffering mortals all bounded by the horizon of Sky and Earth'.¹¹⁷

Hesiod's is a self-differentiating pantheon, because it owes its origin to a primordial Chaos that allowed the divine Cosmos to be rent from it: 'The first power to come into being was Chaos. Then arose Gaia, broad-bosomed earth.'¹¹⁸ *Chaos* is without attributes; it is no-thing. Yet *Chaos* comes into being, it is neither being nor nothingness, a portent of the paradoxes that are to follow. As the originary progenitor, *Chaos* is the fluid matrix of different ontic possibilities: gods, cosmological powers like day and night, geographical features like the Earth and the Heavens, and ethical abstractions such as love

¹¹⁷ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 140.

¹¹⁸ *The Poems of Hesiod*, trans. R.M Fraser, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1983, lines 116.

(*Eros*), war (*Eris*), and necessity (*Ananke*). If *Chaos* is the non-being that conditions being it does not inspire a logic of creative design, it cannot be ontologically recognised or appealed to. *Chaos* provides a horizon in which the ontic, that which is, is relative, open to dissemination, its identity dependent on relationships with what is opposite and other. The paradox evoked by the impossible arrival and being of *Chaos* is repeated in the antithetical parentage of light: ‘And out of Chaos black Night and Erebus came into being, and out of Night then came the brightness of Aither and Day.’¹¹⁹

Rather than polarity, Hesiod's narrative exposition suggests reciprocation and inter-relationship. *Chaos* is, then, an *arche*, an infinite first principle of generation and governance, which signifies texture rather than offering an originary subject or an efficient cause. Anterior to any distinction between nature and culture, *Chaos* engenders a miraculous chronotope that interpellates natural history with social and existential allegory:

The first power to come into being was Chaos. Then arose Gaia, broad-bosomed earth, which serves as the ever-immovable base for all the immortals who dwell on the peaks of snowy Olympos: and then shadowy Tartaros deep in the wide-wayed earth; and then Eros surpassing every immortal in beauty, who, a loosener of limbs, brings all immortals and mortals under his power and makes them unable to think as they should.¹²⁰

Eros is the fourth created power in the *Theogeny*, born from the phallus of the murdered and dismembered Ouranos, forming the flesh of Aphrodite and after her *Eros*, desire, lust. Associated with the nurturing foundations of chthonic Earth, *Eros* emerges as an immanent and interiorised psychosomatic force, born prior to any hint, in the *Theogeny*, of subjectivity or conscious life. *Eros* is not a subject; it is a fertile power present from the beginning of the world. *Eros* elaborates the dramatic tensions of the psyche, the vital life-principle of human beings, and here it acts as an ambiguous power of both preservation and destruction. *Eros* is an *arche*, an originary generative principle, the cosmic source of the most pervasive oppositions in human life - pleasure and pain, union and separation,

¹¹⁹ The Poems of Hesiod, lines 123-4

¹²⁰ The Poems of Hesiod, lines 116-22.

birth and death; a power of binding and gathering, but also dispersion and opposition – ‘wherever there is difference (differentiation) there you also find Eros’.¹²¹

On the one hand *Eros* weakens knowledge and remembrance, dissolving social and psychic boundaries, clouding reason and instilling wayward passion. A potent potential for transformation, *Eros* rules at will the gods (Sophocles *Trachiniae* 441-3), conquering even Heracles who has never yielded to any enemy (*Trachiniae* 488-9).¹²² On the other hand *Eros* is the procreative matrix of the personified forces of Law (*Themis*) and Memory (*Mnemosune*), primordially linked with *Mnemosune* as a capacity for binding, unification, and the mobilisation of forces.¹²³ Aristotle suggests that Hesiod discovered *Eros* as a complex philosophical principle, an *arche* implying that there must be in the world some cause to move things (dispersion) and combine them (*Metaphysics* 984b30).¹²⁴

Eros attends the powerfully ambiguous goddess Aphrodite, born, as we noted, from the bloodied foam or 'aphros' that was spilt from the violent castration of Ouranos, Heaven, by his son Kronos. Hesiod's narrative juxtaposition of blood lust and amorous passion suggests the libidinal investments of violence: the love Aphrodite offers and guards retains the genetic trace of Ouranos' dismemberment, Olympian civil serenity confronts the vengeful cry of a bloody inheritance. Aphrodite, Hesiod tells us playfully, is also called 'Philommedes' because she arose from the *medea* or genitals. A dialogical force, she will signify visceral sexuality and the cohesive power of love, deceptive speech and winning persuasion, sweet delicacies and violent passion: 'these were her honors: flirtatious conversations of maidens, smiles and deceits, sweet delight and passion of love and gentle enticements'.¹²⁵

Eros is always in excess of conceptual determination, a mixture of qualities, a repertoire of possible outcomes. *Eros* is allegory rather than symbolic identification. *Eros* is time, difference, the prompting of varied memories, many stories held in reserve. *Eros* suggests that mortals exist in a medial state between heaven and earth; they suffer from

¹²¹ Sandywell, *Beginnings of European Theorizing*, 189, 90.

¹²² Quoted from Sandywell, *Beginnings of European Theorizing*, 189.

¹²³ Sandywell, *Beginnings of European Theorizing*, 189.

¹²⁴ Quoted from Sandywell, *Beginnings of European Theorizing*, 190.

¹²⁵ *The Poems of Hesiod*, lines 204-6.

and forever require the power of deception and charming appearances. Moreover, *Eros*, presiding over the birth of Law (*Themis*) and Memory (*Mnemosune*), is an element in *paideia* of forces which parent civilised values. *Eros* is a dialogical power in the foundation and governance of the life of humans and gods, binding together and destroying, a potential for both stability and revolution. As tender desire and aesthetic charm, *Eros* harmonises and appeases, as a visceral psychosomatic drive *Eros* overrules even the reason of Zeus, thereby allegorising the tenuousness of the newly won civic order and prosperity under Zeus's aegis.

Homer's *Iliad* as an example of the power of *Eros* to distribute differential effects, to create narrative oscillations between the forces of unity and separation. *Eros* is the prime motivation for the bloody siege of Troy, its resultant disasters and victorious exultations. While *Eros* offers the epic-historical grandeur of an unprecedented pan-Hellenic military collaboration, uncontrollable desire also sets the scene for Achilles' petulance and rage when Agamemnon seizes his captured slave-girl Briseis in book 1 of *The Iliad*.

Eros is the horizon of that intermediate world where lustful gods and mortals intermingle, creating hybrid formations, *mésalliances*. *Eros* lends itself to both fertile collaborations and catastrophic tensions. It enables the marriage and divorce of Heaven and Earth, and the stormy, perennially threatened union of Hera and Zeus that generates such refractive strife for mortals below. Hesiod's reader is encouraged to keep in mind that Zeus's erotically driven fecundity and philandering indiscretions paradoxically create many of the artistic and civic powers, the Muses, Orderly Government, Justice, and Peace.¹²⁶ As the paradoxical condition of civilised attainments, *Eros* is similar to the persuasive force of language or *logos*, permanently suspended between the material and the ideal, earth and heaven, poison and cure, continuity and instability.

The paradoxes of Hesiod's mythic universe and the first principles it introduces are such that the sense of the ontic it cultivates precludes definitive exclusion, the pure exteriority of one power or element to another. If Chaos suggests an interaction of being and not-being, a coming to be of what never was, it exemplifies a paralogical play of unity and difference, a form of *coincidentia oppositorum*. Unlike the progressivist 'myth to

¹²⁶ The Poems of Hesiod, lines 902-4, 916.

logos' thesis, Hesiod limns a philosophy that suggests that no mode of understanding can be autonomous, transcendental; rather there is always relation, structuration, a plurality of formative powers to keep in mind.

Deconstruction, with its admiration of text, texture, the necessary relationship between signifiers, suggests that univocal intentionality - the dream of authorship - undermines itself by necessarily drawing on a reserve of ambiguous forces, figures, metaphors, but also stories, mythemes. I would argue, contrary to its own practitioners' claims, against the idea of deconstruction as a methodology; rather it revisits the formative, creative gods of the Pagan imaginary, a polysemic *paideia* of forces, the paradoxes of civilisation and law.

Hesiod leaves us in no doubt that genealogy is a philosophy of co-existence and paradoxical creations. Violence constitutes a general condition of creative trajectories: the castration of Ouranos by his son Kronos/time is a precondition for the appearance of Light, in turn enabling the cultural aspirations of human beings, symbolised by fire and the communal hearth. The near catastrophic war with the Titans, featuring yet another patricide, that of Zeus over Kronos, produces the more benevolent and enlightened Olympian order presided over by Zeus. That order is indelibly marked with a history of violence, which continues in the suppression, yet never the extinguishment, of the Titans' chthonian powers of bloodlust, darkness and vengeance.¹²⁷

Hesiodic genealogy is fascinated by the differential characteristics of protean gods, their conceptual personae. Hesiod articulates the way a god can embody both the modernising functions of the *nomos*, the civil law, and serve as a reminder of more ancient, divine codes of justice that record the exigency of barbarism and transgression in the founding of civilisation. Pallas Athena, the goddess of civilising love, also presides over

¹²⁷ Richard Buxton, *From Myth to Reason?*: 'the *Theogeny* is about a *sequence* of divinities, but it is also about figures who – precisely because they are divinities - *persist* in time even though superseded in power. That is why the *Theogeny* centrally concerns not killing, but castration and swallowing: divine power can be curtailed or incorporated, but not abolished' (9). Consider too the *Moiria*, the fates, children of darkest Night, chthonian powers who wreak terrible vengeance against the sins of mortal men. Later in Hesiod's narrative, they will emerge as the children of Zeus and *Themis*, products of wise government that apportion both good (life, health) and bad (disease, old age, death) lots to humanity. The fates are minions of an opaque Zeus, instruments of an enigmatic decree of proportion, relation, cycle. Also the *Erinyes*, or Furies, born from the blood of the dismembered phallus of Ouranos, are terrifying spirits ensuring justice in the Homeric imaginary, powers that ensure the memory of violence and transgression, placing effective limits on human hubris and untrammelled aspirations, a powerful thematic presence in fifth century tragedy.

war and destruction; Hermes, a mischievous trickster figure, the illegitimate son of Zeus, also figures the modern technologies (*technê*) of writing and the numerical arts.

Hermes is the well-disposed messenger god, the god of guidance and prosperity. The prototype for Odysseus, he is also an ingenious god, skilled in trickery and deception, having stolen from and fooled his own brother and then evaded judgment for the deed. Hermes is a persona of the intellect, for he is the god of *mêtis*, prudent and guileful, always preferring persuasion to weapons. The patron of orators, he is also a musician, seducing with his charms. Embodying a multiplicity of cultural functions, desired and dangerous like all mischievous trickster figures, Hermes represents the crossroads of fortune, apportioning both good and ill luck in his turn.¹²⁸

The relationship between the present prosperity of a civil hierarchy, and the mythic memory of recurring cycles of violence and retribution, is suggestive of Hesiod's genealogical method, citing histories of the body, of affects and impulses, that compete with and disturb emerging humanist celebrations of the *nomos*, the social contract and rule of law in the city-states which were replacing tribal and customary law by the sixth century BCE. Consequently, both *Eros* as unity and differentiation, and *Eris* as envy, competitive urges and productive rivalry, are persistent figures in the Hesiodic imaginary, allowing holistic analyses, a complex assent to those forces that perpetually threaten optimistic modern ideals, that recall a more archaic *paideia* of vital desires, of struggle, conquest, revolution, sacrifice.

Hesiod's genealogical interrogation of the normative is manifested in the uncertain valency of the King of the gods, Zeus. Zeus is not simply made manifest by the sky; he is hidden by it. He is not simply the regular, periodic cycles of the season but the opaque unpredictability of the wind, clouds, and lightning, an affective focus for celebration and terror. Zeus in turn must recognise his own emplotment, the texture of forces by which he is positioned, the primordial powers he must remember and respect. In Homer, Zeus is

¹²⁸ The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilisation suggests that Hermes, a figure of persuasion and errant communication, was popularly celebrated for subverting values (playing tricks on Apollo and his father Zeus), a carnivalesque figure of the world upside-down: 'At Cydonia in Crete, the Hermaia were a popular festival where slaves took the part of their masters ... he was one of the most familiar gods in the daily lives of the Greeks' - this last aspect typical of celebrated fools and trickster figures. See Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds, Oxford Companion to Classical Civilisation, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1998, 336-37.

depicted bowing down in reverential awe towards primordial *Nux*, or night. Heraclitus, emphasising the polytheistic field of contestations that modify ambitions, assures us that if the sun-king oversteps his mark, the *Erinyes*, enforcers of fate, will visit vengeance even upon him.¹²⁹

The historical necessity of violent acts of transgression, and the equally assured reparations that need to be made for them, haunt the Hesiodic *paideia*. In Hesiod there is a historicity of differential forces, but no wholesome tradition, no assured source of moral appeal and imitation. The story of Prometheus, his theft and subsequent punishment, instead potentialises tactical means, insisting that the provisional, contingent, and deceptive are intrinsic to Pagan sacrality.

J.P. Vernant suggest that the story of Prometheus' deception of Zeus elaborates an ambiguous logic of rivalry and discord.¹³⁰ In the *Theogeny*, Prometheus is defined by his *mêtis* or guile, which is closely associated with his *dolie technê*, his skilful trickery, technical capacities, cunning, foresight, and deception. Prometheus decides to rival Zeus' omnipotence and steal the best meat of the ox by disguising it, concealed in the paunch; in a second act of concealment, Prometheus steals for humanity the sacred hearth, the weariless fire of the Olympian gods, hiding it in the hollow of a fennel stalk.

As Hesiod's narrative unfolds, it emerges that Prometheus' trickery is in fact part of Zeus' greater *mêtis*, a premeditated plot to bring evil as well as good to mortals, as punishment for human *hubris*. We are reminded of the cyclical interplay, to be theorised by Presocratics like Anaximander and Empedocles, between the cultural necessity of finite and partial desire, and the infinite reparations that must be made for such violence and transgression against the holistic unity of the Cosmos. At work in Prometheus's story is a contagion of human and divine characteristics, a complex mimesis of deceptive wiles. Hesiod's figures, his gods and men, activate an extensive *paideia* of social roles and tactical qualities.

In exchange for the fire stolen, Zeus invents a necessary evil, woman, disguised in beautiful adornments, described in a language which insists upon this incident's similarity

¹²⁹ Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Jeanette Lloyd, Harvester Press and Humanities Press, Brighton and Atlantic Highlands NJ, 1980 (first publ. Paris 1974), 112.

¹³⁰ See Vernant, *Myth and Society*, 168-81.

to Prometheus' earlier deceptions, with a narrative reversal, the trickster tricked. Despite the crude misogyny of this mytheme, the arrival of woman and the unleashing of the direful contents of Pandora's box inaugurates a narratological emphasis on complex exchanges and distributions for the common man: 'throughout his life evil and good alternate endlessly' (609). A lot of good and bad helps to define the medial status of humanity between animal and divine, the contingency of earthly appearance and the divine promise of eternal truth.

Prometheus's transgression has enabled technological development and provision of the hearth, the site of civilised community. In exchange, the arrival of woman has signified the post-lapsarian appearance of anxiety and labour, but also the solace of marriage and the means of procreation: the corrupting supplement is also a precondition. For the masculine reader of Hesiod's mythemes, the man who is fated to marry, good and bad are counterparts rather than opposites, signifying the ambiguity of woman as intellectually distressing, affectively consoling, and materially necessary. The gifts of the gods in their magical, deceptive appearance are irresistibly beautiful and must be accepted, yet are often evil in their consequences. Already a topos of the ambiguous effects of charming deception is in place.¹³¹

The tension between appearance and reality cannot be resolved, deception cannot be wished away. Woman is linked by an associative field to the power of eloquence, the deceptive mien of the gods, the cultural importance of transfigurative charms and bewitchments; she is the *mêtis* that both gives and takes away, an equivocal force.

The Promethean myth does not constitute an imperative to act or decide, it is not prescriptive in the manner of the Judeo-Christian tradition, for both gods and men are derivate from forces and principles that are themselves equivocal, non-identical. The chaos of cultural memory is a matrix and a haunting. I think the genealogical method of Hesiod opens an imaginary of virtual dispositions and personae awaiting contextual discussion, celebration, and problematisation. There is no release from immanence, no command morality. Hesiod's focus is intensive, a materialist rendering of somatic forces and violent creations, but its philosophy is extensive, pluralist, allegorical, and enigmatic.

¹³¹ See [The Poems of Hesiod](#), lines 535-616.

Conclusion

My critique of the progressivist thesis has argued that *logos*, before its determination by Plato and Aristotle as apodictical rational method, invoked narrative and dramatic codes, recalling a multiplicity of stories, drawing on a cultural memory of ambiguous figures like Odysseus, Prometheus, Pandora, and Zeus. The revised *logos* I've intimated activates dialogical forces, a *mysterium* of non-intentional figures and allegories. In future chapters I argue that rhetoric as an *ethos*, as a means of critical invention, as a philosophy of communication, continued to activate and meditate on the potential field of *logos*. In so doing, rhetoric discovers mixed forces, it argues for semiotic forms that were both pragmatic and transfigurative. Rhetoric discovers itself not as an episteme, but as a *medium* between the protection of collaborative forms and an inventive desire to move beyond legalistic norms. Rhetoric's theoretical power comes from embracing its discontinuous elements, the mixed inheritance, rational and magical, of *logos*'s protean genealogies.

In this chapter, I argue that a rhetorical ethos, a particular discursive tendency, is given initial historical form in what Barry Sandywell has called the ‘logological form of life’. I argue that the conceptual personae of the Presocratics are formed in relation to the life-spheres of work, technology, law, ethics, and religion. A body of representations, consisting of biographical detail, anecdote, rumour – what is called the ‘doxographical’ tradition – helps to engender the conceptual personae of the Presocratics, the way in which they address themselves to society, their habits, lifestyle, idiosyncrasies. The conceptual personae of the Presocratics are contradictory and inconsistent, responsive to a polyphony of voices, foci for a plurality of hopes, projections, fears; they are a culture’s unconscious, its need for both heroes and mystics.

The close relationship between Presocratics such as Empedocles and Democritus and the first rhetoricians – the first practitioners and theorists of persuasive speech, Gorgias and Protagoras – is strongly suggested by the doxographical testimony. Empedocles is famed to have taught Gorgias, and is himself renowned as a rhetorician, a master of a magical and enchanting *logos*. Although unverifiable, Democritus and Protagoras are said to have been closely associated as natives of the Greek colony of Abdera. Democritus, like Protagoras, was interested in language in its grammatical and persuasive functions, its origins and social purpose. In this chapter I expand on the close association of Presocratic and rhetorical personae, with reference to two Presocratic thinkers, Thales and Heraclitus.

I argue that the personae of both thinkers draw attention to three forms of critical representation appropriate to a dynamic public-intellectual. These are: *invention*, a resourceful and transformative deployment of cultural materials, open to paradoxes; *paideia*, the importance of a polymathic combination of knowledges and breadth of experience; and *ethos*, a self-exceeding tendency, eternally ambivalent in the way it addresses society, a texture of qualities rather than a unified ego.

I argue that Thales and Heraclitus prefigure the ambivalence of the rhetor towards culture and politics. They seek to protect public discourse and democratic spaces, while radically critiquing popular assumptions. They are a figure of constructive activity, of a positive cultural praxis, yet they are misanthropes, moral enigmas. I argue that these proto-

rhetorical personae are equivocal because they are constituted within, given subjectivity by, diverse and contingent representations, in anecdote, aphorism, episodic narration, dialogue and dramaturgy. As Tacitus reminds us in the introduction, rhetors cannot speak without exceeding themselves, they are a copious tendency, a miscellany of traits, an entire cultural complex. The rhetor is a medium of dispositions, inventive strategies, challenging performances, theatrical gestures; the rhetor is *logos*'s diverse cultural memory, its non-identity with itself.

Thales – Between Praxis and Theory

I begin my discussion with the Milesian philosopher Thales, his social accomplishments, and his intriguing eccentricities. We have no reported sayings or biographical details whose validity we can be absolutely certain of. Therefore our reception of Thales is mediated through reportage, hearsay, legend, and folklore, what I will refer to as doxographical testimony, a miscellany of opinion and rumour. The doxography's secondary and selective filtering of memory is of considerable interest. As a body of reportage passed down over hundreds of years, it is not only interested in Thales' theoretical doctrines, but his practical achievements. In particular, the doxography is intrigued by Thales' conduct and attitude in various situations, interpellating him into different chronotopes and narrative frames. The portrait emerging of Thales is protean; he variously embodies the role of civic hero, legislator, ambassador, inventor, prophet, and misanthrope.

According to the testimony of the third century Roman biographer Diogenes Laertius, in his *Lives of the Philosophers*, Thales was known as a successful politician and ambassador, advising the federation of Ionian cities, and successfully dissuading his city-state Miletus from what turned out to be a disastrous military collaboration with Lydia. Biographers such as Laertius, content to chronicle diverse genealogies and perspectives, portray Thales as inventor, technical innovator, mathematician, geographer and astronomer. Thales is the first to discover the period between one solstice and the next, of immense importance for calendrical standardisation. Thales' characteristics converge on the figure of a successful and timely practitioner, a military hero, his city-state's saviour, a

cunning merchant and proto-capitalist.¹³² Thales' philosophical reputation is intimately related to his intensive endeavours, his situatedness and timeliness, borne out in his local activism, civic projects, and architectural construction projects.¹³³

Tejera suggests that in archaic Greece, Thales' wisdom (he is commonly recognised as one of the Seven Sages) or *Sophia* was considered a 'versatile competence', a savoir-faire, a *technê*. By the age of Plato and Aristotle, *Sophia* will gradually lose its eclectic implication, its inscription in social processes and life-spheres, instead becoming its inactive result.¹³⁴ Practice and Theory part ways. Sandywell argues that the doxography of Thales loves to dramatise his critical speculations or 'logological' investigations, as an extended and differential *activity* within a social context. Thales, embodying the cultural function of the *logos*, engenders texts and discourses, and these are communicated in particular communities to specific audiences.¹³⁵

As Sandywell suggestively argues, 'Thales' is less significant as a real person than as a sociological index, an allegory of Miletus' burgeoning technological development and growing mercantile economy. Sandywell argues that the many and sometimes contradictory frames in which Thales' character appears emblematises the excitement of technical, geographical, and astronomical discoveries in the sixth century Greek city-states. 'Thales' serves as a focus for the social consequences of increasing knowledge-specialisation; he projects the desires and anxieties of the new *technê*.¹³⁶

For classical biographers such as Diogenes Laertius, scientific theory was not a completely distinct field of inquiry, or a discipline orientated towards objective knowledge

¹³² Herodotus: 'For it is said that Croesus was at a loss how his army should cross the river...and that Thales, who was in the camp, made the river which flowed on the left of the army flow on the right too (Herodotus, *Histories* I 75.4-5, as in Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1987, 62. Laertius: 'He is also thought to have given excellent advice in political affairs. For example, when Croesus sent envoys to the Milesians to make an alliance he prevented it-and that saved the city when Cyrus came to power... he foresaw that there was about to be a good crop of olives, hired the olive presses, and made a huge sum of money' (Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers* I, 22-28, quoted in Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 66. Future references refer to quotations from Barnes' edition, unless specified otherwise.

¹³³ Barry Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity: The Construction of Philosophical Discourse c.600-450 BC, Logological Investigations Vol.3*, Routledge, London and New York, 131.

¹³⁴ V. Tejera, *Rewriting the History of Ancient Greek Philosophy*, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1997, 7.

¹³⁵ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 131.

¹³⁶ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 75-135.

and general laws. Thinkers like Laertius see science, in its classical guise as natural philosophy, as a significant cultural pursuit with material effects. For the doxographical tradition, the *ethos*, the character and disposition, of philosophical endeavour was of great interest. In what we would call sage-literature, the *ethos* of the sage can accrue a variety of characteristics and mannerisms. ‘Thales’ is not egocentric or psychologically consistent, but a picaresque character, a protagonist of different situations. The chronotopes that situate him as a diverse figure and that dramatise and trial his ideas are not dissimilar to the eclectic episodic form of Menippean satire.¹³⁷

The adventurer and naïf of many situations and episodes, ‘Thales’ is alternately noble and opportunistic, practically minded and abstracted. He is an exemplary citizen of the *polis*, its representative ambassador and occasional hero, but is said to have lived a solitary life, without children, rebarbative towards those who enjoin him to lead a settled middle-class lifestyle. His pregnantly laconic and double-edged responses to such inquiries indicate that the figure of the intellectual and the *logological* desire he embodies, will, like an oracle, eternally tease, yielding few empirical satisfactions:

Some say that he married and had a son...others that he remained a bachelor but adopted his sister's son. When he was asked why he had no children he replied, 'Because I love children'. When his mother pressed him to marry he said, 'It's too early'. When he had passed his prime and she insisted again, he said, 'It's too late'.¹³⁸

What piques the collective memory of the doxographical tradition in an oft-cited exchange such as this? ‘Thales’ is the enigma, the paradox that continues to fascinate; his dry, occasionally cynical aphoristic wit burgeons into a popular tradition of gnomic wisdom that will include luminaries such as Marcus Aurelius (*Meditations*) and the Pascal of the *Pensées*. Fragmented in space and time, constituted only in traces, in representations, rhetorical deportment challenges normative discourse, and disseminates itself as ever more curious legends, commentaries, attempted imitations, and genealogies.

Cryptic Thales is an equivocal symbol of the ‘texture’ of an evolved society that has begun to discuss and debate its achievements and future direction. Thales represents

¹³⁷ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984, pp.5-7, 14-17, 69-73, 111-137.

¹³⁸ Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy* 66.

the intellectual as both marginal and essential to a vital civil-society. By his acumen, his polymathy and diverse research capacities, Thales the generalist increases the cultural-capital of Miletian society. Yet Thales is also a secretive, introspective thinker and speculative ethicist, mysteriously propounding water as the *arche* of the universe, cryptically enjoining humanity to 'know itself'. In one genealogy he will inaugurate the anti-materialist vocabulary of fifth century Socratic moral philosophy. Thales figures the theoretical moment in early Greek thought, but not as something that definitively arrives, is present, beyond myth's ambiguities and equivocations. Such ambiguities and equivocations are the 'pitfalls' of theoretical endeavour:

He is said to have been taken from his house by an old woman to look at the stars, and to have fallen into a ditch: when he cried out, the old woman said: 'Do you think, Thales, that you will learn what is in the heavens when you cannot see what is in front of your feet?'¹³⁹

One can talk of both comic interest and anxiety over the *thaumazein*, the distracted attitude of wonder that was held to characterise the *ethos* of the speculative philosopher. This a logological attitude Socrates argues for in Platonic dialogues such as the *Theaetetus*: the philosopher transcends the quotidian, its everyday concerns, its ephemera. 'Thales' is here the dreamy, aloof individualist whose pursuit of a rarefied existence is destined to threaten social coherence.

Perhaps the doxography remarks Thales within another genealogy, as a progenitor for the state assassination of Socrates, who dared in a democracy to abstract himself from social participation and normative protocols of behaviour. Thales' refusal of domesticity and children is a mock-serious, yet irreversible, 'fall' from shared foundations, from a common nurturing life-world and its natural cycles. The logological attitude emerges as the distinctive power of the rhetor (Odysseus, Hermes) to defy coercive logics, and to inaugurate their own values and imaginative projections.

Heraclitus

¹³⁹ Barnes, Early Greek Philosophy 67.

I now discuss the three rhetorical principles of *invention*, *ethos*, and *paideia* in Heraclitus's *Peri Phusis* (On Nature), which was written around 500 BCE. I argue that for Heraclitus, *logos*, the language of critique, should be understood as inventive and transformative. Heraclitean critical praxis attempts to renew a social imaginary burdened by cognitive errors, partial desires, mob prejudice, and a lack of nuance, an absence of dilemma. Heraclitus's *logos* inveighs against false ontologies and encourages appreciation of the play of difference and unity within the concept. Heraclitus evokes *logos* as paradoxical, paralogical, a post-normative semiotic resource that invokes the differential power of representation, its extension across times and spaces.

I then discuss Heraclitus's methodological emphasis on an extensive *paideia*, a polymathic education and critical training in a plurality of life-spheres. I focus on Heraclitus's interest in comparative method, particularly his analogies between the human and animal worlds, and his theological allusions. In Heraclitus, a combination of knowledges is indicated; anthropology and sociology meet theology, cosmology, ethics, and linguistics. I argue that the figure of the rhetorical polymath is born from a combination of attitudes, a crossing of materialism and idealism.

Lastly, I discuss Heraclitus's *ethos*, his enactment of a logological form of life. Here, Heraclitus is concerned with the wise power of folly, the vitality of gnostic insouciance, and the need to inhabit a world upside-down. The *logos*, I argue, finds fulfilment as an *ethos*, it is not an innate rationality, but a creative reinvention of popular conventions: a recursive energy and vigorous display of acculturation. As a medium of many situations, the logological *ethos* can never entirely know itself; it is oracular, performative, without *telos*.

Invention

Let us begin with Heraclitus' attack on the cognitive malaise of his contemporaries: 'Of this account (*logos*) which holds forever men prove uncomprehending, both before hearing it and when first they have heard it. (B1).'¹⁴⁰

Heraclitus articulates *logos* as a counter-intuitive dynamism, whose suggestions and traces haunt and provoke. The signifying power that is *logos* refuses the immediacy of appearance, it demands reflection and representation, it is not a phenomenological essence. The iron logician Aristotle was puzzled by this sentence, for the adverb 'forever' (*aiei*) can equally apply to the proud eternity of the *logos* or its perpetual opacity to human understanding. No grammatical reading will ever resolve the teasing ambiguity of this grammatical crux, which Charles Kahn aptly describes as a 'more than Delphic delight in paradox, enigma, and equivocation'.¹⁴¹

At any event, one will never comprehend the *logos* without sensitivity to linguistic form; older oral authorities, the epic singer, the charismatic minstrel, are decisively displaced from their positions of authority: 'It is wise, listening not to me but to the *logos*, to agree that all things are one' (Kahn, XXXVI). Let us further contemplate Heraclitus' diagnosis of the contemporary state of human knowledges: 'most people do not understand the things they meet with, nor do they know when they have learned; but they seem to themselves to do so' (B17). Knowledge deficits, error, ignorance, are symptomatic of the wider evil of demotic complacency, indolence, and the perennial human desire to quash rather than nourish further reflection. Heraclitus reminds his fellow Ephesians that they 'do not know how to hear or even to speak' (B19); uncomprehending, 'they hear like the deaf. The saying is their witness: absent while present' (B2).¹⁴² Here, Heraclitus alludes to a popular witticism, a paradox, in order to intensify his attack upon the obtuseness of crude empiricism.

What emerges in Heraclitus's irritation with sensualism is a portrait of alienation, for the human condition is characterised by a fragmentary phantasmagoria of images and partial notions: 'Bad witnesses for men are the eyes and ears of those who have foreign

¹⁴⁰ Barnes, 101, B1 of Heraclitus' *Peri Phusis*.

¹⁴¹ Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, 97.

¹⁴² Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, I, 29.

souls' (B107). The comforting relationship of empirical experience to understanding has been displaced, for now the senses are revealed as an index of the desensitising, destructive operations of prejudice. The previously assured subject now inhabits a dystopia of uncoordinated sensual delusions, particularly vulnerable to the materiality and aesthetic power of language: the 'foolish man is put in a flutter at every word' (B87).

Heraclitus relishes this fantastic and grotesque imaginary, the dislocated world of fools and madmen that he has posited in the signifying space previously occupied by empirical certainty. For it is an imaginary where the vertiginous inversions of analogy can replace conceptual norms and usual assumptions: 'a man when he is drunk is led by a boy, stumbling, not knowing where he goes, his soul moist' (B117). It is a world upside-down, but this folly and inversion is not temporary or regenerative. Humanity is trapped in its own absurdity. The atavistic madness, the stuttering sickness of the moist intoxicated soul, requires the medicinal attentions of the *logos*. *Logismos*, the active process of logological reflection, is a restorative method, a critical alertness to the sustaining relationship between mind and body, between psychosomatic and environmental conditions. Heraclitus recommends a 'dry soul' as wisest and best, a remedy to the wild 'fluttering' of ideas, inscribing reason as a calm feeling, possible in the absence of acute environmental impingements.¹⁴³

Heraclitus's *logos* assumes a therapeutic power in a world whose values have been reversed, exchanged: 'immortals are mortals, mortals immortals: living their death, dying their life' (B62). Previously stable nouns now inspire a lively intellectual economy, paradoxical play displaces the banal and the normative. Looking back to Hesiod we can say that the *logos* refuses predication, it is an ana-logic, a declension of simultaneous possibilities, a philosophy of necessary coexistences. Such an extension of 'sense' is possible only when nature and culture constantly cross, in a world of allegories and hybrid chronotopes. For Heraclitus, the horizon in which the subject will now comprehend itself is figurative, emblematic, generic. The human situation now needs enframing by a variety of fictional and thematic strategies. In this world, unexpected signifying tactics, such as an

¹⁴³ Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, CVIII, CIX, 77.

allegorical tableau vivant, might arrest any ready calculus: 'Lifetime is a child at play, moving pieces in a game. Kingship belongs to the child.'¹⁴⁴

Logos and logological intelligence act in a world necessitating representation, generating a play of relationships that always exceeds the knower, as frightening as it is exhilarating. Logological method might restore balance and equilibrium, but it is also a desire, an analogical appetite, a hunger for a *copia* of discursive resources, a breadth of sensibility. The metaphorical texture of *logos* is riven by alternating desires: it wants to be a subtle reinvention of conventional assumptions, a transcendence of the given, a kind of meta-language; however, it is also a mode of social analysis, in touch with the life of society, timely, appropriate, a medium of cultural exigencies. Heraclitus's displacement of a language of certainty creates *logos* as an economy of desire, a permanent ambivalence.

Paideia

Heraclitus puts logological intelligence in touch with contemporary trends, particularly the burgeoning market economy of Ephesus, which encourages the circulation of values: 'fire is an exchange for all things, and all things are an exchange for fire, as goods for gold and gold for goods'.¹⁴⁵ The figurative texture of the *logos*, a form capable of flexible allusion and indication, easily inhabits salutary social forces and popular idioms, their dynamism and common sense. The *logos* is also a medium of historicity, it mediates myth, archaic memory, complex creation stories.

Sandywell offers us intriguing insights into the duality of fire's significance for the ancient Greeks. Fire combines and fuses the most elemental opposites. As life-giving warmth it symbolises the hearth, civilised rituals, the altars of the city, technical knowledge, and culture. However, fire is also the universal conflagration of war, a scourge on people and cities. Fire is a volatile and undecidable medium between life and death; as stolen from the gods it will bring both hope and technological progress, but in exchange punitive retribution, grief, toil, an inescapable state of delusion. Fire is modern optimism

¹⁴⁴ Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, XCIV, 71.

¹⁴⁵ Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, XL, 47.

and genealogical pessimism.¹⁴⁶ Fire, in archaic Greek representation, is a holistic figure, Heraclitus's equivocal metaphor for the cosmic intelligence and cyclical justice that will 'discern and catch up with all things' (Kahn, CXXI).

Logismos, in the plurality of its aspects and functions, is a semiotic breadth, encouraging comparative frames of reference and profound historical erudition, a varied *paideia*, a thick cultural memory. It is a pluralist imaginary, poised to critique partiality, sectarianism, and their correlatives in ontological assumptions and specious claims to identity. Heraclitus derides cultic practices of deity worship for their sectarian prejudices. He suggests that those who riotously celebrate Dionysus for the god's life-affirming virility need to recognise his identity with Hades, lord of the Underworld, god of the dead and god of death, an equivocal god, both malign and hospitable (B15). Licentiousness, obscenity, ritual, cultic violence, need to be confronted by a theological ecumenicism, diverse modes of religious sublimation. Here Heraclitus's thought will anticipate the tolerant monism of Spinoza in his *Theologico-Political Treatise*, its philological and textual sensitivities, its anti-foundational recalling of the bible's own differential genealogies. Logological erudition challenges immediacy, an economy of relationships confronts self-presence, a multiplicity of senses converses with foundational logics.

Heraclitus's *logos* wishes to protect public space, to affirm a robust civil society that recognises varied attributes. An entire conception of political agency is opened in the interstices of the finite, the partial, and the self-identical: 'the best choose one thing in return for all: ever-flowing fame from mortals; but most men satisfy themselves like beasts' (B29). The mob are unprincipled, hedonistic creatures of nature, a consequence of the confused impingement of a multiplicity of locally motivated desires and fears on their near bestial imagination. Problematic politically is that the mob exist in a perpetual present of utility and greed, not a salutary basis for a civil society seeking to found itself on the memory of legality and constitutional principles. The want of a cosmopolitan moral imagination and of enduring principles of conduct and reflexivity is the source of a political malaise in the city-state. Heraclitus bears anguished witness to the intolerant identity politics of democracy:

¹⁴⁶ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 277.

The Ephesians deserve to be hanged, every adult man; and abandon their city to the young. For they exiled Hermodorus, the best man among them, saying: 'Let no one of us be best; if there is such a man, let him go elsewhere and live among others' (B121).¹⁴⁷

Logological insight into the problem of identity politics requires exercises in perspective, pointed allegories that alert us to other spheres of life, to the material appetites and sensual reflexes of animal behaviour: 'Dogs bark at those they do not recognise' (B97).¹⁴⁸

Intolerance, parochialism and *ressentiment* are revealed as reactive pathologies, sensualisms, which can only be remedied by a therapeutic *logos* that insists on a much more extensive, textured matrix for cognition and ethical deportment. The fierce emotions of personal prejudice need to be moderated by methods of deliberation and analogical invention that promise a far broader and more inclusive image of commonality, a community of *logos*:

you must follow what is common/universal (*xynos*). But although the account (*logos*) is common, most men live as though they had an understanding (*phronesis*- 'understanding', 'intelligence', 'thought') of their own (B2).¹⁴⁹

Heraclitus's logological methodology protects the political and forms itself as a medium of deliberation and communication, regulating diverse interests. As a consequence, *logos* encourages a recognition of what is 'common', not as an epistemological reflection but as a feeling for affective dispositions which allow both public spiritedness and a necessary distancing from the coercions of identity. The community of thought nurtured by *logos* despises tribal or cultic identifications and innate social hierarchies, and most importantly, does not subscribe to disambiguated moral values, purported to exist outside of representation, intellectual debate, and exercises in perspective. *Logismos* enhances a pluralist imagination.

Heraclitus's logological intelligence encourages recognition of laws and customary sociability, the *nomos* of the city-state. The *nomos*, emerging as written law by the sixth century BCE, guarantees a civic constitution, a channelling of agonistic energies into civil

¹⁴⁷ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 237.

¹⁴⁸ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 237

¹⁴⁹ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 242.

life, a post-tribal, post-aristocratic political possibility. To protect a politics of difference, the *logos* need to pay sustained attention to its own condition of possibility, its material means. Contradicting the progressivist thesis, I would say the *logos* is not objective or transparent, but a recursive celebration of discursive idioms, of particular sociabilities, forms and ceremonies that guarantee critical participation. As Heraclitus says: 'The people should fight for the law as for the city wall' (B44). The *logos* requires the protection of legal power in its infancy, a fierce emphasis on commonality and tradition: '(to) speak with understanding, one must hold fast to what is shared by all, as a city holds to its law' (B30). The *logos* inscribes itself in social processes, it is not a universal, it does not exceed the local and historical as such. In this guise it is intensive, alerting us to the 'places', the situation of discourse, its genres, and necessary themes.

We have seen that Heraclitus's *logos* equivocates: it consolidates interactive forms, it prescribes roles and duties for the health of critical discourse, but it is also a tendency towards expansive reflection, archaic memory, mystical symbolism. A mythical, tragic sense of the paradoxes of fate guides the representations of *logos*, destabilising the humanist subject as the sole principle of critical discourse about justice and the operations of law: 'for human nature has no insights, divine nature has' (B78).

The knowledge of an oracular legality as constraining as it is indecipherable converses constantly with the civic optimism of nomocentric rationalism. The *logos* augments mental life as a kinetic movement between plenitude and lack, between grasping the whole, and feeling it stray from one's grip: 'It is not good for men to get all they want' (B110). Logological symbolism, after reminding us of the contemporary importance of the institutional and the social, also wishes us to be attentive to an extensive archaic *paideia*, as in the aleatory power of Zeus: 'The thunderbolt steers all things' (B64).

Heraclitus' sayings, having mobilised fire as the economic motor of civic development, commercial exchange, and cosmopolitan sensibility, now recuperates the double aspect of the King of the Olympian pantheon, Zeus 'the thunderbolt', a terrifying power. Zeus is both the omniscient modern patriarch who governs over a domesticated nature, and the demonic god who effects an incomprehensible tragic justice for mortals, remorseless and pitiless.

Even Zeus, the great sun god, must recognise a law of constraint, the retributions of ancient *Dike*: 'the sun will not overstep its measures, otherwise the Furies, ministers of justice, will find it out' (B94). It emerges that *xynus*, the value of what is common and shared, not only requires culturally specific communicative procedures but a cosmological chronotope, a sense of the indefeasible cycles of transgression and retribution, of divine distributions of love and strife: 'God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and famine' (B67).

Heraclitus reminds us not only of a Hesiodic mythical demonology but also of a mystical natural philosopher, Anaximander, and his concept of *phusis* – that all things must give justice and pay retribution to each other according to the ordered process of time. That which is generated must suffer the retribution of being finite, pay the penalty of being's originary injustice and violence, a violence nevertheless creative and essential for culture and civilisation.¹⁵⁰ A logological sense of the 'common' must refer to both immediate social conditions and a historicity of being that stresses unfathomable cycles, the inextricable relationship of good and evil, dizzying relativism: 'Sickness makes health sweet and good, hunger plenty, weariness rest' (B111).

Heraclitus' *logos* is committed to civic order, but insists on the role of violence in cultural development. Logological considerations are a matrix for rhetoric's ambivalence and inability to embrace a single-minded ethics or programmatic theory. Logological discourse, the discourse of what is 'common', mediates, enables. It is a combination of deliberative optimism, the search for civic values, and the memory of violent means, of revolutionary violence, insurgent transformations. The *logos* is a *pharmakon*: 'We must know that war is common (universal) and justice (*dikê*) is strife and that all things come to be through strife and necessity' (B80).¹⁵¹ Heraclitus's evokes logological intelligence as a work-ethic, a process, forever dissatisfied with the concealed barbarism of present norms, yet incapable of moral solution, codified morality, ontology, identity. Logological

¹⁵⁰ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 139. Heraclitus's dualistic philosophy anticipates Empedocles most famous thesis, that natural and cultural life is generated from a complex *phusis*, the eternal conflict of Love and Hate. Clearly Presocratic terminology, although moving towards philosophical abstraction, is highly indebted to Hesiod's *psychomachia*, often translating his anthropomorphised divinities into a theoretical language of *arche* and *phusis*.

¹⁵¹ Sandywell, *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 244.

intelligence, inventive yet recursive and situated, initiates debate, dilemma, it fuels future rhetorical representations.

Ethos

Logological thinking, the orientation of *logos*, is an energetic problematisation of the acculturation of the intellect, a question of how thought and life are imbricated. A number of Heraclitus's apothegms, his wise aphorisms, prescribe the practical experience and generalist inclinations required by a critical subject: 'Men who love wisdom (*philosophoi andres*) must be inquirers into many things indeed' (Kahn, IX).

Later, Tacitus's dialogue on Oratory (*Dialogus de Oratoribus*) will delineate the oratorical type as someone who, while they ought to drink deeply at certain springs of knowledge, should also wet his lips at them all, receiving a 'tincture' of literature, music, and mathematics.¹⁵² Heraclitus suggests that to enter the *mysterium* one must feel the texture of surfaces, for then, what insight is gleaned can be 'set apart from all' (Kahn, XXVII). The rhetor figures subtle nuanced critical approaches. The rhetor's materialism, his intensive focus, creates extensive and subaltern modes of understanding, crossing many trajectories, summoning hidden possibilities.

In his biography of Heraclitus in *Lives of the Philosophers* Diogenes Laertius suggests the equivocations of the logological attitude, a narrative of social involvements and strategic distancing. Heraclitus is both culture-hero and separatist philosopher, a man of praxis and strange speculation. According to Diogenes, Heraclitus was from an eminent family, and flourished as a competitor in the sixty-ninth Olympiad (504/501 BCE). He was asked by the Ephesians to write laws for them but refused because of their wicked constitution, preferring to retire to the temple of Artemis and play dice with children.

The rhetor always evokes diverse traditions and positional possibilities. In the end Heraclitus became a misanthrope, leaving the city and living in the mountains where he fed on plants and herbs. When, now suffering from dropsy, he returned to the city he asked

¹⁵² Tacitus, 31:7-8, 315, 316.

the doctors in riddling fashion whether they could change a rainstorm into a drought.¹⁵³ The passage from sociability to exile becomes characteristic. Later we will encounter this mixture of open dialogue and self-imposed attenuation in the Platonic thought-figure of Socrates.

Heraclitus speaks through *dramatis personae*, he assumes the *ethos* of the cryptic oracle, who 'neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign' (Kahn, XXXIII). Heraclitus explores a number of 'conceptual personae' and their modes of life, interrogating the constitutive power of sexual difference, the role of feminine knowledges and mantic inspiration in gathering critical intelligence: 'The Sibyl with raving mouth utters things mirthless and unadorned...and her voice carries through a thousand years because of the god who speaks through her' (Kahn, XXXIV).

The *logos* channels many voices, like Oedipus it mediates the realm of the gods, but only as a paradox, blind to common appearances but a medium of what is material and vital in life. The *logos* speaks through the socially marginalised, such as children, innocent carriers of gnomic wisdom:

Men are deceived in the recognition of what is obvious, like Homer who was wisest of all the Greeks. For he was deceived by boys killing lice, who said: what we see and catch we leave behind; what we neither see nor catch we carry away (Kahn, XXII).

It is historical lore that Homer, reputedly the wisest of the Greeks, died at the mercy of a childish riddle he was unable to answer, yet the anecdote also trades on the paradox of Homer as the blind, visionary poet. In *logos* and the community of discourse it founds, the hierarchical positions of child and adult, margin and metropole, visibility and invisibility are fluidly exchanged. The logological *ethos* is performed as both naivety and insight, innocence and sophistication, populism and elitism. In the characteristics of the logological *ethos*, one discovers the fate of critique: 'Man's character (*êthos*) is his fate (*daimôn*, divinity; fortune for good or evil)' (Kahn, CXIV).

The logological *ethos* is not an innate capacity, it is rather configured by erotic and destructive urges, imbricated in and inextricable from the complex proportioning of fortune. As the next chapter suggests, the *ethos* of the rhetor must surrender to experience, to conflicting impulses. A rhetorical *ethos* is not egological but like Heraclitus's conceptual

¹⁵³ Barnes, Early Greek Philosophy 105.

personae susceptible to a multiplicity of impingements, circumstances, re-presentations, and diverse traditions. The rhetor never exists in the neutral and homogenous time of progressivist rationality; his or her inventive resources, extensive *paideia* and complex ethos conduce to dynamism, wondrous sociable sympathies, self-excess, to intensive pragmatism and extensive desires.

Chapter Four: Rhetoric, Cultural Development and the Public Sphere

In previous chapters I've argued that a classical discourse about persuasive language has reproduced itself through conceptual personae. These personae mediate enthusiasm and disquiet about the relationship between performative language and its social effects. As an allegory of the ambiguous power of language, personae from Odysseus to Thales and Heraclitus embody conflicting extremes, they are magicians, civic heroes, misanthropes, mysterious oracles, and tricksters. They are the paradoxical figures of a language held to be dangerous and miraculous, and as such they import a plural spectrum of affective qualities into conceptions of public discourse.

In this chapter, I wish to extend our understanding of rhetoric's contribution to a non-normative conception of the public sphere. I want to discuss a creation story, a narrative of the origins of society and the role of language and associated cultural media in the formation of a robust and diversified civil society. The sociological narrative implies a philosophy of complex assent, suggesting that a culture formed through multifarious representations continues to allow the co-existence of different values, ways of life, and possible sensibilities. It argues that a polity formed from rhetorical representations - from a multiplicity of persuasive modes - will harbour diverse tendencies, conservatively guarding its laws and procedures while allowing for the possibility of re-evaluation and radical insurgencies. A rhetorically formed culture will protect both identity and that which exceeds it.

There is copious textual evidence that classical rhetorical theorists from Isocrates to Cicero and Quintilian argued for the crucial role of persuasive language in the formation of political entities, and they did so by invoking an already well-worn theory of socialisation. Cicero, in his *De Inventione* (c. 87 BCE), argues that rhetoric is supposed to have taught men, when society was still unformed, that they must work for the common good (1.2.3). Asserting control over a scattered people, the 'wise control' of Cicero's mythologised orator protects civil rights, brings help to the suppliant, and provides for the

safety of the entire state. (1.8.30-4). The orator's charisma and breadth of understanding is a powerful mode of social discipline. But it also softens dispositions, a civilizing function that leads 'scattered humanity' out of its brutish existence, creating social communities, laws, tribunals, and civic rights (*De Oratore* 1.8. 32-3). Quintilian later concurs with this appraisal, arguing that *ratio* and *oratio* elevate us above the beasts, and that the orator, excelling in reason and persuasion, is the highest realization of humanity (*Institutio Oratoriae* 2.16.17).

Both Roman rhetorical theorists are almost certainly drawing on a stream of earlier Greek thought, exemplified by Isocrates. Isocrates argued that while in natural ability we are often deficient to animals, slower and weaker, our capacity for persuasive speech has helped us to found cities, establish laws, and invent arts. Isocrates suggests that our speech is a flexible mode: by reasoned, deliberative speech we educate the ignorant and inform the wise by the charismatic power of epideictic speech (a language of praise and blame), we refute the wicked and praise the good (*Nicocles*, 5.ff, *Antidosis*, 253 ff.)¹⁵⁴ Society is formed in the interstices of rational discipline and imaginative invention; it needs a mixture of qualities.

As Eric Havelock and Thomas Cole have argued, Isocrates, then Romans like the Epicurean philosopher Lucretius and later Cicero and Quintilian, are drawing on the sociological precepts of the Presocratic Democritus in attributing the origin of human laws to human speech (*logos*), and to persuasion (*peithein*). As a thoroughgoing historicist of language and society, Democritus evokes the power of *logos* as both a gentle mode of consensus and a masterly exercise of social control.¹⁵⁵ For Democritus, the *logos* is a reserve of qualities, it is humanity's potential, but not its essence. In this chapter I trace the influence of Democritus's evocation of *logos*, the developmental power of performative and critical languages, upon Hellenistic and Roman thought. I suggest that Democritus's *logismos*, logological method, enunciates a subtle rhetorical subject-position, polymathic and inventive, later activated by philosopher rhetoricians like Seneca.

¹⁵⁴ I draw my quotations and references from Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988, which provides a helpful summary of the topos of the *laus eloquentiae* on pages 8-11.

¹⁵⁵ See Isocrates *Nicocles* 6-7 and Cicero's *De Inventione* 1.2, which echo Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, *On the Nature of the Universe*, section 5. Lucretius's work is an admixture of cosmology and sociology redolent of the eclecticism of Presocratic thought.

Eric Havelock in The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics (1957) argues that whereas Plato and Aristotle focus on humanity as an ideal type, rational and moral, intelligent and just, anthropologists like Democritus were interested in acculturation as a contingent achievement requiring a complex analysis of the relationship between people, their environment, and their means of representation. Intrigued by the brutish state of early humanity, Presocratic anthropologists like Xenophanes, Anaxagoras and Democritus did not rationalise civilisation as the effect of humanity's fully formed cognitive powers or innate disposition to morality. Civilisation has not been pre-ordained, people have not simply developed their innate, god-given capacities.¹⁵⁶

Xenophanes asserts that humans did not originally receive any demonstration from the gods on everything pertaining to their needs.¹⁵⁷ This anthropological *topos* of humanity's initial ignorance and incomplete moral and cognitive faculties can also be found in Anaxagoras and Democritus. Their genealogy argues for a genetic scenario of early humanity's desperate need, disunity, of their scattered and planless existence. Language and intersubjective media are not innate or given but the miraculous overcoming of natural alienation, a tremendous complex achievement of the human intellect.

Peter Rose argues for the continuing appeal of the Presocratics' frightening pre-social scenario in fifth century BCE tragedy. Rose argues that Sophocles's *Philoctetes* is a detailed meditation upon the pre-social struggle for survival, incarnated in Philoctetes' lonely habitation of the wild and desolate island of Lemnos. Through Philoctetes' lengthy laments upon the theme of his acute loneliness, the pathos of pre-social isolation is relentlessly displayed before the audience.¹⁵⁸ Philoctetes must survive in complete isolation from other human beings, without material aid, prey to wild beasts, harsh weather, formidably rocky terrain, the difficulties of finding food, and access only to the most primitive herbal medicine. Sophocles' play, according to Rose, is a dramatic reinvention of contemporary anthropological theories about the condition of early humanity.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Eric A. Havelock, The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics, Camelot Press, London, 1957, 26-7.

¹⁵⁷ Havelock, 105, 108.

¹⁵⁸ Peter W. Rose, 'Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the Teachings of the Sophists', Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, vol. 80, 1976, 58.

¹⁵⁹ Fernanda Caizzi suggests that Thucydides' horror at the selfish and destructive impulses unleashed by the internecine Peloponnesian war (see Thucydides' analysis of the civil war at Corcyra, book III, 82-3, where

Sophocles play reflexively stresses that in a state of nature, human beings suffer greatly from the absence of four life necessities: fire, shelter, clothing, and a steady food supply.¹⁶⁰ Social isolation betokens a dearth of material means. Later Cicero will credit persuasive speech as a medium of collaboration, coterminous with the development of these same preconditions of social prosperity.¹⁶¹

The protagonist of Presocratic anthropology has the genetic heritage of a worm, fish, and barbarous savage, an animal whose life and instincts are biologically and environmentally determined. This early human type requires a materialist analysis; it can be traced back to the generation of organic life from inorganic materials, from swamp, slime, moisture, and mud.¹⁶² Humanity always retains the elemental constitution of its heritage according to Xenophanes, since everything that is born and grows consists of earth and water – humanity has a materially based *arche* and *phusis*.¹⁶³

The species career of early human beings accords with the instinctive imperative of organic life to grow and flourish. Its *phusis*, its principle of generation and continuance at this stage, is a herd mentality of self-protection, a purely immanent response to brutal exigencies. Early humanity's struggle is the automatic striving of all life to survive under harsh conditions.

The extraordinary development that fascinated the anthropological speculations of the sixth and fifth century BCE went something like this: how do human beings, closely related to the immanence of animals whose actions and fate are inextricably bound to environmental pressures, become, through an historical transformation, socialised and

he argues that war's deprivations brings people down to the brutal level of circumstance and survival instincts, vitiating moderation and perspectivalism) owes a debt to Presocratic anthropology, with its emphasis on socialisation and related representational means as a necessary movement beyond mere want. Thucydides' signature historiographical mode, which balances perspectives, would seem to affirm his commitment to public dialogue and equality of access to the public sphere, an equable historiography horribly threatened by the violence of war. See Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, 'Protagoras and Antiphon: Sophistic Debates' in The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy, ed. A.A. Long, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1999, 322- 23.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Cole, Democritus and the Sources of Greek Anthropology, published for the American Philological Association, no. 25 of the American Philological Association, press of Western Reserve University, Cleveland, 1967, 7.

¹⁶¹ Cicero, De Inventione, 1:2-3, and De Oratore, 1:35-6.

¹⁶² Havelock, 115.

¹⁶³ Havelock, 105.

intelligent beings capable of forming their own laws (*nomoi*) and transcending environmental contingencies? How has human weakness in the face of more powerful animals become mastery of the environment, and burgeoning scientific and technological capabilities? How has an earlier defensive stage of communitarian severity towards outsiders and internal transgressors been succeeded by an affirmative ethos of pluralism? What has enabled human cultures, initially driven by the need to survive, to develop 'superfluous' leisured arts such as music? How is that we can now appreciate aesthetic qualities such as form, rhythm, and ludic play? How has a formerly defensive and punitive creature come to enjoy dramatic deceptions?

The Presocratic thesis, which resonated throughout the rhetorical theories of antiquity, is that persuasive language was the medium through which human cultures (1) met their most vital needs in order to survive, and (2) became ever more 'plastic', producing an expanding abundance of arts, theories, and spiritualities. The Presocratics therefore reflect on representation as a protean cultural function, an evolutionary force. Democritus's genealogy of social formation is fascinated with the many liminal circumstances and sensibilities that have engendered a sophisticated intersubjective mode of representation. It is a genealogy that argues for a layered cultural memory and an acceptance of change as integral to cultural life.

The Role of Language in Group Formation and Collaboration

It is need, a biological imperative to survive, which creates the first and most rudimentary kinds of collective human interactions and symbolic communications between people. Under pressure from the threat posed by larger animals and the anarchic dangers of individual self-interest, early humans instinctively seek shelter and protection in caves. These aggregations of people are called *systemata*. It is this rudimentary proximity of bodies alone that constitutes the necessary conditions from which people learn to identify shared needs and similar biological characteristics (*typoi*), to recognise themselves as a type, an object of prediction and planning. The rudimentary language of the aggregation is driven, under pressure of survival, to draw attention to commonality rather than difference.

Language, reflexively inaugurating typologies, gradually persuades an aggregate of people that they have common needs, and helps them develop the forethought and the planning necessary to meet those needs. Language becomes the condition under which talent can be pooled and increasingly sophisticated technologies developed. Tools empower weak hands, enabling early forms of agriculture. Weakness becomes strength; accidental discoveries are consolidated into genres of discussion, collaboration, and research. Lucretius argued that *logos*, as rational speech, enables communication and the sharing of discoveries.¹⁶⁴

The first steps towards civilised life receive a huge catalyst from the discovery of fire, perhaps first sighted in a burning tree trunk struck by lightning, or some flaming grass. Its discovery is critical for early humanity, enabling more elaborate technologies, the forging of tools, and building and agricultural programs. Fire, moreover, requires tending at all times, elaborating a rudimentary division of labour, a pooling of talents. An early technology and motor of sociability, fire requires planning, memory, and the capacity to learn from experience, to further seek out this ‘warmth’ one once accidentally enjoyed. The *type* is formed within the sociality of representation, it evokes collaborative moods, inculcates a disposition to share and co-operate.

Language, suggests the Presocratics, is homologous with the effects of fire, since it is also a technique that reminds one of the benefits of collaboration, promoting the formal consolidation of effective intersubjective experiences and actions. Diodorus Sicilius argues that language enables technical achievement by creating collaborative vocabularies, vocabularies that increasingly differentiate and specialise in response to the development of sophisticated technologies. Xenophanes had earlier suggested that the alphabet was a technology, traceable to the Egyptian need for monetary records.¹⁶⁵ Language is imbricated in social technologies and craft; it enables place and habitat. One can also think of the comparison of language and fire from a mythic perspective as evoking the guileful Prometheus who steals fire from all-powerful Zeus, a revolutionary act that generates new

¹⁶⁴ Cole, 40.

¹⁶⁵ Havelock, 106, 111.

trajectories for humanity, language as a hubris one is doomed to be punished for, a necessary transgression of one's allotted place and boundary.

If language is a means of social progress, it is because it is dynamic and alert to changing requirements: it is capable of producing new symbols and types in accordance with immediate exigencies. Signification responds fluidly to chance events in an ongoing process of empirical trial and error. The narrative's oft-repeated genetic chronotope is a cry of terror overheard by a passer-by. Proving experientially successful in mobilising aid, the cry is subsequently formalised as a rallying-cry for the tribal unit. Or in another example, the weaker members of a grouping successfully band together while under threat of external attack, later using an emblematic representation to once again mobilise a defensive assembly. These *symbola* are then used in different spheres of social life by a process of analogical extension, the method of *logismos*.¹⁶⁶ It is a diacritical *mise en scène* of discovery and consolidation, particularisation and extension, birth and maturation; here spoken and written languages are not inherently superior to visual and aural symbols, icons and gestures, all are cultural media invoking circumstantial necessities. It is enough that speech proceeds forth in the manner best suited to catch the attention of others.¹⁶⁷

In the classical creation story, language is viewed as the essential medium of the entire process by which humans secure the advantages of co-operation. As new forms of communication arise in critical situations, language ensures their codification and typological characterisation, cumulatively creating points of articulation within social collectivities. As societies develop, so does the variety of symbolic media, new types and topologies, new modes of life and languages of expression are recognised and thematised. These representations function as diverse rallying points, as increasingly subtle foci for collaboration and critical engagement. The narrative reminds us that as social beings we are adaptable animals, that our history is a process responsive to many contingencies.¹⁶⁸

Evolving newer and more subtle nodes of articulation and sympathy, language enables human groupings to evolve from small defensive aggregations, *systemata*, through to tribes with a positive sense of cultural identity who exercise the rule of law, to larger

¹⁶⁶ Cole, 74.

¹⁶⁷ Cole, 41.

¹⁶⁸ Havelock, 78.

regional civilisations such as city-states, called *êthne*. Isocrates celebrated persuasive language as the capacity to enlarge sympathies and create broader notions of belonging, a force for regional alliances and pan-Hellenic confederations such as that under the aegis of Athens. Isocrates, in an irenic appeal for fairness and justice during the Peloponnesian war, *On the Peace* (355 BCE) celebrated the golden age of Athenian imperium, when it made the term ‘Greek’ synonymous not with a race, but a way of life, a sympathy of values that might unite geographical entities.¹⁶⁹ Rhetorical representation for Isocrates combined the normative and projective, it referred one to the pragmatic recognition of unifying power while allowing for an unfolding conversation about identity and difference.

Democritus’s narrative of persuasion and representation refers to power and social control as formative necessities, a means of protection, order, and discipline. Under the constant threat of external aggression, justice will be necessarily severe in rudimentary societies. One must think of these societies as comparable to the cruelty of various animal species that punish, by killing, the transgressions of their own. Far from judging ‘primitive’ coercions and cruelties, Democritus, the most important of the Presocratic anthropologists, affirms the continuing relevance of this punitive scenario for the modern city-state. Democritus argues for the state’s right to kill those who kill their fellow citizens, suggesting that for human societies, one should destroy at all cost anything that offends against justice. For example, argues Democritus, anyone who kills a highwayman or a pirate should be free from penalty.¹⁷⁰

For Democritus, a ‘softening’ of the legal and moral codes of society is only possible under particular, that is to say, prosperous conditions. Even in this instance, Democritus suggests, a society will always revert to harsh justice to protect itself under duress. The rhetorician, understanding social norms, argues that idealistic tendencies must be tempered by pragmatism. Only when released from scarcity and technologically capable of generating an abundance of material means, can symbolic media like music, art, and drama help the linguistic subject to develop pluralist curiosities and aesthetic sensibilities. Democritus argues that *logismos*, political discourse, only replaces *bia*, brute force and

¹⁶⁹ Cole, 133.

¹⁷⁰ Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1987, 278 (see B258-B260).

tyrannical power, when *rhysmos*, the social harmony of different but equal individuals, is sufficiently strong.¹⁷¹

Democritus explains that music is a young art, as a distinct technique it was not separated off by necessity but came into being from superfluity.¹⁷² For the mouth could not flourish as a distinct organ of communication and aesthetic pleasure until it was released from the brutal immediacy of survival.¹⁷³ The function of language is diversified in its post-necessity phase. Only in conditions of surplus does representation begin to inform the imagination and project beyond immediate exigencies and circumstances. Language now stands on the threshold of a new chronotope that demands novelty and diversity. Democritus argues that in the post-necessity phase of human societies a genuine public-spiritedness develops, an affirmative sociability that is preferable to the defensive mentality and repressive constraints characterising earlier phases of social development. To use a more recent political terminology, Democritus envisages the transition of society from negative to positive freedom, a movement towards civic participation and political discourse.

Representation affects sensibility. Now recognising the law as a positive virtue guiding civic well-being, humans in the post-necessity phase actually mean to do good, for they recognise their own virtue in the law and they acknowledge that from concord comes great deeds.¹⁷⁴ Sociability, care for others, interest in the public welfare, becomes so strong that anyone who neglects public affairs gets a bad reputation, even if they steal nothing and commit no injustice.

Considered an entire sensorium of symbolic forms, as ceremony and convivial dialogue, language, according to Diodorus Sicilius, enhances affective bonds between people, promoting a common culture.¹⁷⁵ One can say that in the post-necessity phase of social evolution there is no 'isolation' in either the material or mental life of a people.

¹⁷¹ Cole, 119.

¹⁷² Barnes, 262.

¹⁷³ Cole, 41.

¹⁷⁴ Barnes, 276, see B248 and B250.

¹⁷⁵ Havelock, 82.

Instead, there is companionship, mutual defence, concord among the citizens, and other good things that Democritus describes as too many to enumerate.¹⁷⁶

Enlarged sympathies abound once the sociality of representation has taken hold: those in power actually take it upon themselves to lend aid and patronage to the poor. Again, whereas among early humans the leader was usually the strongest and initially ruled by force (*bia*), a prosperous humanity firmly diverges from the species-career of animals. Their leaders now respond to the transcendent idea of a ‘people’ and seek their approval; even an old man can now rule by moral persuasion, his people willingly rallying to defend him – a marvellous defiance of brute power that only a society of eloquence is capable, as argued by Odysseus, responding to Euralyus, in *The Odyssey*.¹⁷⁷

The Impressionable Origins of Rhetoric

The story of the origins of sociality tends to evoke the qualities that enable civilised life as paradoxical, a combination of active and passive dispositions. Democritus’s creation story evokes a subject that is nascent, liminal, lacking in a sovereign ego, impressionable and sympathetic. S/he is partly a naïf, with a tendency to mimesis, to copy the world around her. At issue is the formative role of open sensibilities, those with the power of discovery and creativity, those sympathetic to the whole of created life.

For Democritus it is alacrity of mind or *anchinoia* that allows early humanity to capitalise upon the study of immanent behaviour and accidental discoveries. This is made possible by sensitivity to a variety of phenomena, a sympathy or *isonomia* with the range of creation. Democritus holds that we are the pupils of animals in all the important things – of the swallow in building, of the songbirds in singing.¹⁷⁸ ‘Primitive’ wonder, the desire to emulate, allows architecture to suggest itself in the spontaneous copying of the solidity of a cave, weaving to announce its possibility in the woof and warp of a spider’s web, transportation from the close study of the swift feet of a hare.¹⁷⁹ The Presocratic

¹⁷⁶ Barnes, 277, see B253 and B255.

¹⁷⁷ Cole, 90.

¹⁷⁸ Barnes, 262, quoted from Plutarch, *On the Intelligence of Animals*, 974A.

¹⁷⁹ Cole, 51.

Archelaus desired an enlarged sense of affinities between human and animal, a comparative approach to behavioural traits unfettered by complacent anthropocentrism.

For Democritus, representation is often born of gentle moods and naïve mimetic inclinations; on the other hand the appreciation of music and artistic representation requires sophisticated, detached modes of generic appreciation. The social subject constituted within *logos* becomes interested in interstitial spaces and non-existences, rhythm, illusion, fiction, deception. Democritus's influential theory of atoms is a social allegory. It is a monistic philosophy that the world and the way we perceive it is constituted by constellations of minute realia, or atoms. Although the stuff of everyday objects, atoms are capable of ever more complicated configurations, and in so doing they materially affect human sentience, ensuring it develops modes of complex assent, discerning rhythmic wholes (*rhysmoi*), harmony, and cycle where once there was only empiricism, obvious sensualism, a grasping for identity, a hatred of difference, a fragmentary confusion of partial ideas.¹⁸⁰ For Democritus and later Roman theory, *logismos* is an invention (*huerêma*) that reduces strife and increases agreement and harmony (*homonoia*).¹⁸¹

Thomas Cole reminds us that in Democritean theory *logismos*, the verb form of *logos*, rational and persuasive speech, replaces *bia*, brutal force, immanent necessity, when *rhysmos* is sufficiently strong.¹⁸² That is, *logos* as a praxis of deliberation among different possibilities desires interstices, lacunae, configurations of elements, conversational exchange, alternations of agreement and robust difference.

Classical *logismos* pertains to different temporal and spatial possibilities. As rational dialogue, *logos* creates the space for opinions and perspectives to be exchanged, for negotiation and in law courts and oratorical assemblies; its representations belong in the marketplace where commercial transactions take place.¹⁸³ *Logismos* is an idea of time in classical thought, for it defers hasty judgment; it is the moment of pause between different viewpoints, a cross-cultural medium. In the minds of its advocates, *logismos* succeeds the chaotic flux of *bia*, affirming and protecting civil interaction. In this aspect *logos* is the

¹⁸⁰ Cole, 117.

¹⁸¹ Cole, 122.

¹⁸² Cole, 119.

¹⁸³ Havelock, 189-92.

patient, leisured, time of deliberation, and the regulated and predictable time of procedure. Yet *logos* retains the memory of threshold moments, times of crisis and discovery, so it is also an inventive, opportunistic temporality, seizing the moment, engaging quickening desires, alert to when previous conventions must be exceeded.

Roman Theories of Eloquence

Classical rhetorical theory never hesitates to resume the contradictory orientations of the *logismos*, its intensive and extensive dimensions, by which I mean the imbrication of language in material necessity and progressive imagination. Tacitus's *Dialogus*, staged as a dispute about the genealogy and relevance of oratory, reminds us of the 'cradle' of eloquence, of a sublime persuasive language that won favour with men as the soul of poetry, of bards and oracles (12:2-3). Oratory, suggests this mytheme, was born in the communion of a golden age, before the depraved condition, the alienation, of modern social divisions. Eloquence recalls an idyllic habitat, a sympathetic belonging, a discourse of equals. It is inescapable in a democratic society where able speech conveys opinion, where different viewpoints must publicise themselves – it is a 'sheer necessity' (36:6-8).

One can say that in this mytheme the art of eloquent language maximises contact with real life; it deals intimately with good and evil, virtue and vice, justice and injustice. The art of eloquence is knowledgeable about a vast array of topics: it makes a full study of and is *a fortiori* isonomic with 'human nature', for to mollify the resentment of a judge one must understand anger, and have compassion. One needs to 'feel the pulse' of an audience. The art of eloquent language is in this aspect recursive, a studious behaviourism, a 'craft' adaptable to many purposes and whose knowledges and skill never fail to express and display an abundant and sympathetic *paideia* (31:1-4).

In Tacitus, we find a further relay of oratory's perennially mixed mythology, its shall we say inherent Paganism. We are reminded of the self-fashioning of the rhetor, his luminosity and autarkic achievements. In a sense, eloquence is also a 'gift', a mysterious ability, with a hint of 'supernatural power', one to which the plain man in the street points in awe; the orator is a man whose attainment of high position knows no ready genealogy of ascension, no innate wealth, no aristocratic virtue. The orator, rather, climbs to the top through 'sheer intellectual capacity', an assemblage of qualities that resist easy

interpretation (7:4-8:2). Oratory surmounts hierarchy and identity, it is always in excess of its own talents and attributes, its luminosity speaks miracles.

If we turn our attention at this same period, around the first century A.D., we discover subtly varied velleities in another polysemic dialogue about eloquence and oratory, Cicero's *De Oratore*. It is a dialogue about oratory's requirements (natural or learned?), set in a country villa outside Rome, similar to the country estate of Cicero's mature writings. It is a text that draws loving attention to the leisured chronotope of oratorical debate, a dilatory otiose scenario stimulated by the abundance (*copia*) and health of both natural and cultural largesse. Cicero's dialogue partly suggests that eloquence serves cultural memory; it reminds us of our more natural habitats, of convivial relationships outside of the insanity of court politics and inane fashions.

Cicero's setting also reminds us of the 'superfluous' time necessary for discursive health; the debate over the orator acknowledges the orator's transcendental aura and miraculous achievements, in large part due to the copious representational means at his/her disposal.¹⁸⁴ Rhetoric is recursive and situated discourse but it is also fascinated by its own non-normative capacities, reflective about its materiality and historicity while equally aware of its potential for magic, daring, bold action.

Stoic Methodology

It is well known that Roman philosophy was keenly aware of the methodological possibilities of rhetoric considered as a means of argumentative composition, an inventory of tropes and figures, and an ethos of presentation. Less clearly charted is the way rhetoric articulated a copious *ethos*, a subject-position whose drive to display acculturation conflicted with its more programmatic ideological imperatives. By analysing the hortatory

¹⁸⁴ For an excellent discussion of the evocation of oratorical copiousness in *De Oratore*, see Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979. Cave argues that in Cicero and Quintilian *copia dicendi*, copious speech was a ubiquitous synonym for eloquence, Cicero defining eloquence as 'wisdom speaking copiously' (5,6). Under the aegis of copiousness, Cave points out, one can argue for an oratorical ethos that is both situated and dynamic. Cicero's dialogue makes much of its affluent country-estate where images of plenty abound, situating the dialogue's setting as analogues to the orator's *copia argumentorum*, his rich 'store' of arguments, his reserves of natural abundance (6). Cave indicates an ambiguity in the principle of eloquent copiousness, however, for by the Renaissance, which resumed the notion of *copia dicendi* with gusto, it had become unclear whether fertile speech could be said to embrace *res*, the object of discourse, such was the excessive power and luminous autonomy of this rhetorical value (15).

letters of Seneca, we can make tentative steps towards restoring the horizontal relationship of rhetorically exuberant philosophers to the multifarious discourses of their time. Seneca's nuanced advice to Lucilius, nominally recommending Stoic responses to life's ills, demonstrates different moods: it is both a sincere and sympathetic examination of the vagaries of human nature, and a self-referential display of inventive critical resources, a discursive eagerness to displace conventional ideas and legislate new values.

In Seneca's *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, *logos*, the medium of philosophical argument, explanation, hypothesis, and example, is tropological, it takes conventional signifiers and extends or 'turns' their application into unexpected and paradoxical domains.¹⁸⁵ Consider the paradoxical flavour and chiasmic involutions of logic in the following aphorisms:

'To win true freedom you must be a slave to philosophy' (VIII);

'Acknowledging one's failings is a sign of health' (LIV);

'Rest is sometimes far from restful' (LVI);

'Show me a man who isn't a slave; one is a slave to sex, another to money, another to ambition; all are slaves to hope or fear' (XLVII).

The Stoic *logismos* volatilises representation and the philosophical subject emerges as an effect of its energetic operations and imaginative reach: s/he is capable of deflationary irony, supreme skepticism towards given identities, and a sensitivity to the paradoxes of true wisdom. The vocabulary of place, identity, and property on which juridical and political vocabularies depends is again inserted, Heraclitus-like, into a subaltern imaginary, a world upside-down. The term 'slave' is now potentialised, which is to say defamiliarised, rendered applicable to a variety of situations, now gesturing gleefully towards the seemingly powerful and complacent. *Logismos* reverses a materialistic and utilitarian calculus, and it does so with verve and style.

The frequency of striking analogies and inverted metaphors is so pervasive in Seneca's writings, so prominently displayed, that his rhetorical artifice dissuades us from

¹⁸⁵ Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Letters from a Stoic (*Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*), trans. Robin Campbell, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1969.

regarding Roman Stoicism, of which he is its chief practitioner, as a doctrinaire insistence on rational moderation, emotional apathy, and complete autonomy from external impingements. The following exhortations of Seneca, himself a bombastic and declamatory playwright, situate the philosophical desire to suicide in a differential theatre of enthusiastic spectatorship and enjoyable plot twists:

As it is with a play, so it with life – what matters is not how long the acting lasts, but how good it is. It is not important at what point you stop. Stop wherever you will – only make sure you round it off with a good ending.’ (LXXVII)

Seneca’s *logismos* encourages ambivalent sensibilities, suggesting that through representation there is a pleasure in pathos, an exquisite *Schadenfreude* of heroic performance. Indeed it is important that one’s acculturation, one’s capacity for fictional exemplifications, consoles even while dying in one’s bed:

There is room for heroism, I assure you, in bed as anywhere else. How much scope there would be for renown if wherever we were sick we had an audience of spectators! Be your own spectator anyway, your own applauding audience.¹⁸⁶ (LXXVIII)

The *ethos* of *logismos* suggests diverse aesthetic dispositions, the capacity to translate oneself into a number of life-spheres, to play subtle variations on familiar themes; one will secrete to oneself many sensibilities, heroic, solemn and playful. The Stoic subject is an *ethos* addressing itself to its own wayward desires, enjoying the spectacle of self-immolation, inventing new positional strategies, new relationships of self and other, and self and self. The rhetorical subject reaches out to contemporary idioms and historical examples, evoking a nuanced *paideia* of analogies, allusions, and moral precepts.

Situated within a rhetorically educated culture, the Stoic subject can affirm his/her horizontal desires, his/her extensive conception of culture. Seneca celebrates rhetorical skill and its *copia dicendi* as the ‘common property’, the *sensus communis* of a public sphere of discussion otherwise sharply differentiated in its philosophical doctrines and political ideals:

¹⁸⁶ For an excellent analysis of the relationship between Seneca’s bombastic dramaturgy and the heroic *mise en scène* of the Stoic subject in the philosophical writings, see Gordon Braden, Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan tradition: Anger’s Privilege, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1985.

Quite possibly you'll be demanding to know why I'm quoting so many fine things from Epicurus rather than ones belonging to our own school. But why should you think of them as belonging to Epicurus and not as common property? Think how many poets say things that philosophers have said – or ought to have said! Think of the quantity of brilliant lines to be found lying about in farces alone! (VIII)

A kind of textual ethnicity, a love of other cultural personae and of a bricolage of aesthetic forms, is more valuable to Seneca than dogmatic moralising. *Logismos* provides an intersubjective discursive space in which a number of modes of life can converse with each other, and a variety of argumentative forms can display themselves.

Seneca's *bonhomie*, his celebration of rhetorical arts as the possibility of a certain kind of *convivencia* between different opinions, anticipates the complex sensibility of a later rhetorical theorist, Desiderius Erasmus.¹⁸⁷ For Seneca, as for a tradition of dialogical rhetorical treatises, one can affirm and celebrate the rhythms and diverse bricolage of rhetorical representation, as a sphere of collaboration and reflexive meditation larger than one's own partialities, opinions, and intentions.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Walter M. Gordon, *Humanist Play and Belief: The Seriocomic Art of Desiderius Erasmus*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1990, 3: 'While his opponents were pummelling each other over questions of works and salvation, Erasmus was playing with the disputants and their ideas, inveighing against interdenominational strife.'

Chapter Five: The Sophists – Forever the Stranger

In this chapter I want to resume my analysis of the varied discourses of classical rhetoric. I discuss the first explicit teachers, theorists, and practitioners of the art of persuasion, the first generation of Sophists (fifth and fourth century BCE). I argue that the fragmented personae of the Sophists *crystallise* rhetoric's ambiguous provenance and discontinuous future traditions. The mixed mythology, the re-presentable personae of the Sophists, provoke plural critical orientations: intersubjective dialogue, communication theory, relativism, skepticism, charismatic authoritarianism, and aesthetic play. The Sophists render essentialising historicisms, notions of an authoritative rhetorical tradition, misleading, insensitive to rhetoric's inexhaustible contexts and frequent changes of tone and emphasis.

I principally discuss the rhetor and philosopher Protagoras as a projective allegory of rhetoric's multifarious usages and the complex discourses that surround issues of language, persuasion, and performance. Protagoras's reflexivity, caution, and sociological curiosity suggest that the discourse of persuasion adapts itself to prudential concerns, that the *logos* is a moderate and medial power, establishing procedures for communication and dialogue, a force for good governance and wise counsel. There is a non-normative Protagoras, however, who exhibits critical language through bold and audacious gestures, encouraging discourse to sharply delineate its characteristics, to assume a provocative social role, disdainful of complacency and narrow legalism. Here I extend Jean-Francois Lyotard's suggestion that the Sophists desire to maximise various perspectives, treating incommensurable epistemologies as a motivation to performatively enhance the inherent 'sense' of an opinion or argumentative genre, turning accepted values upside-down as they did so.

I reambiguate the Sophists as permanent 'strangers', in the sociologist Georg Simmel's sense of the term.¹⁸⁸ The 'stranger' is an inconsistent conceptual persona, an

¹⁸⁸ See 'The Stranger' in The Sociology of Georg Simmel, ed. and trans. Kurt. H. Wolff, The Free Press, Glencoe, Ill., 1950.

ethos illuminating thought's immanent possibilities and paradoxical contradictions. The stranger is both an important participant in society and a perpetual wanderer, helping to constitute the inside and self-identical while remaining outside, alone, glancing with detachment at all norms and assumptions. The stranger is *pharmakon*, a salve and a corruption, a stingray and a balm. I argue that by association with the stranger/rhetorician and the pharmacological *logos*, thought become estranged from itself, improper, exoticised, decadent, with an uncontrollable desire for the other. The rhetorical stranger affects one from within, ensuring that apodictic thought becomes vulnerable to an archaic *paideia*, to the ancient memory of violent creation and hybrid genealogies.

Protagoras

Protagoras was born around 490 BCE, in the Greek colony of Abdera in Thrace, and is reported to have died around 421 BCE. His remarkable longevity for ancient times, while it cannot be compared to the centurion Gorgias, indicates vigour and health, an almost superhuman robustness, which continues to intrigue a doxographical tradition deeply invested in the symbolic portent of these seeming incidentals. Like earlier Presocratic personae such as Heraclitus and Thales, conceptual personae expressive of pith, vim, and critical energy, Protagoras's copious output and legendary longevity has allegorical significance, figuring the rhetor as variously experienced, polymathic, and resourceful.

Protagoras life-story signifies defiance, challenging social prejudices and engineering new paths for the minority and outsider, an important feature of the mythology of the orator. In Plato's eponymous dialogue *Protagoras*, Protagoras is reputed to have made his innovative yet controversial educational methods and his status as an itinerant a virtue, a necessary cultural function. Protagoras proclaims himself the first *Sophist*, signifying rounded experience, versatility, and eclecticism. Protagoras' biography illuminates one of his most famous principles, the ability to make the weaker argument the stronger, to engineer the revolutionary act or accident of history as a new genre of argument, a respected discursive position. Protagoras is the path breaker, a figure of progressive transformation, successfully defying aristocratic ideals of innate excellence, a

self-made man. Protagoras, as G.B. Kerferd argues, is heralded in his own time, the second half of the fifth century BCE, and throughout Hellenistic antiquity, as the most famous of the Sophists, his life a spur to legend, folklore, and collective memory.¹⁸⁹

By 444 BCE, Protagoras is a well-known educator and intellectual in Athens, where he was to spend the duration of his life. His fame is mostly due to his association with the general Pericles (495-429 BCE), Athens' undisputed leader until the 430s, and reputedly one of history's great statesmen. Protagoras, along with Pericles' Milesian mistress Aspasia, and the Presocratic philosopher and rhetor Anaxagoras, are generally taken to be the crucial players in Pericles' 'liberal-circle' of free thinking associates.

Pericles selected his friend Protagoras to frame a democratic constitution for a new Greek colony at Thurii in southern Italy, around 444 BCE.¹⁹⁰ Protagoras's involvement with Pericles, in the role of advisor and discussant, is credited with giving the Athenian statesman extraordinary powers of speech and understanding, marvellous eloquence and great sympathy with the common people.¹⁹¹ Protagoras is said to have praised Pericles 'philosophical attitude' towards the death of his illegitimate sons, anticipating a later Stoic ideal of wise and moderate counsel to one's friends.¹⁹²

Protagoras's friendship with Pericles adumbrates one of his historical legacies, the legend of a public-intellectual and civic activist. Aristotle, in *On Education*, records Protagoras as the inventor of the shoulder-pad that helps porters carry their loads.¹⁹³ Protagoras's involvement with Pericles, famed for such civic projects as the Athenian building programme of 440s and 430s (including the Parthenon), records him as a social constructivist. Protagoras's salutary influence on Pericles' oratorical abilities imbricates his teaching and advice with Pericles' famous funeral oration to the mourning Athenian people, dramatised by the historian Thucydides. As Nicole Loraux argues, Pericles' rhetorical *tour de force* attempts to substitute a collective civic encomium to the

¹⁸⁹ G.B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 1981, 18.

¹⁹⁰ Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, 42,3.

¹⁹¹ Rosamond Kent Sprague ed., *The Older Sophists*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, South Carolina, 1972, 6, fragment B6.

¹⁹² Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, 18.

¹⁹³ Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 4, mentioned in Aristotle's *On Education*.

achievements of Athens' citizen-soldiers for a previously private lamentation for individual 'heroes'. Pericles' epideictic *logos*, his *epitaphos* to the dead, intends to displace the remaining vestiges of the Homeric age of the heroes, when individual combatants were given private eulogies.¹⁹⁴ Pericles' motivational *logos*, and the public ceremonial surrounding it, substitutes collective exaltation for private mourning, invoking a recognition of civic bonds and desire for public participation.¹⁹⁵

Thanks to the rhetorical theories of Sophists, by the Periclean age, there is, Loraux argues, a fascination with the political dimension of the symbolic, the unifying power of political oratory.¹⁹⁶ Protagoras, often figured within the doxography as keenly involved in robust dialogue and topical disputes, elaborates a language of representation that explores alternatives, a leisured and deliberative *logos*. Protagoras's deliberative rhetoric desires a broad cultural conversation about pressing social issues, associating him with the liberal legal reforms Pericles is famous for: the full enfranchisement of Athens's propertied males, and the establishment of a citizen's jury, the Aeropagus.

In a famous dialogue reported by Plutarch, Pericles and Protagoras debate the attribution of responsibility for a crime:

...when a competitor in the pentathlon, without meaning to, struck and killed Epitimus of Pharsalus with a javelin, [Pericles] spent a whole day with Protagoras trying to decide whether, according to the most correct judgment, one ought to regard as the cause of the mishap the javelin or the man who threw it rather than the directors of the games.¹⁹⁷

This aporetic discussion figures Protagoras as a political liberal interested in contextualising criminality. The famous Protagorean principle of rhetoric as enabling the means to attack any given thesis or opinion might also be construed as democratic, encouraging a capacious understanding of the law and legal dialogue within a democratic society as protective of individual rights against the majority. Protagoras also seems to suggest that the harsh logic of individual punishment needs to be socialised, there must be

¹⁹⁴ Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens – The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London, 1986, 41.

¹⁹⁵ Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 42, 52.

¹⁹⁶ Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 48.

¹⁹⁷ Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, B 9, Plutarch, *Pericles*, 36.

collective redress, and the law should not be blind to socio-economic differences and adventitious circumstances.¹⁹⁸

The Protagorean idea of translating weakness into strength, the overarching theme of Pericles' funeral speech (individual death translates into collective consciousness), would seem to exemplify Democritus' diacritical conception of a sophisticated *logos* invoking social harmony, a sense of commonality that insistently refers to its necessary conditions of social equity and material abundance.

We believe that psychosocial types have this meaning: to make perceptible, in the most insignificant or most important circumstances, the formation of territories, the vectors of deterritorialisation, and the process of reterritorialisation.¹⁹⁹

The Protagorean persona, considered as a psychosocial type, deterritorialises certain traditions and assumptions. Protagoras's *logos* is politically dynamic, abandoning aristocratic, patriarchal and pre-political modalities in order to form more imaginative and relational notions of community and critical discourse. Protagoras's peripatetic movements enacted the expansive rhythms of his *logos*: leaving Abdera, settling in Athens, and leaving again for Thurii to establish the conditions of its democracy. Protagoras prescribes the stranger's mobility and flexibility, a continuum of perpetual displacements and picaresque journeys. From a life of some pathos emerges the stranger's *ethos*, his desire for social participation and conservative emphasis on constitutional law.

In creating the concept of the 'stranger', drawn from the margins of a society into its centre, Georg Simmel suggested the unstable potentiality of social types such as the migrant, transient, and homecomer. Simmel articulates the way in which a society both expels and introjects difference, the way it incorporates otherness as a function of its identity, both promise and threat. We are here within the ambiguity of the pharmacological ritual, the expulsion of the stranger that is not without gratitude for and fascination by their magical powers.²⁰⁰ Simmel's stranger is a paradox, their wayward journeys founds

¹⁹⁸ Construing the Sophists as political liberals and social democrats, Eric Havelock in *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics*, Camelot Press, London, 1957, 189, suggests that the thought of Protagoras was 'sociological rather than educational', inclusive and empirical rather than didactic and idealistic.

¹⁹⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill, Verso, London, 1999, 68.

²⁰⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 67.

territory and institutions. The stranger has a long history, the Native American trickster whose obscene and rapacious acts founded sacred tribal land, the dripping phallus of Ouranos as procreative of new gods, sacrilegious Oedipus's foundation of Athens, wandering Aeneas discovering Rome.

Protagoras is the paradox of the stranger. Never a citizen of Athens, unable to vote or fight in its wars, he is the most prominent intellectual of his day, feted by aspiring young aristocratic men, memorialised even by his nemesis Plato as irrevocably woven into the texture of Athenian life. Protagoras's *mythos* is as an originator. According to Diogenes Laertius, Protagoras is the first to say that on every issue there are two arguments (*logoi*) opposed to each other, he is said to have invented the method of eristic questioning. It was Protagoras who initiated what we now take to be the Socratic method of dialysis – interrogating normative ideas and assumptions by a dialogical process of question and answer, aiming for a rigorous dialectical definition of the concept in question.²⁰¹ Protagoras's rhetoric prefigures the search of the grammarian for a purified propositional language; it makes language into a propaedeutic for transcendental philosophical inquiries.

Protagoras is the first to distinguish the tenses of a verb, the first to divide speech into performative modes: entreaty, question, answer, command. His project is prosaic; it takes the fluidity of a poeticised language and argues for rigorous examinations of its suasive effects, revealing the sociological habitus of performative language. Eric Havelock suggests that the early Sophists understood the function of *logos* as a 'communication between human beings about their joint affairs ... an organised discourse presenting ideas and channelling emotions in a more effective form'.²⁰²

According to Quintilian, sourcing Cicero's *Brutus*, Protagoras is the first to discuss general arguments (*loci communes*), those 'places' of argument without which legal advocacy, political deliberation, and topical debate could not continue.²⁰³ Protagoras initiates a sense of discourse as material location; he finds a site where representation begins to reflect on itself, to engender collaborative research on its sociological forms. Protagoras is a figure of praxis, of practical success and effective public-intellectual

²⁰¹ Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 4, L&T, 1.

²⁰² Havelock, *The Liberal Temper*, 156.

²⁰³ Sprague *The Older Sophists*, 5, L&T, 1.

activities. He initialises a discourse that is fit or appropriate to circumstance (*te prepon*), to the requirements of this place, this time. Protagoras is a technocrat and methodologist; he provides social infrastructure and an effective school of behavioural studies and cultural materialist analyses.

The stranger is also a cosmopolitan, knowledgeable about other cultures, their ideas and customs. Introducing the idea of *dissoi logoi*, that there are two arguments or perspectives on any issue, Protagoras argues for a moderate, relativistic understanding of different cultural customs and perspectives, none of which are commensurate, appropriate to any one standard of judgment. The anonymously authored but undoubtedly Protagorean influenced treatise called *Dissoi Logoi*, written towards the end of the Peloponnesian war, extensively details cultural epistemes, which vary due to a variety of circumstance, customs, and beliefs. The *Dissoi Logoi* can be seen as a landmark of the Sophists' enlightened relativism and humanist curiosity, their sensitivity to a *paideia* of situated knowledges.²⁰⁴

John Poulakos aptly describes the first generation Sophists as 'restless importers and exporters of intellectual goods', figuring the deterritorialising power of a robust exchange economy.²⁰⁵ Protagoras figures a certain trajectory for rhetoric in the Western tradition, that of a *mediator* between cultures and customs, circulating ideas, promoting dialogue and perspectival exchange, extensively describing the idiosyncrasies of culture, historicising representation.

Protagoras, in one tradition, is the migrant who argues strongly for social justice and egalitarian principles, as an outsider he must place a premium on education and acculturation to ameliorate inherent prejudices. To this effect his great speech in Plato's dialogue *Protagoras* (320d to 328d) argues that justice is a virtue acquired through acculturation and that all must have access to contribute to its ongoing definition

²⁰⁴ *Dissoi Logoi* (anon.), Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 279-93. One might consider the Renaissance humanist Erasmus's *Adages*, his continually expanded book of proverbs and their philological provenance, as an example of the humanist rhetorician's interest in the relationship between a robust language of ideas (*logos*) and the varied cultures, circumstances, and beliefs from which it emanates (*paideia*).

²⁰⁵ John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1995, 31.

(323e).²⁰⁶ Protagoras argues that he is a holistic pedagogue with the city-state's best interests at heart. He therefore teaches students prudence in their own affairs, so that they may manage their own household and consequently the affairs of the city, as both a speaker and man of action (318d-319a). Protagoras is the utilitarian interested in the effective distribution of happiness.

The most comprehensive representation of Protagoras's philosophical attitude is his narrative of the origins of justice and political society in Plato's *Protagoras*. It will strike us as familiar, presented as a blend of *mythos* and *logos*, genealogical narrative and critical argument, hybrid and situated. Its theoretical paradigm is Democritean; it seeks to evoke the different habits, communicative media and cultural requirements that have helped to engender political subjectivity and the desire for mutual justice. It is a narrative that valorises both technical rationality and aesthetic imagination as valuable media of socialisation. Its idea of political community is capacious enough to tolerate both elite knowledges and the need to democratise political participation, for the city-state will not prosper if only a few share political virtues (322d, 323a). Like Democritus, Protagoras points out that while technical ineptitude is risible, as in not knowing how to play the flute, violation of civic virtues is punishable by death or exile: political virtues are necessary for the existence of the state (327a-d).

Consequently Protagoras elaborates a narrative of the subject's political, legal, and artistic education, evoking a holistic *paideia* that encourages both civic discipline and critical transformation. The narrative is an allegory of the affects and capacities required by the public sphere, as Democritus's theory of ever expanding atomic configurations was a trope for the complex values (*rhysmoi*) of an evolved society. Protagoras argues that the initial language a child is instructed in is necessarily strict and unambiguous, a language of right and wrong. The fear of punishment conditions correct behaviour in the child. Later in school the educational process balances technical instruction in writing and music with an attempt to make children expand on their capabilities through the imitation and emulation of great artists and writers. The child learns and imitates the epideictic poems and stories of good poets, their admonitions and eulogies to legendary heroes. After prolonged

²⁰⁶ All references are to *The Protagoras*, in Plato, *Protagoras and Meno*, trans. W.K.C. Guthrie, Penguin Classics, London, 1956, 27-100.

imitation of musical masters, the subject finally learns to appreciate rhythm and melody (325e-326b), developing a desire for articulation and interstitial moments, a post-ontological perspective.

Protagoras suggests that the political subject should respond to the law like a child who learns to write by following the outline of the master as a guide: one is punished if one steps outside these lines, but such emulation is never mechanical. One recognises that the line/law is convention and guide for behaviour; one also contributes to its evolving definition and may possibly modify it (326d).

Lyotard is illuminating on this point. He argues that what has been called the conventionalism of the Sophists 'was probably not conventionalism, but rather an awareness of the fact that not only are there laws given, but that there must be laws'. Lyotard's Sophists play (seriously) a language game, that there must be commands and obligations in relation to those commands, but the question of who is authorized to issue laws is left hanging, for the narrative of Zeus dispensing justice is, after all, a playful genealogy, a *mythos*. I agree with Lyotard that one can talk of Sophistic obligation to commands and norms as a 'pragmatic relation' rather than fixed content – the *logos* always signifies relationship and relative contexts.²⁰⁷ For Protagoras, like Heraclitus before him, political vitality is an *ethos* suggesting a complex structure of feeling: an immanent need for coercive social conventions and constitutional law, a dialogical enthusiasm for dynamic conversation and novel approaches. The elective chronotope of the rhetor is mythic, hybrid, a spectrum of forces.

Heeding the Democritean association, one can talk of a distinct tradition emanating from Protagoras's life and teachings. He is an anti-essentialist and progressive social agent. Sensitive to the authoritarian implications of utopianism, he disagrees with the geometers that there is any such thing as 'perfection', reviling the 'repugnant' terminology of mathematics.²⁰⁸ Like Empedocles and the entire tendency of Presocratic philosophy, Protagoras inveighs against the injustices of the finite, praising a more harmonious cosmology, while as a cautious realist acknowledging the role of violence and discipline

²⁰⁷ Jean - Francois Lyotard and Jean - Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich, in series Theory and History of Literature, vol. 20, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 64-5.

²⁰⁸ Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 22, B7, B7A.

in acculturation. He is a polymath, mapping the significance of burgeoning new spheres of knowledge, writing works in areas as far afield as debating, government, Human Errors, Contradictory Arguments. He signifies the coming philosophical eclecticism of humanism, much later a liberal emphasis on multiculturalism and cultural pluralism. Protagoras shines as a great intellectual generalist, urbane pragmatist, and civic hero. Plato, in his *Meno*, records Protagoras as dying honourably, after forty years spent in his profession, his reputation still undiminished.²⁰⁹

Protagoras – The Secretive Skeptic

However, the representations and quotations attributable to Protagoras are not univocal, it is equally plausible to fashion a version of him less amenable to humanism and democratic thought. We must further mine the figure of the stranger. The stranger is the outsider who provokes curiosity and excitement, appreciated for the knowledges s/he imports. But the permanent outsider also threatens what is inside with corruption and degradation. The stranger is forever doomed to expulsion or even death in a time of crisis.

Diogenes Laertius' *Lives* casts a grave shadow over the ultimate fate of Protagoras. He is reported to have been expelled by the Athenians near the end of his life, his books burned in the marketplace, contradicting Plato's account. Philostratus also reports that Protagoras was banished from Athenian territory, eventually sinking at sea, like Athens's navy during the Peloponnesian war.²¹⁰ Protagoras is drawn into the fate of Pericles, who died, under attack from all sides, from the plague in 429 BCE, having drawn Athens into the calamity of the Peloponnesian war.

One thinks of Gorgias, who taught the notorious Alcibiades, flamboyant aristocrat, ambitious demagogue and oligarch who attempted to overthrow Athenian democracy. Protagoras's fate, retrospectively considered, prefigures the state assassination of that other noted 'Sophist' and corrupter of youths, Socrates. The democracy Protagoras manipulated swallowed him up; the ambitious youths to whom he appealed ended up denouncing him.

²⁰⁹ Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 9, *Meno* (91D).

²¹⁰ Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 4, B1, 6, B2.

Rhetoric is a fatal power, distributing dire fortunes, cycles of avarice and decay; it is the means by which a democracy implodes into sedition, tyranny, and mob rule. The foreigner and outsider, rhetoric prevents consensus over its legacy.

Philostratus suggests that Protagoras made the acquaintance of Persian magi at the time of Xerxes' invasion of Greece. It is perhaps from this instruction in Eastern heterodox belief that Protagoras questioned whether the gods exist or not, for the magi acknowledge their gods in 'secret rites'. This is the esoteric Protagoras, the stranger who acknowledges the outward forms of society but keeps his secrets, and continues furtively to practise his beliefs, prefiguring the dual allegiances of the Jewish marrano, the minority threatened by mainstream beliefs.²¹¹ A more despairing Protagoras feels the dilemma of the disenchanted individual, arguing that there is much to prevent knowledge of the gods, stressing the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of one's life.²¹² Mario Untersteiner's imaginative *The Sophists* argues for the existential pathos of the Sophists, theorising at a time when the 'objective' world of epic values had diffused into the subjective uncertainties of lyric poetry, announcing a 'tragedy of the intellect', a sense of both insecurity and wonder, and an emphasis on *aporia* and dilemma.²¹³

Rhetoric, then, pertains not only to democratic optimism but also to sceptical and unsettled ages; it is the end of certainty.

Protagoras is perhaps a sorcerer or magician, identifying himself in Plato's eponymous dialogue as a modern Orpheus, whom Protagoras cheekily suggests was a Sophist *avant la lettre*. Protagoras enchants, like Gorgias who 'played the wizard' with another Orphic poet-philosopher Empedocles, Gorgias who enchanted and amazed the Athenians upon first hearing.²¹⁴ Protagoras animates those around him, but his self-identifications also suggest privation, exile, and death, a loner's tale. Protagoras exhibits the need for new forms of individual 'self-fashioning', inventing his own heritage as both populist and esoteric. While ascribing to his rhetorical arts the 'religious rites and

²¹¹ For an excellent study of the history of Jewish marranos after their expulsion from Spain and Portugal, see Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Marrano of Reason*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1989.

²¹² Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 4, B1.

²¹³ Mario Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, trans. Kathleen Freeman, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1954, 26, 34-5.

²¹⁴ Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 32, B3.

prophecy' of an Orpheus, Protagoras also shrewdly identifies with the communal voices of Homer and Hesiod in poetry, and with the musical talents of Agathocles. A voice of the people perhaps, but all these men also deployed their arts as a pleasing guise with which to avoid the malice of state power.²¹⁵

Suggestively, Susan Jarratt argues that the Sophists align themselves in genealogical terms with the poet and minstrel, those who in mythic times transmitted cultural knowledge into all areas of life, acting as elite prophet, political leader, teacher, and master of the religious sphere.²¹⁶ The Sophist will not affirm that the gods exist, but his atheism is expressed as a doubt or query, in order to avoid putting his views in 'too forceful a way'.²¹⁷ Protagoras, the stranger, cautious of the vulgar and political authorities.

Protagoras fathers less benign traditions. He is held by Diogenes Laertius to parent the 'present shallow tribe of quibblers', the later generations of Sophists infamous for their unscrupulousness, shallow opportunists who created an iniquitous culture of litigation and provided a theoretical justification for the cruelties of worldly power and success.²¹⁸ Here Protagoras insinuates himself only through trickery, he is a self-proclaimed 'master of wrangling', and is this not the force behind the degradation of Athenian morals and its disastrous involvement in the Peloponnesian war?²¹⁹ A keen competitor, Protagoras the democratic discussant shades into the fierce Protagoras of many Olympic oratory competitions, a trickster intent on scoring cheap points, whose interactions are simply performance, mere display, empty exercises. As chronicled by Diogenes Laertius, Protagoras's reported 'wrangle' with a student over a fee poses interpretative problems:

A story is told of the time [Protagoras] demanded his fee from Euathlus, a pupil of his. Euathlus refused to pay, saying, 'But I haven't won a victory yet.' Protagoras replied, 'But if I win this dispute I must be paid because I've won, and if you win it I must be paid because you've won'.²²⁰

²¹⁵ Plato, Protagoras in Protagoras and Meno, trans. W.K.C. Guthrie, Penguin Books, London, 1956, 316D-317A.

²¹⁶ Susan C. Jarratt, Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1991, 34.

²¹⁷ Sprague, The Older Sophists, 15, B23, fragment of Diogenes of Oenoanda.

²¹⁸ Sprague, The Older Sophists, 4, B1.

²¹⁹ Sprague, The Older Sophists, 5, B1.

²²⁰ Sprague, The Older Sophists, 6, B6.

Protagoras is a figure of skilful evasion and transformation; his nous for escapism can be traced back to the tactical cunning of Odysseus. Protagoras steals what is proper to someone else, like Hermes from Apollo, like Prometheus from Zeus. His rhetoric is the artificial deformation of nature; it is hubris. To the first academics, intent on developing a sound epistemology, Protagoras parents every kind of specious relativism. Aristotle chides the Protagorean confidence in making the ‘weaker argument stronger’ as simply false, an obstruction to logical argument, ethics, and metaphysics. The metaphysician shows impatience and anxiety over the mysterious atopia and polysemy of Sophistic discourse, its legitimation of the modish and ephemeral.²²¹

Protagoras acquired the reputation of an atheist. He is in the company of those later Skeptical and nominalist philosophers who ‘do away with every standard of judgment’ according to Aristotle.²²² Protagoras will make every certainty, every fixed idea, shudder violently in his solipsistic utterance that: ‘man is the measure of all things’. Plato in his *Gorgias* (462 ff.) will associate the rhetorical enterprise begun by Protagoras with a mere knack rather than an art. Rhetoric is a sort of cookery that uses a hodge-podge of ingredients, a cosmetic technique that gives the unworthy argument a convincing appearance, a mere technique without propriety or ontological worth. Plato himself knows arts of representation; he takes every advantage of the Athenian perception of the Sophist as stranger and foreigner, as unnecessary supplement, corruption and perversion, portending a horrifying multiplicity that endangers order and homogeneity. A vigorous dialogue about the merits of oratory, Tacitus’s *Dialogus* raises the prospect that eloquence is no quiet and peaceable art, no discourse of prudence and moderation, but a ‘foster-child of licence, an associate of sedition, a goad for the unbridled populace’, devoid of genuine discipline (40:2).

Historiography and the Circumstances of Sophistry

²²¹ Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 13, B 21; Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* II, 24, 1402A23.

²²² Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 18, F1, Sextus, *Against the Schoolmasters* VII, 60.

Edward Schiappa is perhaps understating the case when he remarks that there is considerable disagreement over just how Protagoras's contributions should be characterised. Criticism that attempts to situate his legacy continues to confront a cultural persona that inaugurates different genealogies. As Schiappa remarks, Protagoras can be viewed as the first positivist, the first humanist, a forerunner of pragmatism, a Skeptic, an early utilitarian, and a subjective relativist.²²³ Schiappa remarks that Protagoras belongs to an age when discourse was not neatly divided into academic categories, and when there was primarily one audience for public discourse, rather than the contemporary sphere of specialised academic discussions.²²⁴ Hence there are lingering questions: is Protagoras a responsible thinker or the consummate performer, philosopher or magician? Too often historiography has attempted to decide, which can only preclude a complex interpretation of rhetoric's diverse traditions and often surprising sources or critical appeal. A more recent trend in historiography has argued for the multifarious circumstances of Sophistic teaching and ideas as a key to their contradictory evaluation.

One needs to consider that the same ancient source, including such a rigorous and systematic thinker as Aristotle, becomes inconsistent in assessing the Sophists' significance. C.J. Classen argues that while Aristotle is extremely critical of the fallacious subtleties of Sophistic argument in *On Sophistical Refutations*, he is at the same time prepared to acknowledge that at times the Sophists' devices may be useful or necessary for the elaboration of a mode of practical reasoning or *phronesis*. Such Aristotelian texts internalising Sophistic theory would include the *Topics* (111 B32-112A15), with its methodological emphasis on acquiring an eclectic range of argumentative commonplaces. We could also mention the many tropes and argumentative strategies of the *Rhetoric*, a text whose uncertainties and polysemy we have already discussed.²²⁵ One might wish to

²²³ Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1991, 15.

²²⁴ Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos*, 23.

²²⁵ C.J. Classen, 'Aristotle's Picture of the Sophists' in ed. G.B. Kerferd, *The Sophists and Their Legacy, Proceedings of the Fourth International Colloquium on Ancient Philosophy*, Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, Wiesbaden, 1981, 23. As Lyotard argues in *Just Gaming*, 73, in matters of ethics and politics, Aristotle followed the Sophist's problematic that in the realm of human practices and discourses, there can be no certain knowledge.

dismiss the Sophists, but fluid circumstances say otherwise; in a rhetorical culture one has to adjust oneself to differing tempos and conditions and the Sophists speak to that need.

Plato is by no means unequivocal on the subject of the Sophists, a function of his subtle dramaturgy with its energetic characters. While portraying Protagoras as somewhat pompous and loquacious, the *Protagoras* is prepared to concede Protagoras's contemporary fame, genial good manners, and the sociological significance of his theories. The Sophists are key participants in Plato's most humorous and open-ended early dialogues such as the *Euthydemus*.²²⁶ As vigorous polymaths and intellectual experimenters they encourage Socrates to display his considerable critical dexterity and discursive competence – they 'bring out the best' in him if you will. His virtuoso reading of a poem of Simonides in the *Protagoras*, an exuberant philological exercise and demonstration of rhetorical prowess, exemplifies Socrates' need to emulate Sophistic resourcefulness and display in the early dialogues. Discourse needs to define its characteristics in a rhetorical culture, but Plato hopes this concession to the Sophists' energetic self-promotion is only temporary.²²⁷

Jacqueline de Romilly focuses on the crux of interpretation the Sophists pose to historians of ideas. The Sophists are progenitors of multiple philosophical traditions. They argue for the *logos* as critical and procedural reasoning while acknowledging the realities of a democracy that desired 'ardently' to debate political, legal, and moral problems. The Sophists understood the excitement generated by access to discourse, putting a premium on striking and vivid genres of argument, and tendentious forms of assessment.²²⁸ Mindful of this dual aspect of Sophistic ideas, de Romilly suggests that the Sophists inaugurate both transcendental forms of philosophical critique and immanent social and political discourses, a hybrid of speculative and prudent techniques.

²²⁶ As Jacqueline de Romilly puts it, the Sophists are in the 'least austere' of Plato's dialogues, and are integral to the 'intellectual adventure' being played out in those dialogues, mirroring contemporary Athens. See Jacqueline de Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, 12-13.

²²⁷ Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988, argues that Plato, in the *Menexenus*, makes Socrates, claiming to be inspired by memories of his teacher of rhetoric, Aspasia, on the exalted same oratorical level as Pericles (235e), give an impromptu funeral oration, using all the appropriate topics (236d-249d). Perhaps parodic, perhaps serious, Socrates' detailed rivalling of Sophistic epideixis suggests that 'Socrates, like Plato, thought he could beat the rhetoricians at their own game, any time he chose' (137). The Sophists arouse this kind of ambivalence, one can despise them but envy their abilities and successes.

²²⁸ De Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, 24.

De Romilly makes the point that like the Presocratics before them, the Sophists spoke to an audience yet to be differentiated by the division and specification of knowledges, an audience as interested in the phenomenal aspect of argumentation as its content. Isocrates, the first rhetor to create a stationary academy for teaching rhetoric, suggests that even one's most sincere convictions needed to be supplemented by the theatrical display of a range of discursive skills and novel displays, issuing in the somewhat meretricious Sophistic practice of outwitting normative assumptions.²²⁹

De Romilly suggests that the unified intellectual theatre (of aesthetic form and rational argument) of ancient Athens is the generative medium of salutary *and* pernicious Sophistic traditions. On the one hand, the Sophists responded to the fluid society of which they were a part by a rigorous and non-judgmental examination of human behaviour, resuming anthropological and sociological study of human cultures and types, and a diverse interest in human technological capacities – borne out in the historiography and tragedy of the period.²³⁰ On the other hand, the desire to manipulate and show off to a loving public becomes too tempting, generalist self-confidence easily segues into braggadocio, the boastful Sophistic claim to explain everything and have knowledge of all possible topics.²³¹ Gorgias, emboldened by adoring audiences, comes before the Athenians and boldly dares them to 'suggest a subject' on which he will instantly discourse, apparently demonstrating that he 'knew everything'.²³² This empty boastfulness, discernible in first generation Sophists and satirised by Plato in the *Protagoras*, probably engendered the fatuous obsession with verbal display and oversubtle technique in later generations of Sophists. It also prepared for a philistine horror of speculative philosophy prominent in later rhetoricians like Cicero, who thought of rhetoric as the practical and effective civic

²²⁹ It is a topos of Renaissance humanism that oratorical arts will function as both utilitarian reason and a civic praxis, as well as an aesthetic appeal to sociable sentience, generating affects of pleasure and humour. Again and again we will return to the concept of rhetoric as multi-layered in mien and purpose, both speculation and praxis, utility and excess.

²³⁰ De Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, 8, 17. De Romilly (15) points to the way Thucydides, Sophocles and Euripides celebrate the marvels of civilised life, and the skills and techniques upon which it depended.

²³¹ De Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, 55.

²³² Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, quoting Philostratus's *Lives of the Sophists*, B1a, 31.

art of *negotium*, antithetical to esoteric and useless philosophical *otium*, metaphysical abstraction.

John Poulakos has explored the different chronotopes, the different temporal and situational exigencies, from which multiple strands of Sophistic thought will diverge into different critical traditions. In 'Toward a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric', Poulakos suggests that the Sophists conceived of rhetoric as a social technique whose medium is *logos*, and whose double aim is *pistis*, belief, and *terpsis*, aesthetic pleasure.²³³ The Sophists translated their dramatic flair in Olympic competition and public speaking into an *ethos* of address suitable for the burgeoning public-spheres of the agora, the courthouse, and the democratic assembly.²³⁴ The Sophists thereby translated supple performative gestures and sensibilities into the legal and deliberative sphere. They produced discourse models shaped by a 'logic of circumstances', an 'ethic of competition', and an 'aesthetic of exhibition'.²³⁵ The Sophistic development of the public sphere incorporates arts that are both prudent and performative. Critical interiority refashions itself into response to a changing world, discourse is always both directed at an object of knowledge and a mode of display, it is critical *logos* and performative *ethos* at once.²³⁶ Rhetoric, suggests Poulakos, will emerge from the rich and varied milieux the Sophists inhabited as both an art of personal expression and a dynamic response to social trends. For Poulakos, Sophistic rhetoric is a complex ethos; it encourages tonal shifts, attending to the *kairos* (the opportune moment), *to prepon* (the appropriate), and *to dynaton* (the possible).²³⁷

Liotard also points towards a logic of situation, of the desire to enhance a particular chronotope as a guide to the Sophists' diverse theorems and techniques. The Sophists' bolder claims, such as Protagoras's atheism and cognitive pluralism, belong to a world requiring vivid critical gestures, a world that needs folly, naïveté, and madness. Lyotard

²³³ John Poulakos, 'Toward a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1983, 35. Poulakos' contextual sensitivity towards the Sophists draws on Gorgias's famous *Encomium to Helen*, which argued that according to circumstance *logos* could instil or stop fear, banish grief, create joy, nurture pity.

²³⁴ John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece*, 14.

²³⁵ Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece*, 4.

²³⁶ We are reminded of de Man's interest in the contradictory ethos of the text, those unwitting moments of self-revelation which defy the hoped for self-presence and intentional act of a *logos*.

²³⁷ Poulakos, 'Toward a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric', 36.

suggests that the Sophists ‘maximise’ their claims, unsettling common opinion, giving all possible chances to subaltern opinions and minority sensibilities. Ideas and perspectives, no matter how scurrilous, are maximised in a kind of language game or rhetorical conflict that despises the false assuredness of so called rational premises. To maximise a *logos*, a genre of argument, in a labile world, is to lend it an *ethos*, and to create paradoxical modes of recognition: it is precisely *because* you say that it is always the stronger who beat the weak, that I did not beat this weaker individual. Wisdom is now folly, folly wisdom, but as Christ would later exhibit, such audacious naïveté and performed idiocy is the road by which tyranny and legalism are overthrown.²³⁸

Sophistic Legacies

Cicero’s works argue for the complex legacy of Sophism. One can see in Cicero sudden changes of tone, rapid oscillations between the practical and theoretical, movements in and out of various chronotopes or logics of circumstance. Let us take Cicero’s *Topica* (‘Topics’ 44 BCE), modelled on Aristotle’s similarly titled work influenced by Sophistic argumentative devices or commonplaces. In many ways this is the work of the leading courtroom orator of his day, a man of action and practical success. The commonplace arguments it suggests are redolent of the immanent inventiveness and combativeness of the advocate, always in need of a fresh supply of tactical arguments. If statutory law is against you, appeal to natural law; if there is no question of one’s client’s guilt, try translative pleading, arguing that this jurisdiction has no right to try this case. And do the reverse if one is a prosecutor. As Tacitus reminds us, the chronotope of rhetorical pedagogy is that of danger, crisis, of fluid circumstances and shifting loyalties:

... but when danger hurtles around your head, then surely no sword or buckler in the press of arms gives stouter support than does eloquence to him who is imperilled by a prosecution; for it is a sure defence and a weapon of attack withal, that enables you with equal ease to act on the defensive or to advance to the assault, whether in the law courts, or in the senate house, or in the Emperor’s cabinet council (*Dialogus*, 5:7)

²³⁸ Jean Francois-Lyotard, Just Gaming, 78-9.

Yet it is fascinating how suddenly a shift in emphasis and implied chronotope can affect supposedly immanent and practical texts, introducing more reflective and speculative blends into the mix. For the rhetor's hard won successes, their very malleability, inventiveness and role-playing *élan*, argues for the theoretical significance of rhetoric, for example in suggesting a contradictory and historically minded assessment of the law. Cicero argues that any orator acquainted with the copious 'places' or genres of argument will recognise the law in polylogical terms: one can understand the law partly as a matter of current statutes, partly a much broader matter of equity and natural law, and partly recognition of time-honoured customs. Cicero's descriptive pragmatism or 'conventionalism' exhibits a certain humour towards the law's authority and origins.²³⁹ Circumstantial praxis generates transcendental inquiry, the orator estranged from himself through sheer immanence, is capable, upon mature reflection, of offering thought a profound *paideia*, an account of its own historicity and generative means.

²³⁹ Cicero, *Topica* V.28-9 in *Cicero in Twenty-Eight Volumes: De Inventione, De Optimo Genere Oratorum, Topica*, Loeb Classical Library, 401: 'one should define the civil law as made up of statutes, decrees of the Senate, judicial decisions, opinions of the learned in law, edicts of magistrates, custom, and equity'. See also xxiii. 87-90: 'when ... right and wrong are being discussed, the topics of equity will be brought together. These are of two kinds, the distinction between natural law and institutions.... The institutions affecting equity are threefold: the first has to do with law, the second with compacts, the third rests on long continued custom', 453-4. For a fuller discussion of Cicero and post-Sophistic rhetoric see Ned Curthoys, 'Future Directions for Rhetoric - Invention and Ethos in Public Critique' in *Australian Humanities Review*: <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-2001/curthoys.html>.

Chapter Six: Jena Romanticism: Rhetoric and Representation

There is a material, enthusiastic rhetoric that's infinitely superior to the sophistic abuse of philosophy, the declamatory stylistic exercise, the applied poetry, the improvised politics, that commonly go by the name. The aim of this rhetoric is to realize philosophy practically and to defeat practical unphilosophy and antiphilosophy not just dialectically, but really annihilate it.
(AF 137).

In this chapter I discuss Friedrich Schlegel's critical ideal of a 'materialist rhetoric' and the philosophy of representation that it entails. An historically conceived rhetoric enables Schlegel to form a varied image of criticism, as material practice and transcendental exploration, of intensive and extensive orientations. As Walter Benjamin argues in his thesis on the Jena Romantics, 'The Concept of Criticism' (1920), it was Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg – pseudonym Novalis – who treated the criticism of art as a 'philosophical problem' in their theoretical vehicle, the bi-annual *Athenaeum* journal (1798–1800).²⁴⁰ I argue that the mosaic of discourses evoked by rhetoric, its rich *paideia*, offers these aspiring young intellectuals a mode of critique that is neither negative nor didactic, but, in Benjamin's words, 'objectively productive, creative out of thoughtful deliberation'.²⁴¹

For Friedrich Schlegel, rhetoric will remotivate philosophy and aesthetics as public-intellectual traditions. Rhetoric is the political imperative of a practical philosophy; it is the need to problematise the interdependent relationship between intellectuals and their society.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism' in his Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-26, ed. Michael W. Jennings, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1996, 118. Benjamin's discussion is a methodological and philosophical investigation of the Frühromantik conception of criticism, conceived of as critical representation enacting itself through the medium of art and literature. Benjamin's thesis is that literature and art, conceived of as a medium of 'forms', provided the young Romantics with a propaedeutic for literary, cultural and political criticism/theory, rather than subordinating critique to an object or external decorum.

²⁴¹ Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism', 142.

²⁴² All quotations from the *Athenaeum* except those of Novalis are from Friedrich Schlegel Philosophical Fragments, trans. Peter Firchow, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1991. CF refers to the Critical Fragments published in 1798, AF to the Athenaeum Fragments of 1799, and I to the Ideas of 1800. All Novalis quotes refer to Novalis, Philosophical Writings, trans. Margaret Stoljar, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1997. MO refers to the 'Miscellaneous Observations', the complete manuscript of one

For the Frühromantiks, classical rhetoric's appeal is that of a *communicative situation*, a public theatre and life-world for discourse that both moderates and invigorates the aims of critique. A materialist rhetoric, responsive to a broad audience, is intensive, reflexive and circumspect; it refers thought to its circumstances of production. Erudite, deeply impressed with popular culture and folklore, a materialist rhetoric imbues the language of ideas with historicity, cultural memory, genealogical sensitivity; rhetoric dissociates representation from a narrow referential function. A materialist rhetoric is innately inclusive, it defies the ego, the critical urge to dominate and survey. Rhetoric is a discursive *tendency* that describes the 'producer along with the product', announcing a recursive, a 'cyclical' rather than linear, philosophical form (AF 238, AF 43). Rhetoric is a horizontal drive, expansive, an ana-logic, an assent to co-existence. An intensive rhetoric critiques a bloodless, homogenous abstract thought, it despises shallow universalism, callow philosophical systems, its temporality is layered, diffuse, rather than empty and neutral.

For Friedrich Schlegel, rhetoric also suggests an extensive form of representation, semiological media that are magical, allegorical, sublime. Rhetorical irony succeeds sociality, thought vexes and evades normative commitments, and the play of language gives a teasing glimpse of the unconditioned, the absolute. This rhetoric is not a given subjectivity but a liberal *ethos*, a texture of orientations renewing rhetoric's classical fealty to paradox, to the folly of wisdom, the magnificent power of deception. Schlegel's post-intentional rhetoric is a complex structure of feeling; a diachronic and hybrid chronotope rather than applied art, or improvised technique. It is a rhetoric divided, in conversation with itself. A materialist rhetoric is always two-fold; it is the immediacy and excitement of public performativity *and* its mature comprehension, an urbane critical conduct and ethical generosity.

My analysis supplements Jean Luc-Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's important work on Jena Romanticism, The Literary Absolute (1978), which argues that

hundred and twenty five fragments written in 1797, one hundred and fourteen of which were published under the title *Pollen* in the journal Athenaeum at Easter 1798. LFI refers to 'Logological Fragments 1', an unpublished manuscript dating from the end of 1797 to mid-1798. LFII refers to a section of Novalis's notebooks dating from between May and July 1798. By Schlegel, I refer to Friedrich Schlegel unless stated otherwise.

the Jena Romantics sought a cultural-materialist and literary organon to generate Idealist reflection and project a sense of the unconditioned or ‘absolute’. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe functionalise Jena Romanticism as a predominantly philosophical response to the crisis of representation inaugurated by the Kantian *Critiques*. While acknowledging the Jena Romantic search for a more acculturated Idealistic organon, my emphasis is on the historical sophistication of the *Athenaeum*, its nuanced revival of the rhetorical mosaic as a critical method, creative principle, and discursive *ethos*.²⁴³

The Athenaeum: Intercepting Modernity

The time has come to move beyond a powerful historiographical caricature, a *reductio ad absurdum*, which depicts the young German Romantics, and Friedrich Schlegel in particular, as purveyors of velleities, dreams, fantasies of escape. A certain tradition stretching from Madame de Staël to Kierkegaard, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Carl Schmitt depicts the Jena Romantics as aesthetes and eclectics who adjudge all religions, creeds, and political beliefs by their capacity to stimulate the imagination.²⁴⁴ Nietzsche condescends, describing post-Kantian Romanticism and its love of the suprasensible as a sign language of febrile adolescent emotions, that ‘innocent, rich, still youthful era of the German spirit ... [a] high spirited and enthusiastic movement, which was really youthfulness’. The Idealism of Kant and Fichte, claiming to have discovered moral and aesthetic faculties of mind, appealed to the ‘noble idlers, the virtuous, the mystics, the artists, the three-quarter Christians and the political obscurantists’.²⁴⁵ This historiographical theme can be found earlier in Kierkegaard, who argued in The Concept of Irony (1841) that the Romantic Irony

²⁴³ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, State University of New York Press, New York, 1988.

²⁴⁴ Frederick C. Beiser argues that it is time to question the legacy of Madame de Staël, who set the tone for discussion of the short-lived young Romantic movement. She argued that German intellectual life in the late eighteenth century was fundamentally apolitical and that the inchoate enthusiasms of German Romanticism were the result of an immature public sphere and a characteristically German trait – subservience to their political masters. See Frederick C. Beiser, The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought 1790-1800, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1992, 8.

²⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Penguin Books, London, 1990, section 8, 42-3.

of Friedrich Schlegel freed itself from ‘actuality’, its sorrows ‘but also ... its joys’, for all its affective postures, irony, Christianity, republicanism, idealism, were merely for the sake of a ‘supreme poetic enjoyment’.²⁴⁶

Carl Schmitt in his Politische Romantik (1925) is more severe, accusing the Frühromantiks of subordinating religion, history, and politics to aesthetic ends. Traces of this velleity model can also be found in Simon Critchley’s recent work Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature (1997), where he suggests that the ‘naïveté of romanticism’ is the belief that the modern world can be addressed in the form of art, an ‘organicist fantasy of the overcoming of the state and an end to politics’.²⁴⁷

Certainly it is not easy to characterise the outpouring of whim and vim bodied forth in the aphorisms, dialogues, and cheeky reviews of the *Athenaeum* journal. This is probably why a certain laziness and clichéd conception of Romantic ‘subjectivism’ comes so easily to substitute for sympathetic critical comprehension of Frühromanticism. I do think it possible, however, without detracting from the history of ideas, the genealogies of aesthetic and critical forms that informed the writings of the Frühromantiks, to inscribe the *Athenaeum* within the historical circumstances of the Jena circle. This gesture is important since the lively conversations, readings and collaborations of the Jena Romantics, their conviviality, were the *raison d’être* of the *Athenaeum* journal, tirelessly enthusiastic about the joys of critical dialogue and the possibility of art and writing as a mutual craft, a co-operative ethic:

Perhaps there would be a birth of a whole new era of the sciences and arts if symphilosophy and sympoetry became so universal and heartfelt that it would no longer

²⁴⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Irony. With continual reference to Socrates, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1989, 279-81.

²⁴⁷ Simon Critchley, Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature, Routledge, New York, NY, 1997, 87, 91. Critchley elsewhere refers to the young Romantics ‘almost inconceivable naïvete’, due to a collapse of objective aesthetic criteria leading ‘ineluctably’ to a ‘subjectivisation and privatisation of aesthetic experience’ (92, 93). Romantic irony can therefore apparently only be understood as a single tonality, it is an ‘infinitely evasive relation to the world’ (96), for Jena Romanticism’s dream of the unconditioned is merely a ‘substitution for an impossible happiness’, a velleity, a modernist pathos (138).

be ... extraordinary for several complementary minds to create communal works of art.

(AF125)

I take my cue from a point made by Iain McCalman in relation to English Romanticism, that Romanticism ‘cannot be reduced simply to an ideology’, a single movement, for it is always negotiating the material forces of its age and in that sense Romanticism arises from collective ideals and historical vicissitudes.²⁴⁸ Likewise, (mis)appropriating the anthropological method of ‘thick’ description I cathect the imaginative pluralism and mediatory desires of the Jena Circle to the friction of different worldviews, cultural traditions and ideologies typifying their cultural moment, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

By Frühromanticism or Jena Romanticism, I talk of the years between 1797 and 1802, when a group of writers, aestheticians, theologians, and philosophers met in the home of A.W. Schlegel in Jena, and the literary salons of Henriette Herz and Rahel Levin in Berlin.²⁴⁹ August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845) was a literary historian, philologist, and translator of Dante and Tasso into German, lecturing at the university of Jena; his wife Caroline Schlegel was also a keen participant in the group’s activities and contributor to the journal.²⁵⁰ The group also included A.W. Schlegel’s younger brother and Renaissance man Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), the writer Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853), the philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775-1845), the theologian Ernst Schleiermacher (1767-1834), and Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772-1801), known by his *nom de plume* Novalis. The twice-yearly *Athenaeum* journal is the fruit of their discourses and a commentary on their relations with each other.

²⁴⁸ See Iain McCalman, *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age, British Culture 1776-1892*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, 2.

²⁴⁹ For an informative account of the group’s milieu, see *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, ed., Frederick C. Beiser, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge U.K., 1996, xi.

²⁵⁰ Along with her husband A.W. Schlegel, Caroline co-authored *The Paintings: A Dialogue*, which appeared in Volume 2 (1) of the 1799 edition of the *Athenaeum*, attesting to the collaborative sensibility of much of the journal’s output.

August Wilhelm's younger brother Friedrich Schlegel was perhaps the group's driving force and most significant theoretical mind. He was classically trained, a philologist and theoretician, with burgeoning philosophical interests in the wake of Kant's Critiques (1781-90) and Fichte's succeeding On the Concept of the Science of Knowledge (1794). At the close of the eighteenth century Friedrich Schlegel is enjoying a prominent relationship with Dorothea Veit, a leading salonniere; he is part of a feminised salon culture that brings together Jew and Gentile, praising Enlightenment and Emancipation. In the 1790s and early nineteenth century, Friedrich Schlegel, a dynamic young man with a brilliant reputation, is an urbane cosmopolite and enthusiastic republican.

In Berlin in 1796 Schlegel writes 'one of the most progressive political writings' of 1790s Germany, 'An Essay on the Concept of Republicanism'.²⁵¹ He argues for the enfranchisement of women, against male primogeniture, for the rights of the poor, in favour of democratic political participations, and looks towards a cosmopolitan federation of states.²⁵² Philosophy, he argues, is a political and sociological imperative. The ego has the 'capacity of communication' in regard to other individuals, it should be communicated, not left isolated, as an empirical or rationalist datum.²⁵³ Practical philosophy is political philosophy.

In 1797, Schlegel meets Schleiermacher and Tieck at the salons of Henriette Herz. Ludwig Tieck, popular storyteller and forger of the German genre of dramatic irony, was then engaged in translating Shakespeare and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Schleiermacher was becoming interested in the role of religious faith and infinite intuition in the Aufklärung; one cannot live by reason alone. Schlegel would continue, over the next few years, in the urbane spaciousness of his writings, to discuss the merits of both pantheism and irony, to discuss the irenic possibilities of a new religion and the worldly aesthetic joys of parabasis, of an aesthetic digressive and fragmented. Schlegel's thought bears the traces of dialogue in a milieu without contemporary academic divisions, where knowledges and approaches

²⁵¹ Beiser, Political Writings, 95.

²⁵² Beiser, Political Writings, 95-112.

²⁵³ Friedrich Schlegel's 'The Concept of Republicanism' (1796), in Political Writings, 100.

coalesce.²⁵⁴ In his lectures on transcendental philosophy at the University of Jena over the winter semester of 1800-1801, Schlegel, now of more moderate political views, still argues that a 'practical philosophy' should not construct the ideal of an individual person, but the ideal of the whole, of society, of a genuine emancipation that is only generated by intersubjective encounter, a proximity of different personalities, perspectives.²⁵⁵

Friedrich Schlegel and many other members of the Jena circle exemplify the *humanistaat* ideal, the German version of the Enlightenment, prevalent before Napoleon's invasion of Prussia in 1806. This movement sought to bring together the disparate knowledges of art and science, philosophy and literature, logic and imagination, historical continuity and political progress. A characteristic of German political liberalism in the 1790s is its absence of nationalism, its cosmopolitanism.²⁵⁶ As David Simpson argues, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, German critics were very aware of the relative paucity of precursors in their own language and culture. They were, in response, especially eclectic and internationalist in their understanding of their aesthetic and critical traditions.²⁵⁷ Almost the entire Romantic circle, except the more conservative A.W. Schlegel, had cheered the storming of the Bastille and the end of the *ancien regime*.²⁵⁸ Many of the circle were translators and classicists. Schlegel as a younger man was a well known Hellenophile, adoring Greek literature, inspired by Wincklemann's pioneering work on the nobility and simplicity of ancient Greek art.

Another significant contributor to the journal and member of its inner sanctum was Novalis, Friedrich von Hardenberg, a close friend of Friedrich Schlegel, mystic poet,

²⁵⁴ See David Simpson's introduction to [The Origins of Modern Critical Thought – German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism from Lessing to Hegel](#), ed., David Simpson, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1988, 8: 'In the practical sense, the direct personal contacts and exchanges between such figures as Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher, the Schlegels, Goethe, and Fichte (to name but a few) made for a high level of "interdisciplinary" ... writing. Poetry, drama, criticism, and philosophy were all circulated and held within a coherent social circuit, to a degree that has probably never been matched in any period of British or American culture.'

²⁵⁵ Beiser, [Friedrich Schlegel's lectures on transcendental philosophy \(1800-1801\)](#), 156.

²⁵⁶ Beiser, [The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought](#), 21, discusses the affinity of most Aufklärung German intellectuals with the cosmopolitan and religiously tolerant ideals of the Enlightenment.

²⁵⁷ David Simpson, ed., [The Origins of Modern Critical Thought – German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism from Lessing to Hegel](#), Cambridge University Press, New York, 1988, 1.

²⁵⁸ Beiser, [Political Writings](#), xiv.

philosopher, ecumenical Catholic, amateur geologist and natural philosopher. In 'Faith and Love' (1797), Novalis, celebrating the accession of Friedrich Wilhelm III, attempts to reconcile republicanism and monarchy, a participatory body politic identifying itself in the elite symbolism of the king and queen. The spirit is reformist, conciliatory, open to tradition, suspicious of a rationalist year zero. His 'Grains of Pollen' will appear in the very first volume of the *Athenaeum* produced in 1798, setting the tone for its avowed poetics of the fragment as an annunciation of new births.

Also in this ecumenical circle is the Pietist theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher as well as J.W. Ritter, the chemist and leading practitioner of 'romantic' *naturphilosophie*, a short lived generalist movement which conceived of nature as vital and dynamic, capable of affording analogical insights into mental powers and human morality. Analogues abound, no form of knowledge is for itself, interested in its own teleology alone. Kant's argument in The Critique of Judgment (1790) for the importance of aesthetic taste, of a *sensus communis*, to moral ideas still resonates in the Jena circle.

Within this polymathic group, different elements continue to collide and form promising constellations of speculation and synthesis within an early Enlightenment crucible of intensive sociability, a sphere of discussion, debate, readings, and entertainments. As Kathleen Wheeler points out, from such a hybrid milieu we shall receive a modern conception of art as multifarious, sentimental, fantastic, marvellous, grotesque, and thoroughly historical, always in excess of itself.²⁵⁹ The atavistic terror, materialism, mob violence, and atheism brought about by the corrupted ideals of the French Revolution temper faith in majority rule or a normative commitment to reason, an idea so horrifically abused by the Jacobins and Robespierre. Rather, Jena talk is often urgently historical, renewing the proud tradition of German historicism, attempting to situate and 'characterise' historical tendencies and political ideologies. There is the question of reconciling individual freedoms and social equity within a framework of tradition and continuity.²⁶⁰ Religion is in the air, not as doctrine or received truth, but as affect,

²⁵⁹ Kathleen M. Wheeler, German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 1984, 6.

²⁶⁰ Beiser, Political Writings, xxvi.

sensibility, a feeling for the infinite, an empowering of the idea as unconditioned, without limitation. Secularism has failed to end the nightmare of history; it is blind faith in disguise.

The group are outsiders to the exhilaration and terror occurring in France, and they want to make use of that distance, to comment wryly on fanaticism, to discern historical patterns where there are now claims to new beginnings, to certainty, truth. Novalis sets the tone, remarking on the ‘paradoxes’ of the times, noting that Edmund Burke has written a ‘revolutionary book against the Revolution’ (MO115). Friedrich Schlegel suggests that the ‘paradoxes’ of the ‘French national character’ are revealed by the revolution (AF 424), its alchemical power illuminating contradictory social forces: ‘Paradox is everything simultaneously good and great’ (CF 48).

Many of the group, particularly Friedrich Schlegel, are Spinozists, fans of his mixture of rationalism, pantheism, rigorous historico-philological criticism, and acerbic critique of dogma and religious zealotry.²⁶¹ As Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd note, ‘politics, ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of mind are interwoven in [Spinoza’s] works’.²⁶² Spinoza had intriguingly suggested that the mind was the ‘idea’ of the body, reflecting the body’s persistence and flourishing in a world of ‘difference, diversity, and experimentation’ without telos or final cause.²⁶³ Spinoza had stressed the positive role of imagination in ‘even the highest forms of intellectual life’.²⁶⁴

The trajectory of Spinozistic critique was to move from the collectivity down to the individual rather than in the other direction, to argue for the self as taking on an inner multiplicity that mirrors the ‘complex affective interaction of bodies’. Sociability, for Spinoza, was ‘inherently affective’, reliant on a mixture of intellect, emotion, and imagination.²⁶⁵ Human beings don’t live from the dictates of reason alone, their freedom

²⁶¹ See Beiser, *Political Writings*, xxi: ‘It is indeed the legacy of Spinoza and the radical Reformation ... that emerges time and again in the religious writings of the young romantics. Schlegel, Novalis and Schleiermacher ... sympathise with Spinoza’s pantheism, biblical criticism, and egalitarianism’.

²⁶² Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings, Spinoza, past and present*, Routledge, London, 1999, 1.

²⁶³ Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, 2-3.

²⁶⁴ Gatens and Lloyd, 4.

²⁶⁵ Gatens and Lloyd, 77.

is grounded in a sociability strengthened by ‘sharing forces’ with external bodies that affect us with joy.²⁶⁶

The formation of selfhood is collective for Spinoza, the ego is communicated, multiple, textured, immanent to historical tendencies rather the dictates of opinion alone. The Jena circle interpret their own time of ferment and revolution in such Spinozistic terms:

The French Revolution, Fichte’s Philosophy, and Goethe’s *Meister* are the greatest tendencies of the age.... Whoever cannot take any revolution seriously that isn’t noisy and materialistic, hasn’t yet achieved a lofty, broad perspective on the history of mankind. (AF 216, 1799)

The formation of the subject involves memory, imagination, not just present perception and immediate exigencies.²⁶⁷ The self is communicated and communicating, borne of dialogue; it is also a paradox, subsisting in the contradictions of time, acceding to its own multifarious conditions of being. Frühromantik Spinozism is political, but it is wary of the coercions of a general will, the violence of state power, the caprice of mass opinion.

The *Athenaeum* returns to the rhetorical tradition to theorise the paradoxical energies required by the public sphere. It constructs a sense of rhetorical representation that moves beyond the confirmation of the isolated ego in ideology, moralism, and didactic sentimentality. As David Simpson argues, for Friedrich Schlegel, rhetoric’s skilful evasions and suspensions of meaning are always veering towards its opposite pole in absolute commitment, complete sympathy, infinite communication.²⁶⁸ Romantic affects or dispositions, as theorised and enacted, always resonate with the collectivity, they never come simply from the top down, the apodictic will; they are the salutary materials of a civil society that retains an historical sensibility and pluralist imagination. Schlegel’s materialist rhetoric echoes with conversation, experimentation, diverse experience, and the need, in life, for bricolage.

Witz

²⁶⁶ Gatens, Lloyd, 53.

²⁶⁷ Gatens and Lloyd, 80, 81.

²⁶⁸ Simpson, *The Origins of Modern Critical Thought*, 12.

For Friedrich Schlegel and his intellectual confidante Novalis, ‘Witz’, a higher form of humour, needed to be theorised as both an important critical disposition and ethical tonality. Witz allows philosophy and aesthetics to converse; it is a discursive tendency, a humour, which might subtend a range of intellectual work, an interdisciplinary mien. In an illuminating discussion, Jean-Luc Nancy describes Witz as a polymorphic idea, a genre of utterance or witticism, but also applicable to silences, ironies, lacunae (such as the black page in Thomas Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*). Witz is also the psychological faculty capable of such productions, the English wit, the French *esprit*; it is the general form of these productions, an association or combination of elements, a *mélange*, a transcendence of partiality.²⁶⁹

Witz has a layered etymology, in Old and Middle High German, *Witzi* had designated sagacity, a natural power of discernment, part of the whole family of *savoir*, to know. Later, however, *Witzi* will be associated more with ‘cunning’, *savoir-faire*, technical skill, strategy, especially in the arts of magic and war. Witz draws to itself *Wissen*, knowledge that can be possessed, systematised, and wisdom as refinement, yet it will always remain closer to a keen mind that is discerning and nimble, its knowledges not accessible to easy acquisition or proof.²⁷⁰

Witz is theory’s intuition. Witz is intellectual spice; it is an often provocative juxtaposition of ideas that quickens reflection. It arouses thoughtfulness and intellectual pleasure in its audience; it is figure, trope, rhetorical invention, translation. For the Frühromantiks, Witz is the *ethos* of a ludic avant-garde desiring to shock and provoke its audience. Yet for historically minded theorists such as Friedrich Schlegel, Witz will not play the role of an applied affectation that separates one critical school from its more staid rivals. Witz is not a style or marker of cultural capital, it should never be reified into a fashion or taste.

Witz is a response to the hybrid desires of early German Romanticism, now seeking a form of representation fusing earthy humour and ironic ethereality, the grotesque and the idyllic:

²⁶⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Menstruum Universale’ in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al, Stanford University Press, Stanford Cal., 1993, 251.

²⁷⁰ Nancy, ‘Menstruum Universale’, 252-3.

One is often struck by the idea that two minds really belong together, like divided halves that can only realize their full Potential when joined.... I would like to see Jean Paul (Richter) and Peter Leberecht (Tieck) combined (Richter's) grotesque talent and (Tieck's) fantastic turn of mind would ... yield a first rate romantic poet (AF 125).

Witz is a complex tendency that surpasses the finite work or officially sanctioned genre. Witz is not a poetics. Schlegel sounds the new approach by noting that 'all classical poetical genres have now become ridiculous in their rigid purity' (CF 60). Walter Benjamin remarks that Schlegel's concept of criticism seeks to achieve freedom from heteronomous aesthetic doctrines. Schlegelian critique seeks criteria of aesthetic appreciation distinct from classical rules of form and propriety, namely the criterion of an 'immanent structure specific to the work itself'. Witz is contemptuous of any external decorum; it seeks energies and representational forms invisible to conventional modes of interpretation, historicisation.²⁷¹

Witz is a linguistic power, a characteristic, mannered form of utterance, communicating evanescent whim and ethereal desire. Witz, as distinct from its empirical description in the single work of art or critical essay, is a text's cultivation and universality; it can be resolutely opposed to a 'thin watery' form of reason. Witz, Schlegel tells us, is an acute 'sense' for the representative worth of the absurd, sordid and ridiculous, it is knowledge emerging from communication, from interaction: 'a definition which isn't witty is worthless, and there exists an infinite number of real definitions for every individual' (AF 82). Witz, sublimating collective engagement, fertile sub-cultures, re-evaluates, legislates new forms of life, affirms regions of existence, enjoys, in empirical fashion, the wealth of human nature.²⁷²

²⁷¹ Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism', 155. Benjamin will glean his own objection to historicism from this approach.

²⁷² One might conjecture that Schlegel is enamoured of an empiricism of humanity's varied affects, habits, and inventions in the wake of David Hume. Deleuze is especially insightful in this regard in Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity, an Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas, Columbia University Press, New York, 1989, 21: 'The constitution of a psychology of the mind is not at all possible, since this psychology cannot find in its object the required constancy or universality; only a psychology of affections (can constitute) the true science of humanity. In this sense Hume is a moralist and sociologist, before being a psychologist'. Deleuze writes: 'We can now see the special ground of empiricism: nothing in the mind transcends human nature, because it is human nature that, in its principles, transcends the mind' (24). And: 'To speak of the subject now is to speak of duration, custom, habit, and anticipation ... (of a) fundamental dynamism' (92).

For Friedrich Schlegel and the *Athenaeum*, Witz is the matrix, the ur-disposition of critical theory. It is an organon of textual production as well as a disposition to be affected in myriad ways. Witz, for instance, speaks of an urbane receptiveness to the ‘interest’ of a discursive encounter, an enjoyment of conceptual personae like the buffoon, the harmonious bore, the ‘brilliantly stupid’, with traces of the popular love of the fool figure. Witz avoids rancorous or personalised polemic; it artistically sublimes individuals who are ‘classic’ and have lasting merit. Witz revels in a post-traditional modernity with a classicist temperament, and this aloofness creates ‘ideal prototypes of objective stupidity and objective foolishness’. These behavioural types are ‘infinitely interesting’, worthy of the highest form of polemic. (CF 81) Witz is a rhetorical disposition: it is both intellectually piquant and culturally inclusive; it belongs, simultaneously, in the realm of rich sensuous appearance and critical reflection. It is an active catalyst (pot-stirrer) and leisurely spectator.

Witz, like oratory, needs a capacious chronotope; it belongs to a spacious and fluid collective theatre of discourses, where anything might happen:

Just as with blood-horses it takes a roomy track to show their mettle, so orators need a spacious field in which to expatiate without let or hindrance, if their eloquence is not to lose all its strength and pith (Tacitus, *Dialogus*, 39:2, 339)

Witz, in its diverse experience and a-teleological praxis, understands that ‘nobody is uninteresting’ (AF 81). Witz glimpses the unconditioned, combining ‘absolute rigor’ with ‘absolute tolerance’. In the aphorisms of Novalis, Witz is associated with a pictorial and hieroglyphic language of pure gesture, naïve dramatisation, a passive medium of new births, heteroscopic empiricism:

Who invented wit? Every characteristic or mode of conduct of our spirit that is consciously reflected upon is in the truest sense a newly discovered world (MO 35).

The highest sense would be the highest receptivity to the particularity of human nature (MO 72).

Witz is post-egological, it requires a ‘sacrifice of the self’ that is the ‘foundation of all true exaltation’ (MO26). Witz is akin to a hieroglyph, an allegorical sign that lends representative worth to the natural world, that translates sensuous particularity into

mystical comprehension. Witz is a generous Phenomenality, but it secretes hidden depths, an oracle, a conceptual persona: ‘I would acquire mediated and immediate knowledge and experience of the thing at the same time – it would be representative and not representative ... my own and not my own’ (LF1 72).

For the Jena Romantics, Witz is not the instrument of a subject. Witz is the historicity of affect, habit, cultural practice; it surpasses the possession of an individual, the whim and caprice of the isolated genius, the expressivist subject of the *Sturm und Drang*.²⁷³ For Schlegel, Witz’s interest is not psychological but linguistic and theoretical. Ambiguous in its mien, Witz is both fragmentary and holistic. It is the artistry of a particular personality, but it is also necessarily unwitting, encompassed by a sociable tendency: ‘the objects of social intercourse are nothing but means to enliven it. This determines their choice – their variation – their treatment.... Each human being is a society in miniature’ (MO 42).

Witz ‘grasps the *idea* at a glance’ but it also cultural memory, subaltern tradition, rising above official vocabularies.²⁷⁴ In ‘Miscellaneous Observations’ written around 1797 and published in the *Athenaeum* in 1798, Novalis suggests the necessary temporal disposition for the theory of humour; it is only for the weak person that the ‘fact of this moment’ can become an ‘article of faith’ (MO 23). Jean-Luc Nancy provides valuable insights into the many chronotopes of Witz. Witz figures the dashing *virtu* of *l’homme d’esprit*, the worldly courtier and dynamic Renaissance individual on the model of Castiglione. It can also signify the urbanity and élan of the man and woman of taste; it is the characteristic tone of the ‘salon’, the discursive lubricant of bohemian and artistic circles, an urbane principle of conversational selection, an intimacy, a nuance.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ René Wellek comments: ‘But Schlegel can say that he is “disgusted with every theory which is not historical”’. Wellek argues that Friedrich Schlegel’s most significant intellectual breakthrough was his movement away from a standard of ‘prescriptive nature’ based on an ideal model of the Greek classics, towards a pluralist appreciation of modern art and the diverse tendencies inscribed within it. See René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism, The Romantic Age: 1750-1950*, Jonathon Cape, London, 1955, 7.

²⁷⁴ Nancy, ‘Menstruum Universale’, 253.

²⁷⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Menstruum Universale’ in *The Birth to Presence*, 257. See also Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*: ‘Witz, then, is not merely a “form” or a “genre” ... although it is indeed ... the preferred genre of conversation, of *sociality* ... the genre of a literature that would be the living and free exchange of opinions, thoughts, and hearts in a society of artists, in a group like that of the authors of the *Fragments*’ (53).

For the historically invested Frühromantiks, Witz should be disentangled from theories that functionalise humour as sentiment, or that bring it into the service of the powers that be. Witz is its own value, it neither ‘substitutes for an impossible happiness’ in the manner of the cynical Chamfort, nor is it the touchstone of human truths or a means of moral ennoblement as commended by the Earl of Shaftesbury. To say that Witz is either cynical or moral is a ‘vulgar prejudice’: ‘Wit is its own end, like virtue, like love and art’ (CF 59).²⁷⁶

Witz suggests a certain immediacy in its act of performance that makes it inseparable from what utters it. It is the force of language itself, the power of brevity, the electricity of an interruption or startling idea: ‘Wit is like someone who is supposed to behave in a manner representative of his station and instead simply *does* something’ (AF 120). Witz is an interloper, a scandal, a corruption of standards. Witz is forceful rhetorical power, an Aristotelian *dynamis* that concentrates all eyes on the exercise of a talent, the felicity and forcefulness of a style, the power of a strategy, the extremity of a point.²⁷⁷ Witz is monstrous, hybrid, it gives birth to a miscellany of genres, it is dialogue, fable, aphorism, and anecdote. Witz is an interpenetration of genres and a carnivalesque social space.²⁷⁸ Witz is an acerbic rhetorical force and an abundant gratitude for life. Witz is an imaginative, multiply situated praxis and a theoretical mode, interested in typologies of characteristics and pluralist histories.

Friedrich Schlegel distances Witz from any specific intention or animus: ‘one should have wit, but not want to have it. Otherwise you get persiflage, the Alexandrian style of wit’ (AF 32). Witz is not utilitarian: ‘to use wit as an instrument for revenge is as shameful as using art as a means for titillating the senses’ (CF 51). Witz is the sustaining

²⁷⁶ Despite Friedrich Schlegel’s mild condemnation, Shaftesbury’s idea that truth is best served by the robust interrogations of humour and the refraction of an idea through multiple media undoubtedly anticipates the Frühromantik concept of Witz as an intuitive and intersubjective medium. See Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, ‘Sensus Communis, an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in a Letter to a Friend’, in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, 30: ‘Truth, it is supposed, may bear *all* lights, and one of those principal lights, or natural mediums, by which things are to be viewed, in order to a thorough recognition, is ridicule itself, or that manner of proof by which we discern whatever is liable to just raillery in any subject’.

²⁷⁷ Nancy, ‘Menstruum Universale’, 257.

²⁷⁸ Nancy, ‘Menstruum Universale’, 255: ‘Witz; the uncontrolled and uncontrollable birth, the jumbling of genres ... literature and philosophy, neither literature nor philosophy, literature or philosophy’.

condition of sociable discourse, but it cannot be appropriated: ‘A sense for the witty without the possession of wit is the ABC of tolerance’ (CF 71). Witz’s *paideia* is the enchantment of bodies and substances, it gives birth to paradoxes:

A witty idea is a disintegration of spiritual substances that, before being suddenly separated, must have been thoroughly mixed. The imagination must first be satiated with all sorts of life before one can electrify it with the friction of free social intercourse so that the slightest friendly or hostile touch can elicit brilliant sparks and lustrous rays – or smashing thunderbolts’ (CF 34).

Witz is exercised by combination, interaction, sociable habits, sumptuous display, and in that sense it exceeds all principles heretofore. Witz, the principle of cosmic affinities, is at the same time the *menstruum universale*, a universal solvent, a power of chemical decomposition into simple elements and raw materials (MO 57). One might say that Witz, as a tendency, inhabits Erasmus’s *De Copia* and brings it to excess. Erasmus’s text is both a gentle, erudite propaedeutic of suasive forms and an energetic display of rhetorical resourcefulness and stylistic extremes, with a proclivity to irony, obscenity, and carnivalesque copiousness of sensual forms.²⁷⁹ Witz refers us back to Protagoras, to his valorisation in discourse of the appropriate and the opportune, his suggestion that ‘timely’ communications, transformative verbal acts, are usually the product of repetitive discursive exercises and experience in communicative arts. Witz is the mystery of the Sophists.

Witz: Disturbance and Restoration

I now turn to Friedrich Schlegel’s *Dialogue on Poetry* (1799-1800), published in the first volume of the *Athenaeum*’s 1800 edition. It is a dialogue, a symposium in the genre of Plato, where characters modelled on the men and women of the Jena circle debate the history and theory of art, a kind of *roman à clef*. At the outset the participants agree to disagree as the preliminary conditions for the amicable expression of a diversity of views.

²⁷⁹ Erasmus’s rhetorical textbook was influenced by Cicero’s thematisation of oratorical copiousness (*copia*) in *De Oratore*, a dialogue which suggested that the practicality of the orator should nevertheless be subtended by a *paideia*, an historical understanding of rhetorical style and characteristic modes of ethos, also a prevalent theme of Cicero’s *Brutus*.

The dialogue will be a ‘festive occasion’ in which the battle becomes quite hot, as otherwise ‘there is no hope for a perpetual peace’.²⁸⁰ Witz is a vigorous extreme *and* irenic possibility. The very extremity of wit, its power of novelty, can nevertheless restore and renew, rediscovering a forgotten sociability or relationship of elements: ‘many witty ideas are like the sudden meeting of two friendly thoughts after a long separation’ (AF 37). As Novalis comments: ‘[Wit] is at once the result of a disturbance and the means of its restoration’ (MO 30).²⁸¹

Witz shatters egoistic complacency only to create the possibilities for civil dispositions: ‘Wit is absolute social feeling, or fragmentary genius’ (CF 9). One thinks of witz as the discharge of enforced restraint, as the sudden outburst pertinent to a confined space, the sudden revivification of a period of torpor, the interruption of a staid monologue, the evanescent moment of release after a period of irritation: ‘Wit is an explosion of confined spirit’ (CF 90). For Novalis it is in witz that ‘imagination and judgement touch’, or where freedom and restraint converse. As Benjamin argues of the Jena Romantics, Witz is a desired mode of critical representation because it suspends all limitations by resting on those limitations, it is where immanence and transcendence combine, it is the paradox of genuine sociability. Witz, as a form of critical representation, transforms ‘positively’ formal moments into ‘universally’ formal moments. By relating the individual work to the collective idea of art, Witz affords a sociable basis for judgment, a subtle propaedeutic.²⁸²

Benjamin, with heuristic flair, describes Witz as an undogmatic or ‘free formalism’ that grounds the validity of forms independently of the ideal of determinate structures.²⁸³ Witz derives not rules, educative precepts, or demonstrable concepts from its aesthetic awareness and theoretical sensibility. Witz rather highlights the creative formal principles of folly, licentiousness, absurdity, theatricality, and paradoxicality. Witz mediates these energies, it is their prism, it cannot itself be historicised by essentialist gestures, it is

²⁸⁰ Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms* (1799-1800), trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park and London, 1968, 56.

²⁸¹ One thinks here of the rhetorically acerbic and sarcastic Erasmus (witness the *Praise of Folly*) who advocated defending the broad church of Catholicism against the splintering effects of Lutheranism. In rhetorical sensibilities one often encounters linguistic intensity and philosophical pluralism, contrasts of form and content, as our analysis of Nietzsche will suggest.

²⁸² Benjamin, ‘The Concept of Criticism’, 156.

²⁸³ Benjamin, ‘The Concept of Criticism’, 158.

linguistic intensity and philosophical pluralism. Witz is the irony of classicism, the wisdom of folly, the organon that is not, that is yet to arrive, that is in reserve: ‘wit in all its manifestations is the principle and the organ of universal philosophy ... the value and importance of that absolute, enthusiastic, thoroughly material wit is infinite’ (AF 220).²⁸⁴

Rhetoric and the Public Sphere

What is a public? How can thinking be enriched by a collectivity without succumbing to state power, public opinion, or the current arbiters of taste? The philosophy of the Jena Romantics differentiates itself from the interior a priori faculties of mind heralded by Kant, as well as Fichte’s idea that epistemology is enabled by the absolute, non-negotiable positing of an originary ‘I’. Fichte was interested in how a purely logical I posits itself and then progresses towards a subject of practical reason and aesthetic imagination by positioning differences and obstacles it must dialectically incorporate. Benjamin, limning his own ideal of an immanent critical method, argues in ‘The Concept of Criticism’ that Schlegel and Novalis oppose an ‘infinity of connectedness’ to Fichte’s infinity of continuous dialectical advancement.²⁸⁵ Benjamin suggests that for the Romantics the matrix or midpoint of reflection is the immanent representations of art, not the originary ‘I’.²⁸⁶

For Jena Romanticism, the public is neither a guarantor of one’s rectitude nor a *prügelknabe* for Enlightenment rationality. It is more a matter of considering critical and aesthetic dispositions that are engendered through an ambivalent relationship to the public sphere: ‘To want to judge everything is a great fallacy, or a venial sin’ (CF 102). The *Critical Fragments* of 1798 often point to the venality of lower critical and aesthetic genres: ‘carrying on a polemic against an individual has something petty about it, like selling retail’ (CF 81); ‘isn’t everything that is capable of becoming shopworn already twisted or trite to begin with?’ (CF 118). Good writing does not predicate itself on an identifiable audience,

²⁸⁴ cf. *The Literary Absolute*, 55: ‘the truth of the *organon* becomes accessible in geniality’, a Frühromantik philosopheme traceable to Shaftesbury.

²⁸⁵ Benjamin, ‘The Concept of Criticism’, 126.

²⁸⁶ Benjamin, ‘The Concept of Criticism’, 134.

genuine sociability is more subtle: ‘every honest author writes for nobody or everybody. Whoever writes for some particular group does not deserve to be read’ (CF 85). The pedagogical aggression of the Enlightenment receives similar notice: ‘the function of criticism, people say, is to educate one’s readers! Whoever wants to be educated, let him educate himself’ (CF 86).²⁸⁷

The Frühromantiks repudiate a Voltairean mandate to polemicise and moralise. To write for the public in fact devalues one’s efforts to the level of the empirical and importunate: ‘People who write books and imagine that their readers are the public and that they must educate it soon arrive at the point not only of despising their so-called public but of hating it’ (CF 69). Thought is not a normative calculus: the ‘analytic writer’ who aims for a ‘proper impression’ is surpassed by the ‘synthetic writer’ who imagines a reader ‘alive and critical’ and discreetly demurs from making a ‘particular impression’, heralding a relationship with the reader which is that of deepest ‘symphilosophy’ (CF 112).

So what is a public that is not simply present and objectifiable as a set of reified interests? What is the public that continues to enrich and subtilise art rather than exhaust its possibilities? How to describe that idea of the public that allows historicity in discourse, that opposes itself to demagogic opportunism, that is not the greed and envy of the multitude? Schlegel plays the nominalist out of irritation with vapid, ahistorical vocabularies:

One sometimes hears the public being spoken of as if it were somebody with whom one had lunch at the ... Leipzig Fair. Who is this public? The public is no object, but an idea, a postulate, like the Church. (CF 35)

Novalis, one of Catholicism’s great theoreticians after Augustine and Erasmus, is also around this time theorising a spiritualised, internationalist conception of the public, resonant with the affective complexity and lost opportunity of an idealised Christendom. This public subtends critical discourse in the manner of a powerful popular religion, the ‘comprehensive suppleness and rich substance of the Catholic faith’. One can rhetorically articulate this theistically imbued public, it animates a discourse that is ‘lively and

²⁸⁷ One can only be bemused by Frederick Beiser’s argument in Political Writings that the Romantics were ‘preoccupied with the need to determine the standards of good taste and literature’ (xii).

effective', spiritually profound yet appealingly superficial.²⁸⁸ Novalis conceives of Catholicism and its lost Christendom as a paradoxical possibility rising from the diverse relations of a collectivity, engendering multiple sources of appeal and forming itself from the diverse tendencies of a people: 'The people is an idea ... A perfect human being is a people in miniature. True popularity is the highest goal of humanity' (MO 47).

A public culture's copious aspect, its joy and sadness, its material life and power of fancy, inform one's own critical values. The public is an idea, a *paideia*, surpassing one's own will, engendering the self as a multiplicity. Such a public should condition all one's initiatives. Novalis is blunt on this point: 'Flight from the common spirit is death' (MO81). The public diversely stimulates both in its individual characteristics and as infinite horizon: 'The public is an infinitely large, diverse, interesting person – a mysterious person of infinite worth – the actual absolute stimulus of the artist' (LF II, 34).

The public is not organic, it is not yet the nation, it does not simply exist in history, it stimulates rhetorical desires; it fragments logic into inclusive deliberation, exercises in perspective, a speculative mien without logical origins or aims:

The more perfectly and variously we can *produce* something, *execute* it, the better we *know* it. We know it perfectly if we can *communicate* it, arouse it everywhere and in all ways (LF II, 37).

We are reminded of the Earl of Shaftesbury's ironic 'conventionalism'. Shaftesbury argued that it is only men of 'slavish principles' who affect superiority over the vulgar and despise the many. The lovers of mankind 'respect and honour the conventions and societies of men', and this acknowledgement of a *sensus communis* means that we shall 'grow better reasoners by reasoning pleasantly', without rancour, dogma, or narrow mindedness.²⁸⁹ Schlegel enthuses about a philosophic tenor that is always *in media res* (AF 84), variously conditioned *inter alia* rather than *ex cathedra*, a philosophy of human nature.

The diversity of a public teaches us that the author is not an ego or homogenous theoretical territory, but an itinerant thinking, an immanent variety of individual activities and desires:

²⁸⁸ Novalis, 'Christendom or Europe' (1799) in *Philosophical Writings*, 141, 151.

²⁸⁹ 'An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour', 36-37.

Only then do I show that I've understood an author: when I can act in his sense, when I can translate him and transform him in diverse ways, without diminishing his individuality' (AF 287).

The public Jena Romanticism posits as its organon is demanding. It would like not only virtuosity and paradox, but also cultural materialism in its discourse:

Might there not be something to be said for the everyday person, who has recently been so much abused? Does not persistent mediocrity demand the most strength? And is the human being to be more than one of the *popolo*? (MO 44)

It takes strength to be mediocre. The formal variety and historicity of one's milieu suggests new critical tasks, reinventions, re-positionings, and translations into new idioms. In one sense the thin rationalism of the Enlightenment was for the Frühromantiks merely reactive, weak, pallid and afraid, demonstrating an inability to cope with energetic stimuli, the *rigorous* requirements of a materialist rhetoric, a communicative art form. The thinker who would be a rhetor must forego certainty and completion: 'might it not be the same with the people as with the truth: where, as they say, the attempt is worth more than the result' (AF 73).

To postulate a pluralist public that subtends one's thinking is to admit that ideas and their genres of presentation are fatally imbricated, in excess of each other: 'Formal logic and empirical psychology are philosophical grotesques. For whatever is interesting ... in an experimental physics of the spirit can surely only derive from a contrast of form and content' (AF 75).

When, like Witz, philosophy experiences that combination of creative freedom and situational restraint that characterises popular genres and conversational conventions, it can be remarked upon as double:

Wherever philosophy appears in oral or written dialogues – and is not simply confined into rigid systems – there irony should be asked for and provided ... There are ancient and modern poems that are pervaded by the divine breath of irony throughout and informed by a truly transcendental buffoonery. Internally: the mood that surveys everything and rises infinitely above all limitations...; externally, in its execution: the mimic style of an averagely gifted Italian *buffo* (CF 42).

Philosophy's new era is paradoxical. One talks now of a 'logical sociability' (CF 56), a 'scientific wit', a 'logical beauty', a 'brilliant stupidity', of Socrates as urbane *buffo*, of the

many roles of the conceptual persona. Thought has a material form or comportment, it is ‘characteristic’: ‘manners are characteristic edges’ (CF 83). Thought is the interplay of the material and ideal, it enacts the *logos* as Janus faced, logical desire and aesthetic form, always supplemented, dangerously, by an *ethos*.

Heeding these imperatives, Schlegel calls for a poetry that combines ‘transcendental raw materials’ and the preliminaries of a theory of ‘poetic creativity’ with the expansive power of ‘artistic reflection’, of an inventive *logos* and a fragmented *paideia*. He talks of an aesthetic form that would be simultaneously ‘poetry and the poetry of poetry’. Schlegel argues that if symphilosophy and sympoetry become universal and heartfelt, it will no longer be anything extraordinary for complementary minds to create ‘communal works of art’ (AF 125).²⁹⁰ If the artist is become an expert in his field and ‘understands his fellow citizens in the kingdom of art’, then he will have to become a philologist as well (AF 255). Criticism is both inspired and mundane, it is art and method, its propaedeutic is at once pragmatic, soberly historical, and infinitely imaginative.²⁹¹ The republic of letters is now within, the ego communicates with itself, introjects a number of social and critical practices.

Rhetoric – with its ambivalent mythology of rhetorical personae, its excitement and anxiety over the eternally problematic relationship of language to the human condition, its anthro-po-sociological valorisation of language and cultural media as a-teleological motors of social formation – suggests to the Jena Romantics a critical *ethos* that is immanent to the instability and materiality of representation as communicated affects, roles, habits, collective memories.

²⁹⁰ In other words, the ecstasies of poetic praxis must be recuperated by the sober restrictions and articulations (decompositions, characterisations) of theory. The infinitude and affirmative contingencies of lyrical subjectivity finds both its necessary displacement and consummation in the sound formalist methodologies and intensified philosophical consciousness afforded by critique. Benjamin, ‘Concept of Criticism’, 152, 153: ‘criticism is therefore the medium in which the restriction of the individual work refers *methodically* to the infinitude of art’ (my italics), ‘for the Romantics, criticism is far less the judgment of a work than the *method* of its consummation’ (my italics).

²⁹¹ One should consider this ambiguity of the rhetorical critic, as technician and speculative theorist, before prematurely circumscribing the aims of Paul de Man’s well-known manifesto ‘The Return to Philology’ (1982) as merely reductively technical and institutionally aggrandising, as suggested by Guillory in The Problem of Literary Canon Formation (1994). De Man, in the *role* of pedantic specialist and critical egalitarian: ‘Attention to the philological or rhetorical devices of language is not the same as aesthetic appreciation’, in The Resistance to Theory, 24. Note de Man’s interest in rhetoric and philology as a propaedeutic or ‘prosaics’, influenced by Jena Romanticism.

Rhetoric, which can function as a circumstantial practice and an enthusiasm for embellishment, magical fictions, and enhanced affective states, inaugurates the Romantic ideal of a 'prosaics', a continuum of forms. Walter Benjamin argues that for the Frühromantiks the 'idea of poetry is prose', that prose is the 'creative ground of poetic forms'.²⁹² Rhetoric, a tendency, an excess, fragments representation into a *copia* of possible tonalities, ideas, themes, motifs, characteristic drives. It is the jumbling of genre (philosophy, poetry), the mixed ethos ('inspiration and criticism') (AF 116). The rhetorical drive of Witz, and its ambiguous relationship to public life, suggests a critical topos that resurges in Nietzsche and Arendt, the problematic of the living, socialised intellectual restrained and emancipated by their involvement in the world:

... wherever one does not restrict oneself, one is restricted by the world, and that makes one a slave, because even what seems irrational or supra-rational, one's unlimited free will, must at bottom be simply necessary and rational. (CF 37).

We must now turn to history, to the idea of a rhetorical culture, a teasing idea, the basis of a very different philosophy of history.

²⁹² Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism', 173-4. Benjamin argues that the reflective medium of poetic forms is prose understood as a rhetorical mixture of elements without rule. In prose, all genres and 'all metrical rhythms pass over into one another and combine into a new unity, the prosaic unity'. Rhetoric, which is an extension of forms, is therefore enunciation's 'canonical creative ground' (174).

Chapter Seven: The Frühromantik Philosophy of History

Our intention here has ... been to sow the idea that the spontaneity, freedom, and fantasy attributed to Plato in his legend of Theuth were actually supervised and limited by rigorous necessities.... [We concern ourselves] with the fact that Plato has not merely *borrowed* a *simple* element.... we... point to the internal, structural necessity which alone has made possible such communication and ... contagion of mythemes.²⁹³

Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. [It puts] poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric.... so that many artists who started out to write only a novel ended up providing us with a portrait of themselves ... a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. (AF 116)

In this chapter I analyse how the Jena Romantics recuperate classical rhetoric as a philosophy of history and an ideal of socialisation. I argue that the Frühromantiks conceive of rhetoric as an acculturated ‘tendency’, an urbane disposition that subtended the different artistic and philosophical schools of antiquity.

Understood as a hybrid chronotope, rhetoric allows the Frühromantiks to ‘fragment’ history by translating historical time into what Benjamin in ‘The Concept of Criticism’ calls ‘potentiated’ or ‘representative’ forms rather than the essentialised cultural periods of later historicisms. I follow Benjamin’s suggestion in ‘The Concept of Criticism’ that the Frühromantiks conceive of the past as a relative rather than absolute unity; there is an interpenetration of past and present, historicity and experimentation. The relative unities of the past, suggests Benjamin, ‘are so far from being shut up in themselves and free of relations that through the intensification of their reflection (potentiation, romanticisation) they can incorporate other beings, other centers of reflection, more and more into their own self-knowledge’.²⁹⁴ Benjamin argues that ‘progredibility’, the progressiveness of Romantic art and critique, should in no way be understood by the modern ideology of ‘progress’. The Romantic idea of history is not some ‘merely relative connection of cultural

²⁹³ Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, in *Disseminations*, trans. Barbara Johnson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, 85.

²⁹⁴ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism’, in *Selected Writings, Volume I, 1913-26*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, 146.

stages to one another', it is the past enacted through the present, an 'infinite process of fulfilment', neither mere becoming, nor nostalgia or tradition.²⁹⁵

I suggest that the Frühromantiks argue for an historical form that realises 'all that is practically necessary'. The idea is that the rhetorically acculturated intellectual cannot speak simply, apodictically, as a self-identical subject, as a benevolent, present interiority. A rhetorical culture is the mixed elements of the collectivity, its genealogies, mythemes, poetic images, vernaculars, rising up within thought itself, constituting thought as an immanent confusion, a contagion of thought in the idioms and affects of social life. For the Jena Romantics, a rhetorical culture promises mixed sensibilities, prudent *and* artistic orientations. Romantic historicity is the precursor to Benjamin's philosophy of history, it redeems or 'crystallises', for the present, the fragments of historical time, the repressed, marginalised, and excluded.

Plato: A Free Formalism

In the previous chapter I analysed the Frühromantik articulation of Witz as an ambivalent rhetorical principle of representation, fragmentary and holistic, intuitive and theoretical. In Witz one can celebrate 'superficiality': popular technique, sensuous immediacy, the pleasures of spectatorship, a proclivity for character type and genre. One could also celebrate 'profundity': ironic evasiveness, allegorical mysteries, a speculative organon, a transcendence of the ego. Schlegel and Novalis embed the complex disposition of rhetoric, as propaedeutic and immediacy, within the historical question of the sort of

²⁹⁵ Benjamin, 'Concept of Criticism', 168. One finds an earlier statement of Benjamin's desire for a 'unity' of historical knowledge and critical imagination in the essay 'On the Program of the Coming Philosophy': 'but there is a unity of experience that can by no means be understood as a sum of experiences'. See Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-26, 'On the Program of the Coming Philosophy', 108. John McCole discusses this youthful essay as the beginnings of Benjamin's increasing attention to elaborating a philosophy of history. Benjamin, interested in Kant's sophisticated critique of experience, disagreed with Kant's tendency to conceive of knowledge as a relation between the entities of subject and object, a propaedeutic for epistemology. McCole argues that Benjamin sought to exceed this antithesis through a philosophical comprehension of myth, theology and the historicity of language, philology. Noteworthy is McCole's argument that Benjamin's attempt to enrich a philosophy of experience with 'mythic forms' was an attempt at recapturing, for the critical subject, the full range of experience 'from the vitalist right'. One can argue that Benjamin displaces organic, nationalist historicist fantasies with a dynamic and fragmented historical sensibility. See John McCole, Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1993, 76.

public habitus, the pedagogy, audience expectations, and discursive tendencies that generates rhetorical personae. Here Frühromanticism looks back (or perhaps forward) to classical culture. Schlegel and Novalis want to comprehend Greek and Roman art, philosophy, historiography, and literature within a sociological and genealogical analysis of a rhetorically flourishing public sphere. Friedrich Schlegel enthusiastically theorises a convergence of archaic polytheism, ethical generosity, and a philosophical tendency towards public display as the configurative elements of a rhetoricised culture.

Schlegel and Novalis are interested in those historical cultures that demanded urbane and elastic dispositions and inclusive methodologies as the preliminary conditions of deliberative reasoning. They will look to Greek and Roman antiquity as an avatar, a model of formalist acculturation. The Jena Romantics are fascinated by the ‘tendency’ of rhetoricised cultures, their subtle intersubjective energies and communicative imperatives, to *articulate* the classical intellectual, to evoke in the subject multiple and contradictory desires, a structuration of feeling. We shall see this exemplified in a favoured thought-figure of the Jena Romantics, the foolishly wise, the sublime and ‘mediocre’ Socrates.

The Frühromantiks conceive of Plato’s early dialogues, which featured Socrates as a multi-accented *dramatis persona* in discursive competition with other thinkers and philosophical approaches, as displaying a broad *sensus communis*: ‘Novels are the Socratic dialogues of our time. And this free form has become the refuge of common sense in its flight from pedantry’ (CF 26). The critical agenda of Plato was not of interest to Schlegel, whose contemporary quarrel with the slavish neo-Kantians was predicated on a firm opposition to a hermeneutics of intentionality and consistency: ‘The tacitly assumed and real postulate ... of the Kantian evangelists reads as follows: Kant’s philosophy must be in agreement with itself’ (AF 107). Schlegel’s philosophy of history, predicated on the rhetorical animus of classical thought, displaces the Fichtean I and the celebrity of the Kantian master theorist. Schlegel and Novalis’s meditative crux is the form of public culture and its embodied dispositions that could constrain Plato: constrain his artistic form to reflect the abundance of his circumambient culture; to reflect the materiality of the portrayer as well as the ideas portrayed.

There are a number of aspects of a rhetorical culture. Schlegel is interested in those acculturated tendencies that generated Plato’s flair for theatrical scenography, constrained

him to invoke and harness the power of various performative genres and critical techniques; witness Socrates' mastery of various kinds of rhetorical exercises, logography, epideixis, aporia, dialectical reasoning. The Frühromantiks are interested in Plato's relationship, constraining and liberating, with a classical 'public' imaginary, that desired vivid, oblique, earthy, paradoxical, broad, nuanced modes of representing ideas. A rhetorical public sphere is imbued with genealogy and mytheme, so that argumentation must, as Derrida argues, *necessarily* negotiate a repertoire of ethical valencies and creative principles, realising itself as a plurality of forms. Schlegel discusses the impact of polytheism on the language of ideas:

An ideal is at once idea and fact. If ideals don't have as much individuality for the thinker as the gods of antiquity do for the artist, then ideas [are] ... hollow phrases, a brooding intuition of one's own nose.... The great practical abstraction is what makes the ancients – among whom this was an instinct – actually ancients.... of this only a mind is capable that contains within itself ... a plurality of minds and a whole system of persons (AF 121).²⁹⁶

The motley gods of Paganism are the semiotic instinct of antiquity, itinerant characters of many narratives, they individuate thought; prevent it from resting in the noun, the self-same, the empty generalisation.²⁹⁷ In Paganism and its many mythemes, various creative principles or ethical genii, *Eros*, *Eris*, texture the critical subject as an immanent ethos, a genealogically sensitive set of practices.

²⁹⁶ Also: 'Speculation *en détail* ... beget(s) the whole substance of scientific wit ... the principles of higher criticism' (AF 121).

²⁹⁷ See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994, 40: 'These stories have no origin. They treat origins in terms of stories that presuppose other stories that in turn presuppose the first ones. And so the gods can become, like human beings, like Ulysses, the heroes of numerous, almost innumerable narratives.... They become like a species of proper name whose corresponding bodies change.... a pagan ideal that occurs again and again in various forms.... the ideal of games and masks:

the awareness that the relation between the proper name and the body is not an immutable one. *This bars the way to the notion of a subject identical to itself through the peripeteia of its history ...* '(the italics are mine). Samuel Weber also examines the appeal of polytheism to the modern imaginary: 'the polytheism of the mythical world, in which no clear hierarchy permits an unambiguous identification of authority';

See Samuel Weber, 'Genealogy of Modernity: History, Myth and Allegory in Benjamin's *Origin of the German Mourning Play*', MLN Vol. 106, no. 3, April 1991, 480.

Novalis offers an interpretation of Pagan mythopoesis as a popular natural religion, mimetically responsive to a diversity of environmental stimuli that it allegorises and sublimates:

A mind is needed where the spirit of poetry and the spirit of philosophy have saturated each other in all their fullness. Greek mythology is in part such a translation of a natural religion. The modern Madonna too is such a myth (MO 68).

Catholicism, suggests Novalis, is an historically syncretic theology that has acceded to the popular demand for a natural religion replete with iconography and synaesthesia, fragmented into erotic and devotional personae such as the Madonna and the various Saints. A popular religion wants a distribution of narratives and cultural functions, it wants spiritual media who embody both sensuous superficiality and Elysian mysteries, and it wants paradoxes, man gods, and the sensuality of the sacred. Popular religions want an historically layered, practical theology, *in media res*, without authoritative genetic origins. In Novalis's genealogy, Catholicism succeeds Paganism because both are rhetorical, sociably effective, immanent to the diverse needs of a life-world, evoking the potentiality of forms and intermediaries: 'applied Christianity, a faith that had come alive.... Christendom must again become lively and effective'.²⁹⁸

Paganism, anterior to modern conceptions of the unitary subject, suggests a heterodox assemblage of affective characteristics, traits, and mannerisms. Polytheism is a linguistic and representational drive, analogous to Witz. It is the fragmentary wisdom and psychological valencies, folkloric, habitual, and miscellaneously accrued, of a human nature translated across many cultures:

²⁹⁸ Novalis, 'Christendom or Europe', 151. Given the Frühromantik assault on historicism, which evokes the aesthetic movement as epiphenomena of a cultural period, one must be suspicious of sweeping efforts at contextualising the Christianity of Jena Romanticism according to anachronistic projections of Romanticism's pietistic revolt against rationalism. David Simpson falls into this trap: 'It is common wisdom, that, for example, the German romantics are frequently engaged in a philosophical or aesthetic legitimization of Christianity against the challenges of scepticism or paganism', German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel, ed. David Simpson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 1984, 19. But what, for early German Romanticism, is Christianity? Is it self-identical, at one with its institutional history? Or is its potential that of a Pagan generosity to, in the Humean/Deleuzean sense, the plurality and habituality of human nature? This reconfigured and genealogically imbued Christianity would agree with Simpson's more apposite statement that Romantic theory is suspicious of the 'extremes of subjective enthusiasm of *Schwärmerei*' (19). Romantic religiosity is not interiority; its wisdom is that of an historical propaedeutic, a *paideia* of social affections.

In investigating ancient Greek mythology, hasn't too little attention been paid to the human instinct for making analogies and antitheses?... In that old remark of Aristotle that one gets to know people through their gods, one finds not only the self-illuminating subjectivity of all theology, but also the more incomprehensible innate spiritual dualism of man (AF 162).

In the *Dialogue on Poetry*, mythology is related to the dualism of Witz as a 'perennial alternation of enthusiasm and irony'. In an a-teleological popular and natural religion, happy with its creative fictions, without claim to the truth of history and morality, human characteristics and sociable desires are still visible. For the Jena Romantic philosophy of history, Paganism's semiological bathos was contagious even for the higher ideals of an emergent philosophy: 'Might not the cyclical nature of Plato's and Aristotle's supreme being be the personification of a philosophical mannerism?' (AF 161). If Pagan mythology is a self-referentiality, then, as Kevin Newmark argues, it should be understood less as the grand Romantic project than as a 'naive profundity' that allows the semblance of absurdity and madness, stupidity and foolishness, to shimmer through.²⁹⁹ Pagan stories and their confused and immanent chronotopes, mixing human and divine *dramatis personae*, infusing social and sacred narratives, transplants us back into the 'original chaos of human nature'.³⁰⁰

Inhabiting a culture whose polytheistic instincts index thought to a genealogy of creative characteristics or genii, Plato's dialogues exhibit, for Schlegel, a productive tension. Plato announces a philosophical program, an intended 'content' of conceptual idealism, anti-democratic elitism, rational purification of myth, and a contrast of philosophy and rhetoric as authentic knowledge and shallow opportunism. Plato's form, however, is rhetorically intricate, polyphonic, constrained by a culture of display and generic eclecticism to horizontally display a rounded 'common sense', to complicate extensive universal truths with intensive, localised cultural materials. As Andrea

²⁹⁹ Kevin Newmark, 'L'absolu litteraire: Friedrich Schlegel and the myth of irony', in *MLN*, Dec 1992 v107, n5. Newmark is responding to the historicism of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe who in *La Fiction du Politique* argues that the Nazi project of a nationalist aestheticism can be derived from Friedrich Schlegel's call for a 'new religion' that would unite thought with a concrete imagery and cultural poetics. Newmark's excellent article casts doubts on the historicist narrative that sees the foundation of national mythologies in the Romantic project.

³⁰⁰ *Dialogue on Poetry*, 86.

Nightingale argues, Plato is well aware of a genre's context of performance and the ways in which it is embedded in the social and political institutions of Athenian democracy.³⁰¹

Plato knows the democratic force of rhetorical genres (Gorgias 'amazed' his audience) and their thriving personae, so, as Nightingale suggests, in order to create the specialized discipline of philosophy, Plato had to distinguish his own brand of idealism 'from all other discursive practices that laid claim to wisdom'. Hence a diacritical medium, dialogue, assessing typological or characterological differences, was needed whereby Plato set out to define and defend a new and peculiar mode of living and thinking.³⁰² In his construction of a multi-accented persona, Socrates, who offers an exacting and specialised mode of philosophical thought, Plato was playing an intricate game of fort ... da with a robust and generalist concept of wisdom, the broad cultivation of the *sophoi*. Plato both draws on and attempts to exceed that eclectic form of wisdom practised by Presocratic intellectuals, poets, lawgivers, and other men of skill and wisdom who enhanced the thinking of the age.³⁰³

For the Jena Romantics, Plato's critical condition is rhetoric's imaginary, where a rhetorical pedagogy, a broad cultural repository, interferes with more singular aims; where conceptual language finds itself alluding recursively to a phenomenally vivid typology of philosophical mannerisms and performative gestures; where linear argumentation conflicts with allusive and digressive rhetorical modes; and where the affectless universal idea and the relational tonalities of scenography, *mise en scène*, are in perpetual tension.

Plato's conversational dramas are supreme works of art in the Romantic sense because, perhaps unwittingly, they capture a cultural moment in all its situational complexity, its running themes and ongoing debates. Plato's novelistic awareness of plural voices and diverse genealogies offers another window into a classical representational matrix that is a realm apart from mere polemic, persiflage, didactic stricture, and moralisation. Constrained and liberated by his florid rhetorical culture of display, Plato offers a detailed materialist rhetoric, a 'mode of representation conforming to the actual

³⁰¹ See Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue. Plato and the Construct of Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 2000, 9.

³⁰² Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue*, 10-11.

³⁰³ Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue*, 10-11.

object', where the 'moment described can emerge alive from a story', where an almost 'mathematical exactness of topical detail is necessary, communicating the "how" of it to the reader, painting "word-pictures"' (AF 177). Plato, as we shall see, exhibits for the Jena Romantics the fruitful division of the rhetor between a natural outpouring of eloquence, a mimetic *claritas* of heightened perceptions, a 'naïve' isonomic sympathy with the plurality and contingencies of one's environment, and a sophisticated narratological mode, a *savoir-faire*, a cunning, strategic interest in artifice, embellishment, *ornatus*:

It is the notorious delights of speech-making that I am enumerating ... that are not so obvious ... known only to the orator himself. If he comes out with an elaborate oration which has been carefully rehearsed, his feeling of satisfaction, like the discourse itself, has about it something solid and abiding.... But quite the most exquisite delight comes from speaking extempore, in bold fashion and even with a touch of daring; for the domain of the intellect is like a piece of ground under tillage – though you find pleasure in (cultivation), yet the growth that comes by nature is more pleasing still (Tacitus, *Dialogus*, 6:6, 245).³⁰⁴

Plato, whose sensibility is qualified by the eclecticism of the social, becomes for the Frühromantiks a *medium* of embedded generic types:

In Plato we find unmixed all the pure types of Greek prose in their classic individuality, and often incongruously juxtaposed: the logical, the physical, the mimical, the panegyric, and the mythical. The mimical style is the foundation and general component of all the rest (AF 165).

Mimesis is a foundational disposition because it is a complex structure of feeling, it does not know itself or what it wants; it is a contradictory combination of enthusiasm and irony typical of Witz. Mimesis is an obligation to emulate and respectfully copy that exists in tension with the creative power of adaptation. Mimesis desires fidelity and

³⁰⁴ For an excellent discussion of the mixed senses of the rhetorical figure of *ornatus* in Cicero and Quintilian, see Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 1996, 49-50. Skinner argues that as one of the classical rhetorical *figurae* or 'shapes' of speech, the orator's capacity for *ornatus* suggests not only a power of ornament, the copious discursive means of an extemporising speaker, but preparedness for battle, someone possessing the accoutrements of war. From the moment Plato must assume a rhetorical posture, he will not know himself, he has begun a war with the Sophists, but not with weapons of his own choosing, a conventional disciplinary idiom, a language of pure concepts. Cf. Derrida, in 'Plato's Pharmacy', 142-3, speaking of Plato: 'He seems to want to substitute *logos* for myth, discourse for theatre, demonstration for illustration. And yet, within his very explanations, another scene slowly comes to light ... just as tense, just as violent as the other, composing ... an artful, living organization of figures, displacements, repetitions'.

documentary transcription only to generate a new form or a display of innovative skill and initiative. Mimesis is the urbane mood, the robust Witz that looks, simultaneously, towards the sublime, and recursively, to a collective source of inspiration in popular conventions. Mimesis is the desire to surpass and exceed that must nevertheless rely on its opponent and what has come before it to do just that. Mimesis is the aspirational *logos* that folds back into the imbricated tissue of a performative *ethos*, it is the idea returning to its personality and chronotope. Mimesis expels by introjecting, competes by emulating.³⁰⁵

Here we draw on Derrida's 'Plato's Pharmacy' essay discussing classical rhetoric as philosophy's *pharmakon*, its poison and cure, Derrida suggesting that philosophy, indebted to a reserve of representations that can never exclude rhetorical persuasion and formal mimicry, is condemned never to succeed in its two-millennia-old desire to pass from scenography to ideational discourse, *mythos* to *logos*. In Plato, the 'meshing of the mythological and the philosophical points to some deeply buried necessity'.³⁰⁶ In these terms Plato is a secret Spinozist – affect must enhance reason, thought's freedom and invention rely upon a sociality and a proximity of bodies and ideas that its universalism overtly rejects. Plato writes, and writing is constrained by the forms and contingent representations of an historical situation. As Derrida argues, its truth cannot be discovered 'in ourselves, by ourselves'. Writing is not the object of a science but of a history that is recited, its forms re-presented, it is 'a fable that is repeated'. Because of the constraining equivocality of its mythic forms, writing, as representation, sounds an estrangement from any single origin.³⁰⁷

The rhetor is the external become internal, the uncertain interaction of intellect, affect, imagination in a diacritical time and space. Derrida will follow Benjamin in opposing an authoritative 'History' of truth that has been produced in its entirety in the *philosophical* difference between *mythos* and *logos*. This progressivist historicism can no

³⁰⁵ For an insightful probing of the problem of mimesis in the history of philosophy, with particular attention to Plato, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography, Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, trans. Christopher Fynsk, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1998, 'Typography', 124. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that mimesis has 'always been an economic problem', tending towards a 'generalised depropriation, the risk of a polytechnics or of an uncontrollable polyvalence, the exacerbation of desire, the appetite for possession, the triggering of rivalry and hatred'.

³⁰⁶ 'Plato's Pharmacy', 86.

³⁰⁷ 'Plato's Pharmacy', 74.

longer be sustained if Plato is to be read in terms of his relation to the alterity of a rhetorical imaginary, its excess.³⁰⁸

For Schlegel, rhetoric is a mixed sensibility, a soil organic *and* cultivated. The mimetic tendency of rhetoric suggests not only naturalism but craftsmanship, artifice: ‘whoever has imagination, or pathos, or a gift for mimicry ought to be able to learn poetry like any other mechanical art’ (AF 250) Plato’s texts evoke a *paideia* of discourse practices, exercises in genre and theme redolent of the Sophists’ cultivation of discourse’s relationship to its situation. From the historicity of a relational Plato, immersed in a rhetorical culture, the Jena Romantics can theorise another philosophy, inherently recursive and thematically sophisticated, attentive to its inventive commonplaces:

... the representation of philosophy consists purely of themes – of initial propositions – principles.... The analytical exposition of the theme is only for those who are sluggish or unpractised... Attentiveness is a centripetal force (LF 1, 3).

If an acknowledgement of discursive situation and theme is a hallmark of classical philosophy as the Frühromantiks conceive of it, one can thank the contagious power of the Sophists, as disease and cure, magic, *pharmakon*, excess:

The mistakes of the Greek sophists were errors more of excess than omission. Even the confidence and arrogance with which they presumed and pretended to know everything has something quite philosophical about it: not intentionally but instinctively. For surely the philosopher has only the choice of knowing everything or nothing ... no philosophy worthy of the name tries to teach only some particular thing or mélange of things (AF 164).

In countering local Sophistries, a critical philosophy, like Plato, must acknowledge not only their speculative ambitions but also the pragmatic nodes of discourse they established, their polymathy, urbanity, and their intensive pedagogical emphasis on intellectual labour as requiring micrological and lapidary qualities:

Until philosophers become grammarians, or grammarians philosophers, grammar will not be what it was among the ancients: a pragmatic science and a part of logic (AF 92)

³⁰⁸ ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, 86. Also: ‘The cure by *logos*, exorcism and catharsis, will thus eliminate the excess. But this elimination, being therapeutic in nature, must call upon the very thing it is expelling, the very surplus it is *putting out*’ (128).

Only a man who knows or possesses a subject can make use of the philosophy of that subject (AF 252).

The Jena Romantics loved Socrates, a figure of Witz, for he embodies a rhetoric in conversation with its bombastic proclivities. Socrates will use all the resources of a materialist rhetoric to argue with the pomposity, hyperbolisms, selfish individualism and anti-philosophical pragmatism of which Sophistry and rhetoric is capable: ‘Whoever doesn’t pursue philosophy for its own sake, but uses it as a means to an end, is a Sophist’ (AF 96). Schlegel also favourably contrasts the ‘sublime urbanity’ of the Socratic muse to the ‘sophistic abuse of philosophy’ and the ‘declamatory stylistic exercise’ (AF 137).

The Frühromantiks savour the earthy, pragmatic Socrates of Plato’s early dialogues, seeing them as a response to the sophisticated exegetical interests of the Sophists. Here Socrates is the lover of verbal jousts, the grammatologist and philologist of the *Protagoras* who relishes the semantic minutiae and aporias of poetic criticism. Here Socrates enacts the enthusiastic critical tendencies of his age, a mode in need of renewal: ‘the doctrine of the spirit and the letter is so interesting because it puts philosophy in touch with philology’ (AF 93). For the sake of a future philosophy, the Frühromantiks rejoice in the *overlapping* of persona and disposition in Socrates, the sublime philosopher as low comedy *buffo* intimated in the lively Aristophanic comedy, *The Clouds*, which satirically confuses Socrates the sage with his Sophistic rivals. The philosopher must be legend and myth, confused, qualified, genealogically hybrid, folkloric. Both effect and critic of the Sophistic legacy, the agonistic Socrates directs philosophy towards a deepening of its scenography, a review of its creative instincts, its relational capacities, its needful recovery of a rhetorical surplus, potentiality.

For the Jena Romantics, the most significant thinkers of the classical world arouse a field of associations and diverse commentaries that signifies their functioning within a diverse milieu. The classical milieu is an outstanding model of Eclecticism, positioning the philosopher within a rich scenography of possible critical styles and individually performed characteristics.

For Jena Romanticism, an ecumenical assessment of the present possibilities and genealogical sinews of classical critical inclinations, including those of the Cynics, takes priority over a top-down or teleological intellectual history:

If the essence of Cynicism consists of preferring nature to art, virtue to beauty and knowledge ... focussing entirely on the spirit; of absolutely despising every economic standard and political pomp, and maintaining the rights of an independent will: then Christianity is really nothing but universal cynicism (AF 16)

In such writing one glimpses the defiant, ramshackle Socrates of the *Apology* theatrically repudiating politics and officialdom, refusing to save himself if it means acceding to the law, reprising that overt, performatively rich hostility to legal norms so ‘characteristic’ of the Cynics. As Luis Navia suggests, the Cynics developed a philosophical style in which actions and succinct declarations were the chief medium of the philosophical message they sought to communicate. Communicate the Cynic did, teaching by the example of his life and his immediate verbal and behavioural reactions to specific situations. The rhetorical vividness of Cynical exhibitionism left a rich formal legacy of anecdotal representations, ‘a graphic record of what Diogenes, Crates, and other Cynics did and said’.³⁰⁹ Rhetoric impresses itself on history from below, not as pomp, ideology, officialese, but as an astonishing individual act, or the higher sympathy, the transcendence, of a committed critical style.³¹⁰

For the nostalgic classicist turned progressive political theorist Friedrich Schlegel, the philosophy emanating from a rhetorical imaginary elucidates holistic scenographies and social issues rather than isolated belief systems.³¹¹ For the Jena Romantics, the rhetorically acculturated intellectual can only communicate by oscillating between the extremes of vivacious performance, pithy tendentiousness, and profound situational engagement, the imbrication of their particular sentiment within a unity of representations: ‘one should really be able to communicate (something) and share it with somebody, not simply express oneself’ (CF 98).

³⁰⁹ Luis E. Navia, *Classical Cynicism: A Critical Study*, Greenwood Press, Westport CT, USA, 1996, 9.

³¹⁰ Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1987, ‘The Problem of Speech Genres’, 63: ‘any style is inseparably related to the utterance and to typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres. Any utterance ... in any sphere of communication ... is individual and therefore can reflect the individuality of the speaker ... it possesses individual style ... The least favourable conditions for reflecting individuality in language obtain in speech genres that require a standard form, for example, many kinds of business documents, military commands, verbal signals in industry, and so on’.

³¹¹ Cf. Bakhtin, ‘The Problem of Speech Genres’, 64: ‘Style enters as one element into the generic unity of the utterance’.

Navia argues that the classical Cynic was versatile, on the one hand a raging misanthrope with a deeply held antipathy to social norms, on the other a consummate conversational performer and discursive bricoleur, a ‘busybody’ forever engaging in conversation in the marketplace, arguing, asking embarrassing questions, acting out a critical social and sociable function, that of the provocateur and pest.³¹² Rhetorical philosophers enact their *logos*, their critique, in a *paideia* of civil loci; their quarrelsome and misanthropic discourses act to protect an argumentative public sphere, enhancing those civil places conducive to robust public exchanges.

As the *Phaedrus* reminds us, Socrates’ chosen element for the exposition of his philosophy is not the *otium* of a rural retreat but the *negotium* of the marketplace, the sensuousness of the gymnasium, the density of urban spaces. In The Concept of Irony, Kierkegaard suggests that Socrates is a paradoxical persona, a perpetual disharmony of inner and outer, an ideal and a caricature, man and god, sage and figure of fun.³¹³ These paradoxes inhabit the classical philosopher as a socially involved rhetor, Kierkegaard arguing that ‘situation was immensely important to Socrates’. Socrates is both a vital and secretive presence in, while mystically floating over, the marvellous, multicoloured variety of an exuberant Athenian democracy, and indicating a ‘duplexity of existence’.³¹⁴

In the early Platonic dialogues, suggests Kierkegaard, Socrates is very much part of an emerging mood of inquiry, an epistemological crisis, an enthusiastic participant in the salutary rivalry and comparative assessment of different philosophical modes of life and thought.³¹⁵ Socrates’ fixed point is not a ‘true centre’ but a unity of potential forms, an *ubique et nusquam*, an everywhere and nowhere, a fullness that is not a positivity, a sociality without identity.³¹⁶ Sophisticated and urbane, Socrates is also electrified by the stimuli of collective existence, sensing the presence of ideas in everything, his

³¹² Navia, *Classical Cynicism*, 24.

³¹³ Kierkegaard, Søren, The Concept of Irony. With continual reference to Socrates, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1989, 12, 13.

³¹⁴ Kierkegaard, 16.

³¹⁵ Kierkegaard, 16.

³¹⁶ Kierkegaard, 51-2: ‘The fullness in (Socrates) ... is neither the fullness in immediacy as such nor the fullness acquired through reflection’, it is a ‘vitality which continually feeds (a) sickness ... it does not unfurl into the fullness of beauty’.

philosophical metaphors routinely dwelling on the carnivalesque lower stratum of life: food, drink, shoemakers, tanners, shepherds, pack asses.³¹⁷

Socrates is the rhetorical philosopher as sustained artifice and naïve delight, a philosopher for the ages, an average and unremarkable man, venerable and young at heart: ‘the more ignorant one is by nature, the more capacity for knowledge. Each new insight makes a much deeper, livelier impression ... (hence) the spirit of invention of young minds’ (MO 89).

Derrida draws attention to Socrates' equivocal social and mythic functions in ancient Greece, his *pharmakological* structure (poison and remedy) of which Plato's dialogues are in some ways the complex effect. The Socratic *pharmakon* petrifies and vivifies, anaesthetises and sensitises, appeases and anguishes. Socrates is a benumbing ‘stingray’ but also an ‘animal that needles’, temporarily embodying the role of Cynical provocateur, at other times, a Sophistic magician.³¹⁸ He is like Diotima's textured portrait of *Eros* in *The Symposium*, a fearsome sorcerer and magician, a sophist, a being, a medium, ‘that no “logic” can confine within a noncontradictory definition’.³¹⁹ For Schlegel, the infinitely evasive Socratic persona exhibits a representational unity of styles. Socrates reveals traits that emanate from the Sophistic age and its effort to explore and maximise perspective and opinion, assuming that a diversity of knowledges enhances and is enhanced by sociabilities, intricate relationships.

Schlegel's Socratic irony is the problematic of thought as communication, its absolute indifference/commitment, its surpassing individuality and sympathetic sociability:

Socratic irony is the only involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation. It is equally impossible to feign or divulge it.... In this sort of irony everything should be playful and serious, guilelessly open and deeply hidden. It originates in the union of *savoir vivre* and scientific spirit, in the conjunction of a perfectly instinctive and a perfectly conscious philosophy. It contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between ... the impossibility and necessity of complete communication (CF 42).

³¹⁷ Kierkegaard, 17

³¹⁸ ‘Plato's Pharmacy’, 119, n.52.

³¹⁹ ‘Plato's Pharmacy’, 117.

For the Jena Romantics, irony is not an intentional mode of representation, evasive, isolated, and elitist; rather it is a critical condition, a duplex existence. Romantic irony, on the Socratic model, is an *expression*, in Spinoza's sense of the term, of the relative unity of a rhetorical imaginary, which requires the interaction of intellect and imagination, an ethic of generosity to phenomena and a critical pathos of distance. Irony maximises the attributes of thought, its possible moods and sensibilities, cathecting representation's possible qualifications and contingent modes to the infinite and unconditioned.³²⁰

For the Jena Romantics, it is representation's *kairos*, its sprightly moment of communicative energy and intuitive immediacy, its fungible relations, that make it expressive and exceeding: 'As a temporary condition skepticism is logical insurrection; as a system it is anarchy' (AF 97).³²¹

Evanescent moods and the forcefulness of a style, a nuance, a *jeu d'esprit* – for the Jena Romantics these often invisible critical energies are the *sine qua non* of a philosophy that sublimates negativity and finitude, renewing itself as embedded practice, a heightened conventionalism subversive of axiomatics and *a priorisms*:

Why is an entry for the ridiculous always missing in those fashionable catalogues of all possible principles of morality? Perhaps because this principle is generally valid only in practice? (AF 320)

Socrates knows many temporary qualifications; he plays the roles of Cynic, Skeptic, and Sophist in order to fight reification. He is the ridiculous satyr and *buffo*, arguing that philosophy is not the hierarchical subordination of form to determined content, but the excess of paradox, the deformity of philosophical beauty, the low comedy of the sublime.³²²

³²⁰ Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics in On the Improvement of the Understanding, The Ethics, Correspondence*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, Dover Publications New York, NY, 1955, Prop. XXIV, 260: *The more we understand particular things, the more do we understand God.*

³²¹ Pierre Macherey, indebted to a philosopheme of Spinoza elaborated by Deleuze, argues for the exceeding dynamic of expression: 'The logic of expression is basically a logic of power, one might even say a logic of life or a logic of movement, essentially different from the traditional logics of representation that, in their quest for static identity, are constantly threatened by negativity, and therefore dependent on a transcendent principle'. See Pierre Macherey, 'The Encounter with Spinoza', in Paul Patton, ed., *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, 146-7.

³²² See Nightingale, 190: 'By portraying (the rhetoricians) as lovers, as flatterers, as cooks, Plato.... uses a number of recognizable comic *topoi* to bolster his own critique of Athens. Clearly, Plato is not correcting or

For the Frühromantiks, theory, an intuited unity of idioms and critical powers, is a structuration of feeling in relation to the infinite. Socrates in *The Symposium* responds to Aristophanes' witty, yet pathos-imbued, fantasy of hermaphroditic re-unification with his own call, at the close of an exhausting festival of rhetorical explorations of *Eros*, for a uniting of the comic and the tragic. For the Frühromantik philosophy of history, the complex of forces within the Sophistic age suggests that theory can only be a tendency, a *paideia* of impulses and forces, rather than a system or faculty: 'an intellectual intuition is the categorical imperative of any theory' (AF 76).

Socrates' sense of communicative incompleteness, and the aporias of epistemological inquiry in Plato's early dialogues, recall the vital interplay of philosophical inclinations contributing to the discursive health of the Hellenistic world: the strong Skeptical strain in ancient Greek philosophy dating from the aphorisms and riddles of Heraclitus, the quasi-satirical paradoxes of Zeno, the worldly fullness of the Sophists, the obscene performances of the Cynics. Modern philosophy will need to recover the sense of philosophy as a shading of possible qualifications, a variety of moods, all of which restrain a shallow universalism:

I'm disappointed in not finding in Kant's family tree of basic concepts the category 'almost'.... in the mind of natural skeptics it colours all other concepts and intuitions (CF 80)

The sociable, role-playing tendency of classical thought always found principles of difference, and multiple inflections, within itself. This is why a rhetorical ethos for the Frühromantiks is to be *kairological*, a differentiated interiority through time, always on the verge of becoming its opposite, and such, ironically, is a deliberative ideal: 'Most thoughts are only the profiles of thoughts. They have to be turned around and synthesised with their antipodes' (AF 39). Never itself, never purely content, allowing itself to become a function of narrative, situation, theme, topic, classical discourse develops into a self-parodying principle: 'The founders of the art of tragedy found their material and their prototypes in the epic. Just as the epic developed parody within itself, so did the masters who invented

parodying comedy but rather harnessing its "voice of criticism". For the importance of the scenography of Roman Old Comedy to the rhetorical delineation of character in Cicero's speeches, such as portraying the accused as a foolish old man or *senex*, or the female accused as a lying strumpet, see Joseph J. Hughes, '*Inter tribunal et scaenam*: Comedy and Rhetoric in Rome', in William J. Dominik, ed., Roman Eloquence: Rhetoric in Society and Literature, Routledge, New York, 1997. 183-97.

tragedy delight in the invention of satirical plays.’³²³ Rhetoric, as Heraclitus demonstrated, must turn the world upside down to recover sense and meaning.

Communication as a Medium

Contrary to conventional perceptions of the rhetor as a silky, manipulative orator with a preconceived agenda, the Jena Romantic philosophy of history would recover the potential of a material or higher rhetoric which demands thought’s dynamic expressiveness, its varied powers of communication. Schlegel conceives of the rhetorical intellectual as fragmented, articulated, dialogised, a function of the necessity and impossibility of communication, the paralogic of the communicative imperative:

If in communicating a thought, one fluctuates between absolute comprehension and absolute incomprehension, then this process might already be termed a philosophical friendship. For it’s no different with ourselves. Is the life of a thinking human being anything else than a continuous inner symphilosophy? (Blütenstaub, 2).³²⁴

The rhetorical intellectual is a distributive praxis rather than an imperious ego, a plurality of performances, a system of talents, an assemblage of *ethoi*. Like Socrates and other conceptual personae, the Frühromantik intellectual would like to be an immanent medium of historical forces, a node of collective desires, a stimulus of diverse interactions and collaborations:

Real sympathy concerns itself with furthering the freedom of others, not with the satisfaction of animal pleasures (AF 86).

No occupation is so human as one that simply supplements, joins, fosters (I 53).

The critical ego is communicated, given political and discursive substance, through a history that is dynamic and exceeding, in the service of no single world view or ideology:

The thinking of a religious person is etymological; it traces all concepts back to the original intuition, to whatever is characteristic (I 78).

³²³ *Dialogue on Poetry*, 62.

³²⁴ This is the second of four fragments by Friedrich Schlegel included in Novalis’s collection of fragments, *Blütenstaub* (Pollen), published by the Schlegel brothers in the *Athenaeum*, 1798.

philosophy – which always must organize and disorganize itself anew – into its living, fundamental forces, and trace these back to their origins (AF 304).

The rhetoricised philosopher incorporates history as instinct, potential, a plurality of forms of life. From the history of discourses and ideas it would derive a joyous ethic of relationship and cosmopolitanism rather than an emerging national tradition or superior world view. As we've glimpsed, this may involve a counter-traditional momentum, a reversal of what is taken to be social and ethical progress, such as the revival of a Paganism and animism as the possibilities of a tolerant natural and popular religion in a gloomy monotheistic age:

Nothing is more indispensable for true religious feeling than an intermediary – which connects us to the godhead.... The more independent the human being becomes, the more the quantity of the intermediary is diminished, the more the quality is refined – and his relations to it become more diverse and more cultivated – fetishes – stars – animals – heroes – idols – gods – *one* God-man.

One soon sees how relative these choices are and one is driven ... to the idea – that the essence of religion does not in fact depend on the nature of the mediator, but consists purely in the way he is regarded, in the relations that exist with him (MO 73).

The evaluative criteria of a disorganized and renewed philosophy is a question of its vital forces and the expressive power of its attributes, its potential for a higher sociability: 'Philosophers who aren't opposed to each other are usually joined only by sympathy, not by symphilosophy' (AF 112). Symphilosophy is philosophy's plane of immanent self-evaluation, its scenography, in which the tragedy, comedy, and nightmare of history, its diverse characteristics and their present possibilities, can be assessed against the grain of supremacist ideologies and historically derived partisanship:

Catholicism is naive Christianity, Protestantism sentimental Christianity.

The latter, besides the merit of its polemical revolutionary services, has ... given birth to philology, one of the essentials for a universal and progressive religion. Only Protestantism is perhaps still somewhat lacking in urbanity (AF 231).

Opposed to Symphilosophy are relationships between disciplinary practitioners that are born of tacit class affiliations, fidelity to a canon of texts, or a certain 'thin' or triumphalist universalism, an immoderate agreement about the rational power to judge and proclaim. One can admit a certain pragmatic association with other intellectuals if one, like a

philosophe, is engaged in considering ‘what man is’, measuring humanity, devising formulae, quanta, sharing a vocabulary of abstract generalities, engaging in a contract to denude the world of its complex forces for the sake of a predicative logic. Such is the sympathy of people who share a common institutional authority and work within confined disciplinary parameters.

In contrast, the communicated ego of the copiously cultivated, polytheistically disposed thinker emanates from a potentiated antiquity:

Universality is the successive satiation of all forms and substances. Universality can attain harmony only through the conjunction of poetry and philosophy.... the Universal Spirit ... is a genuine polytheist and bears within himself all Olympus (AF 451).

In Symphilosophy, polytheism’s mixed chronotopes and plural genealogies reassert themselves in critical representation. The profundity of Paganism’s sensuous naïveté, which translates thought back into its cultural materials, becomes an exigency of the coming philosophy:

... we wouldn’t think much of an uncritical transcendental philosophy that doesn’t represent the producer along with the product and contain at the same time within the system of transcendental thoughts a description of transcendental thinking (AF 238).

For Frühromanticism, the classical text, deeply affected by a rhetorical milieu and pluralising polytheistic tendencies, is never a singular work or a function of intention. The classical text cannot be crudely historicised; it is a palimpsest and the possibility of a project. As Walter Benjamin desired, the critic would no longer be the epiphenomenon of Representation and History, but create arts of self out of a fragmented sense of tradition, a potentiated classicism.

The *Athenaeum* will devote considerable attention to the critical import of a fragmentation of the classical Greek and Roman worlds:

Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as soon as they are written (AF 24)

... feeling for fragments and projects is the transcendental element of the historical spirit (AF 22).

In order to imbue the public sphere with an enabling historicity, the Frühromantiks acknowledge the classical past as individual, adverting to the alterity of its sensibility. For the individual rhetorical flourishes of classical texts engender classicism's propaedeutic power, its creative canonicity: 'a real feeling for the Romans is much rarer than for the Greeks.... For one can have a feeling for nations too, for historical as well as moral individuals, and not simply for practical genres, arts, and sciences' (CF 46).

By capturing the rhetorically characteristic dimension of classical authors, the past is realised as a discursive resource, a practical possibility, and a vital non-normative ethic for future discourse. As individuated, asystematic, and prone to extension and immoderation, classical works expand the boundaries of sense and reference.

The historical critic can argue, on the basis of the classical 'niveau', for a genealogical recognition of what is now slighted or ignored according to narratives of aesthetic progress: 'Ludovico ... began to talk of (an historically derived) *system of false poetry* that he wanted to present.... (which) he thought as peculiar and instructive as it was amusing and grotesque'.³²⁵ The romantic critic seeks in classical forms certain subaltern historical tendencies that are capable of revitalisation:

... the historian is a prophet facing backwards (AF 80).

Derrida will return to this subaltern historiography, after the Jena circle, after Benjamin, reiterating that '*logos* remains potency, potentiality, and is not yet the transparent language of knowledge'.³²⁶

Ancient thought is a work in progress, without artificial disciplinary divisions, subtended by a *paideia* of material themes:

... the great practical abstraction is what makes the ancients – among whom this was an instinct – actually ancients (AF 121).

Ancient works can be decomposed into tendencies, forces, and mannerisms that inform and transcend the single work. Benjamin in 'The Concept of Criticism' suggests that the

³²⁵ *Dialogue on Poetry*, 59.

³²⁶ 'Plato's Pharmacy', 115. Cf. Benjamin's famous image evoking the angel of history whose 'face is turned towards the past' in 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, 1969, 257-8.

Frühromantiks conceived of classical art not as ideal, but as ruin, limitation, evanescence, a ‘fleeting figure’ that can only be made ‘eternal’ through criticism, refracted and redeployed.³²⁷ History for the Jena Romantics is no longer to be a given, for ‘the subject of history is the realization of all of it that is practically necessary’ (AF 90), an *ethos*, a subtle opportunism.

One will, then, need to think of romanticism, this ‘progressive, universal poetry’, as a union of an open historical sense and interested sentiment, both enchanted mimesis and acute reflexivity:

Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. It ... should mix and fuse poetry and prose ... poeticise wit and fill and saturate the forms of art with every kind of good, solid matter for instruction, and animate them with the pulsations of humour.... It can so lose itself in what it describes that one might believe it exists only to characterize poetical individuals of all sorts; and yet there is ... no form so fit for expressing the entire spirit of an author.... *it opens up an infinitely increasing classicism....* Romantic poetry is ... what ... sociability, friendship and love are in life.... The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming (AF 116, my italics)

Romanticism, for Schlegel and Novalis, is not simply a *phenomenology* of becoming, it is suspicious of lyrical enthusiasm and the vagueness of poetic transcendentalism, particularly the restlessness of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, its immature embrace of the unconditional and measureless, its indecorous ideology of progress through poetic expressivism. Benjamin suggests that for the Frühromantiks it is never a question of progress into a void, a ‘vague advance in writing ever better-poetry’, but of a ‘continually more comprehensive unfolding and enhancement of poetic forms’. The futurity of Romanticism is not, as Benjamin points out, what is understood by the modern term ‘progress’, it is an ‘infinite process of fulfilment’ through the mediation of history.³²⁸

Rhetoric, as an historically imbued ethic of representation, combines ‘absolute tolerance with absolute rigor’ (CF 123). Rhetoric is not a function of a paternal History or identity, like Aristotle it loses itself in its heterogeneous grasp of individuated cultural materials, topics, genres, tropes, it is history’s bricolage and *flanerie*. Rhetoric realises the

³²⁷ Benjamin, ‘The Concept of Criticism’, 182.

³²⁸ ‘Concept of Criticism’, 168.

potential of circumstance, it suggests a multifarious and conflicted experience of institutions and authorities, it discerns the lacunae in official versions of history, renewing experience as an immanent power. Rhetoric a radiant personality, a unity of forces, a transcendental critical power, the law of plurality, the sense within chaos:

From the study of transcendental poetry a tropology can be anticipated - which comprehends the laws of the *symbolic construction* of the transcendental world (LF I, 42).

Rhetoric engages our imagination and active desires but also offers 'solid materials' for instruction and attention, provoking a continual movement between territorialisation and deterritorialisation:

... a large class of anecdotes are those which show a human trait in a strange, striking way.... we ... have two main classes, descriptive and poetic anecdotes. The former employ our cognitive capacity, the latter our capacity for desire' (LF II, 12).

The rhetoricised classical text cultivates both cognitive and imaginative faculties, potentiates both creative and prudent sensibilities, it realises the historico-philosophical disposition of Frühromanticism.

Rhetorical Reading

When the Frühromantiks conceive of the 'niveau' (CF 36) of classical texts, they think not of unified and bounded works but rhetorically fragmented discourses that demand imaginative and flexible reading practices. Romanticism's 'productive' concept of reading, derived from an individuated conception of classical discourse, will discern and articulate the 'interested', immoderately sentimental, the sub-generic elements of a text. Romanticism reads classicism as a self-affection, not orthodoxy: 'to live classically and to realize antiquity practically within oneself is the summit and goal of philology. Is this possible without any kind of cynicism?' (AF 147) To read classicism romantically, philologically, is to interrupt its seeming arguments, to become attuned to the pictorialism of tropes, the situated digressions of *figurae*, the thematic resonances and representational potential of a characterisation or mannerism. A Romantic rhetorical reading practice is materialist, philological, alternatively passive and active, alert to the grainy texture of the

moment and the broader historical and hermeneutic questions of discursive tendency and subtending stylistic unity:

... compelling brevity and digressive fullness, reproducing even the inexplicable features of the individual it delineates: these are the essential characteristics of the historical style. The historical style is distinguished by... the selection of the most significant, weighty, and precious words; by a nobly outlined... articulated periodic structure like that of Thucydides... superb joviality of tone and colour after the manner of Caesar; but particularly by that innate and exalted cultivation of Tacitus, which poetizes, civilizes, and philosophizes the dry facts of pure empiricism' (AF 217).

A rhetorical reading discerns the mien and generalist cultivation of the classical text, whether it be the political theory and public sphere scenography of Thucydides, the robust anecdotes of a Caesar or the Witz, the interpenetration of genre in Tacitus, a formally nuanced sententiousness that is critically superior to modern pretences towards objectivity:

... to characterize nations and ages, to delineate the noble nobly, is the real talent of the poetical Tacitus. In historical portraits, the critical Suetonius is a greater master (AF 166).

The classical text is a hybrid, tensile, an indeterminate oscillation of form and content, with a strong mimetic relationship to the methodologies and perspectives circulating in its milieu. Thucydides portrayed the catastrophes of the Peloponnesian war but he also communicated a Sophistic methodological interest in representing set piece dialogues on political and moral topics, his texts dilated, acculturated by this rhetorical/political imperative. Tacitus documented the Julio-Claudian emperors, but he also asserted republican dignity in an autocratic age, his language pithy, incisive, rhetorically resourceful, and reliant on the language of satire. Hence the classical text is a fractured poetics, rich in a sub-generic tropes, mythemes, and methodological suggestions, and supra-generic, related to the vibrancy and curiosity of the age. The classical texts, as individuation and unity, open the question of reading as theory and its resistance.

The classical text is enjoined to communicate to a broad audience rather than a specialised field, in appealing to a broad imaginary it exceeds itself to produce 'a work on the art of living' (AF 225), an *ethos* and *paideia*. The classical text suggests comparative critical methods, cross-generic investigations, an economy of urbane tendencies, creative

emulations, cross-fertilisations, depropriating the reified conception of the individual expression or genius:

Just as the novel colours all of modern poetry, so satire colours and, as it were, sets the tone for all Roman poetry, yes, even the whole of Roman literature. This poetry...remained throughout all its changes a classic universal poetry, a social poetry emanating from, and created for, the center of the cultivated world. In order to have a feeling for what is most urbane, original, and beautiful in the prose of a Cicero, Caesar, or Suetonius, one has to have loved and understood Horatian satires for a long time. They are the eternal wellsprings of urbanity. (AF 146)

Roman urbanity and satire are the thought-feelings of the age, encompassing and transcending individual volition, political sectarianism, and doctrinaire ethical positions. The rhetorical *sensus communis* is irreducible to the work, the individual idea or belief:

The fondness of ... Roman poets for difficult and unpoetical themes is really a result of their grand conception that all things are subject matter for poetry, though this was ... *by no means a conscious artistic intention, but an historical tendency of their works*.... Behind the confusion of all the artistic genres ... there lies the demand that there should only be One poetry and one Philosophy (AF 239, my italics).

Rhetoric, of a higher kind, is the genius of an age, a renewable possibility of acculturation that would enable singularities to communicate, Epicurus to respect Seneca:

... the individual great figures are less isolated among the Greeks and Romans. They had fewer geniuses but more brilliance.... All of antiquity is a genius, the only genius that could without exaggeration be called absolutely great, unique, and unattainable (AF 248),

Even the Stoics considered urbanity a virtue (CF 42).

Rhetoric's teasing habitus of possible activities and positionings, its transformative insertion of intellectuals, legal advocates, and politicians into a performative chronotope, a labile public dialogue, a *paideia* of situations, suggests the potential of the era for reinvention, self-artistry, making anew. For instance there is Cicero, that 'virtuoso of urbanity who wanted to be an orator, and, yes, even a philosopher, and who could have been a brilliant ... man of letters, and polyhistorian of old Roman virtue and old Roman festivity' (AF 152).

Rhetoric is not only what was, but could have been, and may come again, suggesting energies and nuances that fall through the net of critical and aesthetic representation. In the next chapter, I discuss how the Frühromantik philosophy of history enabled an aesthetics that was not a poetics, a concept of literary history as a texture of tendencies, sub and super generic. Returning to the oft debated issue of whether philosophy and literature can be demarcated, given their common modes of representation, I argue from a Jena Romantic perspective, that the question is not merely epistemological but historical and relational, that a future criticism awaits literature and aesthetics as resonating materialist rhetorics, relational forms.

Chapter Eight: Jena Romanticism: Aesthetics, Philosophy, Politics

The *Athenaeum*'s aesthetics offer intriguing possibilities for a critical philosophy and cosmopolitan politics. The *Athenaeum*'s desideratum is for a Romantic tendency in literature and art, which in the late eighteenth century it discovers in the novel, as derived from the mixed form of the *Roman*. The Romantic novel is a rhetorically varied aesthetic form, a colouration and tonality, a representational energy, rather than an identifiable genre or neo-classical rule. Friedrich Schlegel, in his *Dialogue on Poetry*, published in the 1800 volume of the *Athenaeum*, theorises the novel as renewing the hybrid forms and eclectic tastes of earlier milieux, indexing florid public cultures such as the Elizabethan era of Shakespeare.

The novelistic work, according to the *Dialogue on Poetry*, is the function of a communicative imperative, stimulated by a fluid theatrical situation, a scenography of desires, which it refracts as a fragmented, carnivalesque 'free form'. Romantic art is situated and vigorously discursive, enthusiasm and irony. The Romantic aesthetic evokes multiple chronotopes, rather than a formal or conceptual identity. Romanticism is never the sum of its external parts or an epiphenomenon of historical experience; it demands a critical mode sensitive to its varied elements. I argue that Romanticism reciprocally determines literary theory as historical, philosophical, and political.

The Frühromantik aesthetic echoes with the potential of a philosophy that can realise its critical and creative capacities, translating the empirical differences and historicity of human nature into philosophical forms. The Frühromantiks vehemently disagree with a post-Kantian philosophy that arrogates to itself the role of a master discipline, a higher epistemology, the science of science, a propaedeutic of unified experience and universal reason. Their preferred philosophy is *in media res*, heuristic, inconsistent, intuitive and paradoxical. I essay some suggestions about the Frühromantik political sensibility as a projection of a pluralist historical sense and vigorous cosmopolitanism, a political mode genealogical and incomplete. I conclude by discussing the impact of the *Athenaeum* on the early methodological writings of Walter Benjamin that desire a philosophy of history as the propaedeutic for a transformative political awareness.

Romanticism and the Modern

According to Schlegel and Novalis's historical philosophy of rhetoricised cultures, an aesthetic form necessarily *communicates* far more than it may intend or explicitly announce. A rhetorical form entails complex cultural interactions, a surplus of formal possibilities, and the overwhelming power of informing genealogies. Rhetorical form is the momentum of a discursive tendency, and the effect of a subtending cultural genius, in Pagan terms, a museology. Rhetoric encourages bi-focal critical attentions, recursive or 'cyclical' evocations of the producer as well as the product. Rhetorical discourses therefore encourage cultural-materialist reading practices, a disciplined genealogical formalism:

Art is based on knowledge, and the discipline of art is its history. It is an essential quality of all art to follow closely what has already been formed.³²⁹

Aesthetic criticism, however, is (to use Walter Benjamin's term) a 'progredebility', a becoming and enrichment. It does not codify genres according to preconceived schema of historical evolution; it is not a Herderian historicism with its notion of distinct and organic cultures.

Critical taxonomy is rigorous and genealogically sensitive, so that it might be enchanted, that is, theoretical:

... a theory of genres is just what we lack. And what else can it be but a classification which at the same time would be a history and theory of literature?³³⁰

A theory of romantic literature should advocate a revivification of classical forms, not prescriptively, as the pure archetypes for imitation recommended by Goethe, but as 'sure tools', those formal elements that can be variously combined, those symbolic media that promise collaboration, research, creative discussion, an intensification of symphilosophy, a deepening sense of the scenography of history.³³¹ Frühromanticism is not the Modern,

³²⁹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, in *The Athenaeum*, 1800, 60.

³³⁰ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 76. Such a statement would seem to anticipate and inform Bakhtin's critical approach, his historicisation of the novel's carnivalesque dialogism and polyphony antipathetical to a coercive social-realist theory of the role of literature in society.

³³¹ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 74, 77.

its current fashions, the vagaries of public opinion, the belletristic nature of passing critical and aesthetic debates, an assumption of the historical advancement of ethics and tastes. One will never pin down Romanticism, it cannot be confined to a single genre, an available modality of taste, a belief system; it is as little self-identical as the aesthetic and philosophical forms it elaborates.³³² Romanticism ‘tends towards antiquity’ in spirit and in kind: ‘Romantic is not so much a literary genre as an element of poetry which may be more or less dominant or recessive, but never entirely absent’.³³³

The Romantic critic should not, in the manner of Winckelmann, seek out the harmony and sublime nobility of Greek antiquity as a reflection of the simple nature and comfortable sensuousness of a pre-Christian era. The plangent tendencies and subaltern elements of *Romanticism* refrain from inaugurating a standard for imitation or an uplifting poetics. Domineering and infiltrating, Romanticism is an excessive health, the effects of pathology, and a fatal predisposition: ‘Just as our literature began with the novel, so the Greek began with the epic and dissolved in it’.³³⁴ Romanticism is the divine sickness of a Socrates, an immoderation, the exceeding dynamic of expression, the irreversible decadence of a ‘fragmented’ classicism. Romantic art and critique are ‘interested’, rather than tranquil; dislocated from history and tradition, Romanticism is the *dynamis*, the amoral power of representation that Aristotle could not contain, the ruins of history, dwelling in the remaining fragments of coherent world-views, speaking the collapse of nostalgia, the impossibility of recovering a golden-age.

‘I detest the novel as far as it wants to be a separate genre.’³³⁵ So says Antonio in his ‘Letter on the Novel’, one of many forceful presentations on the history and theory of

³³² Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 100. Antonio speaking: ‘please do not immediately assume that the Romantic and the Modern are entirely identical for me. I consider them approximately as different as the paintings of Raphael and Correggio are from the etchings which are fashionable now’.

³³³ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 101. See also Kathleen M Wheeler, *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic ironists and Goethe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 4, discussing the philological excitement among the Frühromantiks about the *Roman*. ‘*Roman*, then, did not have a genre meaning, as, for example, ‘novel’ does; rather, it indicated a *tendency* in modern literature away from classical styles and towards prose ... encompassing a wide range of content and styles as well as genre, a *Mischgedicht*. As a tendency, the word *Roman* included not only *Romane* and *Novellen*, but also the plays of Shakespeare, medieval Romances, and the writings of Cervantes, Dante, and others’ (4).

³³⁴ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 101.

³³⁵ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 101.

Romantic art forms in the *Dialogue on Poetry*. Throughout the *Dialogue*, the emergence of the novel in the eighteenth century is connected to a wealth of precedents, one of which is the tendency of popular genres, in their adaptability and performativity, to develop hybridity and self-parody, to exceed their initial purpose.³³⁶ For the *Athenaeum*, the novel's pre-history determines it as a succession of enthusiasm and irony, moral sentiment and sensuous arabesque. The novel echoes with the Catholicity, the overstimulation of ripe or decadent cultures, whose 'discontinuous form', in Benjamin's terms, can no longer be traced to any original inspiration or monotheistic prescription.

Antonio, in his 'Letter on the Novel' is adamant that no aesthetics based on the formal externals of the genre, such as a neo-Aristotelian poetics of plot and coherent narrative, will ever come to terms with the novel's mien, which can only be elaborated by a patient genealogical rendering of the form's historical emergence. The novel, for the Frühromantiks, is not the function of a bourgeois public sphere demanding realist particularism, moral independence, private experience, and plain common sense in their aesthetic discourse.³³⁷ Rather the novel, a determination of the *longue durée* of the *Roman*, evolves from a complex *paideia*. It emerges from a baroque fatality, the fractured immanence of a polytheistic *ethos*.

The preparation for a Romanticised novel, a free form, begins with the maturation of poetry in the Renaissance. According to the historical scheme of the 'Letter on the Novel', the centre of poetry slowly 'devolves' from the 'perfection' and 'beauty' of the

³³⁶ Here Jena Romanticism can be seen as anticipating Bakhtin's notion of 'novelness': see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1984, 275-77.

³³⁷ Antonio would not have been enamoured of Ian Watt's *locus classicus* in his history of the novel which assimilates the rise of the eighteenth century novel (Henry Fielding *et al*) to a mediocre bourgeois public sphere, now demanding a less historically derivative, ornately conventional, and learned aesthetic, in favour of particularism and realism:

It would appear, then, that the function of language is much more largely referential in the novel than in other literary forms; that the genre itself works by exhaustive presentation rather than by elegant concentration. This fact would no doubt explain why ... many ... great novelists ... often write gracelessly ... with downright vulgarity; and why the novel has less need of historical and literary commentary than other genres' (31). 'The novel's conventions make much smaller demands on the audience than do most literary conventions ... this explains why ... the novel ... most closely satisfies (the audience's) wishes for a close correspondence between life and art' (33-4).

See Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth UK, 1968 (first published 1957). The novel, argues Antonio, is not a paradigm shift; its hybridity and low elements fulfil its highest possibility as a discursive tendency.

lyrical Petrarch, who, in Neo-Platonic fashion, idealised the beautiful Laura as the one true source of his love, thereby inaugurating a devotional language of true feeling for the courtly aristocracy. By contrast the embedded narratives and picaresque stories of Boccaccio prosaicised and hybridised the romance form. Boccaccio, *pace* Petrarch, prefers to console ‘all charming women’ with his joyful grace and sociable jest rather than to worship one. Boccaccio disseminates his seed; his amorousness is an allegory for his ‘inexhaustible’ source of peculiar and elaborate stories. Moving from an historical hermeneutics, to considerations that are sub-generic, that is, grammatical and philological, Antonio notes that Boccaccio’s expressiveness and ‘excellent periodic structure’ raised the narrative language of conversation to a solid foundation for the prose of the novel, while establishing the gay tone of the Italian Romance.³³⁸

For the Jena Romantics the pre-history of the novel is extensive, absorptive, as the mixed tone of the Romance, I would argue, resonates with the sociable anonymity and picaresque storytelling of *The One Thousand and One Nights* as it entered and became popular and influential in European literary and cultural history.³³⁹ The novel in a sense inverts teleological Judeo-Christian history; it is a peripatetic Paganism, a function of many narrative urges. The Romantic tendency resonates with the Witz that knows no determinative origin (Novalis - ‘who can have invented Witz’), a popular religiosity that in its iconography and fetishism opens up worlds of discourse, moving from pathos to bathos, interspersing the sacred and the sensuous.

A form originally meant for public reading, owing its vitality to oral traditions, the Italian Romance changes tone according to the communicative demands of its situation, popularising miraculous stories of old and changing their tenor into the grotesque with a touch of ‘sociable Witz’ and ‘intellectual spice’.³⁴⁰

The story-telling power of the Romance form is *in media res*, inessential, flexible, stimulated, an exteriority, a communicative drive. The Romance form is infinitely

³³⁸ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 68.

³³⁹ Cf. Peter L. Caracciolo, ed., *The Arabian Nights in English Literature*, Macmillan, London, 1988, Introduction: "Such a store house of ingenious fiction and of splendid imagery", p.12. Cf. Eva Sallis, *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass: The Metamorphosis of The Thousand and One Nights*, Curzon, Surrey, 1999.

³⁴⁰ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 69.

translatable; it impresses itself on popular memory and enables the cachet of the novel, its popular niche as a loose, conversational, form combining high sentiment and low comedy. Walter Benjamin, in an essay called 'The Storyteller' (1936) argues that the Romanticised story-telling Antonio has in mind derives not from the delicacies of aristocratic feeling but from the 'milieu of work' – the rural (the Arcadian idyll, grotesque folk tale, and travestied pastoral of Cervantes), the maritime (the picaresque travel tale and its utopian offshoots), and the urban (the social and psychological novel), an 'artisan form of communication'.

Storytelling, for Benjamin, does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report, rather it 'sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller'.³⁴¹ Representing, in detail, situational features of his own experience and conversations with others, the storyteller makes his own experience that of those who are listening to the tale. However, while still conveying the accreted wisdom of a life and the fullness of a milieu, the novel's portrayal of the solitary individual 'gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living', Benjamin exemplifying the eponymous hero of *Don Quixote*. For Benjamin the novel's emerging pathos of distance refers us back to Plato's Socrates in *The Symposium*, sober and speculative in the midst of intoxication and revelry, desiring a comic-tragic sensibility.³⁴² Romanticism and its preferred novelistic tendency reaches back to the Sophists and Socrates, it is the irony that revels in a crowd, the loneliness that demands company.

For the Frühromantiks, Romantic storytelling is topical, thematic, mimetic, it communicates the fullness of life because it is rhetorically suasive, 'interested' rather than an 'objective' genre such as the epic. A rhetorical form always falls from the grace of pure origins, the idealised, inspirational Lauras of this world.³⁴³ We have seen how the Stoic Seneca failed to simply convey a doctrinal apathethia or elitism because of the abundant *rhetorical awareness* of his pedagogy, its enjoyment of convention, friendly forms of

³⁴¹ 'The Storyteller' in Walter Benjamin *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, Fontana Press, London, 1992, 91.

³⁴² Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', 87.

³⁴³ One thinks of the rhetorical artifices and self-representations of Philip Sidney's sonnets, intent on meretriciously displaying paradox and intricate figuration as rehearsing their unrequited love for Stella. Rhetoric engenders its own *ethos*, a discursive energy that fractures the sensibility of a text, a feature of Renaissance discourse.

address, and its desire to cultivate a *sensus communis*. Just so, the vigorous Italian Romance, a felicitous mixture of jest and seriousness, the grotesque and idyllic, failed to imitate its classical prototype, the heroism and militarism of the ancient epic. In the hands of Ariosto, who ornamented or textured his romances with the rhetorical ‘devices’ of the ancients, Romance proceeded on its devolutionary path towards tonal and generic fragmentation, a mix of ‘facile narrative and sensuous fantasies’.³⁴⁴

For Schlegel, the pre-history of the novel shifts its port of call to Spain and the great Cervantes, where a rhetorical *copia* begins to overwhelm generic fidelity ever more vividly. *Don Quixote* enables both fantastic wit and a ‘lavish abundance’ of daring ideas to prevail, in the spirit of Cervantes’ comic novellas.³⁴⁵ The rhetorical recursiveness or ‘interestedness’ of the novel begins to assert itself, in and through hybrid sub-genres, a textured repast of song, pastoral idyll, romance, parody, and satire. This splintering tendency will be fulfilled in Shakespeare’s dramaturgy and its responsiveness to the heady milieu of Elizabethan England.

Shakespeare

... the English only praise Shakespeare’s truth (AF 301)

The simplest and most immediate questions, like Should we criticize Shakespeare’s works as art or as nature? can’t be considered without the deepest consideration and the most erudite history of art (CF 121).

Friedrich Schlegel wanted an historico-formalist approach to displace the psychologism, didacticism and utilitarian overtones of English criticism of Shakespeare, inaugurated by the rationalism and moralism of Samuel Johnson, his disdain for embellishment, nonsense, excess, rhetorical word play. The Frühromantiks, engaged in translating Shakespeare’s work, would remove his plays from any association with patriotic insularity or banal

³⁴⁴ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 69.

³⁴⁵ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 70.

conceptions of ‘genius’ and instead theorise the conditioning sociological factors and the thematic and linguistic ‘tools’ available to Shakespeare. Shakespeare is to be situated, critically socialised, the task of a ‘materialist rhetoric’.

We learn that for Shakespeare the way was prepared to some degree by the ‘colourful variety’ of the English theatre. In the Elizabethan milieu scholars, actors, noblemen, and court fools worked for the theatre, and the audiences were similarly stratified. Glancing back a little farther, this contemporaneous hybridity of tastes and dispositions was historically prepared by the recent history of the English theatre, where mystery plays from the ‘childhood of drama’, and old English farces, alternated with patriotic histories and subjects in every form and manner - indeed generating nothing that a serious aesthete could call ‘art’.³⁴⁶ Schlegel has in mind here the cross-fertilisations of miracle story and carnivalesque irreverence, ‘spiced’ with topical themes that ‘characterised’ the English Miracle Play, a performatively geared, carnivalesque form that deviated from the verisimilitude and piety of biblical legends. The Frühromantiks feel that Shakespearean dramaturgy needs to be contextualised in terms of its situational tendency, its folk concessions, its performative ribaldness, and its earthy, populist syncretism.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 71.

³⁴⁷ For an excellent discussion of the carnivalesque aspect of English Miracle and its generic successor Morality plays, see Sandra Billington, “‘Suffer Fools Gladly’: The Fool in Medieval England and the Play *Mankind*”, in Paul V.A. Williams, ed., *The Fool and the Trickster: Studies in Honour of Enid Welsford*, D.S Brewer, Roman and Littlefield, Cambridge and Ipswich UK, 1979, 36-54. Billington restores the communicative/performative context of the anonymous Morality play *Mankind*, arguing that ‘amateur cap and bell activity was part of popular entertainment in English society as well as in the French’ (36), fool activity known in England throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, ‘especially during the Christmas season’ (44). Just as in the French medieval context, there is ‘a difficulty in distinguishing between *sotties*, *farces*, and *moralités*, given that *sots* or explicit fool-figures ‘could and did perform all three’ (37). In the play *Mankind*, written around 1466 and performed on and around Shrove Tuesday, folk games such as ‘mock beheadings’ were used, such travesties of didactic pieties usually centring around the activities of the three Vices, often dressed in ‘absurd fashionable costume’ (46). The Vices indeed enacted a choric parabasis, corrupting the internal chronotope of the play by stepping out of role, establishing ‘close contact between the Vices and the audience’, joking and shouldering their way through the audience on exiting: ‘there is folk play - games, dancing and singing - in the behaviour of the Vices’ (47). The interest of a character who is simultaneously a celebrated cultural persona (fool, tempter, trickster, clown) travesties employment and engages the fluidity of the performative situation: ‘Twice Tityvillus calls for silence so that he can tempt Mankind, and one can imagine the kind of barracking which might have been going on’ (51). Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis’s love for allegory, and their sympathy for the inorganic, mixed, or ‘free form’, are also manifested in their advocacy of allegory and Catholic iconography that in carnivalesque settings creates a devolution of emplotment in favour of the theatrical contestation of perennial human orientations: as Billington argues, ‘it would not be surprising if *Mankind*’s psychomachia also appeared as a struggle between Carnival and Lent’ (52).

And then there are structural constraints in the development of English theatre, such as a stage not designed for exterior appearance and the ‘monotony of themes’ in historical dramas.³⁴⁸ From such a paucity of plot content, from such intellectual *mediocrity*, came an ‘effective’ and ‘thorough’ theatre that ‘directed the writer’s and viewer’s attention to the form’. Making a virtue of immanence, the Elizabethan age cultivated a superb sense of stagecraft, tempo, intuiting ‘necessary’ dramatic rhythms of pathos and comedy, kings and clowns.³⁴⁹ The sublime artist of an eclectic age, Shakespeare’s romantic élan was also inspired by the delicacy and fantastical charms of Edmund Spenser’s poetry, the favourite of the ‘elegant set’. Such is his ‘profound thoroughness’, his thick and fiery Witz, with its material and refined mien, that Shakespeare transcends the culture that funds his art, and floats mysteriously over the vitality of his milieu. The combination of qualities, this transcendental immanence, constitutes a ‘romantic basis’ for the modern drama.³⁵⁰

Shakespeare’s achievement is powerfully singular because the universal dimension of his work redeems the fragmentariness of the modern romance form, so much so that the Frühromantik critic can consider his dramaturgy the ‘actual center, the core of the Romantic imagination’.³⁵¹ Shakespeare, Cervantes, Italian poetry and medieval romance are quintessentially Romantic because they evoke the possibility of a potentialised aesthetics, an individuated sensorium of images, stories, grotesques, arabesques, and authorial whims. The productive matrix of the Romance form ‘tends towards antiquity’ because its blossoming imagination is ‘worthy of adorning the images of the ancient Gods’; it explodes into motley stores, mythemes, tableaux.³⁵² Shakespeare dominates Romanticism as his identity recedes, initiating the coming of a great Romantic tendency in art, the self-ironic and diversely representational, novel form.³⁵³

In Schlegel’s native Germany, the novel is again flourishing as an historical form in the classical yet ‘interested’ or sentimental oeuvre of Goethe, who ‘explores the forms

³⁴⁸ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 71.

³⁴⁹ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 71.

³⁵⁰ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 72.

³⁵¹ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 101.

³⁵² Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 101.

³⁵³ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 101.

of art back to their sources in order to be able to revive and combine them'.³⁵⁴ Schlegel's interpretation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* evokes its profound contemporary significance:

Whoever could manage to interpret Goethe's *Meister* properly would have expressed what is now happening in literature (CF 120).

According to conventional genre considerations, *Wilhelm Meister* is a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of personal development, a founding text of the German ideal of holistic acculturation (*Bildung*) that stresses, as in Schiller's formulation, the harmonious role of aesthetics in moral and cognitive development. Schlegel's historical critique would change this, even before it gets started. He suggests of *Wilhelm Meister* that what nominally seems to be a novel about an artist's education and socialisation is 'surprised by the tendency of its genre', becoming suddenly 'much larger than its first intention'.³⁵⁵ The novel's adulterously amorous tendency asserts itself, as it distributes its character studies and love of mannerism among 'several persons' (Schlegel elsewhere refers to the desired critico-aesthetic work as a 'a system of talents').

The increasingly 'impoverished' focus on the narrative of the naïve and jejune central protagonist enables a world of relationships to be thoroughly explored. Monofocus becomes fetishism, the 'almost' of many another text comes into play.³⁵⁶ Overlaying its original intention, Schlegel argues that the finite work is overtaken by a stylistic unity, a classical niveau, and a 'theory of education' in the art of living. This unexpected, horizontal cultivation is the real 'genius of the whole' of *Meister*, expressed in authorial ironies and salty individual sub-generic moments, introducing, for Romanticism, the interplay of classical form and vigorous discourse.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 74.

³⁵⁵ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 112.

³⁵⁶ We could compare Schlegel's favoured aesthetic tendency, where the subaltern and minor detail explode into the forefront, to a television situation comedy whose minor characters become more important than originally intended. One thinks of the Fonz in the 1970s sitcom *Happy Days*, Alex Keaton in the 80s sitcom *Family Ties*, or, more recently, the always 'perplexed' Homer, wise fool, idiot and hero, eternal paradox, of *The Simpsons*. As a rule, the minor character becomes the crux of these shows because of his (or her) mixed qualities, his polymorphous adaptability, and the contradictory human traits he/she embodies. S/he steps out of the quotidian chronotope into the realm of icon and allegory.

³⁵⁷ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 112.

Romantic art's urbanity betrays it, its form is 'conspicuously duplicitous', a bifurcation of form and content visible in the most meaningful Romantic art works, such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Schlegel suggests that the way Shakespeare 'transforms a theme' is not unlike Goethe's treatment of the ideal of a form. Nominally an ostentatious and melodramatic revenge-tragedy in the spirit of *The Spanish Tragedy*, Shakespeare both abolished and sublimated the revenge genre in *Hamlet*, whose narrative of revenge is beset by philosophical perplexities, linguistic foolishness and stunning individual episodes, ekphrastic tableaux such as the death of Ophelia. Practised in manifold existential and political themes, ironic and enthusiastic, *Hamlet* signposted Shakespeare's 'maturity', it portended art as a meditation on arts of living, establishing a propaedeutic for the novel form.³⁵⁸ The Romantic tendency is translative or tropological, representing a 'sentimental theme in a fantastic form', transforming romantic themes like romance and heroism into an interest in 'representative' or iconographic social characteristics, the noble folly of a Don Quixote, the long suffering schlemiel Sancho Panza, the mournful beauty of an Ophelia, the immoderate extremes and archetypal pathos of a Hamlet.³⁵⁹

As a scenography of characters and styles, the dramaturgical novel is responsive to the intimate and topical demands of popular audiences, inflected with a refreshingly naive quality of 'confession' and gay 'arabesque'. Thomas Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) is a powerful novelistic exemplar for Schlegel, because digression and sub-generic embellishments are crucial to its very conceptualisation. *Tristram Shandy* is a novel whose sentimental plot is fragmented by a sociable enthusiasm for stupidity and eccentricity of manner: 'foolishness, you will admit, is the loveliest thing that man can imagine'. *Tristram Shandy* is 'a brilliant study', impressing the imagination in its rhetorical dexterity and world upside-down sensibility more than realistic emplotment ever could.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 72.

³⁵⁹ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 98.

³⁶⁰ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 98. See also 96: 'Now ask yourself if your enjoyment (of Sterne's sensibility) was not related to what we often experience while viewing the witty paintings called arabesques.... I consider the arabesque a very definite and essential form or mode of expression for poetry'. Typically, Romantic 'free forms' are heteronomously structured and synaesthetic, nourished by a semiotic sensorium including non-Occidental aesthetic and architectural languages.

The novel conspicuously betrays an ethos; it becomes the ‘confession of a whole life’ in many accents, a distribution of singularities, a convergence of extremes, rather than a sum of external features. The novel resumes the polytheistic bequest of codifying cultural instincts and representative characteristics, a combination of affect, intellect, and imagination. Confession is not a portrayal of interior life, however, as putatively embodied in Rousseau’s autobiographical *Confessions*, for Schlegel cheekily suggests this work is a great ‘novel’, picaresque and episodic, a communication of the ego rather than a straightforward representation of a life.³⁶¹

Recalling de Man’s rhetorical reading practices, we can discern here an interest in the ‘laws of figural language’, often evoked as a text’s unwitting tendency towards dramatisation and intersubjectivity, along the lines of Kant’s ‘squabbling’ faculties. De Man alerts us to the tendency of a rhetorically sophisticated text to translate from one genre to the next, exemplifying the uncertain oscillation between deistic worship and interpersonal eroticism in Rousseau’s *Julie* (as read by de Man).³⁶² In these terms we can say that Schlegelian rhetorical reading does not sterilize or relativise the text, it fragments it for the sake of an urbane confession, a sociable duplicity, an insurgence of other idioms and creative lines of flight.

Philosophy

I now consider the *Athenaeum*’s argument for philosophy as a rhetorical mode, harnessing ‘effective’ discourse practices and critical habits, a heightened or ironic

³⁶¹ Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry*, 104.

³⁶² See Paul de Man, ‘Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant’, in *Aesthetic Ideology*, The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, 87. See also ‘Allegory (Julie)’ in de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1979, 200: ‘contrary to received opinion, deconstructive discourses are suspiciously text-productive ... From a rhetorical point of view, nothing would distinguish the discursive language of ... earlier texts from the language of the novel’. Later in this essay de Man discusses the relationship between rhetoric and tonality, invoking depropriation and substitution as rhetorical drives: ‘every piece of writing can be questioned as to its rhetorical mode’ (204)...‘Consequently, it will be difficult to tell apart the discourses addressed to Saint-Preux from those addressed to God or virtue’ (218). Rhetorical modes defy a loss of self or obeisance to authority, they are self-affecting, replenishing and resourceful: ‘Julie and God become the two-sided exchange of a dialogue in which the words carry shared substances that can be offered and received ... Attributes (intersubjective and sensuous) circulate freely’ (218).

conventionalism that realises the possibilities of human nature. It is a question of considerable import as to what philosophy actually signifies for the Frühromantiks and here I quarrel with the idiom of one of the most important texts on this topic, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's The Literary Absolute.

According to The Literary Absolute, the *Athenaeum*, inspired by the Idealism of Kant that freed morality and epistemology from noumenal constraints, will inaugurate a 'properly indefinite program', a 'romantic "project"'.³⁶³ The *Athenaeum* sets itself the 'task of a completion', its 'goal is to have done with partition and division, with the separation constitutive of history', of which the genre divisions of neo-classical poetics and the separation in sensibility of the Classical and Modern are the most obvious reflections. For the Jena Romantics, Literature, trans-historically considered, will imply a 'generativity' that produces an 'infinitely new Work', a sense for the *absolute*.³⁶⁴

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's thesis is that along with Idealists such as Schelling and the young Hegel, the *Athenaeum* is interested in articulating a matrix or 'organon' for the Idealistic Subject's development towards unconditional or infinitised self-knowledge. This matrix can only be served by a concept of literature as incomplete, unconditional material forever expanding theoretical reflections. This unconditioned (post- and sub-generic) concept of literature, this 'literary absolute', is concerned with 'production, absolutely speaking'. The *Athenaeum's* thinking will anticipate Hegel by constituting the 'ultimate instance and closure of the speculative absolute', as a 'literature producing itself as it produces its own theory', an 'absolute literary operation'.³⁶⁵ Healing the modern division between philosophy and aesthetics, Jena Romanticism, the lonely moral subject of modernity and pagan sensuousness, promotes literature as an infinite speculative mien and self-engendering 'auto-critique'. The *Athenaeum* imbricates the possibility of philosophical reflection in the resources of a genealogically imbued literature and vice versa. This co-dependence is in fact constitutive of 'literary theory':

In short, we ourselves are implicated in all that determines both literature as auto-critique and criticism as literature. Our own image comes back to us from the mirror

³⁶³ Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, The Literary Absolute, 6-7.

³⁶⁴ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, The Literary Absolute, 11.

³⁶⁵ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, The Literary Absolute, 12.

of the literary absolute. And the massive truth flung back at us is that we have not left the era of the Subject.³⁶⁶

I have some doubts about any version of Jena Romanticism that, at least in its terminology, stresses its conciliatory, that is totalising or absolute aims. The language of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe suggests a symptomatology that understands the *Athenaeum* as primarily an instance of ‘programmatically’ Idealism, another example of a philosopheme stretching from Fichte to Hegel that insists on the expansive auto-production of the Subject as it incorporates negativity and history towards its ‘absolutisation’, its mastery of history. A language of project, program, organon, Subject, both lends necessary dignity to the *Athenaeum*’s philosophical interests and is in danger of reducing the import of their work to a function of a philosophical problematic, that of the critical form the transcendental subject should take. I think it equally possible to discuss the philosophical desideratum of the Frühromantik as a free form stimulated by popular conventions, contemporary themes, and a range of interdisciplinary discourse practices. Philosophy does not resolve historical divisions, it asserts itself as an enthusiasm for and irony towards human nature and intersubjective relations. It is the possibility, in critical representation, of reflecting on habit, memory, disposition. The philosophy of Jena Romanticism confesses its non-identity; its resonance, as a rhetorical mode, with other languages, idioms, drives.

In an *Athenaeum* fragment, Schlegel suggested that just as Cicero had ranked philosophies and political discourses according to their material contribution to the orator, so too poetry needs a philosophy that does not transform the real into the illusory, deny intuition or feeling, or exclude itself from making decisions. The philosophical tendency rather is to illustrate how the human spirit impresses itself on all things (AF 168). Philosophy is a paradoxical exercise; it can be theoretically centred by its outside, its relational characteristics, its confession of the human spirit, or its aestheticism and historicity. Philosophy can be translated, historically displaced by a materialist rhetoric to exhibit its extremes, its immoderate energies, its modes of conduct at variance with its own ‘programmatically’ desires. Philosophy, or the complacency of its practitioners, needs to be interrupted, for ‘Nothing is more rarely the subject of philosophy than philosophy itself’

³⁶⁶ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, 16.

(AF 1). The thematisation of philosophy is situational; it imbricates a philosophy prone to a belief in its total comprehension as a complementary praxis within a spectrum of critical senses or affectively diverse *logoi*:

It is a thoughtless and immodest presumption to want to learn something about art from philosophy.... philosophy, after all, shouldn't be able to do more than order the given artistic experiences and the existing artistic principles into a science... raise the appreciation of art, extend it with the help of a thoroughly learned history of art, and create here as well that logical mood which unites absolute tolerance with absolute rigor (CF 123).

Philosophy is a mood; as logic and analysis, it introduces a degree of methodological consistency, of determined organisation into discourse. In one of its roles, it is the tedious architectonic problem of the organon; it calls for patience in this regard. The lumbering yet determined philosophical will towards systematics has an admirable regularity about it, a stay against dilettantism. Philosophy is a sort of post-lapsarian ennui, an almost solipsistic stubbornness that shouldn't be impatiently scorned; as will and organisation, philosophy introduces a disciplined stay against seductive distractions, its quite astonishing will to construct and systematise resists the perturbations of life. Philosophy is somewhat eccentric, and as such it plays a part in the life world of forms, embedded in inherited dispositions and a genealogy of desires: 'Viewed subjectively, philosophy, like epic poetry, always begins *in media res*' (AF 84).

If it's achieved anything, philosophy has made the valuable though not necessarily justifiable assumption of eternal verities, rising above the noise of life, emerging from our shadowy cave into a more serene world. In the instance of its own relentless performance, philosophy has brought another world of value to us, more ascetic, harder to reach, and one can affirm this supra-sensory fiction at many levels other than ontological: 'Some things philosophy must assume for the present and forever, and it may do so because it must' (AF 95). Philosophy, the translation, into a language of ideas, of an individual's sense of probity and obligation, can be justified in other than metaphysical terms - its chronotope, its self-affecting imaginary, is the drawn out meditation on an important theme. Philosophy has the cachet of transmitting worthiness and reflective seriousness throughout history: 'Duty

is Kant's alpha and omega... only out of a sense of duty did he become a great man' (AF 10).

Kant is a representative characteristic of philosophy as a mien, he dramatises a way of life, a mode of being that values sober critical habits and shudders at excitations: 'There is a kind of person for whom an enthusiasm for boredom represents the beginning of philosophy (AF 52)'.³⁶⁷ One thinks of Kant's provincialism and less than itinerant life and the somewhat febrile philosophical and anthropological ambitions that resulted. One could say that his 'impoverished' sense of adventure and exploration combined with a certain petit-bourgeois conventionalism to produce the rigorous, profound *Critiques* with their salutary attempt to integrate social conventions and rather uninspiring examples of 'taste' within the *sensus communis* of a practical reason. One can talk of a Kantian thematic 'thoroughness' born of experiential impoverishment.

Schlegel restores, by displacing, characterises, by de-essentialising, affirms by parodying, the significance and educative possibilities of the Kantian project, all the while arguing for a broader philosophical *paideia*. Spinoza, in turn, suggests the miraculous power, the calm chaos of the theoretical attitude:

The piety of philosophers is theory, pure intuition of the divinity, calm and gay in silent solitude. Spinoza is the ideal of the species (I 137).

From the contented, abundant gratitude for the infinite attributes of the godhead, comes a scientific method, *more geometrico*, the thrilling power of logical method exercising itself against the fanaticism and fear of the Churchmen. Yet there is another Spinoza, a rhetorical mode, an epistolary proclivity for friendship, an enthusiasm for topical debate and particularised discussion, as exemplified in the scholia to the *Ethics*. There is a relational

³⁶⁷ Again we draw attention, via Deleuze, to a possible relationship between Humean empiricism, with its affective critique of reason, and Jena Romanticism's interest in a pluralised philosophical *ethos*: 'Reason is a kind of feeling. Consequently, just as the method of philosophy goes from the absence of an idea to the presence of an impression, similarly the theory of reason...moves from a skepticism of reason to a positivism of feeling ... reason as a reflection of feeling in the qualified mind'. See Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity, an Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V Boundas, Columbia University Press, New York, 1989, 30.

Spinoza, open to many stimuli, contradictory, emotional, desiring to diminish inhibiting fears and increase the power of joy, *conatus*, within a social framework.

Philosophers still admire only Spinoza's consistency, just as the English only praise Shakespeare's truth (AF 301).³⁶⁸

Philosophy is a Pascalian wager, a projection into the beyond, a house of cards that nevertheless provokes stimulation and recursive reflection; only in its most mediocre determinations does it attempt conclusive demonstration. Leibniz's monad, relating the single to the whole, the detailed to the unconditioned, is instanced: 'Leibniz proposed and Wolff proved. Need one say more?' (AF 82). The monad exemplifies the power of a philosophy considered under the aspect of the witty fragment, the suggestive aside: 'Leibniz's whole philosophy consists of a few fragments and projects that are witty' (AF 220). So philosophy, in the midst of its most ambitious endeavours, will need to think on the kind of sensibilities that have enabled it. It needs to be open to the translative sophistication of rhetoric, re-describing itself in genealogical and characteristic terms: 'Philosophy is still moving too much in a straight line; it's not yet cyclical enough' (AF 43).

Philosophy, after all, will always emerge from an ensemble of lived characteristics, certain vectors of thought suddenly congealing, an instinct needing discharge. Philosophy, like Witz, is not a possession or instrument of a subject. It captures what one might call 'prosaic' structures of feeling and a propaedeutic of problems and themes, but the combinations of knowledges and approaches it requires are never present to it: 'One can only become a philosopher, not be one. As soon as one thinks one is a philosopher, one stops becoming one' (AF 54). Philosophy intuits *a posteriori*, not according to the faculties of Kant: 'An intellectual intuition is the categorical imperative of any theory' (AF 76). If one values philosophy's methodological character, its desire to subsume phenomena within critical systems, never a worthless enterprise in a chaotic and self-absorbed world, that evaluation should tend towards agonistic respect, symphilosophy rather than identification.

³⁶⁸ For an interesting discussion of the 'duplicity' of Spinoza's *Ethics*, the disruption of the axiomatic, geometrical ideal of the main body of argument by the expansively suasive annotations, the topical and interpersonal tenor of the 'scholia', see Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1988.

In philosophy, one deals not with a master-discipline, but with a trait, a characteristic that might occasionally require an eager or cheeky response: ‘Since nowadays philosophy criticizes everything... a criticism of philosophy would be nothing more than justifiable retaliation’. (AF 56)

Like all modes of life and discursive traits that transmute themselves into thought, sympathy, toleration and gradual redress are needed, no ferocity, no ideological partisanship is necessary: ‘My experience with the greatest philosophers is like Plato’s with the Spartans. He loved and admired them enormously, but continually complained that they always stopped halfway’ (AF 48). One can now arrive at a sense of the differentiated cultural contribution of philosophical methods, their relevance as temporary qualifications of a critical sensibility that has for instance become too fuzzy, enervated, aestheticised: ‘Logic.... is ... a coordinated pragmatic science opposed to poetry and to ethics and deriving from the demand for a positive truth... and the possibility of a system.’ (AF 91)

Philosophy is communicated; it is an agonistic structure of competing attitudes, none in themselves sufficient for mature reflection. For example, sometimes the dreariness of rationalist demonstrations and proofs require a real provocation, a contrapuntal jolt by the forces of thetic revelation, the power, the mysterium, of a moral law:

The categorical styles of the laws of the twelve tablets and the thetical method, where we find set down the pure facts of reflection... are still the most appropriate for a studied natural philosophy (AF 82).

Structured as a rhetorical bricolage, philosophy can reorganize itself anew, as venerable method or the immediacy of intuition, an evolving communicative imperative, an irony and sociability.

Political Tendencies

Frühromanticism is an educative ideal; it would see aesthetics and philosophy as complex suasive modes and self-affectations, rather than axiomatic truths. Politically, this is significant, for the history of human actions, institutions, and formal creations should never become the function of a dominant group:

... universal history becomes sophistic as soon as it places anything above the communal education of all mankind ... as soon as it chooses to take up the cause of any particular side of the historical universe (AF 223).

The responsibility of political agency is towards redeeming and realising the many senses and critical modes of the past, not simply acting according to the dictates of the present: 'The historical tendency of his actions determines the positive morality of the statesman and citizen of the world' (AF 228).

Rather than regarding the French Revolution as either disaster or emancipation according to a conventional spectrum of political ideologies, we should think of its turbulence, perhaps, as a crisis of 'incipient puberty' (MO 116), as a youthful though anarchic spirit requiring diacritical appreciation. Meanwhile, the cultural renaissance in Germany, if properly characterised, transcends local boundaries and narrow parochialisms in its translatability of character and diverse genealogies:

... there are Germans everywhere. The German character is not confined to a particular state, any more than the Roman, the Greek or the British. They are general human qualities (MO 66).

It is a political responsibility to realise the incompleteness of the present as an effect of history's psychosocial atavisms and evolving relational capacities, crude and bathetic as they often are. Like Isocrates on the need for pan-Hellenism, one should oppose cultural nationalism:

Germany is probably such a favourite subject for the general essayist because the less finished a nation is, the more it is a subject for criticism and not for history (AF 26).

The tendency of art, criticism, and politics should be medial, a realisation of diversity rather than an exclusive ideology or a faith in Progress. A certain fetishism and absurdism turn out to be the most mature of political dispositions.

Benjamin: A Post-Romantic Methodology

I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of Walter Benjamin's early work, in particular his attempt to align philosophical reasoning and an anti-fascist politics with the historicity and immanence of representation, as a *paideia* and *ethos*. In the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1923), Benjamin suggests that philosophical writing must continually confront the question of representation. While philosophy seeks to assume the quality of a doctrine, it 'does not lie within the power of mere thought to assume such a form'.³⁶⁹ As the Frühromantiks had argued, so for Benjamin philosophy, as representation, becomes immersed in historical and formal considerations because of its 'duplicity', its ingrained tension between universal content and localised form, *logos* and *mytheme*, concept and image.

To put it another way, Benjamin suggests that philosophical doctrine can always be historically 'codified'; despite its own leanings towards pure referentiality, philosophy cannot be reified into a pure didactic content, a universal axiomatics. The more mathematics attempts the total elimination of the problem of representation, 'as does every didactic system', the more conclusively does it renounce that area of truth towards which 'language is directed'.³⁷⁰ It is representation, tendency, disposition, thetic intuition, wherein truth lies.

If philosophy is to be true to the discursive tendencies that have conditioned it, then the exercise of form must be accorded 'due importance'.³⁷¹ The explicit 'exercise' of a form has imposed itself upon all epochs that have recognised the 'essentiality of truth in the form of a propaedeutic'. Benjamin cites, as an example of a form whose tendency is propaedeutic cultivation, the theological 'treatise'. The treatise is discursive; the absence of an uninterrupted, purposeful structure is its 'primary characteristic'.³⁷² The treatise dispenses with the coercive proof of mathematics, its structure is therefore more expansively suasive, its method is 'essentially representation', and representation is digression: 'Method is a digression'. The treatise is recursive; it returns in a roundabout

³⁶⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, NLB, London, 1977, 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', 27.

³⁷⁰ Benjamin, 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', 27.

³⁷¹ Benjamin, 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', 28.

³⁷² Benjamin, 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', 28.

way to its original object and discerns different levels of meaning. It ‘tirelessly’ makes new beginnings.³⁷³ Benjamin evokes the treatise as stimulated, communicative, a flexible free form, *in media res*. The treatise’s only element of an intention is ‘educative’ rather than didactic, an ideal of authoritative quotation and mimetic emulation, and this mimesis depropriates and hybridises its form.

Digressive representational forms produce a ‘mosaic’ of images and thought ‘fragments’.³⁷⁴ Truth-content, that truth towards which language is directed, is only to be grasped polymathically, ‘through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter’. The ‘truth ... remains an indivisible unity ... an encyclopaedic accumulation of items of knowledge.’³⁷⁵ Truth is a prosaic kernel of sub-generic elements and individual traits, it communicates a complex tendency that makes the ‘reader pause and reflect’.³⁷⁶ Knowledge, on the other hand, is merely the desire to appropriate – ‘knowledge is possession’.³⁷⁷ Knowledge is univocal, it is the concept as a spontaneous product of the intellect and its egoism, and so it arouses enthusiasm, fanaticism, dogmatism. Truth, which is not conceptual, is synergetic with aesthetic considerations of rhythm and cycle; it is bodied forth in the ‘dance of represented ideas’. The ‘ideas’ are ‘simply given to be reflected upon’; they are sophisticated discourse practices and thematic constructions, not for the cognitively sluggish.³⁷⁸ Truth is never a dialectic of subject and object within a unified experience; it is textured, relative, infinitely qualified.

Philosophy, argues Benjamin, cannot master aesthetics; philosophy merely borrows from and is supplemented by aesthetic forms and comportments. Truth flows out from acculturated intuitions, it is ‘devoid of all intention’, it is a quality of sensibility, an

³⁷³ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 28.

³⁷⁴ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 28-29.

³⁷⁵ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 29, 33.

³⁷⁶ Benjamin here derives philosophical principles from the baroque form, arguing that a philosophy of art can only supplement and codify the immanent ‘tendency’ of the work of art, given that the tendency of the mourning play is in fact to displace tragic sublimation in favour of the wild plurality of allegory, the realisation of a natural history. As Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993, 195, argues: ‘*Trauerspiel* in its extreme allegorical form demands a theological understanding not an aesthetic one ... this theology would be a dynamic theology of history not "a guaranteed economics of salvation"' (195). See Gillian Rose,

³⁷⁷ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 29.

³⁷⁸ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 29-30.

exteriority to itself, and a propaedeutic for evolving discussions.³⁷⁹ Therefore the concept of philosophical style suggests an ‘art of interruption in contrast to the chain of deduction’, persuasion and communication as opposed to logical exclusivity, and the ‘repetition of themes in contrast to shallow universalism’. Philosophy is a form whose recursive ‘thoroughness’ follows from its intensified conventionalism and rhetorical imperatives.³⁸⁰

Knowledge is possessive and ‘didactic’, seeking a continuum of epistemic advancement and mapping out its ethics by reacting against alternatives. Truth to the contrary is ‘restorative’ of situated possibilities; it is a Witz, scenography. Benjamin, theorising against cognitive progress, argues that even philosophical systems whose cognitional element has long since lost any claim to scientific truth ‘still possess contemporary relevance’ for a hermeneutics of philosophical themes and heuristic methodologies. Leibniz’s monadology is exemplified.³⁸¹ Like the *Athenaeum*, Benjamin would translate philosophical systems into their worldly characteristics. A prescription for an interruptive, interventionist, translative historicity still resounds twenty years later in Benjamin’s ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’:

... every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably (V).

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. (VI)³⁸²

The idea is best explained, says Benjamin, as the ‘representation of the context, within which the unique and extreme stands alongside its counterpart’, the ‘sense’ imbued, the typical, the thematic. Ideas are like Witz, they only come to life ‘when extremes are assembled around them’.³⁸³ Ideas in no way correspond to the average, or to a ‘certain set of rules’, a conventional poetics, an imitable standard, a logic of identity. Benjamin’s idea

³⁷⁹ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 35.

³⁸⁰ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 32.

³⁸¹ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 32.

³⁸² Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ (1940) in *Illuminations*, 247.

³⁸³ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 35.

of the idea would seem to be rhetorically anti-normative, figural, individual, interested in the higher sympathy of a stylistics. The survival of ideas depends on a search for that which is exemplary, ‘even if this exemplary character can only be admitted in respect of the merest fragment’. Ideas emerge ‘immanently’, from the praxical quality of the work, its sympathy with the grainy materials and the sub-cultural varieties of form and tendency. A politics is implicit in this historiography:

The nature of this sadness stands out more clearly if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor. A historical materialist ... regards it as his task to brush history against the grain. (VII)³⁸⁴

The philosophical theory of ideas in art does not evolve in response to external comparison of genre or doctrine, but in ‘the development of the formal language of the work itself’; it does not produce a totalising mythology or national aestheticism.³⁸⁵ Genuine contemplation is a representation of ideas in which their ‘individuality is preserved’.³⁸⁶ In the ‘Prologue’ Benjamin evokes representation and the language of ideas as a continual movement between an access of fragmentation and singularity, and a sense for what is thematically valuable and representative; a language immediate *and* historically replete. Such is Benjamin’s conception of origins (*Ursprung*). To discern the origins of a work of art is to avoid historicist classification and psychologism. The term origin in the terminology of ideas is not genetic; it is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being. The rhythm of origins is available only to a ‘dual insight’, a representational process of restoration and re-establishment on the one hand, and a stimulated sense for the individuated and fragmentary, for something ‘imperfect and incomplete’.³⁸⁷

Benjamin’s historical materialism, cultivating both *paideia* and immanent *ethos*, is alert to the totalitarian construction of an ‘homogenous, empty time’, without difference,

³⁸⁴ Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, 248.

³⁸⁵ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 44.

³⁸⁶ Benjamin, ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, 45

³⁸⁷ For a subtle philological discussion of Benjamin’s concept of origin or *Ursprung*, see Samuel Weber, ‘Genealogy of Modernity: History, myth and allegory in Benjamin’s “Origin of the German Mourning Play”’, *MLN*, 106 (1991), 468-73.

without the possibility of another, confronting niveau, another historical standard. Fighting against the progressivist ‘universal history’, the repressions of historicism, the historical materialist grasps the ‘constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one’, establishing the present as the ‘time of the now’ shot through with the material tendencies of the past, the chips of ‘Messianic time’.³⁸⁸ In the next chapter I argue that Nietzsche assumed the Frühromantik possibility of a counter-historical untimeliness, a differential historicity, as a weapon against modernity, the insidious development of positivism and insular disciplinarity. The rhetorical mode of the intellectual, the imperative of their communication and qualification, reaches crisis levels in Nietzsche’s early writings.

³⁸⁸ Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, XVII, XVIII A, XVIII B. For an interesting discussion of the political implications of Benjamin’s philosophy of temporality, see Kia Lindroos, Now-Time/Image-Space: Temporalization of Politics in Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy of History and Art, SoPhi, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland, 1998, 98, 100. Lindroos discusses Benjamin’s ‘cairological’ conception of ‘now-time’, the resurgent images of the past disrupting the legitimising foundations of the present: ‘Benjamin seeks a way to set history as confronting every present conscious moment in its immediate appearance’. For Benjamin, History should be ‘brushed against its grain’ and the differences between cultural, social, and natural scientific histories should be discussed and arranged in a reflective relationship. This is the task of Benjamin’s materialist writing of history. See also Beatrice Hanssen, Walter Benjamin’s Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles California, 1998, 109-111, who discusses Benjamin’s montage of twenty-five letters by German intellectuals, spanning 1783-1883, published under the title of *Deutsche Menschen* (German People) in 1932 and, in Switzerland, in 1936. Against the backdrop of fascism, Benjamin made a ‘gesture typical of (his) historico-philosophical thought, according to which the present was to be salvaged by means of the unresolved potential of the past’. In this case Benjamin was interested in restoring a lost tradition, humanistic, cosmopolitan and questioning, an archive of a ‘hidden Germany’ that ‘questioned the boundaries of the German nation and identity from within’, opening up a constellation of past and present, a disruption of totality and universality.

Chapter Nine: Nietzsche, Reprising a ‘Productive Culture’

Nietzsche argues for a rhetorically vibrant culture in three essays in his Untimely Meditations (1873-1876). In this chapter, I discuss his ‘untimely’ contemplations upon the ‘uses and abuses of history’, and his dramatic contrast of two representative cultural personae, the philistine David Strauss and Arthur Schopenhauer, the classical philosopher who unites life and thought, critical distance with engaged sociability. I argue that Nietzsche reactivates rhetoric’s dialogue with itself, the attempt within rhetorical theory to distinguish its potential as a civic propaedeutic from a pernicious, formalist, and opportunistic rhetoric, an applied art and improvised politics.

The distinction between rhetoric as a speculative philosophy and utilitarian organon arises throughout the history of rhetorical thought. It can be found, for instance, in the self-critical movement of Cicero’s oeuvre from technical rhetorical treatises to open-ended, theoretical dialogues.³⁸⁹ It is a reflex that can be discerned in Friedrich Schlegel’s denunciation of certain forms of sophistry while simultaneously embracing urbane,

³⁸⁹ See Cicero, De Oratore Books I-II, trans. E.W. Sutton, Harvard University Press, Suffolk UK, 1996, 1.2.5, p.5, where Cicero denounces the ‘crude essays’ of his youth, critiquing the narrow practical focus of his *De Inventione*, arguing for a genealogical assessment of oratorical styles and a more ‘complete’ survey of the social role of eloquence. As Brian Vickers argues, in his mature years, exiled from public life, Cicero ‘scorned the idea of writing a rhetorical handbook’ desiring to write a more comprehensive treatise suspicious of rhetoric’s instrumentalism, its deployment by careerists and demagogues in the frenzied back-stabbing atmosphere of imperial Rome. Hence, in *De Oratore*, written 30 years after *De Inventione*, the conversational participants Antonius and Crassus are united in their scorn for the usual kind of rhetoric teaching and textbook. See Brian Vickers, In Defence of Rhetoric, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988, 32. One might say that Cicero’s ‘duplicity’ in this regard, highlights what Paul de Man has described as the pedagogical gap in the history of the term rhetoric. This is especially apposite given that while *De Inventione* was the only Ciceronian rhetorical work to have an unbroken tradition of commentaries and manuscripts from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, the dialogical form of the *De Oratore* would inspire the convivial humanist dialogue from Erasmus to Castiglione. See Vickers, 11. Rhetoric’s lacuna, the gap between practicality and theory, technique and genealogy, continues to exert itself in later eras, posing problems for any historicism. Cicero would seem to derive his legitimisation of a philosophical as against an instrumentalist rhetoric from Isocrates. Isocrates, in treatises like *On the Peace* (355 BCE) agreed with Plato that a particular sort of sycophantic and flattering rhetoric can be particularly dangerous for a polity, but clearly separated the corrupt rhetors from those concerned with the state’s true health. See Vickers, 154. Nietzsche’s contrast of the sycophantic Strauss and the civic minded Schopenhauer relives this ancient and never entirely solidified, demarcation.

reflexive critical representation, a ‘materialist rhetoric’. De Man sums up a rhetoric fearful of itself:

At crucial moments in the history of philosophy (Nietzsche being one of them), rhetoric becomes the ground for the furthest reaching dialectical speculations conceivable to the mind; on the other hand, as it appears in textbooks that have undergone little change from Quintilian to the present, it is the humble and not-quite-respectable handmaiden of the fraudulent grammar used in oratory.³⁹⁰

Rhetoric, throughout its history as a philosophy of representation, recognises itself as *pharmakon*, poison *and* cure, the possibility of and gravest threat to epistemology and self-knowledge.

Rhetoric’s diacritical tensions are never more in evidence than in Nietzsche’s typological contrast, over different essays of his Untimely Meditations, between the philosophers David Strauss and Arthur Schopenhauer. In Strauss, Nietzsche encounters a fraudulent philosophical grammar, subservient to the powerful, glib, improvising, callow, opportunistic, boastful, bland, modish, nugatory. Strauss is Nietzsche’s figure of a corrupted, atomised, and insincere intellectual culture. Strauss’s near contemporary Schopenhauer, however, figures the exemplary discursive power of which the rhetor is capable, creative, in excess of all norms, embodying the fullness of life and the paradoxes and perplexities of truth.

While Strauss is a figure of a positivistic modernity, arrogant enough to believe itself objective, its methods axiomatic and universal, Schopenhauer limns untimely possibilities, the recovery of other histories. Schopenhauer desires a *sensus communis*, a vital, pluralist culture capable of realising a variety of forces, individual contributions, and self-reinventions. Through Schopenhauer, Nietzsche reprises the genius of a rhetorical public culture, a productive element or ‘*phusis*’ for the intellectual. Schopenhauer is Nietzsche’s classically derived model of the philosopher rhetor, a diacritical type, civic hero and wandering stranger, speculative thinker and performative bricoleur. The allegorical power of Schopenhauer, whose representative character is far more important to Nietzsche than his philosophical ideas or empirical person, indicates an historiographical problematic that stimulated Nietzsche’s thought after The Birth of Tragedy (1872). As Paul

³⁹⁰ Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1979, 130.

Redding argues, Nietzsche's thought continually mediates a Romantic vitalism and critique of 'thin' reason with a 'critical and yet affirmative relationship to Enlightenment thought', sympathetic to rationalist investigations of the historical origins of cultural phenomena.³⁹¹

One can suggest that for Nietzsche rhetoric in all its discontinuous elements offers a relative unity of considerations, a niveau of evaluation, a conversation between Romantic dynamism and a critical philosophy of history. Rhetoric communicates the ego as both dynamic and prudent; it portrays thought's historically duplex *paideia*, its need for a public ethos of address, methodological probity, rational enquiry and rigorous self-criticism. Rhetoric also lends the critical subject dynamic historicity, and an excess of discursive possibilities, knowledges immediate, intuited, situated, qualifying the subject in ways inimical to rationalist abstractions. In Nietzsche's thought, rhetoric communicates ego and world, problematising the intellectual as a social and historical being.

Some measure of Nietzsche's regret about the absence, in his early writings, of a communicative imperative can be gleaned from his self-critical prologue to the second edition of The Birth of Tragedy (first published 1872, prologue in the second edition 1886):

To say it once again: today I find it an impossible book – badly written, clumsy, and embarrassing, its images frenzied and confused ... uneven in pace, lacking in any desire for logical purity, so sure of its convictions that it is above any need for proof, and even suspicious of the *propriety* of proof...an arrogant and fanatical book that wished from the start to exclude the *profanum vulgus* of the 'educated' even more than the 'people'.³⁹²

Nietzsche's lingering embarrassment is over his neglect, in the first Birth of Tragedy, of formal offices of public propriety, reasoning, and accountability. Nietzsche acknowledges the distasteful aspects of his sovereign decision to do away with *prudence*, circumspection, that centripetal 'mediocrity' of execution that allows for the translation of one's discourse into a variety of idiolects and perspectives. In 1886 a rueful Nietzsche now speaks, a philosopher of representation who has long theorised mature, deliberative rhetorical arts; advocated self-disciplining through disputation, detailed philological decompositions of

³⁹¹ See Paul Redding, 'Child of the English Genealogists: Nietzsche's affiliation with the critical historical mode of the Enlightenment', chapter 11 of Nietzsche, Feminism, and Political Theory, ed. Paul Patton, Routledge, London, 1993, 207.

³⁹² Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Attempt at Self-Criticism' (1886), The Birth of Tragedy out of the spirit of music, trans. Shaun Whiteside, Penguin Books, London, 1993, 5.

language; discussed methodologies that vary perspective and promote a peripatetic philosophical life of multifarious experiences; suggested the important role of good taste and delicate judgment in philosophical evaluation.³⁹³ Nietzsche, by 1886, has come around to enjoining an *ethos* of address, the enriching possibilities of communicating to oneself and others.

Nietzsche's untimely prophet Zarathustra is also a rhetor, a persona of overlapping dispositions like the Sophists, Cynics, and Socrates. Zarathustra is the sage and recluse, prophesying self-overcoming and transvaluation – though after his descent from the mountain he will find his discursive matrix in public spaces, always willing to engage his fellow citizens in debate, to exhort, and to perform himself as an allegorical example of the peripatetic philosophical life.

One can account for Nietzsche's increasing concern for discourse as an intersubjective art by considering a transformation in his philosophy of history as it pertains to the aesthetics and philosophy of the ancient Greeks. One can describe Nietzsche's historical trajectory as a shift from essentialism to rhetorical potentiation. The Nietzsche of 1886 has perhaps come to discover that the drama of Greek antiquity cannot so easily be recovered as authentically existential, a Dionysian revelation of the suffering and mystery of existence, dialectically 'redeemed' by an aesthetic attitude, the illumination of tragic suffering through the simplicity and individuating clarity of Apollonian imagery. For the strident, polemical young Nietzsche of The Birth of Tragedy, neither the audience nor the tragic chorus motivated fifth century BCE tragedy, which he conceived as the historical expression of the mystery, revelation, and existential suffering of the Dionysian cults.³⁹⁴

By The Gay Science (1882), however, Nietzsche argues for a criterion of *superficiality* to be brought to bear on the interpretation of ancient Greek drama. The

³⁹³ See Nietzsche, 'On the Genealogy of Morals', third essay, section 12, 119, in On The Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1989: "'objectivity" – the latter understood ... as the ability to control one's Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge'.

³⁹⁴ Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, section 4, 26: 'The Apolline Greeks [were] unable to conceal from themselves ... their entire existence, with all its beauty and moderation, was based on a veiled *substratum* of suffering and knowledge' (the italics are mine). Nietzsche then asks a question he would attempt to answer in later works: 'What sort of artistic genre would it be that took as its foundation the concept of the spectator, and whose actual form was the "spectator as such"' (37). The objective correlative of an aesthetic disdain for any separation between art and experience is a suspicion of rhetoric: 'For the true poet the metaphor is not a rhetorical figure but a representative image that really hovers before him in place of a concept' (42).

mature Nietzsche, in a vigorously anti-Aristotelian mood, now seeks to restore Greek theatrical form to its contemporary audience and their insatiable demands for oratorical eloquence and virtuoso rhetorical display:

The Greeks (or at least the Athenians) liked to hear people speak well. Nothing distinguishes them so thoroughly from non-Greeks as this truly greedy craving. Even of passion on stage they demanded that it should speak well, and they endured the unnaturalness of dramatic verse with rapture... The Greeks went far, very far in this respect - alarmingly far ... they made the stage as narrow as possible and denied themselves any effects by means of deep backgrounds ... they also deprived passion itself of any deep background and dictated to it a law of beautiful speeches. Indeed, they did everything to counteract the elementary effect of images that might arouse fear and pity - for *they did not want fear and pity*. The Athenian went to the theatre *in order to hear beautiful speeches*. And beautiful speeches were what concerned Sophocles: pardon this heresy!³⁹⁵

Nietzsche's new found rhetoricism reminds us of Friedrich Schlegel's development from an idealistic Hellenophile theorising the authentic, undiluted archetypes of ancient Greek genres, to a political theorist seeking out the critical and communicative potential of an ironically fragmented classicism. For Nietzsche, too, Greek drama is depropriated, its scenography, its pure foreground, is one of possible forms, tones, and characteristics, displacing its historical anchoring in morality, psychology, and emplotment.

One can anticipate, in Nietzsche's emerging historiographical emphasis on Greek drama's exteriority, its diffuse formal desires, Benjamin's interpretation of the German baroque mourning play caught up in its own superficialities, its figural tendencies, its linguistic immanence.

For the mature Nietzsche, Greek aesthetics is more homologous with a motley Paganism, a luscious exuberance of itinerant gods and enjoyable mythemes. In Frühromantik terms, Nietzsche's reconsidered classicism is a diverse stimulus to modern criticism, a topology of affective positions:

Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial - *out of profundity*. And is not this precisely what we are again coming

³⁹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (first published 1882, second edition 1887), trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1974, fragment 80 of Book 2. Future references to *The Gay Science* will be in parentheses in the text, denoted by (GS).

back to.... Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of words? And therefore – *artists*? (GS, preface, 4)

Rescinding his earlier dismissiveness about the audiences of Greek tragedy, Nietzsche assumes the role of an enthusiastic and acculturated spectator, appreciating a *kairological* or qualified aesthetic sensibility: quixotic traits, supple tempos, rhythms, digressions. Criticism is now an ‘untimely’ spectator of the classical world, demanding, like contemporary audiences, the travesty of self-contained works in favour of a combination of qualities and rhetorical play. Nietzsche’s aesthetics and philosophy of history now call for a critical constellation of past and present.

We turn to Nietzsche’s philosophy of history. In an early essay, one of his four ‘untimely meditations’, ‘The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ (1874), Nietzsche suggests that historical scholarship and intellectual disciplines more generally have become the ‘enemy of the necessary’. Put bluntly, we ‘lack the things we need’ from the ‘scholarly’ type, the disciplinarian intellect.³⁹⁶ In historiographical terms, the rage for positivism and empiricism has created a kind of undirected bustling and agitation, an unfocussed idling in the garden of history, a dilettantish curiosity that seems in no way to impinge upon sensibility. Because it lacks the venerable piety and social focus of former communal and legendary histories, ‘the habit of scholarship continues without it and rotates in egoistic self-satisfaction around its own axis’ (75).

Historical sense has been confused with epistemology, with a project of mastering history through knowledge of its ‘content’, generating the illusion of a ‘scientific’ historiography (67). Such a historiography no longer serves ‘life’ and its activities, its particular drives and intersubjective engagements; rather the illusion of ‘objectivity’ can only extenuate the self-seeking, the ‘base and cowardly action’ (59). Rankean historicism, for Nietzsche, is coterminous with the institutional production of history as a piecemeal ‘encyclopaedic’ erudition and *recherché* empiricism. Nineteenth-century historiography projects a dystopic future, that of a protected critical niche that can afford, in its salubrious surrounds, to turn away from pressing social imperatives.

³⁹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘On the uses and disadvantages of history for life’, in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 1997, 59.

Nineteenth-century institutionalised historiography has become epistemology, seeking to possess its object as a confirmation of its own industriousness. Nineteenth-century scholarly historicism, predicated on an 'objective' recovery of the past, has become incapable of realising history as a stimulus to be imitated and enacted in myriad ways: 'the soul of historiography lies in the great *stimuli* that a man of power derives from it ... as imitable and possible for a second time' (70).

A mythological age, a Pagan age, was admirably self-affecting; its gift to itself was enduring and vivifying naturalistic *fictions*, those muses and gods whose legendary deeds inspired an active mimetic economy. Yet risks are run by mythological ages, which are incapable of distinguishing between a monumentalised past and a mythical fiction, given that precisely 'the same stimuli' can be derived from one as from the other, running the risk of a national aestheticism, a myth of origins, a quest for purity (70).

Fanaticism and foolhardiness can be bred by a culture's simplistic identification with the 'seductive similarities' of a mythicised past, driven by the demagogic power of egoists and visionary scoundrels, not to mention the reactive weakness of the impotent and indolent (71). Assessing the cultural contribution of a typology of historical modes, Nietzsche argues that historical narratives should be tempered *and* enthusiastic, celebratory of their inheritance while alert to the transformative power of historical enquiry:

[one needs] the possession of a powerful instinct for sensing when it is necessary to feel historically and when unhistorically. This, precisely, is the proposition the reader is invited to meditate upon: *the unhistorical and historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture* (63).

Nietzsche broadens his critique to include the baleful uniformity of Germany's system of 'universal education', where the significance of history has been reduced to general propositions, to a *mélange* of 'effects' or events without any imaginative investments in the rich and strange societies that produced them. By transposition, modern culture has become simply 'knowledge of culture', with an idea of and feeling for culture but incapable of emanating 'true cultural achievement' (78). Culture itself, suffering from a thin, universalist education, has become a 'walking encyclopaedia', 'dyspeptic' and dissipated (79).

Nietzsche laments an indiscriminate historicism which contains no possibilities for meaningful self-affection, for particularising an essentially unfamiliar past and reconstituting it as an imaginative counter-history to present cultural norms. For Nietzsche, historiographical representation has lost a chronotope of social need that might reclaim a history that has become exiguous.

Nietzsche takes stock of this dire state of affairs and recommends a 'critical history' that can translate historical data into specific engagements and expressions of desire. The historical sense of occupying one moment in the midst of different and inassimilable possibilities, rather than straddling a linear and progressive historical time as its 'universal protagonist', should be reclaimed by a critical historiography. Critical history will trample partiality and piety, deploying symbolic forms that are at once creative, destructive, polemical, and interrogative, as well as restorative of difference and alterity. Like Novalis, Nietzsche's critical historian continually reinvents his or her 'relationship' to the past, sometimes acting as its generous medium, sometimes fetishising it, sometimes seeking to destroy its falsification as auratic 'tradition'. The unity of history is not a given, but a relative constellation of elements in the critical imagination.

Critical history is that 'untimely' idea whose focus oscillates between historical inquiry and contemporary methodological applications. Critical history feels the imperative of its milieu, it can easily segue from broad narration to anecdote, dramatisation, pithy commentary, it colours its investigations with the genius of an urbane and sophisticated culture. Nietzsche's critical history reprises Democritus, demanding intellectual forms evocative of environmental awareness, an antidote to the inertia of an institutional habitus.

It shouldn't be thought that Nietzsche's critique of the insularity of German academia comes from a purely Romantic position, reviving folk cultures and accusing the scientific hubris of post-Rankean historiography of being inorganic, a false universalism, uprooted from national tradition and collective memory. Rather, Nietzsche, in this same essay, reverses the nineteenth-century trend towards anti-intellectual Romantic nationalism and instead offers a wide-ranging critique of the German cultural malaise in the Bismarck era.

Nietzsche imbricates the impoverishment of scholarly ideals with the tediousness of cultural expression in 'modernity'. He suggests that an absence of communicative media

in modern Germany means that profound and subtle thinking can find no points of contact, no realm of discussion and collaboration, even agonistically charged or parodic, by which it might be nourished and disseminated.

It would be insufficient to evoke Nietzsche's response to scientific history as a call for 'vitalism', for a shift of cognitive emphasis from the object of knowledge to the experiential hermeneutics of an initiated subject, in the manner of Dilthey. Frankly put, the subjectivity or 'inwardness' that would seem to elevate the credentials of modern humanity, according to Hegel, bores Nietzsche. The same undifferentiated, complacently content-based 'universal education' that has severed the vital link between the self and its past has also damaged the capacity of German subjectivity to communicate its putative profundity in effective ways. Thought has lost its capacity for joyous appearance, performative publicity, and the ability to articulate itself as worldly types, distinct mannerisms, conceptual personae.

Comparisons between *gauche* nineteenth-century Germans and the urbane duplexity of the Romans are unfavourable to the former:

I ask whether it would be possible to represent our contemporary men of letters, popular figures, officials, or politicians as Romans; it simply would not work, because they are not human beings but only ... abstractions made concrete. If they possess a *character of their own* it is buried so deep it cannot get out into the light of day (85-6, my italics).

Increasingly in the nineteenth century, the Germans, Nietzsche argues, have rejected any sense of the unifying power of style out of a misplaced faith in their complex interiority and spiritual depths. Their Francophobic objection to styles of appearance and address has left them looking shabby, weak in personality. The German distaste for supercilious French 'convention' in favour of a rough-hewn naturalness has left them with a culture lacking a *sensus communis*.

In a later essay, an untimely meditation upon Schopenhauer, Nietzsche gestures towards the 'suppleness and courtly charm of good French writers', the effects of a neo-classical culture instructed in form and decorum.³⁹⁷ In German cities everything is 'colourless, worn out, badly copied, negligent'. Haste and a rage for 'ease and comfort'

³⁹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Untimely Meditations*, 134.

dominate the cultural landscape.³⁹⁸ Nietzsche is willing to accept some of the German claims to a deeper soul, as Novalis and Schlegel praised the possibilities of the German character while decrying the *lack* of actual Germans. For the problem is the loss of mannerism, the absence of Renaissance *virtu* on Castiglione's model, an *ethos* combining gallant adventurousness and dash with urbane wit and good taste.

Germany rejects its eighteenth-century tendencies towards theoretical synthesis and historical eclecticism, in favour of immediate opportunism, the right of the victor. Celebrating their post Franco-Prussian war victory, the Germans correlate military superiority with cultural supremacy and autarky, the 'sense of form is rejected without the slightest misgiving – for we possess the *sense of the content*: for the Germans are, after all, celebrated for their profound inwardness'.³⁹⁹

Determining oneself as 'content', as a unique soul, can leave one without relational bearings, a sad lack of feeling for other cultures, an incomprehension of any era other than one's own, an inability to celebrate interesting characters and the cultural geographies to which they belong. A nascent German suprematism means a philistine incapacity for an 'untimely' rapport with the past, turning one's back on a pre-nationalist Germany whose intellectual curiosity could have provided for a sociably 'effective' and communicative culture:

... the foreigner will still be to some extent justified in maintaining that our interior is too feeble and disorganized to produce an outward effect and endow itself with a form. The interior of the Germans can be receptive to an exceptional degree: serious, powerful, profound, and perhaps even richer than that of other nations; but as a whole it remains weak because all these beautiful threads are not wound together into a powerful knot.⁴⁰⁰

We might say that the gaze of the other, in the manner of the eighteenth-century novel (Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*) and utopian fiction, is turned back on latter day Germany, revealing only nakedness where there would be new clothing.⁴⁰¹ In both their

³⁹⁸ Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', 80.

³⁹⁹ Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', 80-81.

⁴⁰⁰ Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', 81.

⁴⁰¹ Nietzsche, arguing for the incompleteness of German culture, recalls the pre-nationalist discourse, the cosmopolitan hopefulness and enthusiastic interdisciplinarity of the eighteenth century, another aspect of his performative 'untimeliness'.

scholarship and cultural assertiveness, the Germans lack rhetorical resourcefulness, they are incapable of collaborating around the value of the familiar and typological. Lacking what we could refer to as a Shaftesburian delight in popular conventions, the Germans don't even desire to compose inspired variations on 'commonplace themes' and 'everyday melodies'. Nietzsche's contemporary Germans lack urbanity, and Witz, they cannot elevate the familiar trait, the eccentric but loved mannerism to the level of a comprehensive 'symbol', a 'world' in Novalis' terms of profundity, power, and beauty. Only an artistic facility and creative vision, combined with a mimetic inclination, a 'loving absorption in the empirical data', enables the critical capacity to further develop a given type, to translate history into a world of representative characteristics.⁴⁰²

The German spirit quests and dreams, but just as Friedrich Schlegel and later Benjamin realised, a rhetorically thorough and effective culture allows for translatability and exceeding expression:

*If you are to venture to interpret the past you can do so only out of the fullest exertion of the vigour of the present.... you will know the quality of a mind when it is obliged to express something universal or to repeat something universally known: the genuine historian must possess the power to ... express the universal so simply and profoundly that the simplicity is lost in the profundity and the profundity in the simplicity.*⁴⁰³

In a chiasmic desire that evokes the transformative conventionalism of Presocratic anthropology, Nietzsche suggests that the breach between inner and outer, self-referential desire and social sense, must 'again vanish under the hammer-blows of necessity.... the abolition [in Germany] of the antithesis of form and content, inwardness and convention'.⁴⁰⁴

A culture that is stimulated by superficialities, that feels the contagious pleasure and interest of what is exterior to its own measure, doctrine, and system, can be called rhetorical. It has the affirmative power, the insouciance, to refuse moralistic 'depth', to create through its resourceful historicity many nodes of interest, many ways of escaping the onerous causality of the past in the present: 'these ... Greeks – during the period of their

⁴⁰² Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', 92-3.

⁴⁰³ Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', 94.

⁴⁰⁴ Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', 82.

greatest strength – kept a tenacious hold on their unhistorical sense’. The Greeks, for Nietzsche in 1874, now signify a cultural genius, a plangent urbanity, and the ‘unity of artistic style in all the expressions of a people’.⁴⁰⁵ If the ‘rank analytical impulse’ is to make the present into a homogenous desert, otiose neutrality, the communicative *ethos* of the untimely historical critic draws a sustaining illusion around itself, a certain madness and folly, a sense of ‘hope-filled striving’ that fragments linear time and creates new desires.⁴⁰⁶

Strauss, Confessing Philistinism

In an earlier essay in Untimely Meditations, ‘David Strauss, the confessor and the writer’ (1873) Nietzsche developed an interpretative prism through which to examine the pallidness of German culture and the stylistic banality of modernity. Here Nietzsche dissects the all-encompassing influence of modern bourgeois philistinism and transitory linguistic fashions in Strauss’s supposedly ‘progressive’ and enlightened *The Old Faith and the New: A Confession* (1872), which argued for a reconciliation of religious theism with a modern, scientific world view. Nietzsche’s Strauss is the danger of a narrow, technical rhetoric, he is the Sophist servile to higher powers, the rhetoric that confirms a social order, than normalises rather than transforms.

Nietzsche’s counter-historical lament is now familiar. Theorising against the complacency of the times, Nietzsche describes the recent military victory of Prussia against France as representing a ‘great danger’, that of rank materialism and an oppressive narrowing of cultural life and critical discussion.⁴⁰⁷ There can be no question of a corresponding victory of German culture, ‘for the simple reason that French culture continues to exist as heretofore, and we are dependent upon it as heretofore.’⁴⁰⁸ The putative unification of German culture cannot obscure the perennial worth of the French,

⁴⁰⁵ Nietzsche, ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’, 79.

⁴⁰⁶ Nietzsche, ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’, 94.

⁴⁰⁷ At the risk of repetition, Nietzsche’s plaint resonates with the Frühromantik distaste for the materialism and atheism of the French Revolution, a revolution which held great dangers if treated as a merely temporal event rather than as one of the great ‘tendencies of the age’ in Friedrich Schlegel’s terms, in need of historical characterisation.

⁴⁰⁸ Nietzsche, ‘David Strauss, the confessor and writer’, in Untimely Meditations, 3.

who ‘possess a real and productive culture’, whereas in Germany, where a ‘chaotic jumble of styles’ reigns, there is a complete lack of a ‘productive and stylistically secure culture’ (6-7).

German culture has become pseudo culture, the trappings of culture, knowledge of culture, the half-formed but unrealised idea of culture, that is, philistine culture. The contemporary philistine erects boundaries, is reactive, and lacks genuine enthusiasm, while the German spirit is preserved only in dreams, in the fragments of history, as it searches, inquires, and refuses identity or completion: ‘For it *seeks*, this German spirit!’ (9). The philistine feigns cultivation but is thoroughly imbued with the bourgeois spirit of common utility: all they would ‘know of an artist is that by which he is suited for their domestic service’.

A certain heteronomy or inflection of the forms of the wider society – its civil, educational, and political spheres – upon intellectual grammars, is inevitable. In modernity, however, the hegemonic constraints of the banal utilitarian Now dominate as Nietzsche argued in ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’:

All modern philosophising is political and official, limited by governments, churches, academies, customs, and the cowardice of men to the appearance of scholarship (85).

David Strauss, a would-be philosopher and historian, is perhaps the *summa* of these limitations for Nietzsche. Here is a thinker who grovels ‘before the realities of present-day Germany’ with a ‘shameless philistine optimism’. Strauss regards things, and here the caricature is particularly telling, *sub specie bienni*, under the aspect of two years, that is, according to the latest trends or the desires of his paymasters, public opinion (27). The cognate of cultural myopia and self-satisfaction is a crude epistemological realism everywhere, which Strauss cravenly ‘flatters’ (27). The linguistic pronoun ‘we’ which Strauss chooses to deploy in his philosophising is no less offensive, reflecting a ‘philistine chieftain’ mobilising jejune sentiments (27).

While supposedly bravely propounding atheism, Strauss’s seemingly controversial thesis about the triumph of a scientific *Zeitgeist* is kept within ‘definite limits’, indicated by the softening effect of a terminology of ‘faith’, as indicated in his work’s title. Indeed if Strauss did overstep certain discursive limits, as Schopenhauer does ‘with almost every

sentence', this 'philistine chieftain' would be deserted 'as precipitately as he is now followed' (39).

Nietzsche's point is that Strauss has an audience to flatter, the modern 'scientific man' who is now in a 'frantic hurry' in Germany, as though science were a factory, as though the mind can labour on industrial time and then relax and read the newspaper, the attitude of all those institutionally ensconced 'quarter philosophers' that Nietzsche condemns. The scientific man 'goes through all the business of life ... with the half-consciousness or the repellent need for entertainment characteristic of the exhausted worker' (35). Meanwhile academic scholarship, with its narrowed purview, is hardly to be distinguished from 'farmers who want to increase the tiny property they have inherited' (36).

With such pinched ambitions and narrow aims determining the *Zeitgeist*, it is unsurprising, Nietzsche suggests, that Strauss's work is a 'casual, only half-listening accommodation with philosophy and culture', always conceding to a public desire for diversion at any price (36). Like the learned classes he inhabits and appeases, Strauss lacks genuine experience; his judgments are bookish, at bottom 'merely the sort found in newspapers', belletristic, a miscellany of opinion, an 'accommodation to linguistic usage', a 'ceaseless drip of the same locutions and the same words' (36, 37, 41, 49). Nietzsche embarks on a rhetorical assessment of the relationship between styles of enunciation and cultural health, suggesting that Strauss is the characteristic expression of a linguistic habitus where 'platitudes, commonplaces and hackneyed and feeble language are the rule, and badness and corruption received as stimulating exceptions' (50).⁴⁰⁹ The problem is the erosion, in the modern German school and university system, of a propaedeutic of

⁴⁰⁹ Nietzsche's suggestion is that a complacent era is in fact inimicable to spirited oratory and representational diversity. Here he follows Tacitus's character Messalla in the *Dialogus De Oratoribus*. Messalla harks back to Rome's turbulent republican days, when the seat of judgment was the populace, forging the true features of eloquence as hardy resourcefulness and diverse experience, the enemy of 'weak imitation'. The orator of the republic, Messalla argues, gained renown as much on the opposition benches as their own side, thriving among an audience that was 'always numerous and always different', composed of friendly and unfriendly critics (34.5, 325). The great orators exceeded partiality and conventional divisions, at any moment they might bring the whole community together *en masse* (39.5, 341). Messalla goes on to mourn the orator's comparative loss of dignity in the supposedly more peaceable and imperially successful Augustan age. Eloquence is emasculated by the small audiences of recitation-halls and the bureaucratic proceduralism of record-offices; the numinous orator needs a spacious field, a great public culture (39.1, 339). Rhetoric can be the discourse of the outsider, militating against the narrowness and authoritarianism of the age.

conversational exercises, a Sophistic discursive confidence and combination of knowledges. Nietzsche argues that the current grammatical and linguistic imperatives of German speech, as inculcated by its education system, are mechanical, with its enforced Latin exercises or its promoted models of ‘astonishingly crude’ French writers, a taint on German culture, that is spoiling its young.⁴¹⁰

Such is the absence of genuine historical models, of a robust philology of the representational forms of other times, that Strauss is compelled to believe that the ‘new and modern’ are the same thing.⁴¹¹ Strauss complies with the philistine demand that from time to time a ‘new metaphor must make an appearance’, be it that of the stock exchange, the steam-engine, or the telegraph.⁴¹² Nietzsche’s critical task is to counter-theorise another, classically inspired linguistic matrix which affects the intellectual from within rather than offering more and mere technique, as in bland figurative ornaments, cheap metaphors, a certain gloss on banality.

Nietzsche feels that part of the problem for the mature Strauss is that his intellectual career has vacillated since his early Hegelianism, which at least gave his ideas a respectable lineage and a number of important themes and topics with which he could engage. Accommodating himself to the powers that be, the law of utility, Strauss’s ear has become dulled, sadly now deaf to the ‘subtle and mighty laws of sound’ under whose rule every writer lives ‘who has been strictly trained to *follow good models*’, like the classically minded French for example.⁴¹³ Modernity is the sad loss of a classical niveau, a delicate historicity.

For Nietzsche, nothing condemns the complacency and self-satisfaction of his contemporaries more than their half-niggardly, half-thoughtless, ‘*undemandingness*’ in regard to teachers and educators.⁴¹⁴ In classical times, following Nietzsche’s train of thought, one demanded to be rhetorically educated, to ‘hear’ many accents, to be instructed in a *paideia* of arts, to sense many forces teeming within the one discourse as it reorganised itself anew, to have many stimulating models of discursive instruction.

⁴¹⁰ Nietzsche, ‘David Strauss, the confessor and writer’, 50.

⁴¹¹ Nietzsche, ‘David Strauss, the confessor and writer’, 50.

⁴¹² Nietzsche, ‘David Strauss, the confessor and writer’, 51.

⁴¹³ Nietzsche, ‘David Strauss, the confessor and writer’, 54, my italics.

⁴¹⁴ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 131, my italics.

Nietzsche subjects Strauss's callow rhetoric to a broader assessment, arguing that his bad writing is softened by the fact that in Germany it is very difficult to become even a mediocre and tolerable writer, let alone 'a good one'. For a 'natural basis', an 'artistic evaluation, treatment, and cultivation of oral speech', is lacking.⁴¹⁵ Germany lacks a unifying public culture. The current miscellany of verbal idiolects, 'salon conversation', 'sermon', 'parliamentary oratory', do not communicate with each other, their languages do not overlap in public life, indicating that public speech has, in Germany, not yet attained to a national style or even to the desire for a style.⁴¹⁶ Germany is ill equipped to provide such a *Bildung*, a synaesthesia of language and image, *logos* and *mytheme*. 'We modern men', argues Nietzsche, appear wretched in comparison with the Greeks and Romans, who possessed a 'serious understanding' of the tasks of education.

Strauss's jumble of styles, his appalling yet fashionable modern German, proves resistant to creative adaptation, to what Benjamin will refer to as 'progredebility', an interrelation of forms. Unlike Kant and Schopenhauer's diction, the confusion and illogicality of Strauss's style is uninformed by the 'grandeur and simplicity' of the classical, and is therefore untranslatable into exacting languages like Latin. Strauss's pseudo-style is ominously ahistorical, doomed to be ephemeral, lacking the resonant publicity of a vigorous manner. Nietzsche suggests that it is only from a prudential basis, the productive classical dictions with their 'firmly established' grammar and orthography, that one finds those 'ancient yet ever new languages' in which thought finds expression.⁴¹⁷ Strauss is the ego that cannot be communicated, the banal and callow I.

Schopenhauer: An Educating Philosopher

'That Schopenhauer can offer us a model is certain.'⁴¹⁸

At the close of his essay 'On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life', Nietzsche had discussed the rich polysemy of the Greek *phusis*, the culture whose principle of

⁴¹⁵ Nietzsche, 'David Strauss, the confessor and writer', 48.

⁴¹⁶ Nietzsche, 'David Strauss, the confessor and writer', 48.

⁴¹⁷ Nietzsche, 'David Strauss, the confessor and writer', 53.

⁴¹⁸ Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', 143.

development encouraged ‘unanimity of life, thought, appearance and will’.⁴¹⁹ Nietzsche suggests that in Greek culture the intellectual needs to compose with many different forces, never neglecting the power of appearance. Thought needs to be represented as an art of life, a particular modification of desire, and a generous orientation towards the world rather than a self-enclosed doctrine. Echoing Friedrich Schlegel’s portrait of Socrates as centrifugal (ironic) and centripetal (sociable), Nietzsche argues that ‘man should have a center and ... that he should also have a periphery’.⁴²⁰

Nietzsche’s desired philosophical model is tendentious *and* holistic, a vigorous *ethos* and pluralised *paideia*. The ‘educating philosopher’ of whom Nietzsche dreams embodies a strong personality, a ‘central force’, but the philosopher would know how to prevent this central force from ‘acting destructively on other forces’. The educational ‘task’, the higher social calculus or rhetorical attitude of the educational philosopher, would be to rejoin a *phusis*, a texture of relationships, to ‘mould the whole man’ into a living ‘planetary system’ with ‘higher laws of motion’.⁴²¹

One profits from a philosopher, argues Nietzsche, as long as he can be an individual, an example. Such an example must be provided in a sensorium of appearances, in the ‘outward life’ and not merely in books. The philosophers of Greece are therefore exemplary in that they taught through their bearing, through what they wore and ate, in their morals. Their pedagogy was both simple in appearance yet radically suggestive, a profound superficiality. Such was the performative tendency of classical philosophy, that the peripheral characteristics of ancient pedagogues were more valuable than what they said, let alone in what they wrote, their conceptual ‘content’ a secondary concern in many ways.⁴²² The idea, as a post-romantic Benjamin reminds us, is imbued with peripheries, extremes, and the accidental features of a genre.

Nietzsche wishes to discover a philosopher who might raise us above the insufficiencies of the age and teach us to be ‘*simple and honest*’ in thought and life, to be ‘untimely ... in the profoundest sense’.⁴²³ Schopenhauer attained no lustrous philosophical

⁴¹⁹ Nietzsche, ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’, 123.

⁴²⁰ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 131.

⁴²¹ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 131.

⁴²² Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 137.

⁴²³ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 133.

reputation in his lifetime; it is the unresolved example of his life and relationship to the world, not any secure position in the canon of thought, that instructs us now.

In the complex personae of Arthur Schopenhauer Nietzsche discovers a ‘classical’ philosopher, a rich educational ‘model’, the ‘sounding of many voices in one nature’ rather than system, abstraction, mere ‘content’. In Schopenhauer Nietzsche finds not simply the ‘remote heights of a genius’ but a ‘fellow sufferer’ for thought, an imperfect ‘all too human nature’ and this brings us closer to him in a ‘human sense’.⁴²⁴ For Schopenhauer is not simply a solitary figure, to be educated by him is to rediscover the power of mien and gesture. As Nietzsche affirms in his unpublished early essay on the Greek philosophical demeanour, there ‘is a steely necessity which binds a philosopher to a genuine culture’.⁴²⁵ Schopenhauer’s philosophical love of *paideia*, of the robust, multifarious situation of discourse, is a powerful rejoinder to the philistine’s need for an agreeable, pacified audience.

Schopenhauer is an anti-type to the corporatised scholar and professorial philosopher, a thinker who ‘strove to be independent of state and society- this is his example, the model that he provides - to begin with the most superficial things’.⁴²⁶ To begin to flesh out the ‘productive’ example of Schopenhauer requires illuminating the tension between the form and content of his philosophy, Nietzsche’s feisty and yearning Schopenhauer is some distance from the philosopher, in *The World as Will and Idea* (1818,1844) suspicious of the will and representation. Nietzsche is interested in what philosophy can protect, a fiduciary relationship to critical thought in defiance of the insidious narrowing of discourse by society, government, religion, public opinion, and the subservient scholarly castes:

philosophy offers an asylum to a man into which no tyranny can force its way, the inward cave, the labyrinth of the heart: and that annoys the tyrants.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 143.

⁴²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1962, 34.

⁴²⁶ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 137.

⁴²⁷ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 139.

Yet in this self-imposed concealment of the philosopher, in the resourceful interior spaces of untimely thinking, lurks a ‘great danger’, the heteronomous demands of one’s time, a power that will not be resisted. Those people in every age who fled ‘inward’ for their freedom also have to ‘live outwardly, become visible, let themselves be seen’. They are united with humanity through ‘countless ties’ of residence, education, country, chance, and the importunity of others. They know, these free spirited solitaries, that they continually seem other than what they think. While they might desire nothing but truth and honesty they are encompassed by an entangling net of misunderstandings; covered in a cloud of false opinions, approximations, half-admissions; incapable of preventing erroneous interpretations from gathering about their actions.⁴²⁸ The social is the threat of the inauthentic, but there is a more constructive response to its demands.

Melancholy, resentment, withdrawal, even a desire for revenge awaits solitary thinkers in their enforced concealment and ‘compelled restraint’.⁴²⁹ Isolation and despair for the truth pose great and remorseless dangers for them, prone throughout history to disintegrate under the weight of skepticism and gloom. Nietzsche suggests that they will perish who cannot deal with the torment of silence and dissimulation, such as Heinrich von Kleist who died of ‘not being loved’, from the grief of uncommonness⁴³⁰. The value of Schopenhauer as an educational ‘example’, then, is his capacity to absorb, to introject the pressures and importunities upon his interior life, and then to produce a holistic model or ‘persona’ to inspire kindred souls:

Schopenhauer ... leads us from the depths of sceptical gloom ... up to the heights of tragic contemplation, to the nocturnal sky and its stars extended endlessly above us.... His greatness lies in having set up before him a picture of life as a whole, in order to interpret it as a whole.⁴³¹

Schopenhauer pursued this picture theatrically, like a perplexed Hamlet ‘pursues his ghost’, permitting and enacting doubt, brooding, contradiction. Like Hamlet, Schopenhauer was not monomaniacal, teleological, he saw that the tenor of a philosophical life is to be both

⁴²⁸ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 139.

⁴²⁹ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 140.

⁴³⁰ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 138.

⁴³¹ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 141. In *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 44, Nietzsche affirms that the philosopher ‘seeks to hear within himself’ the echoes of a ‘world-symphony’, and to re-project them in the form of concepts.

tragic and comic, to express complex attributes, to exceed the dichotomies of conformity or martyrdom. Schopenhauer does not simply ignore or perish of the profane world, he elevates it through allegory, iconography; he is stimulated into paradox and narrative mobility, Catholic and polytheistic. Thus, Schopenhauer communicated himself:

this is the picture of all life, and learn from it the meaning of your own life. And the reverse: only read your own life and comprehend from it *the hieroglyphics of universal life*.⁴³²

Nietzsche revives a fallacious but highly creative Western myth of origins, a fascination with the legendary polysemy of the Egyptian hieroglyph, comprehended before its decoding in the nineteenth century as a magic pictorial language, oracular, guilelessly open and deeply hidden.

My reading of Schopenhauer's persona (as suggestive sign, trope, *ethos*, within a classical genealogy of such communicators) would affirm Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's insightful remarks on the significance of Nietzsche's rhetorical studies of the early 1870s for his critical trajectory. In 'The Detour', Lacoue-Labarthe argues that Nietzsche's turn to rhetoric made it impossible for him to continue to speak the genetic language of The Birth of Tragedy. Now aware of language as rhetorical and representational, a continuing transposition and translation of cultured characteristics, mannerisms, habits, and competitive struggles into abstract and philosophical idioms, Nietzsche, argues Lacoue-Labarthe, was no longer able to posit 'any originarity' to representation, be it music, interiority, or Dionysian mythology. 'Rhetoric', says Lacoue-Labarthe, 'ends up contaminating a whole *belief*', allowing philosophy to be re-described and evaluated according to relational criteria and unintended purposes.⁴³³

Nietzsche's sympathy for hieroglyphics and allegory, for semiological strategies of displacement, argues for Lacoue-Labarthe's suggestion that Nietzsche, once won over to rhetoric, no longer deployed the term 'symbol' after The Birth of Tragedy as a 'sign of truth', an identity of signifier and originary meaning, intention and essence. Moreover, from the time of the 'Course on Rhetoric', Nietzsche's lectures at Basle, the kinship of the

⁴³² Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', 141, 2.

⁴³³ 'The Detour', in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, The Subject of Philosophy, The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, 34.

actor with the orator is enthusiastically affirmed, suggesting that for Nietzsche Schopenhauer is the philosopher as polyseme, rhetor/mime/performer.⁴³⁴ A communicating classical intellectual, Schopenhauer did not allow the uniqueness of his being to become an ‘uncommunicating atom, an icy rock’, remaining fruitful and capable of ‘propagating himself’.⁴³⁵

Nietzsche’s Schopenhauer refers us to questions of social agency, his uncompromising cultural commitments evoked in him a strange and ‘extremely dangerous’ dualism. Schopenhauer was a feisty thinker who felt with an incomparable intensity and certainty that genius moved within him, giving him the strength to challenge humanity, to proclaim a genuinely revolutionary thinking.⁴³⁶ Yet this ‘pugnacious’ character also felt a ‘burning longing’ for sainthood, a beatific desire, a sense for the unconditioned, for cosmological harmony. In Nietzsche’s terms, the critical Witz that allows Schopenhauer to see further and more clearly than others also allows a vision of the reconciliation of knowledge with being, an insight into the domain of peace and denial of the will.⁴³⁷

Nietzsche’s point is that it is not Schopenhauer’s retiring nature or pessimistic philosophy of will that lead him to strive against his age. Schopenhauer wished to determine the significance of his age anew, to embody the function of ‘lawgiver’, to be the measure, stamp, and weight of things (144). Transmuting the importunities of his times, Schopenhauer, the exemplary philosopher, plays a *kairological* role, methodically comparing his own age with others and ‘deliberately’ under-assessing it, qualifying

⁴³⁴ The Subject of Philosophy, 28. For a subtle analysis of Nietzsche’s ambivalence towards the inauthenticity of the actor, see Paul Patton, ‘Nietzsche and the Problem of the Actor’ in Alan D. Schrift, ed., Why Nietzsche Still? Reflections on Drama, Culture, and Politics, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles California, 2000. Patton argues that for Nietzsche, the actor as social role-player is often born out of relative weakness or impoverishment, developing in relations of dependency, an art of diplomats, Jews, and women. The actor is a kind of artist, a danger to society, a type who is no longer material for a society, whose protean transformations vitiate tradition and moral seriousness, portending a corruption of standards. As Patton points out, however, a principle of Nietzsche’s genealogical analysis is that the value of things is not determined by their origins, the eventual utility and functioning of something within a system of purposes is ‘worlds apart’ from its original telos (*Genealogy of Morals* II: 12, quoted in Patton, 173). The peripheral figure of the actor as dangerous minority becomes the central problematic of the age: the anti-modern need for artistry and style, the inner craving of philosophy in a pinched age for role and mask, the restorative possibility of the good European, experimental, cosmopolitan, rising above petty nationalism.

⁴³⁵ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 144.

⁴³⁶ Schopenhauer renews the intense commitment of the Greek philosophers, who, ‘whatever they learned, they wanted to live through, immediately’. See Friedrich Nietzsche, Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, 31.

⁴³⁷ Nietzsche, ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, 143.

himself, overcoming the present in himself by the ‘picture’ he gives of the totality of life, rendering modernity unremarkable (145).

Schopenhauer, however, was not a thinker like Empedocles whose verdict on life and the value of existence says so much because he lived ‘in the midst of the most exuberant vitality of Greek culture’ (145). Empedocles, co-habiting with a conflux of intellectual forces, rationalist and magical, was able to affirm existence and posit the dialectical nature of the whole, the conflict of Love and Strife, to argue philosophical ideas in a poetic form. The modern thinker such as Schopenhauer is alienated, grotesque, questing and incomplete, unable to fluidly occupy the discursive positions at the disposal of the classical intellectual. This constitutes the danger of the untimely philosopher; he would be the reformer of life, the saint, and also judge. The philosopher figures the incompatibility of enthusiasm and irony, revealing an immense ‘struggle within’(145).

The modern thinker suffers from unfulfilment and wants to be shown life’s copiousness again, ‘true, red-blooded, healthy life’, so that he may then pronounce his judgment on it. The modern thinker must reclaim what is lost; he should be a living human being if he is to be a just judge (145). For this reason, despite Schopenhauer’s seemingly ‘negative’ disregard for the German state and German philistine cultural life, it is precisely the untimely philosophers who are the ‘mightiest promoters of life’, and they are driven to extremes of love and hate by such longing. From out of their own exhausted age the modern philosopher longs for a culture, for a transfigured *phusis*, a hybrid of natural impulse and acculturated energies (145). The modern thinker would reprise the ‘glorious conditions’ of the classical intellectual who was able to really live for such a task, oppressed by none of the petty necessities of life, disdainful of ‘posts and honours’ (182).

Schopenhauer is not one of the ‘timid and uncertain folk’, he possesses something of the ‘old arrogance’ of ancient thinkers, who thought ‘logically’ and correctly estimated the scope and quality of their argument because of the ‘formal disputations they used to practise’ (189). Schopenhauer is knowingly performative, but he is also a stern example for others, inexorable, he ‘maximises’ sense, affective interpretation, his disease is also his health. Only after embodying the critical function of *pharmakon*, banished yet salvific for his age, did Schopenhauer behold the genius in himself, a genius capable of justifying ‘life as such’ (146). Not the flatterer of modern life Strauss, but the *contretemps* philosopher

Schopenhauer is capable of ‘redeeming existence’, disentangling the ‘seriousness of philosophy from the seriousness of a newspaper’ (146-7). Schopenhauer is someone who is always ‘too much in the shadow’ in terms of their age and personal disposition, yet capable of imagining a transformative *physis*, a new sum of human relationships, a more vivid chronotope, ardently wishing to ‘see close at hand the sunshine that one lacks!’ (160). Schopenhauer is tragi-comic, embodying pessimism of the intellect (*logos*) yes, yet also a cheerfulness of orientation (*ethos*), a desire to engage this life, to imbue it with other forms and tones.

‘Schopenhauerean man’, as Nietzsche puts it, is a mixed type; his legacy is the ‘fundamental idea of *culture*’. As a medium of intricate relationships, Schopenhauerean man distributes to each one of us a number of overlapping role-playing assignments: ‘*to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist, and the saint within us and without us and thereby to work at the perfecting of nature*’ (160). In other words, culture, as a distribution of talents, allows us to realise our artistic potential and sense of the whole, to enact rational calm, exuberant artistic creativity, and a vision of peace, to encourage the contagious effect of these moods in others, limning a ‘teleology of man that extends beyond the welfare of a state’ (148).

Schopenhauer was not merely a great thinker, but a ‘real human being’. His thought is not the empty time of a doctrine but the situationally pregnant, fissiparous time of ‘character’. As a rounded human being and rich exemplar of a philosophical life, Schopenhauer pursued many elective affinities, found many philosophical ‘friends’, and allowed himself to mediate multiple predilections and forms, which Nietzsche attributes to the diversely self-affecting power of polymathic desire. In a precedent established in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Schopenhauer engaged in philosophy as a civilised human being, *in media res*.⁴³⁸ Dedicated to the cultivation of historical themes, he forbore like the Greeks before him any attempt to ‘re-invent the elements of philosophy and science’, he was ‘free of any kind of autochthonous conceit’.⁴³⁹

Schopenhauer sensed the genius not only in himself but also in the dexterity and classicism of Goethe, and through a process of ‘two fold reflection’ was ‘wise to all

⁴³⁸ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 31.

⁴³⁹ Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, 31.

scholarly goals and cultures from the ground up'.⁴⁴⁰ Even when he was suffused with a 'saintly' desire to judge existence and pronounce on its nullity, Schopenhauer was capable of tactics and bricolage, deploying the Kantian philosophy as an 'extra-ordinary rhetorical instrument', and making use of Buddhist and Christian mythology as a 'colouring' and 'means of expression'. For Schopenhauer, there were 'countless hieroglyphics' with which to express his philosophical outlook. No self-importance, no pretence to self-determination was necessary; he incorporated the genii of many ages.⁴⁴¹ Schopenhauer, the philosopher rhetor, is a representational drive, he engages a plurality of cultural conventions, yet is capable of transfiguring current values, and legislating new critical trajectories.

In the next chapter I discuss Nietzsche's theory of an agonal civil society, and the importance of a rhetorical 'ethicity' to Nietzsche's evocation of a qualified philosophy formed within representation and chronotope.

⁴⁴⁰ Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', 181.

⁴⁴¹ Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', 181, 2.

Chapter 10: Nietzsche and the Traces of Sophistry

So far I've discussed a subtle yet far reaching shift in Nietzsche's philosophy of history and representation, as he comes to appreciate rhetoric as a broad *paideia* and ambivalent mien, the dilemma of the intellectual as a communicator, someone who spurns, derides, rejects, embraces, and suffers for the sake of their culture. Nietzsche embraces rhetoric's temporality and contingency, that renews, by relating, thought to its outside. As my tenth chapter suggests, for the mature Nietzsche rhetoric unveils a purposefulness without teleological purpose, an economy of forces that suggests a supple intellectual ethic or ethicity, a critical movement between centre and periphery.

I argue that Nietzsche, in his early writings on Greek philosophy and its competitive civil society, and his slightly later lecture series and theories about rhetoric, reactivates the complex configuration, the diffuse legend of the Sophist. Nietzsche, like the Frühromantiks before him, evokes the Sophists and their multiple traits as the genius of an urbane, artistic culture. Nietzsche invokes rhetoric as a flexible disposition, a political passion and competitive intensity, a civilian art, an ethic of pluralism, a necessary discursive discipline, prudent and playful.

Political Passions

In an early, posthumously published essay entitled 'The Greek State', Nietzsche enthuses about the Greek *polis* as a competitive stimulus for political discourse. History, Nietzsche avers, knows of no second instance of the political passions of the Greeks for their state, with only the Renaissance city-states even approaching such an energetic public culture.⁴⁴² In the Athenian *polis* of the Periclean age, Nietzsche posits a public sphere of robust interactions and rapid suasive counterplay, a combative to and thro, parry and thrust. Nietzsche's *polis* is a florid culture display, with a broad audience demanding oratorical

⁴⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Greek State', Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays, trans. Maximilian A. Mügge, T.N. Foulis, London and Edinburgh, 1911, 4.

skills and expansive discursive modes rather than dispassionate bureaucracy or politically expedient platitudes.

Nietzsche idealises the communicative sphere of the Athenian *polis* because it was not stunted by the narrow agendas of ideologues and technocrats, but disorganised and renewed by multifarious communications, representations highlighting the portrayer and evoking detail, individual circumstances. In the Athenian *polis*, Nietzsche discovers a constantly invigorated imaginary community whose opinions are fluidly reshaped by persuasions that can capture momentary exigencies, languages that mediate a gamut of opinions, rather than the normative clichés of institutional powers.⁴⁴³

In another unpublished disquisition upon the particularity of Greek discourse, 'Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks' (1872), Nietzsche theorises the communicative subtleties of the Athenian *polis* as the obverse of the powerful individualised character of ancient Greek thought. He finds critical personality in the 'marvellously idealised philosophical company' represented by ancient Greek 'masters' such as Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, and Socrates. This convivial company of thinkers may differ in doctrine, but they have in common an absence of 'conventionality', for in 'their day there was no philosophic or academic professionalism'.

The thinking and character of these men stood in a relationship 'characterized by strictest necessity', their thought was a characteristic 'edge', an orientation to the world, a form of performance and display.⁴⁴⁴ While bound to the appearances demanded by social participation, there was no stultifying conventions, no consensual language to stifle such thinkers, able to develop their own form through all its metamorphoses to its 'subtlest and greatest possibilities'.⁴⁴⁵ Here, in an early Nietzsche essay, we encounter a torsion typical of his thought, the idea that theoretical profundity and critical reflexivity issues from the derring-do, the bravado of a diverse praxis, from the relationship to the *popolo* that Novalis exhorted.

⁴⁴³ Nietzsche, 'The Greek State', 6-7.

⁴⁴⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, trans. Marianne Cowan, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago Ill., 1962, 31.

⁴⁴⁵ Nietzsche, Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, 32.

In 'The History of Greek Eloquence' (1873), Nietzsche suggests that discourse in antiquity found its provenance in the 'immoderate' presumption of the rhetor and the stylist that they could change their audience's opinion about things, and hence the effect of things upon men. Gorgias claimed that through speech (*logos*) his listeners would transmute their hatred for Helen of Troy into sympathy, that by speech he would 'remove hate from a woman'.⁴⁴⁶ Despite these sophisticated oratorical ambitions, this revelling in the power of artifice and novelty, argues Nietzsche, the orator imagines rhetorical skill as enhancing social intercourse, as cultivating discursive territories. The orator seeks renown, he wants to display his ability to a knowledgeable, rhetorically educated audience, ergo there is no simple 'intention to deceive'.⁴⁴⁷ Rhetoric, the problem of relationship and exteriority, is always the possibility of a philosophical reflex, a movement from immanent praxis to social consideration.

Nietzsche argues that what we might call the *chutzpah* of the Sophists and self-confidence of later rhetoricians ideally presupposes a highly educated and rhetorically informed 'republican' audience that would like discourse to achieve its aims by 'elegant means'. An extensively educated audience of this sort demands that discourse display not merely 'content' but formal innovation and acculturated modes of engagement, an *ethos* of address.⁴⁴⁸ Nietzsche's rhetor inherits different genealogies, he exhibits the philosophical desire to communicate vividly to a world to which he feels bound, simultaneously experiencing the performative desire to be guileful, to both sublimate and abolish all known genres of discourse.

Nietzsche's belief that a communicative imperative subtilised discourse is exemplified in his exuberant short essay, 'Homer's Contest' (1872). Here Nietzsche discusses the pervasively competitive or agonistic artistic and political culture of post-Homeric Greece. He configures the agonistic orientation of Greek thought with the multivalent ethics of ancient Greek polytheism, its evocation of the formative power of violence and desire.

⁴⁴⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The History of Greek Eloquence' (1872-73), in Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair, David J. Parent, eds, trans. Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language, Oxford University Press, New York, 1989, 213.

⁴⁴⁷ Nietzsche, 'The History of Greek Eloquence', 216. See Gorgias's encomium to *Helen*, translated by George Kennedy, in Readings from Classical Rhetoric, ed. Patricia P. Matsen, Philip Rollinson, Marion Sousa, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1990, 36.

⁴⁴⁸ Nietzsche, 'The History of Greek Eloquence', 213.

Nietzsche begins by informing us that in the Homeric world, salvation from internecine violence and cruelty, from the disastrous consequences of avarice and lust, is sought in the formalisation of combat and contestation, channelling the combative exertion and victorious achievement towards civic ends, the enhancement of sociability, collective affects. Nietzsche evidences Hesiod's *Theogony*, which makes it quite clear that Greek law has developed from murder, from the will of the victor in war, as in the bloody victory of the Olympian gods over the Titans.⁴⁴⁹ Anticipating his later genealogical method, Nietzsche suggests that those abilities which are terrifying and considered inhuman, those wholly natural urges, may even be the 'fertile soil' out of which, alone, humanity can grow through the impulse to create and transform, through deed and work.⁴⁵⁰

The function of the sacred in polytheism, suggests Nietzsche, is to acknowledge the strife caused by and pleasure of victory, to typify the manifold cravings, antagonisms and competitive urges that spur one to act and create. Nietzsche here invokes Hesiod's genealogical mode of affective interpretation, his equivocal source of moral behaviour, *Eris*, jealousy, envy, rivalry, and emulatory desire. As we have seen in Hesiod's genealogical *Theogony*, *Eris* is a baleful, terrifying chthonic god, a creature of night, inciting war and strife among men. However, in Hesiod's ethically prescriptive *Works and Days*, jealousy and envy spur neighbourly rivalry, the healthy desire to compete with and emulate their achievements, the 'genius' or motivating impulse of technology and the arts. Nothing distinguishes the Greek world from our moralistic age, Nietzsche argues, so much as the 'colouring', the duplex tonality of individual ethical concepts such as *Eris*. These qualities, these qualifications of sensibility dear to the Greeks, suffer no adverse judgment; they are considered the gift of a beneficent godhead, a mysterious power of uncertain origin, a function of many narratives.⁴⁵¹

Eris is the exalted genius of productive contestation in ancient Greek ethics, for even the gods rival each other and envy and seek retribution against the human who has excelled above all others, as in the story of Athene and Arachne. Under a monotheistic order of representational idealism such visceral cravings and unruly passions can only be

⁴⁴⁹ Nietzsche, 'Homer's Contest' in *Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays*, 53.

⁴⁵⁰ Nietzsche, 'Homer's Contest', 32.

⁴⁵¹ Nietzsche, 'Homer's Contest', 35.

interiorised as a personal responsibility and fault of the will in need of extirpation. In polytheism with its theatricalised gods, erotic and competitive passions are spiritualised as a social necessity and healthy source of agonistic conduct. Hence, in the realm of civil society, the greater and more sublime a Greek is, argues Nietzsche, the ‘brighter the flame of ambition that flares out of him’, aching to consume everybody who runs on the same course.⁴⁵²

Competition never annihilates opposition, though, for there is a conviction in the ancient Greek world, permeating its polytheism and civic ethics, that the contest is necessary to preserve the health of the pantheon or the state: Nietzsche delights in the original meaning of ostracism suggesting the banishment of he or she who would be the best, beyond relationship. The contest is perennial, the eternal source of life for the Hellenic state, a means of stimulation to further activity, augmenting a diversity of purposes and usages.⁴⁵³

Following Nietzsche’s line of argument, I would suggest that the individual towering above the rest is constant anathema to Greek philosophy, refuted by the pluralism of the Sophist’s *dissoi logoi* and their development of an eristic spirit of inventing counter-arguments; one suspects such a spirit in the ludic paradoxes of Zeno, travestyng the normative assumptions of common concepts. For Nietzsche, the ‘genius’ of the Greeks is pluralist and socialised, hostile to the modern idea of the ‘exclusiveness’ and autonomy of genius. Hellenistic genealogy and sociality presupposes centrifugal and centripetal forces, that in the natural order of things there are always several geniuses who ‘spur each other to action, even as they hold each other within the limits of measure’, inspiring relational enthusiasm and transformative desires.⁴⁵⁴ We are reminded of Protagoras’s idea of the law as a pattern to be imitated and innovated upon, a social convention rather than definitive commandment.

Nietzsche suggests that the aspiring Greek pupil’s ambitions will be moderated by a channelling of his or her energies into sociable goals, a desire, through excellence and skill, to contribute to the fame and achievements of one’s society. While competing with

⁴⁵² Nietzsche, ‘Homer’s Contest’, 35.

⁴⁵³ Nietzsche, ‘Homer’s Contest’, 36.

⁴⁵⁴ Nietzsche, ‘Homer’s Contest’, 36-7.

others in athletic contests, the youth thinks of the glory of his native town. Out of a tremendous rivalry do the Sophists, whom Nietzsche refers to as ‘the highest teachers of antiquity’, meet and outdo each other in the development of performative argumentative skills, polymathic understanding, and ceremonial magnificence. Only by revelling in the sensuous skin of a great public theatre, Nietzsche intimates, did the Sophists come to ironise truth. Their skepticism, their questioning of all hierarchies of knowledge, all absolute truth, was perhaps only the means to a positivity of feeling, the differential realisation of human nature.

This fold, this reflex of the Sophistic competitor, also engaged the tragedians and poets, who reached new and sublime heights by contributing, in competitive performance, to their respective genres; great masters such as Pindar and Simonides excelled each other as they stood side by side, mistrustful and jealous. In a significant move, an elaboration of a counter-normative philosophy of history, Nietzsche extends this agonistic tendency to Plato's artistic dialogues, which he analyses as a complex effect of Plato's close emulation and rivalry with dramatic, poetic, and mythological genres.

In a reading redolent of the Frühromantik analysis, Nietzsche suggests that the special artistic significance of Plato's dialogues, is the result of a contest with the ‘art of the orators, the sophists, and the dramatists of his time’. Nietzsche evokes the internal scenography of Plato, who wanted to stand above his predecessors, to celebrate both victory over his rivals and the formal excellence of his writings. He, Plato, wishes to say, look I too can do what my great rivals can do, and I can do it better than they. No Protagoras has invented myths as beautiful as mine, no dramatist such a rhetorically vivid and captivating whole as my *Symposium*, no orator has created orations like those in my *Gorgias*. Now, however, I repudiate all this entirely and condemn all imitative art. Only the contest made me a poet, a sophist, an orator.⁴⁵⁵

Nietzsche's prosopopoeia, his dramatisation of Plato's complex combination of mimetic desire and hubris, articulates the abyss of considerations, the economy of forces, the demand to rhetorically communicate opens up: ‘What a problem opens up before us when we inquire into the relationship of the contest to the conception of the work of art!’⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ Nietzsche, ‘Homer's Contest’, 37-8.

⁴⁵⁶ Nietzsche, ‘Homer's Contest’, 38.

Plato's sublime art is bound by a steely resolve to his culture and its wealth of expository discourses. Nietzsche's Plato is stimulated, communicated, exteriorised, constituted within representational forms that are deftly reinvented, and ambivalently repudiated.⁴⁵⁷ At his moment of glorious achievement, having finally purified ideas and rigorously established a universal methodology, Plato will nevertheless look back with pride to his *acting out* of personae, his mimetic talents, the abundant copiousness of his discourse, and his enrichment of genre. The intellectual become rhetorical is the exceeding dynamic of multiple and contradictory attributes; transcending any isolated and now passé school of thought, they enact a constellation of historical form and present critical interests.

Indeed Nietzsche's Platonic anti-Platonism suggests a critical ethic that seeks meditative themes, rich materials, in the problem of winning over an audience. Nietzsche argues as much in Daybreak (1881):

The Scylla and Charybdis of the speaker. - How difficult it was in Athens to speak in such a way as to win one's hearers *for* one's cause without repelling them *through the form* in which one spoke or drawing them *away* from one's cause with it!⁴⁵⁸ (DB 268)

Rhetoric, long associated with vested interests, demagogic fanaticism, enables us to mediate the polarities, the Scylla and Charybdis of callow content and empty affectation. Rhetoric, an effect of many demands, those of audience and cultural moment, suggests to Nietzsche a transvaluation of values, a critique of modernity's hegemonic conceptual generalities.

⁴⁵⁷ Rhetoric, theatricality, and contestation are *pharmakon* for Plato, as Derrida argues in 'Plato's Pharmacy', both poison and cure for the elaboration of philosophical ideas. In the same essay, Derrida will evoke a now venerable analytic and portray a Plato dependent on rhetoric, on writing and representation, as perpetually confused: 'He would like to isolate the good from the bad, the true from the false. He leans over further; they repeat each other.... In the enclosed space of the pharmacy, the reverberations of the monologue are immeasurably amplified ... disarticulated parts begin to circulate through the corridors ... contradict each other, make trouble ... institute an internal commerce.... Full of meaning. A whole story. An entire history. All of philosophy'. See Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy' in Disseminations, trans. Barbara Johnson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, 169. Derrida's *mise en scène* tells us much of the sensibility a deconstructive reading conveys, encouraging a rich affective and perspectival interpretation, a tapestry of feeling, to substitute for essentialist hermeneutics and determinist historicisms.

⁴⁵⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, Daybreak, Thoughts on the prejudices of morality, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, no. 268, 147. Future references are in parentheses in the text, denoted by DB.

An historical awareness of the *ethos* of the rhetor reveals our fabled common sense, our proud claims to realism and objectivity, as extreme, unbalanced, indelicate, egoistic, lacking in subtle experience:

... knowledge, joy, pain - all are names for *extreme* states: the milder, middle degrees, not to speak of the lower degrees which are continually in play, elude us, and yet it is they which weave the web of our character and our destiny. (DB 115)

Rhetoric, as a situated art, realises nuanced dispositions, a sense for the almost and incomplete, an awareness of the importance of varied *paideia*, affective *ethos* to our mental life. Rhetoric provides Nietzsche with a counterpoint to egoistic self-satisfaction, indeed it can be surmised as a noble and subtle discourse among creative equals, typical of the Greeks as a 'nation of artists'.⁴⁵⁹

If the opinion of a participatory and acculturated audience might be impressed towards new possibilities, if, in the age of the Sophists, the language of the sciences and history was amenable to a fluidity of reinvention, a *tempo presto*, this power of transvaluation should not be ascribed to mythic laziness or a degenerative relativism, according to Nietzsche. If in the Greek world 'all that was solid melts into air', Berman's famous phrase (adapting Marx) for a vertiginous modernism,⁴⁶⁰ then it was only because the Greeks as a whole *worked* at developing provocative forms of persuasion, evaluating eristic play as a sensible cultural practice.⁴⁶¹ Nietzsche's Greeks are the genius of the Presocratics and Sophists, their heightened conventionalism, the attempt in their discourse practices and perspectival exercises to expand logics of sense and create new generic foci.

The Sophists, says Nietzsche, typify the paradox at the heart of rhetoric's educational propaedeutic. On the one hand, in their vision of argumentative maximisation the Sophists posed a limitless expansion of the *doxa*, the possibility of an *episteme* continually absorbing new perspectives and critical extremes. On the other hand, the Sophists, establishing polymathy as a critical mien, are also responsible for *concentrating* intellectual 'powers of the highest rank'. Only thus were the Sophists able to establish a 'higher' level of education that demanded a subtle combination of knowledges and mental

⁴⁵⁹ Nietzsche, 'The History of Greek Eloquence', 214.

⁴⁶⁰ For an analysis of modernity as both 'revolutionary and conservative', full of possibility and threatening, see Marshall Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity, Penguin Books, New York, 1988, 13-15.

⁴⁶¹ Nietzsche, 'The History of Greek Eloquence', 213-14.

capacities.⁴⁶² Embodying a heteroglossia of senses, centrifugal and centripetal tendencies, one can bring the Sophistic legacy into contact with the life of critique, assessing the Sophists as a critical possibility, a necessary variety of proclivities.

While admiring the discontinuous elements of the first generation Sophists, Nietzsche also elaborates the sheer particularism of the rhetorical training programme that emerged in the age of the second Sophistic, as conducive to a range of critical capacities, theoretical and practical; a fully evolved rhetorical *paideia* includes training in stylistics, declamation, study of the ancients as models, philological, practical-juridical, and dialectical exercises, as well as an introduction to extemporizing.⁴⁶³ Because these diverse skills nurtured the manifold talents and critical nuances required by the vigorous egalitarianism of a republican society, it is not surprising, Nietzsche suggests, that the sociably effective and generically productive communicative culture engendered by the pedagogy of the Sophists proved historically contagious, ‘blossoming forth’ again and again throughout Greek and then Roman antiquity.⁴⁶⁴ Rhetoric stimulates a history that does not reproduce identity; it cultivates sensibility while preparing for the transformative power of individual action.

We should keep in mind, argues Nietzsche, that if rhetorical pedagogy and practice proved historically irrepressible in the classical world, it is because rhetoric does not impose a consensual thought-object according to programmatic intentions, but propagates discursive forms capable of reaching a wide audience. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche notes that antiquity was less than thrilled by the referential function of ideas. It is ‘characteristic’ of the ‘mankind of antiquity’ to prefer formal play, ‘the simple construction and the inventive elaboration and variation of a single motif or of a few motifs’ (DB 245).

Nietzsche hopes that the restoration of rhetoric’s communicative imperative will cast doubt on the Enlightenment fantasy of a pure, ‘autochthonous’ language of concepts:

It is not enough to prove something, one has also to seduce or elevate people to it. That is why the man of knowledge should learn how to *speak* his wisdom: and often in such a way that it *sounds* like folly! (DB 330)

⁴⁶² Nietzsche, ‘The History of Greek Eloquence’, 215.

⁴⁶³ Nietzsche, ‘The History of Greek Eloquence’, 239.

⁴⁶⁴ Nietzsche, ‘The History of Greek Eloquence’, 213.

To communicate is paradoxical; it requires cunning, but also charisma, (mock) heroic qualities. To communicate effectively is to acknowledge that representation must not only project new and interesting ideas, but also return, cyclically, genealogically, to its formative 'senses', its material element; that it must acknowledge itself as folly, obscenity, absurdity, a carnivalesque power of renewal. Truth is also masquerade and game; it knows many chronotopes.

Rebuking thin universalism, Nietzsche suggests that to communicate one must be a Sophist, prudent, initiated in customs and mores:

In itself truth is no power at all - whatever its flatterers of the Enlightenment may be accustomed to say to the contrary! It has, rather, to draw power over to its side, or go over to the side of power, or it will perish again and again! This has been proved ... more than sufficiently! (DB 535)

Rhetoric is discourse *in media res*. It must have the malleability, the adaptation to desire and belief, typical of syncretic popular religions. Sociability is the orientation of thought:

Are warmth and enthusiasm not needed if a thing of thought is to have *justice* done to it - *and that precisely is seeing!* As though you are *able* to traffic with things of thought any differently from the way you do with men! (DB 539)

Rhetoric signifies the journey that thought must take, buffeted by rocky outposts and tempted by divergent paths. Despite its concentration of powers, its commitment, its urge to act, communicative representation finds itself generous to exteriority, alive to detail, meandering:

Thinker's digressions. - With many thinkers, the course of their thought is rigorous and inexorably bold ... while in detail they are gentle and flexible; with benevolent hesitation they circle around a thing ten times, though in the end they resume their rigorous path. (DB 530)

Thought is centre and periphery, disciplined deliberation and idyll. The communicated ego is an ethicity on many levels:

Indeed, to throw aside for a while that which one now has, and to dream oneself a child, beggar, fool - can from now on occasionally give us pleasure. (DB 531)

We have a duty of care towards ourselves, and that is to realise our own fruitfulness, to 'benefit that which is coming to be within us', which is greater than we are, and which

must be disseminated into the world. Nietzsche's philosopher preserves a relationship of 'pregnancy' to every bringing forth, and this ought to 'blow to the winds all presumptuous talk of "willing" and "creating"', the hubris of the sovereign ego. For as 'intermediaries', as fertile texts, as a propaedeutic for the future, we watch over and care for ourselves 'to the *benefit of all*' (DB 552). The rhetor is a prophet facing outward.

Logography

The rapid expansion and consolidation of logography in Athens during the 4th century BCE provides Nietzsche, in 'The History of Greek Eloquence', with a model of how an immanent and disseminating genealogy of representation, an excitable quickening of discourse, can provide the paradoxical conditions for sober analysis, a leisured articulation of forms. Nietzsche discusses the renown of the logographers, the rhetorically trained speechwriters who wrote speeches for defendants forced to represent themselves under the adversarial juridical laws of Athenian democracy.

While presented orally and for a specific case, the more exemplary speeches of notable logographers such as Lysias and Demosthenes soon captured the wider literate and legally discerning public's imagination as 'clever accomplishments'. This had indeed been the case since Gorgias's widely celebrated and circulated written speech, the *Defence of Palamades*, which simultaneously functioned as a propaedeutic for inventive legal arguments and probabilistic reasoning.⁴⁶⁵

Acknowledging, to borrow Roland Barthes' parlance, the death or insignificance of the empirical subject of these speeches, the logographer began to prepare his 'communications', in Nietzsche's terms, with an eye for style, technical achievement, and a desire to contribute to the theoretical stocks of logography as an important social art. The logographer, responsive to the appetite of a broad audience, sought to contribute not only to political oratory but artistic discourse, in competition with their fellow practitioners.⁴⁶⁶ Logography, for Nietzsche, is a desire for overlapping personae; it is not the autochthonous

⁴⁶⁵ Nietzsche, 'The History of Greek Eloquence', 216.

⁴⁶⁶ Nietzsche, 'The History of Greek Eloquence', 217.

conceit of a particular discipline but a system of many talents, resonating with many accents and traces of discourse.

The text of the logographer, in Nietzsche's genealogy, becomes foreground, a spectator to itself, and in its circulation as a written text it is eagerly translated by its diverse audience into a panoply of characteristics and mannerisms. Suffused with the pressurised chronotope of public performance and interaction, Nietzsche's point is that the *kairological* logographical text offers its reader leisure and lapidary analytical techniques. We are reminded that the spicy Witz and whimsy of the novel suggested to the Frühromantiks a paradoxically mature artistic form, critical materials for a materialist rhetoric. Nietzsche imagines Isocrates, a former logographer, and a pedagogue, a man of practice become theorist in his later life (a common trajectory for the rhetor), 'sipping in sentence after sentence with lingering eye and ear'. The rhetorically practised reader is someone who 'imbibes a work like a delicious wine, following every detail of the author's art', a person who 'still has time' and 'misses nothing'.⁴⁶⁷ Rhetoric fragments and individuates, in order to restore and comprehend.

Arguing for the intellectual as urbane spectator, a sophisticated lover of discursive foreground, Nietzsche feels that the 'active, the passionate, the suffering person is not a reader'.⁴⁶⁸ For Nietzsche, the circuitous path of the logographical text, its depropriation, follows Democritus's genealogy of social formation, where a symbolic form expands from a technique serving immediate environmental exigencies to a rich medium, an aesthetic appreciation of rhythm and style.

For Nietzsche, the 'superficial' orientation of rhetorical form sediments into a power of critical appreciation and profound contemplation. I quote his idea of the 'three tasks for which educators are required' in 'Twilight of the Idols':

One must learn to *see*, one must learn to *think*, one must learn to *speak* and *write*: the goal in all three is a noble culture. Learning to *see* - accustoming the eye to calmness, to patience, to letting all things come up to it; postponing judgement.... not to react at once to a stimulus, but to gain control of all the inhibiting, excluding instincts - to *be able* to suspend decision. All un-spirituality, all vulgar

⁴⁶⁷ Nietzsche, 'The History of Greek Eloquence', 223-4.

⁴⁶⁸ Nietzsche, 'The History of Greek Eloquence', 223.

commonness, depend on the inability to resist a stimulus.... the famous modern 'objectivity' is bad taste, is *ignoble* par excellence.⁴⁶⁹

Rhetorical training, which concentrates the power of eye and ear, generates patience and deliberative discipline. On the other hand, Nietzsche's communicative imperative also records the role of vivid instincts and proximate sense in critical judgment – the role of tastes, smells (the importance of *nose* as a figure of intuition), a language very much immanent to the excessive possibilities of what Nietzsche, in paralogical fashion, calls 'life'.⁴⁷⁰

To love the foreground of forms, tones, and surfaces is a disposition not only to ironic spectatorship, but to engage with a vigorous sense of usage, unintended effect, cachet and context. Nietzsche is angry in 'The Twilight of the Idols' that priggish morality with its codes and strictures condemns for its own sake, without regard for the 'concerns, considerations, and contrivances of life'. The morality of the bigot and prig lacks any feel for the 'enchanted wealth of types, the abundance of a lavish play and change of forms'.⁴⁷¹ One needs to dispense with a determinate or code morality in favour of an anthropology alert to a dynamic economy of valences and needs.

Nietzsche enjoys a Pagan flourish, pointing out that a human being is a piece of *fatum*, not self-willed but caught up in a fatal vortex, 'one necessity more for all that is yet to come and to be'.⁴⁷² Therefore to ask humanity to be a given, a single dimension, to be virtuous, to be 'man', is precisely to negate the complex purposes of this world. But we immoralists, says Nietzsche, make room in our hearts 'for every kind of understanding, comprehending, and *approving* ... we make it a point of honour to be *affirmers*'.⁴⁷³ We know a higher economy of functions, we know 'how to utilize' the holy witlessness of the priest, finding an advantage 'even in the disgusting species of the prigs, the priests, the

⁴⁶⁹ Nietzsche, 'Twilight of the Idols', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Viking Penguin, New York, 1982, no. 6, 511, 12.

⁴⁷⁰ For discussion of the homosocial energy and 'erotic grammars' of Nietzsche's rhetoric of philosophy as instinct and sensuality, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990, chapter 3, esp. 168.

⁴⁷¹ Nietzsche, 'Twilight of the Idols', 491.

⁴⁷² Nietzsche, 'Twilight of the Idols', 491.

⁴⁷³ Nietzsche, 'Twilight of the Idols', 491.

virtuous'.⁴⁷⁴ Nietzsche, like his romantic forebears, will articulate a rhetoricised, 'untimely' philosophy, of diverse habits, purposes, and sensibilities divorced from origin and essence.

Nietzsche's Rhetoric

Let us now examine the texts of Nietzsche's lectures on rhetoric in more detail, arguing for a joyfully contradictory, unstable evocation, complex sociology and image of excess. In his lectures, 'A Description of Ancient Rhetoric', given 1872-3 at the University of Basel, Nietzsche attempts to defend the concept of rhetoric from its current ill repute, compounded by a modern usage that is often dilettantish or crudely empiricist.⁴⁷⁵ Nietzsche returns to an anthropological refrain, arguing that modernity has a much more highly developed idea of what is true in and of itself, whereas rhetoric arises among a people whose life-world is full of mythical images, a people yet to experience the unqualified need of historical accuracy.⁴⁷⁶ Yet such naïveté has its strenuous demands. Nietzsche argues that what the populaces of antiquity did need was persuasive skill and liberal arts more generally, given that they would rather be persuaded than instructed, for rhetoric is an 'essentially republican art'.⁴⁷⁷

Rhetoric, in its broadness, stimulates a *popolo*; on the other hand it is the mature art of a pluralist culture, encouraging unusual opinions and perspectives, and a pleasure in their counterplay. Rhetoric reconciles aesthetic tolerance and rigor, it the 'highest spiritual activity' of the 'well-educated political man'.⁴⁷⁸ Rhetoric allows for competing political desires, it can be a spirit of dialogue and commonality in the Greeks, or the more Roman idea of the commanding dominance, the seductive powers of an individual personality. Here Nietzsche revives a Sophistic paradox, that of Gorgias, who famously praised the audience's capacity to be deceived and enchanted by aesthetic fictions as the condition of

⁴⁷⁴ Nietzsche, 'Twilight of the Idols', 492.

⁴⁷⁵ Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', in Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language, 3.

⁴⁷⁶ Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', 3.

⁴⁷⁷ Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', 3.

⁴⁷⁸ Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', 3.

a liberal ethics.⁴⁷⁹ Rhetoric is not an irenics or universal morality, it requires power, violence, partisanship, ‘interestedness’ as its very conditions.⁴⁸⁰

Nietzsche evidences Plato’s Socrates as a conceptual persona who conveys the twin imperatives of instructing an audience academically, and at other times being ‘rhetorical in a popular fashion’, deploying mythic fictions, urbane, eristic, always negotiating opinion, sensitive to situation.⁴⁸¹ Nietzsche identifies a similar tension in Cicero’s *Topics*, which ‘goes beyond’ its instructive goal of being a topology of argumentative tropes, becoming simultaneously philosophical and reflective, a liminal text (15). In rhetorical discourses the controlling, intentional instinct converses with inventive abundance, is tempted by the positional possibilities gifted it by an urbane culture.

Nietzsche also discusses the Cicero of the *De Oratore*, who advances the idea that the characteristic style is the proper domain of the art of the orator, but who also argues that rhetoric is a ‘free, plastic’ art form. We can note this ambivalence, argues Nietzsche, and say that the true orator speaks forth from the *ethos* of the persons or things represented by him, becoming absorbed by the *force* and *power* of a perspective, or genre of utterance. Sophocles is Nietzsche’s representative of a re-presentational *ethos*, of a rhetorically ‘characteristic’ style that states a cause with the utmost potency, where all the ‘speakers’, the contesting characters of his play, maximise the power of their discourses to such an extent that they convince us of his or her cause as just and best (37). The most sophisticated of future philosophies can only hope to recapture our formerly naïve susceptibility to an aesthetically powerful *ethos*.

Rhetoric subtends ancient Greek cultural production because its complex disposition and sociable élan prove far superior to a form that emanates from a mundane ego or monological system. What is ‘remarkable’ about oratorical forms, argues Nietzsche, is that their artistic love of form and tone, combined with their prudent and inclusive respect

⁴⁷⁹ Nietzsche, ‘Description of Ancient Rhetoric’, 5.

⁴⁸⁰ As Thomas Rosenmeyer argues, Gorgias’s celebration of *apate*, the power of deception, is indebted to the spectrum of Pagan powers. The Greeks celebrated their gods as deceitful; in the *Odyssey* heroes and scoundrels alike practice *apate*. In Hesiod, *apate* is sacred, daughter of night (Nux) but also sister of Love, related to the charms, both necessary and dangerous, like the female sex; in this sense, for Gorgias, *apate* can be thematised as a social necessity, cathecting the emerging art of rhetoric with traditional themes. See Thomas Rosenmeyer, ‘Gorgias, Aeschylus, and *Apate*’, *American Journal of Philology*, vol. LXXXVI, 3, 1955, 228 n.11, and 233.

⁴⁸¹ Nietzsche, ‘Description of Ancient Rhetoric’, 7.

for cultural differences, actually ‘discovers’ more challenging arguments and psychological nuances, sees further, than the most aggressive ego, the most passionate, agitated ‘genius’, ever could. Nietzsche in these lectures accordingly prefers the Aristotelian notion of rhetoric as a *dynamis*, a power of discovery, a faculty or ability, rather than an ancillary technique, a *technê* (9). Rhetoric is a simulacrum, it can never possess the identity of a single art, it is the paradox of the commonplace, the convention, as invention and transformation.

Nietzsche argues that the orator who is merely competent and intelligible goes unloved by an audience demanding artistry. Nietzsche chooses a mixed metaphor to depict the rhetorical *copia* recommended by Cicero in *De Oratore*, later a favourite theme of Renaissance disquisitions upon eloquence. The ideal of the orator, Nietzsche feels, is analogous to the prosperous house that not only fulfils essential needs but provides abundant decorative items for admiration: rhetoric is a sound structural basis for discourse and a theatre for play; a combination of the necessary and the aesthetically expansive (39).

Nietzsche also admires the vivid physiognomic depiction of rhetoric in the usually sober and sardonic Tacitus, who compares rhetorical discourse in his *Dialogue on Orators* to someone who is not only not ill, but overflowing with strength, heartiness, and vigorousness, where healthy blood ‘riots over the muscles’ (41). We should keep in mind that the Nietzsche who deliquesces, in his discussion of rhetoric, from historical description and a comparative typology of tropes to imagistic absorption is perhaps the example of the ideal rhetorical tendency, a co-habitation of elegance and sufficiency, theory and its resistance. Rhetoric, internalising its mixed imperatives, encourages a ‘prudent relation between the sincere and the artistic’ (37).

In order to translate themes into the domain of culture, to ‘dramaturgically project’ and play immanent variations, the rhetor will embellish topics according to the ‘laws of beauty’. This means enhancing important traits, eliminating what is less noble, invigorating discourse with ‘representative’ characteristics in Frühromantik parlance. This is what Nietzsche calls the ‘transfiguration of what is typical’, rhetoric as acculturated translation, instruction become *ethos* (43). Rhetoric is the parody of dialectics, it does not begin with an I, it is thematically and aesthetically practised: ‘what is typical in rhetoric restricts the beautiful, and the beautiful restricts what is typical’ (39). A higher rhetorical awareness

continues to subtly re-position philosophical enunciation according to multiple genii, given that in a public appearance one must handle one's verbal weapons both suitably and beautifully, one must win elegantly and not just be victorious. The orator must be reasonable and sincere, but not coarsely natural, not a populist. Certainly it is necessary to be *superior* in freedom, dignity, to formally innovate and excel (37).

Rhetorical discourse is liminal, it 'plays at the boundary of the aesthetic and moral'; it is serious discourse and aesthetic cultivation, for any one-sidedness destroys the outcome. In rhetorical discourse aesthetic fascination joins moral confidence, saint and artist meet, one distributes oneself as a plurality of roles (39). Rhetoric is a 'middle-faculty' that engages in *particularising* representation through the *generalist* capacity to translate powerful characteristics, intuitive immediacies and human relationships into acculturated representative domains.⁴⁸²

The rhythmic origins of rhetoric

It is a false contrast, Nietzsche tells us, to ascribe popular metaphors to embarrassment or stupidity and educated rhetorical tropes to artfulness and aesthetic delight. Rhetoric is not the symbolic capital of a social class, a critique dating from Plato; it is a genealogy of moods and social needs. Nietzsche argues according to a now familiar semiological history, that metaphor is a 'forced' reaction to a missing synonym; it is a transferential initiation of a new discursive domain rather than a naïveté or mere luxury.⁴⁸³ At its most sophisticated and elusive, rhetoric, as with Schopenhauer, feels the need for a more vital culture, for stronger collaboration and sympathy.

In 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense' (1873), Nietzsche will again warn against cultural forgetfulness when it comes to language-acquirement. Nietzsche renders a powerful analytical account of the acculturation of language, the passage from a semiotic that conveys specific impressions and imperatives to a heightened aesthetic sensibility and theoretical pluralism.⁴⁸⁴ Nietzsche suggests that language is the vestige of a series of

⁴⁸² Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense' (1873), in Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language, 252.

⁴⁸³ Nietzsche, 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', 53.

⁴⁸⁴ Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense', 246-57.

metaphorical phases whereby a nerve-stimulus is translated into an image, then a sound, then a figure, and finally into abstractions and schemata, the more familiar and intellectually deadening languages of conceptual truth.

Nietzsche's remedy for the indelicacy of conceptual language depends on a kind of anamnesis, the collective memory that any concept or type presupposes a vast number of dissimilar entities and actions that have been rendered equivalent by reference to an outstanding characteristic.⁴⁸⁵ Nietzsche charges us to remember that language generically represents not truths but the most prominent characteristic of a communicative situation, whether it be an impulse, a mood, an opinion, or the character of a people, all of which at different times and for different purposes needed to find utterance. Each time we enunciate, says Nietzsche, there is an overlapping of spheres, a transference of a vivid impression, a technological sensitivity to form and number, a translation of human relationships to a more abstract status.⁴⁸⁶ Nietzsche's intensive analysis fragments and decomposes language in order to restore its collective possibility, its extensive imaginary.

Language is inherently rhetorical, says Nietzsche, in the sense that it transposes and formalises communicative situations, bearing the traces of purposive, but not crudely teleological, relational acts and gestures. Language, qua rhetoric, embodies for Nietzsche the 'remarkable paradox' that something can be 'purposeful without a consciousness', the essence of an 'instinct'.⁴⁸⁷ Language is the problem of extensive and plural nodes of agency, a 'purposefulness' that lacks an originating 'consciousness', that belies a monotheism of intelligent design.⁴⁸⁸

It is a question then of a philosophy which is not programmatic, not ruled by any single measure, or architectonic drive. Nietzsche suggests in The Gay Science (1882, then 1887) that subtlety and strength of consciousness are proportionate or related to a man's (or animal's) *capacity for communication*, that consciousness has developed only under the pressure of the need for communication, an *effect* of an acculturation which is

⁴⁸⁵ Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense', 249, and Nietzsche, 'Lectures on Ancient Rhetoric', 57.

⁴⁸⁶ Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense', 248,9.

⁴⁸⁷ Nietzsche, 'On the Origin of Language' (1869-70), 211.

⁴⁸⁸ Nietzsche, 'On the Origin of Language', 210.

competitive, theatrical, formal.⁴⁸⁹ Far from a marker of progress, for Nietzsche, rational apodictics and empirical faith in ideas both threaten the erasure of the sociability of language, the long held idea that language is a ‘mien, a pressure, a gesture’.⁴⁹⁰

For Nietzsche, interiority is subtilised, delicately acculturated, precisely where a play of appearances, rather than settled ideas, could still contribute to the philosophical and political domain. Nietzsche suggests that when philosophy became a matter of public competition in Greece, in the third century BCE, many philosophers wished to theatricalise their own happiness in order to torment advocates of different principles. However, in the act of seeming happy, in the act of maximising their own philosophical beliefs through acting and public display, mental life was vivified and transformed, these philosophers were ‘bound in the long run to *become* happy!’ This was the fate of those rhetor-philosophers the Cynics for example (DB 367). One could also mention Seneca whose exuberant sociability and capacity for friendship overwhelms a programmatic isolationism. It must at least be a possibility in a Nietzschean ethic for *logos* to segue into *ethos*, for the centre to be transformed by its peripheries.

Certainly the relationship between ethics and cultural life was significant for the mature Nietzsche’s interest in cultural personae or ‘types’. Here my discussion seeks to further Gilles Deleuze’s powerful analysis of the role of typologies in Nietzsche’s work, Nietzsche and Philosophy (1962). Deleuze argues that Nietzsche’s typologies (philosopher, priest, saint, redeemer) seek to recover the habitus of thought and value, the ways of being and modes of existence of those who judge and evaluate.⁴⁹¹ The type is a representative character within a broader scenography, like Schopenhauer and Plato they open up worlds of philosophical considerations, a passage beyond self-sufficient ideas.

Deleuze argues that Nietzsche’s typologies allow for both a critique of the values of values, and the positive element of a creation. Typological critique loves the foreground of culture, it displaces cognitive pretence by analyses of sense, mien, gesture, characteristic, always relishing thought’s role in a theatre of the absurd. Deleuze suggests

⁴⁸⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1974, no.354, 298.

⁴⁹⁰ Nietzsche, The Gay Science, no. 354, 299.

⁴⁹¹ Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, the Athlone Press, London, 1983, 1.

that Nietzsche's typological criticism no longer judges phenomena from a moralistic or rational perspective, rather seeking out the 'sense' of a phenomenon in terms of the different forces that have appropriated it.⁴⁹²

It is a question of illuminating the situation of a discourse and orientation as it struggles with, or rhythmically complements, other forces in a given time and region of the earth; a rejection of the idea as determined 'content' and therefore subject to judicial condemnation. Contrasting Nietzsche's thought to Kant and Hegel, Deleuze stresses that thinking for Nietzsche is neither an innate rational faculty, the exercise of an authoritative reason, nor the pan-historical vision of a teleological subjectivity, a Hegelianism.⁴⁹³

Types are never self-sufficient entities. An *a priori* faculty of mind cannot grasp them, they teasingly elude the possessive grasp of empirical objectivity, and they are not a datum, neither utilitarian nor average. Simultaneously biological, psychical, historical, social, and political, the type provokes a symptomology and semiology, an alertness to the interplay of cultural forces it reflects and the example or 'model' for discursive practices that it offers us.⁴⁹⁴

One thinks of Nietzsche's 'Schopenhauerean man', whose suffering was symptomatic of the deficiencies of a particular space and time, German philistinism and nineteenth-century positivism. Schopenhauer's vigorous extremes (polemicist and saint, pugnacious and reclusive, in a love/hate relationship with his culture) were a sign or 'hieroglyph' pointing towards the future prospects of an embodied and richly contradictory philosophical mien.⁴⁹⁵ One thinks of the type as a Sophistic figure, consolidating and transfiguring certain themes, an indeterminate sign that asks us to reflect in subtle evaluative terms on its ethical and social legacy, the many purposes it has bequeathed, beyond any initial origin or intention.

Deleuze argues that Nietzsche's preferred mode of typological critique has no feeling for dichotomies of truth and error: rather it immanently describes, encourages a multiplicity of senses and affective dispositions as its nodes of analysis. Rather than asking

⁴⁹² Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 2, 3.

⁴⁹³ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 108.

⁴⁹⁴ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 115.

⁴⁹⁵ Benjamin's analysis in his 'Epistemo-critical Prologue' of philosophical 'ideas' as mediating 'extremes', as opposed to the utilitarian generalities of the concept, would seem to have some affinity with Nietzsche's re-presentation of the 'type' as preferable to a disembodied idea or bloodless abstraction.

whether something is good or evil, a typological axiology asks whether something is ‘interesting’ or ‘boring’, whether it serves ‘life’ or is moribund, healthy or sick, fertile or arid. Deleuze cites Nietzsche’s genealogical understanding of religion and religiosity as an example of an assemblage of senses and types that has served many forces.⁴⁹⁶ Often cited as a nihilistic atheist, polemical anti-Christian and proto-Nazi anti-Semite, Deleuze’s Nietzsche is, to the contrary, an affirmative pluralist. As typologist and genealogist, sensitive to praxical qualities, Nietzsche is capable of praising the persona of the saint for encouraging reverential affects, enriching feelings of wonder and awe; or suggesting that religious practices such as prayer encourage necessary disciplines and affective continuities, the cultural value of stillness, tranquillity, and meditation.⁴⁹⁷

One might add that this typological Nietzsche sympathetically portrays the gentle sensibility and anti-legalistic symbolicity of Jesus, whom he characterises as the Redeemer type, one might say both abolishing and renewing the genre. The Redeemer type is the gentle prophet who, afraid of the tyranny of determinate content, the partiality and violence of moral law, would transform himself into suggestive sign, luminous icon, allegory, trait, a model for sympathetic relational forms rather than cruel and inexorable code moralities. The Redeemer type is an intermediary, realises human potential. He is the unifying sympathy of a style. The Redeemer type encourages an imaginative social calculus, a sense of paradox, wise foolishness, the god in man.

Antithetical to all purity and monoculturalism, the Redeemer type opens onto exteriority, otherness. He inherits and transmits diverse performative models; he is an eclectic historicity. The Redeemer type is like the Buddha who attempts to lead even the most ‘spiritual interests’ back to the *person*, the Redeemer’s gentle customs, disciplines, and possibilities of self questioning reinvent Buddhism’s total absence of militarism.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁶ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 4.

⁴⁹⁷ See ‘The Gay Science’ sec. 128.

⁴⁹⁸ ‘The Antichrist’ in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 588. Later Nietzsche articulates the Redeemer type as a cultural possibility whose transmission and unresolved possibilities pose genuine questions to modernity: ‘What concerns *me* is the psychological type of the Redeemer.... *Not* the truth concerning what he did, what he said, how he really died; but the question of *whether* his type can still be exhibited at all, whether it has been “transmitted”’ (600). Like Novalis and Schlegel before him, Nietzsche imagines a counter-history to sectarianism, monoculturalism, and petty bigotry.

Nietzsche has a Socratic love of situation, and encourages a duplexity of existence. It is incomprehensible to Nietzsche to make a 'hero' and offer an ecclesiastical history of the Redeemer type, for he or she is a sublime 'idiot' in Dostoevsky's sense of the term, naive and indiscriminate in his infinite love, with no definitive role to play in any actual time or place.⁴⁹⁹ The Redeemer type is a symbolist par excellence who stands outside all religion, all cult concepts, all history, all natural science, all knowledge, all politics, all books, all art; in-finite 'his "knowledge" is *pure foolishness*'.⁵⁰⁰

Masks and Signs

For Nietzsche, the ability to value the complex practices and overlapping chronotopes of the type is the *sine qua non* of a genuinely historical spirit, the promise of a cosmopolitan intellectual outlook. The type is praxical, fluid, an assemblage of senses and qualities, never coercive, rather indicating rhythms of identification and critical distance. It is always a question, in a leisured tempo, of selecting and combining the qualities of the type, and translating them into one's own sphere of concerns. The type is material for an interested and situated rather than positivist critical mien. Reflecting upon his philosophical life in 'Ecce Homo' (1889), Nietzsche will talk of an interplay of exhilaration and cautious concealment in his communications through the medium of the type:

I caught hold of two famous and as yet undiagnosed types, as one catches hold of an opportunity, in order to say something, in order to have at hand a few more formulas, signs, means of language.... Plato employed Socrates in this fashion.⁵⁰¹

Nietzsche masks himself, provides himself with supple resources, transfiguring those 'healthy states', those evanescent moments of cheerful sensibility, into 'spiritual form and distance'; for 'this art of transfiguration *is* philosophy' (GS, preface, sec. 3). Philosophy will no longer know itself or its purpose in history, it is no longer a temporal event but an economy of character, a propagation of desire.

⁴⁹⁹ Nietzsche, 'The Antichrist', 601.

⁵⁰⁰ Nietzsche, 'The Antichrist', 605.

⁵⁰¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Ecce Homo', in On the Genealogy of Morals: Ecco Homo, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, New York, 1989, section 3 of "The Untimely Ones", 280.

Like Plato, who had mixed feelings towards his audience and artistic contemporaries at the height of his contestative and formal powers, Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch* still has need of the 'company' of types in order to disorganise and renew his powers of representation. Like Socrates, the philosopher needs company in order 'to embrace his solitude more tenderly' (DB 566). In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Nietzsche will affirmatively associate himself with a subaltern genealogy, a nonetheless 'productive' historical tendency, the emergence of a pan-European 'type'. Empathising with this slowly emerging, ductile persona emerging from the remaining fragments of cosmopolitanism in European life, Nietzsche seeks to recover the immoderate health, the vital sickness of the 'hybrid European' as a counter valuation to petty nationalisms.

In many ways an 'ugly plebeian' and badly 'costumed' actor, capricious and rootless, the hybrid European will nevertheless ripen during an age preparing for the 'carnival in the grand style', an age of genre mixing and role playing. Only the hybrid European, the 'good European', is capable of reaching the 'transcendental' heights of 'absolute nonsense'. The material realisation of a multi-layered historical current, the hybrid European promises to deappropriate and travesty all that is pure and essential, a trait that the ugly nineteenth century is more likely to treat as degeneration, bastardisation. The 'European' is not merely a cultivated entity, but one of 'God's buffoons', a parodist of world history. And it is precisely in this laughter, feels Nietzsche, that we 'may still have a future'.⁵⁰² As artist and mime, as the naïve dreamer of a pluralist culture, one imbricates oneself in history, transposes one's longing and nostalgia into a potential *ethos*.

Deleuze draws attention to Nietzsche's argument for Greek tragedy and drama more generally as an 'amoral' semiology, a study of the interest of extreme psychic states, their contribution to the interactive theatre of existence, free from the jurisprudence of consequences.⁵⁰³ Typological interest wants a *mise en scène*, historically and ethically it

⁵⁰² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Penguin Books, London, 1990, sec. 223, 152.

⁵⁰³ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 11, 79, 119. Benjamin's essay 'Fate and Character' discusses the drama of fate as an aesthetic form capable of realising the 'interest' of fatal dispositions and extreme psychic states without the premature judgments of morality and psychology. Benjamin examples the vices relished by comedy: 'in a comedy of character, stands often enough a person whom, if we were confronted by his actions in life ... we would call a scoundrel. On the comic stage, however, his actions take on only the interest shed with the light of character ... the subject not of condemnation but of high amusement'. See Walter

seeks out occasions for the irruption of diverse critical forces, without the moral opprobrium or utilitarian philistinism of causal analysis.

Against the tyranny of the true: In Daybreak Nietzsche argues that even if we were mad enough to consider all our opinions true, we should still not want them to exist alone, for truth must be able ‘to *struggle* and have opponents, and one must be able to *find relief* from it from time to time in untruth’, enjoy surrendering to play, deception. It is enough that truth has *great power* as a temporary condition, an energising of some aspects of our being, an interruption of our inertia. It is enough that truth is a particular force, a subaltern tendency (DB 507). If truth plays a particular role in an economy of needs, then we should also realise that evil spirits have done the most to advance humanity, as a centrifugal power. Like the Sophists, by means of violating pieties, by inventing new moralities, so called evil spirits and heretics have re-awakened again and again the sense of comparison, of contradiction, the pleasure of the new and untried, forcing us to ‘pit opinion against opinion, model against model’ (GS, Book 1, no.4).

Nietzsche feels that a genealogy of needs enables philosophical leisure, a taste for the interstitial space between one opinion and another, a spectatorial and readerly enjoyment, a rhetorical dilation and transfiguration of crude content. One should realise, argues Nietzsche, that moralities too are only ‘a sign-language of the emotions’ (BGE no. 187). The sign language of the type may belong to a time and region yet it is always capable of being deterritorialised and recomposed, for the sake of new beginnings.

Deleuze suggests that Nietzsche is training attention on the complex forces that have educated critique. Deleuze too wants a new ‘image’ of thought that takes into account the differential formation of critical insight. Thought, says Deleuze, requires a stimulating *paideia* in the Greek sense of learning through multiple situations (forum, gymnasium, palaestra).⁵⁰⁴

This image of thought should not only have a generosity towards historical forms, it will celebrate those practices and assumptions that have disciplined and restrained our urges, producing us as subjects. I quote Nietzsche in Beyond Good and Evil:

Benjamin, Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Schocken Books, New York, 1986, 310.

⁵⁰⁴ Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 109-10.

Protracted unfreedom of spirit, mistrustful constraint in the communicability of ideas, the discipline thinkers imposed on themselves to think within an ecclesiastical or courtly rule or under Aristotelian presuppositions, the protracted spiritual will to interpret all events according to a Christian scheme ... all these violent, arbitrary, severe, gruesome and antirational things have shown themselves to be the means by which the European spirit was disciplined in its strength, ruthless curiosity and subtle flexibility (BGE sec. 188).

The type enhances the *element* of thought in all its complexity. Deleuze argues that thought must inhabit extremes, it must allow itself to be intensified by harsh and intemperate geographies of the spirit, summits, caves, labyrinths, tropical zones; it must have its midday and its midnight of solitary self-affirmation and liminal turning-points; thought must become dance, play, artifice, be able to communicate and conceal at once. Philosophy is reserve and surplus, restraint and excess, a detailed and open-ended historical tendency and a power of creatively transmuting passive concepts, of acting as artist, physician, and legislator, as mime, actor, therapist, lover, hermit.⁵⁰⁵

In the next chapter I discuss the stimulating influence of an historical rhetoric on Hannah Arendt's theory of political agency as liminal and medial.

⁵⁰⁵ Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 75.

Chapter 11: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Representation

... *authoritative discourse* ... demands our unconditional allegiance.... It is indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person.... One cannot divide it up – agree with one part, accept but not completely another part, reject utterly a third part.... A playing with distances, with fusion and dissolution, with approach and retreat, is not here possible.... it cannot enter into hybrid constructions.... there is no space around it to play in, no contradictory emotions – it is not surrounded by an agitated and cacophonous dialogic life ...⁵⁰⁶

(Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination)

...the public realm, as the common world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.⁵⁰⁷

(Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition)

With these words Hannah Arendt issued a vibrant challenge to the ‘unworldliness’ she felt had pervaded late industrial capitalism, establishing the conditions for the rise of totalitarianism in the twentieth century. In The Human Condition (1958), she metaphorically suggests that the common world we share is manifested in the spaces between us, akin to a table that both relates and separates us, gathers us together and yet prevents us falling over each other.⁵⁰⁸ Arendt’s thinking on the need to maintain a shared ‘world’ in the face of coercive systems of thought continues to stimulate and provoke political theory.

In this chapter I explore Arendt’s interest in two forms of representation that promote worldly thinking. I discuss her fascination with what Deleuze and Guattari have termed ‘conceptual personae’. These are characters and personalities who immerse themselves and their ideas in the abundance and inconsistencies of life. Conceptual personae ‘figure’ thought as disposition, sensibility, a mode of existence rather than an authoritative ideology. Arendt’s conceptual personae convey to political theory a

⁵⁰⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, in The Dialogic Imagination, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981, 343.

⁵⁰⁷ Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1973, 51.

⁵⁰⁸ Arendt, The Human Condition, 50-52.

heterodox methodology, a fragmented interest in the paradoxes of a vigorous public *ethos*, sincere and artistic.

Arendt's critical imaginary is eclectic, traversing space and time, drawing on literary and cinematic representations, decomposing and renewing the elements of political thought in search of thought-figures. Here I touch on Gotthold Lessing, Rosa Luxemburg, and Charlie Chaplin, all of whom illuminate representative political characteristics, nodes of critical interest. I suggest that Arendt is influenced by a post-romantic philosopheme, which holds that only the most challenging modes of representation and vigorously performative types are capable of restoring political thought to a broad context, a milieu, a mood, a social animus.

I also discuss Arendt's interest in the heuristic power of narrative. Arendt's favoured thought-figures or public-intellectual 'characters' are necessarily created by narrative representation, in biography, story telling, anecdote, and vignette. Here I expand on what Julia Kristeva, in her recent Hannah Arendt, Life is a Narrative (2001), has called the 'public wisdom' and 'exemplary' moments Arendt hoped narration, as a unification of theory and individual action, would yield. I explore Kristeva's suggestive comment that for Arendt it is through narrative that 'essentially political thought is realized'.⁵⁰⁹ Arendt's personae preserve mythical diversity, they are a function of many narratives and affective possibilities, they present ideas as non-authoritative, contradictory, a *copia* of tactics immanent to the theatre of political struggle.

Finally I discuss Arendt's methodological affinities with another Jewish intellectual and exile, Walter Benjamin. I draw parallels between Arendt's conceptual-personae and Benjamin essays like 'Fate and Character', where the interest of character is bound by necessity to narrated action, critiquing the politically dangerous, totalising tendencies of moralistic and psychological analyses, their logics of identity. I argue that Arendt, like Benjamin, was intent on 'blasting' open the homogeneous time of liberal and Marxist historicisms. I suggest that Arendt agreed with Benjamin that a new historical imaginary needed to be opposed to the nineteenth century's positivist and ideological obsessions.

⁵⁰⁹ Julia Kristeva, Hannah Arendt, Life is a Narrative, trans. Frank Collins, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2001, 27.

Arendt: The Political and the Social

The recent posthumous resurgence of critical interest in Arendt's broad conception of political theory has unsettled the dismissive critique which charged her with an elitist nostalgia for the politics of ancient Greece, a nostalgia which seems to have engendered a fatal divorce between the 'political' and the 'social' in her thinking. I take it for granted that Arendt's consistent desire to separate 'politics' from 'social' issues such as wealth redistribution, equal access to education, housing, desegregation of schooling, the feminist desire to make the experiences of the private realm a political theme, and other issues left-liberal politics hold dear, is untenable, insensitive, and naive.⁵¹⁰

However, I think it is worth trying to comprehend why, in works like The Human Condition (1958) and On Revolution (1963), Arendt went to such pains to delimit a distinct arena of experiential possibilities and inspirational activity called the 'political', from social needs and grievances. Such an inquiry should not simply rely on her philhellenism as an explanatory crux, though Arendt's genealogy of politically vibrant societies is important in this respect. For Arendt, political discourse inherits certain persuasive arts and oratorical personae, and because of its complex historicity, the health of a polity is irreducible to the ideologies of the left or the right. Arendtian politics is *rhetorical* in the sense of Nietzsche's non-instrumentalist theory of the classical oratorical tradition. Politics is a complex disposition that plays at the borderline of the artistic and the sincere, it is an *ethos* born of multifarious experiences and perspectival forms. Arendt feels that, historically, a rhetorically sensitive politics attracts liminal sensibilities, thinkers and activists skeptical and sanguine; worldly, socially engaged outsider figures who transcend all given identities and modes of belonging.

A guiding principle in Arendt's political thought, I suggest, is her desire that the many superficialities of political action and communication should be preserved from the

⁵¹⁰ For a useful situating of Arendt's seemingly conservative views on desegregation and public housing, her desire to separate politics from economic and social questions, and its criticism by her contemporaries, see Seyla Benhabib, The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California, 1996, 146-60.

instrumental designs of the state and public opinion. Arendt argues in Men in Dark Times, in a dictum that will require considerable teasing out, that ‘the world and the people who inhabit it are not the same’.⁵¹¹ Politics, as a worldly orientation, should not be identified with any program, shibboleth, or mass movement, it is un-timely, a being apart, heeding no absolutes.

Arendt resumes Nietzsche’s critical role of the formalist spectator, arguing that for the sake of a vital political culture one must assume that there are no political truths *behind* appearances, no Subject or historical process of which politics is the mere manifestation and instrument.⁵¹² For Arendt, politics has always relied on the simple enjoyment of togetherness and the joy of a wealth of appearances. For Arendt the Athenian *polis* is not a self-sufficient origin, a golden age of political participation, but a theatre of discursive forms of interest in the present, where political significations are under-determined by instrumental ends. Arendt’s political arena potentiates an abundance of activities and practices; in Friedrich Schlegel’s terms, the *polis* mediates and distributes, it gifts to the present ‘all that is practically necessary’ for a pluralist politics.⁵¹³

In The Human Condition (1958), Arendt discusses the ancient Athenian *polis* as a public assembly where propertied and intellectual equals can debate issues of moment. Arendt’s model political space suggests an interaction of orator and demanding audience, an inherent unpredictability. In the *polis*, particular perspectives must publicise themselves as themes of universal concern by charismatic persuasion and compromise, combative élan and careful deliberation. Political languages, faced with a broad and knowledgeable audience, recursively *translate* their arguments into practical characteristics – thematic recursiveness and subtle variations are required, shallow platitudes and convenient generalizations repulse. Discourse reciprocates with the aesthetic appreciation of different tempos - dilatory metaphors, extravagant embellishments and the immediate power of sudden transfiguration, the shock of the new, are all celebrated as virtuoso political forms.

⁵¹¹ Hannah Arendt, Men in Dark Times, Jonathan Cape, London, 1970, 4.

⁵¹² Cf. Dana Villa, Arendt and Heidegger – The Fate of the Political, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1996, 90.

⁵¹³ Villa in Arendt and Heidegger describes Arendt’s ideal political space as one of ‘spatial distribution and perceptual diversity’ (33).

The *polis* is a convivial being-together, an interplay of unity and difference, a space in-between fixed viewpoints, different in kind from an organic, closed, essentialised community.⁵¹⁴ In the *polis*, the decision-making process is not yet disciplined along party and factional lines, according to vested interests. Arendt, in a Nietzschean vein, imagines a fluid mode of governance that is yet to be functionalised as mere administration, economy, or ‘housekeeping’.⁵¹⁵

By inheriting the agonistic realm of the ancient tribal *agora*, the public meeting space, the civic *polis* is a space of appearance where the *logos* in its very performance can effect ‘action’, where speech and action are considered coeval and coequal.⁵¹⁶ The *polis* echoes with a lineage of renowned oratorical performers; its political oratory resumes the charismatic position of the epic hero and rhetor, a speaker of words and doer of deeds, such as Achilles or Odysseus. Like the *agora*, the tribal assembly so frequently theatricalised in Homer’s epics, the *polis* illuminates rhetorical performance as a heroic ‘act’, a space in which ‘men’ as linguistic beings ‘can distinguish themselves’, like brave warriors on a battlefield or athletes in a contest.⁵¹⁷ The *logos* is an ‘active’ and formally productive power, a communicatively ‘effective’ semiology in the Frühromantik sense, because it functions in a shared collective space with overlapping discourses, a public forum yet to be rent by disciplinary and utilitarian modes of knowledge production.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁴ In The Human Condition, Arendt describes as ‘a simple historical fact’ that the foundation of the Athenian *polis* was preceded by the destruction of all social units resting on kinship (24). Arendt, in a theme that resonates throughout her work, allies the ‘social’ motivation of politics with tyranny and absolutism, necessitating a division of political and social space: ‘In Greek self-understanding, to force people to violence, to command rather than persuade, were prepolitical ways to deal with people characteristic of life *outside* the *polis*, of home and family life, where the household head ruled with uncontested, despotic powers’ (26-7, my italics).

⁵¹⁵ Arendt, The Human Condition, 45.

⁵¹⁶ Arendt, The Human Condition, 26. Arendt argues that in the *polis* only two complementary activities would be necessary and present for what Aristotle calls the *bios politikos* (the political life), namely action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*). These two capacities ‘belong together’, because words do not simply ‘express’ great thoughts, they have their own dignity, intervening in this world and teaching understanding. In these terms, the epic hero is a ‘rhetor’, a ‘speaker of words and doer of deeds’ (*Iliad* ix. 443) (25).

⁵¹⁷ Arendt, The Human Condition, 25, n. 7. Here Arendt follows Nietzsche in anchoring the linguistic agent in an active agonistic realm, where poets, tragedians and philosophers overlap in their discourse practices.

⁵¹⁸ Although in some senses a *tabula rasa*, a public sphere cleansed of tribal hatreds and domestic patriarchy, Arendt, in addition to her emphasis on the heroic epic rhetor, emphasises the *polis*’s resumption of the Presocratic belief that speech and action belonged together. We should note, then, that Arendt’s *polis* has its idiosyncratic genealogies, a sediment of duplex epic heroism (Odysseus) and active or praxical

In the *polis*, language is illuminated as phenomenon and sense, as action (*praxis*), deed, gesture, mien. Speech (*logos*) constitutes a political ‘way of life’, in which speechifying and not violence or command ‘makes sense’, where the ‘central concern’ of all citizens was to talk with each other, and where every politician was called a ‘rhetor’, accorded the dignity of a generalist and polymath.⁵¹⁹ Yet if public, suasive speech is homologous to a phenomenally accessible activity (*praxis*), activity itself is only illuminated through the representational power of language (*logos*). Arendt argues that the stature of Achilles is only discernible if one understands him simultaneously as a ‘doer of great deeds and speaker of great words’. He is not simply an epic hero judged on his military conquests, but someone whose mien and discourse can be immortalized. Achilles is a *model* of conduct, an inspiration for future generations.⁵²⁰

Arendt invokes the Athenian politician Pericles, who understood that the ‘innermost meaning of the acted deed and the spoken word is independent of victory and defeat’. Unlike empirical human behaviour that needs to be judged by moral standards such as motives, aims, and consequences, politically effective action can only be judged ‘by the criterion of greatness’.⁵²¹ Pericles, like the dramatist-historian Thucydides, knew full well he had broken with ‘normal standards for everyday behaviour’ when he promoted the glory of Athens as a testament, an ‘everlasting remembrance’ of its deeds, capable of reinventing the significance of death and loss.⁵²²

The political oratory of the *polis* is a foreground or scenography of forces and desires, the specific meaning of each deed ‘can only lie in the performance itself’ and neither in its empirical motivation nor its achievement. The *polis* is there to ‘inspire men to dare the extraordinary’, interested in a spectrum of ‘psychological qualities’ that are ‘characteristic of different types of persons’. The *polis* collectivizes the power of

philosophising (Thales, Heraclitus), a space that allows equally for the trickster figure and the inexorable convictions and loyalties of the philosopher.

⁵¹⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 26, 27 n. 9.

⁵²⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 25.

⁵²¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 205.

⁵²² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 206. Arendtian political discourse is a rhetorical unity of the magical/metamorphic and the prudential.

individuality, it wants both recursive themes and potent individual examples, it is unmoved by watery ideals.⁵²³

Nativity

The relationship of language to praxis in Arendt's *polis* is chiasmic. Both terms cross over each other and affect the standards by which each is judged. Action is representation, representation is action. Ideas are translated into worldly practices, worldly practices become exemplary ideals; representation requires phenomenal power, phenomenal power, representation. In The Human Condition Arendt theorises the possibility of 'nativity' in politics, activities that engender the 'birth' of new trajectories. Arendt is interested in actions, linguistic and phenomenal, which do more than attain limited ends; enacting a work of 'world-constitution' rather than a finite teleological labour, a utilitarian technique. As Dana Villa suggests, Arendt here leans heavily on the Aristotelian distinction in the *Nichomechean Ethics* between *poesis*, instrumental labour, and *praxis*, a work or purposefulness without ultimate end, a unique activity that consumes itself in the act, enhancing a convivial sense of being with others.⁵²⁴

The subtending condition of action and speech, that which imbricates their functioning, argues Arendt, is human plurality, which has the twofold 'character of equality and distinction'. A pluralist political society needs creative equals, people who understand one another and yet are distinct from each other, requiring speech and action to make themselves understood. Discourse, as Democritus then Nietzsche reminds us, is a net of needful communications between equals, whose evolutionary tendency is to enable diverse spheres of activity, the communication of singularities.⁵²⁵

⁵²³ Arendt, The Human Condition, 206.

⁵²⁴ Villa, Arendt and Heidegger, 45. Villa describes Arendt's version of politics as a 'radically anti-teleological stance', 49.

⁵²⁵ Arendt, The Human Condition, 175-6. Consider Arendt's distaste for the bourgeois celebration/mystification of 'genius', the modern age's obsession with the 'unique signature of each artist'. In a labouring or productivist society, a subtle meta-language about creativity is lacking. Turning to aesthetics out of exhaustion, a philistine age is preoccupied with those features by which an artist 'transcends ... skill and workmanship' as well as 'all other products of human hands' (210). This borderline 'idolatry' of genius,

Arendt avers that only in a space of togetherness and interaction does political language have a ‘power’ to continually enrich the public realm with new ‘appearances’ and human ‘artifacts’. The ‘natal’ power of word and deed ‘actualizes’ the human condition of plurality, that is, ‘of living as a distinct and unique being among equals’.⁵²⁶ With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, like ‘a second birth’.⁵²⁷ Action and speech are closely related because the primordial, specifically human act must contain a response to the question asked of all ‘newcomers’, ‘who are you?’ Unaccompanied by words, by suggestive signs, by performance and tonal inflection, the deed will only be apprehended in its ‘brute physical appearance’. Action unaccompanied by speech is not really ‘action’, for in that case ‘there would no longer be an actor’, and the ‘actor’ is only possible if he is at the same time the speaker of words, bringing us back to the paradox of Witz, as singular performance and collective context.⁵²⁸

To act, in and through language, is a moment of simple courage, it is to ‘show who you are’, to give yourself phenomenal relief, to give oneself the ‘unique shape of the body and sound of the voice’, it is to display one’s thought in one’s life. On the other hand a complex self-representation is involved, one acts oneself, repositions oneself, exalting in the diacritical power of performance.⁵²⁹ Therefore to act and display oneself is not so much a ‘form of achievement’, a sop to the ego, as the communal revelation, over time and innumerable performances, of a ‘specific character’, constituted within representation.⁵³⁰

Arendt argues that, once intercepted by an historical process of interpretation, the ‘author or producer’ does not in essence determine the significance and effects of activity. The ‘disclosure’, the unfolding significance of an action, can almost never be achieved as a ‘willful purpose’. The ‘who’ illuminated through action is more like a *daimon*, a genius

this mystification of the sociable conditions of creativity and praxis, ignores the ‘elementary fact’ that the essence of ‘who’ somebody is cannot be reified ‘by himself’, genius is a typological quality, it presupposes skill and craft (211). For a philosophy of communicating singularities, or ‘literary communism’, see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor and Lisa Garbus, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1991, 19: ‘This consciousness – or this communication - is ecstasy: which is to say that such a consciousness is never *mine*, but to the contrary, I only have it in and through community’.

⁵²⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.

⁵²⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

⁵²⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178-9.

⁵²⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.

⁵³⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 180.

that accompanies one throughout one's life, while remaining 'hidden from the person himself'. Upon entry into the shared world of the public, the phenomenal disclosure of performance and gesture allows interception, translation, interpretation, fragmentation and recomposition.⁵³¹ The 'revelatory' quality of speech and action 'comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them - that is, in sheer human togetherness', a discursive foreground emancipated of judgment and sentimentality.⁵³²

Arendt's inheritance of the many chronotopes of the rhetorical tradition is indicated. Politics as word and action is both the energetic deeds and glorious acts of youth and the mature, leisured interpretative art and cultivated propaedeutic of the retired orator and teacher, who can assess stylistic felicities and interesting oratorical personalities regardless of their empirical being or ideologies. Arendt recalls the classical doxography that relentlessly interrogated the 'who', the thinker revealed through phenomenal attributes and performative display; those thought-figures immortalised for their 'characteristic' orientation to the world, their *ethos*. Natality requires genealogy, representation, the protection of personae and plurality.⁵³³

Arendt's commitment to the forms of political discourse helps us to explain her strong opposition to a politics anchored in sentimentalism, a discourse of foundations. The political ideal of popular sovereignty, as manifested in the idea of the 'will of the people' or 'public opinion', held few attractions for Arendt. She ascribed both the bourgeois instrumentalisation of politics for class imperatives, and revolutionary populism, to the overweening 'social' values that overwhelmed politics from the late eighteenth century, preparing the ground for totalitarianism. If the private greed of the bourgeoisie scorns the manifest institutions of democratic politics, the French Revolution stands equally accused of engendering a 'boundless sentiment' that sought to overwhelm difference and institutional forms.

⁵³¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 179.

⁵³² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 180.

⁵³³ Arendt argues for the 'togetherness' of the *polis* diacritically, as both a chronotope of phenomenal variety and sensuous appreciation, and a political space requiring coercive power and unifying fictions: 'Without action to bring into the play of the world the new beginning of which each man is capable, "there is nothing new under the sun"; without speech to materialize and memorialize ... "there is no remembrance" ... the enduring permanence of a human artifact.... And without power, the space of appearance brought forth through action and speech will fade away' (204).

In Robespierre, Arendt in On Revolution (1963) finds an antipode to the urbanity of the political rhetor. Here she discusses the French Revolution's fatal attempt to embody Rousseau's theory of political power as emanating from a *volonté générale* or popular will. Arendt argues that the social exigency of poverty and 'biological need', the pressing issue of hunger, radicalised Robespierre's mentality. He became overwhelmed by compassion for the poor and hatred towards the aristocracy, as well as immensely suspicious of the dispassionate legalism of the bourgeois constitutionalists. Politics as the instrument of the 'compassionate zeal' of popular sentiment, Arendt feels, will tend to consume the in-between communicative mechanisms of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise. Robespierre's intense enthusiasm for redressing inequalities ended up by plangently overwhelming the continuity and stability of institutions and procedural forms. Terror is unleashed when politics attempts to *found* itself on a unified voluntarism and sentimentality, ignoring the political necessity of a variety of personae and the plural interests of civil society. Arendt suggests that Robespierre engaged in a grotesque mimesis of bourgeois aspirations, which desire to subvert representative institutions, from the moment that his paranoia was able to detect only hidden hypocrisy and secret social alliances in constitutional liberalism.⁵³⁴

As a critical response to the overpowering role of unified sentiment in political movements, whether it be bourgeois greed or revolutionary compassion, Arendt discusses the articulations of narrative, the dilations of representation, as a mature form of political expression. In the polyphony of drama and the calm interest of narrative in the fate of character, Arendt draws on what Kristeva has called the 'exemplary' power of narratology to disclose the political 'who' from multiple perspectives. As Kristeva argues, Arendt rehabilitates a mode of political understanding that gives 'privileged status to a revelation of social mechanisms', of the orientation of affect, intellect, and imagination to the world.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ Hannah Arendt, On Revolution, Penguin, Suffolk UK, 1963, 86-90.

⁵³⁵ Kristeva, Hannah Arendt, Life is a Narrative, 8, 17, 39. Arendtian narrative evokes both mature typological assessment and a generous appreciation of the fluidity and vicissitudes of political agency: 'The art of narrative resides in the ability to condense the action into an exemplary moment, to extract it from the continuous flow of time, and reveal a *who*... it [narrative signification] launches an infinite act of interpretation' (17-18).

In an adventurous discussion of the Grand Inquisitor scene in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Arendt wonders, in On Revolution, whether Jesus' compassion and love, with its desire to transcend the generalisations of law and judgment through the redemptive appreciation of human singularity, can ever found political institutions. In Arendt's reading, Jesus' sublime lack of 'worldliness' condemns him, like Robespierre, to inarticulateness, unwilling to offer demonstrative reasons in response to the Grand Inquisitor's anguished interrogation of the political effectiveness of infinite love and forgiveness. Jesus' answer, which is to disarm the Inquisitor with a beatific kiss, is, in its own way, overwhelming. Jesus is Nietzsche's acultural Redeemer type; he lacks the specifically political quality of deliberation, a discursiveness translatable into worldly qualities. Arendt likens Jesus in this respect to the completely innocent 'natural' man, Billy Budd in Melville's eponymous tale. Here, the 'selfless' being of pure sentiment and innocent idealism is reduced to a violent inarticulateness, an 'instinctive' act of murderous violence, the culmination of his inability to comprehend, absorb, and respond to a variety of stimuli, to reinvent and renew himself. Innocence and naïveté lack the 'pathos of distance', they cannot communicate their needs, translate themselves within a political theatre of diversity and difference – they pose the threat of the self-identical, the noun as opposed to rhetoric's articulated grammar:

Jesus' silence in the 'Grand Inquisitor' and Billy Budd's stammer indicate ... their incapacity (or unwillingness) for all kinds of predicative or argumentative speech, in which someone talks *to* somebody *about* something that is of interest to both because it *inter-est*, it is between them.⁵³⁶

By contrast, in a series of essays entitled The Jew as Pariah, Arendt turns to the ambiguous figure of Charlie Chaplin as a critical response to the threat of an 'overwhelming' inarticulateness. Unlike Jesus and Billy Budd, Charlie Chaplin *performatively* 'allegorises' the 'incompatibility' of general laws and individual misdeeds. A combination of impudence, cunning, naïveté, and fearfulness, Chaplin's 'little Yid' character, trickster and schlemiel, was the most 'popular' of contemporary figures. On the one hand a guileless visual comic, Chaplin's 'type' inherits the 'hidden tradition' of the

⁵³⁶ Arendt, On Revolution, 86-90.

Jewish pariah figure, their ‘humanity, humour, and disinterested intelligence’. Chaplin, with his ‘gypsy’ insouciance and mobility and ‘clearly Jewish traits’ of caution and vulnerability, figures the exemplary political ‘interest’ of various cultural milieux, qualities of political formation usually invisible to political theory.⁵³⁷

The mixed chronotope of the Chaplinesque figure is constituted in vaudevillian theatricality and picaresque narrative, in scenography rather than sentimentality. The Chaplinesque figure is untimely, promissory: ‘It is true that in “dark times” the warmth which is the pariah’s substitute for light exerts a great fascination upon all those who are ... ashamed of the world as it is’.⁵³⁸ Pariah figures exert a political influence and inspirational model outside conventional ideological co-ordinates, they confront all organised political movements and doctrinaire schools of thought with their *pharmakon* or internal other, their need for provocateurs and dreamers.

Through hybrid figures and multiple genealogies, Arendt suggests that there is no foundation to politics, which demands many narratives and thematic materials. For Arendt, the absolutism of populist politics, born with the emergence of mass working-class movements in the French Revolution, supplants the recognition of a myriad of interests and perspectives, those institutions that provide ‘worldly spaces between men’. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries, argues Arendt, witness a disastrous recrudescence of Robespierre’s sentimentalisation of politics, the unacknowledged affective subtext of Marx’s ‘scientific’ universalism. Sentimentalism and its ideological correlatives diminish respect for institutions and their procedural forms, creating an absolutist metaphysic of direct and violent action against the putatively ‘unrepresentative’ institutions of law and politics and the continuities of memory and the legal symbolism that they preserve.⁵³⁹

Arendt pours scorn on Marx’s subjection of the liberationist promise of spontaneous political uprisings, such as the Paris Commune of 1870, to naturalised, scientifically

⁵³⁷ See Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, ed. Ron H. Feldman, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1978, 65-82.

⁵³⁸ Nietzsche, *Men in Dark Times*, 16.

⁵³⁹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 86-7. Cf. Karl Marx, ‘On the Jewish Question’ (1843) in Robert C. Tucker, ed. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 24-51, which suggests that Enlightenment liberal freedoms are illusory, are merely formal and empty, since the real movement of history is the way capitalist commercial society (‘egoistic man’) denies the release of man’s species-powers.

predictive laws of class conflict and social necessity. Marx, like Robespierre, is indicted for his disregard for ‘surface’ parliamentary and juridical institutions and the rule of law, which require a subtle evaluation of their usage and purpose rather than being conceived as epiphenomena of bourgeois hegemony. The totalitarian animus, Arendt suggests, is to be found whenever a distancing respect is lost for the manifest ‘visibility’ and plurality of social conditions and the characteristic ‘who’, the public actors (juridical and executive) whose recognition forms the basis for political persuasion and argumentation.⁵⁴⁰

Politics needs a sense for the portrayer as well as the portrayed; it must renounce all claims to objectivity or unified foundations.

One of the features of Nazi anti-Semitism that made it an ideological tool for total domination, Arendt argues, is that it was no longer to be considered an arguable or experiential matter, but a pervasive metaphysical reality requiring counter-action on a global scale.⁵⁴¹ An insidious and always meta-physical evil, the ‘Jew’s’ ‘apparent’ differential public-political manifestation as bourgeois expropriator or socialist agitator was always a ruse in Hitler’s paranoid imaginary, a mere façade hiding a trans-national social conspiracy of Jewish world domination.

All seeming disagreement and signs of difference in public life, the topology of appearances, were mystified by the Nazis, converted into a genetic logic of natural, social, and psychological sources. A vocabulary of deviance, degeneration, and decadence negates the empirical visibility of political/ideological difference; a political vocabulary with its institutional vestiges of agonistic respect for other political agents is replaced by monolithic ‘social’ values, a claim to the general will, a racist essentialism, a paranoid victimology; now the totalitarian regime no longer feels any need to ‘refute opposing arguments’, preferring death to persuasion, and terror to conviction.⁵⁴²

Arendt explains Hitler’s steadfast refusal to nominate the form of government his regime embodied, as a means of generating a conception of power that does not rely on

⁵⁴⁰ Arendt’s thinking seems influenced by Nietzsche’s call in ‘Twilight of the Idols’ for a ‘spiritualisation of enmity’, a mode of ‘agonistic respect’ in the political theorist William Connolly’s terms.

⁵⁴¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1951, 362.

⁵⁴² Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 312.

verifiable or arguable forms. Only the indeterminate and unarguable ‘will’ of the Führer, reciprocal with the aspirations of the German people, would be allowed to underscore political power in the third Reich. The mystical legitimacy of Hitler, moreover, was further removed from the sphere of rational argument by the gnomic repetition that he was always right and always would be right, that the test of what he had done would only be revealed in centuries to come, once again removing political decision from the ‘visible’ experience of his contemporaries into the untestable discourse of the visionary and prophet.⁵⁴³

Even the party program of National Socialism itself, as an articulated and ‘visible’ reference point, was tacitly ignored in Germany in the 1930s, in a shift from a party-political program to the metaphysical destiny of the ‘movement’. What ‘totalitarianism’ wishes to dispense with, says Arendt, is ‘common sense’, which has its pre-condition in institutional continuities, legal precedent, civic association, and the memory of plurality. To establish a reign of terror, the positive laws of constitutional government, with their ratified boundaries and established channels of communication between people, are nullified, replaced by unarguable laws of nature and history, a consequence of Robespierre. In Nazism, organic and Manichean models of Aryan community and racial conflict supplant those legal and political vocabularies which preserve a field of guaranteed modes of relationship and separation in the realm of human affairs.⁵⁴⁴

For Arendt, the recovery of a form of ‘common sense’ that combined a rational predilection for deliberative argumentation with an appreciation of a phenomenal variety of performative characters was an urgent task. Arendt did not turn to any available critical position, such as liberalism, to achieve her critical goals, but to people, as conceptual personae, at once unique and characteristic. It is conceptual personae who illuminate, as a medium of signs, as assumed role, the impoverished politics of modernity. It is conceptual personae who figure possibilities repressed, ignored, misunderstood, denied.

Worldly Types, Narrative Figures: Men in Dark Times

⁵⁴³ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 383.

⁵⁴⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 465.

In a book of essays on the relationship between intellectuals and the public sphere, Men in Dark Times (1970), Arendt turns her critical gaze to those worldly literary critics, philosophers, and political activists who can satisfy her demand for an open, vigorous temperament that inserts itself into the world, offering a unity of life and thought, ideas and phenomena, heeding no retreat into truth, orthodoxy, convention. The full significance of these ‘men in dark times’, these figures shrouded by the obtuseness of modern positivism, will, however, only be revealed through the retrospective form of historical narrative, interspersed with biographical fragments, a montage of anecdotes. Like the fool figure in comedy, these characters stand in the foreground of the stage, chatting amiably and openly with the critic as spectator, yet within their superficiality inheres a profound wisdom and an abundance of critical resources.

With proleptic gusto, Arendt warns readers of Men in Dark Times that if they are on the lookout for mouthpieces of the Zeitgeist, for exponents of History as a unified era, then they will look into this book in vain. For we now occupy a benighted public realm that no longer illuminates ‘the affairs of men’ by providing a space of appearances in which they can show, in word and deed, ‘who they are and what they can do’. Speech no longer ‘discloses’ what is of worldly inter-est, of in-between value, but ‘sweeps’ intuition and sense ‘under the carpet’. By double-speak and moral exhortations, official discourse, under the pretext of transparency, ‘degrade(s) all truth to meaningless triviality’.⁵⁴⁵

Arendt argues that as in Sartre’s *La Nausée*, everything publicly recognized, those people who generate publicity, are among the *salauds*. Everything existent has an opaque, meaningless ‘thereness’ that spreads obfuscation and inspires only ‘disgust’ (viii). The natal, fertile power of the ‘who’, the fluid recursive effect of an interpretative community of acculturated, interactive equals has been displaced, in dark times, by a lack in public life of credibility and conviction; a lack that is the ironic, but by no means accidental, product of an age that serenely boasts of its capacity to know the ‘truth’.

In a more qualified sense than one can attribute to Heidegger’s pessimistic existential modernism, Arendt feels that in these times ‘the light of the public obscures

⁵⁴⁵ Arendt, Men in Dark Times, preface, viii. Arendt’s complaint resounds with Nietzsche’s earlier attack on the philistine public sphere of which Richard Strauss was an embodiment.

everything' (ix). In such a world, great individuals retreat and a 'demonstrable loss' takes place, that 'specific and usually irreplaceable in-between which should have formed between this individual and his fellow men' (4-5). Modernity lacks a communicative imperative, a stylistic genius, and a vital and productive public culture.

Arendt's Nietzschean lament for the 'untimely' thinker shunted into obscurity by modern philistinism draws on Benjamin's historiographical ideas for redress. For even in dark times, Arendt feels, 'we have the right to expect some illumination', which might well come less from 'theories and concepts' than from the uncertain, flickering, and often weak light that 'some men and women' in their lives and works will 'kindle under almost all circumstances' and shed over the time span given them on earth (ix). The theoretical supposition of Arendt's narratology and typology follows Nietzsche and Benjamin in questioning the 'relevance of the Western tradition as a whole', the impossibility of a humanist continuation of the past, the disastrous faith of the nineteenth century in material and moral progress, Capitalist or Marxist (190).⁵⁴⁶

Tradition, as 'transmissible truth', can no longer transform its putative truths into wisdom, that is, into an experientially informed propaedeutic for new knowledges. Tradition now lacks the 'characteristics' that it could acquire only through 'universal recognition of its validity'; it is no longer informed by a *sensus communis*. Arendt, in her essay on Benjamin (famous as the introduction to Illuminations), praises his historiography. Benjamin was indebted to the 'genius' of Kafka and like him sacrificed an historicist faith in history as a continuum of discernible truths for the 'sake of clinging to the transmissibility' of certain forms and temperaments (196).

For Kafkaesque Benjamin, what was now transmissible, what could now illuminate, was not an authoritative history, a continuous tradition, but the 'piecemeal' representation or 'citability' of the past, its fragmentation and redemption. Historical 'citability' deprives the present of its peace of mind, the 'mindless peace of complacency'; it is a 'destructive power' that wants to cleanse, to tear out of context, to destroy, like

⁵⁴⁶ Arendt takes Benjamin's side in his disagreement with Gershom Scholem, arguing that what Scholem (a humanist and Zionist) 'did not understand was that such a return to and continuation of the past was the very thing which the "morality of his insights" ... was bound to rule out for Benjamin' (191).

‘robbers by the road side’ (193). It is the violence and illumination of rhetorical Witz, a *menstruum universale*.

Arendt favours a vigorous, ‘interested’ historiography because it has a ‘double function’, interrupting the flow of conventional narrative presentation in favour of fragmentation and singularity, while at the same time ‘concentrating’ within itself that which is presented, focusing attention on the elevated characteristic, enabling, in the present, a language of critical communication rather than chronicle or documentation (193-4). Benjamin’s historiography breaks the spell of tradition in order to cut out, preserve, and transmit things ‘rich and strange’, corals and pearls, an abundance of potential discourse forms and critical gestures which had previously been handed down monolithically, ‘in one solid piece’ (196). Benjaminian historiography is an ‘ambiguity of gesture’, destroying in order to preserve, fragmenting in order to concentrate knowledge, discovering that the process of decay is at the same time a ‘process of crystallisation’ that remains ‘immune to the elements’, that restores and protects (206).⁵⁴⁷

Arendt’s project in *Men in Dark Times* is to both disperse a complacent historicist construction of the relation of a thinker to his/her historical time, often grounds for dismissiveness or totalising judgment; and to concentrate attention on their representative political characteristics, on their social qualities, for which ‘piecemeal’ episodic narrative, not linear History, is Arendt’s chosen form.

Lessing

Arendt’s search for a discourse of illumination arrives at one of eighteenth-century Germany’s premier literary, artistic and cultural critics, Gotthold Lessing. Lessing’s worldliness, as Arendt evokes it, was not a straightforward sympathy for his country’s empirical inhabitants and their traditions, a cultural nationalism; nor can his life-span be typified by pragmatic careerism, vying for posts, honours, and status. In Arendt’s view, Lessing never felt at home in the world ‘as it then existed’ and reciprocally the German

⁵⁴⁷ In terms redolent of Frühromanticism, the realisation of the past as fragmented is both a deliberate critical intervention for Benjamin, and a result of the ‘chemical’ tendencies and grotesque sickness of the times, hence never a purely voluntarist act: ‘the break in tradition which took place at the beginning of this century [the twentieth] had already relieved him of this task of destruction and he only needed to bend down ... to select his precious fragments from the pile of debris’ (200). Benjamin’s ‘genius’ is not isolated but historically and politically illuminating, a *daimon* in a Socratic sense, in excess of his self-knowledge.

public were unprepared for him and never honoured him in his lifetime. Still, lacking any natural concord with his times, Lessing, after his own fashion, remained ‘committed’ to the world. Lessing’s attitude towards the world was neither positive nor negative but radically critical, indeed ‘completely revolutionary’ in respect to the public realm of his time, unprepared as it was for his rhetorical vim and vigour, his combination of irony and enthusiasm (5).⁵⁴⁸

Lessing was a strange creature, Arendt points out, in looking beyond the immaturity of the nascent German public sphere. Somewhat of a recluse, his attitude nevertheless remained ‘indebted to the world’, refused to leave the solid ground of the world, and never went to the ‘extreme’ of sentimental utopianism or escapism or political aestheticism. Lessing’s ‘revolutionary temper’ was of a different order to Robespierre’s turbulent idealism, for though a partisan of sorts he ‘clung to concrete details’ with an exaggerated care (5). It was Lessing’s insight, and a difficult one for contemporary Germans to grasp, that ‘justice has little to do with objectivity in the ordinary sense’. What Lessing never lost sight of, despite the truth-claims of others, was the real relationship to the world of the things or men he attacked or praised (5-6). Lessing, I would argue, offers Arendt a Socratic critical praxis, where no phenomenon or detail was too humble a departure to meditate on ethics and human relationships. He is Nietzsche’s Schopenhauer, bound with grim determination to his situation while limning, through his example, the possibility of a better world.

Lessing, says Arendt, was a spectator to the world, yet interested rather than objective. Indeed he broke ranks with classical decorum and generic closure, having scant regard for the Goethean desideratum for the ‘perfection’ of the work of art in itself. Nor was Lessing enamoured with Herder’s impressionistic desire for an organic and lyrical art, an affective force that moves the soul (6). Like Aristotle, Lessing was concerned with the effect of an action upon a spectator, positioning himself as someone ‘who represents the world’, arguing for his spectatorship as a middle faculty, illuminating the worldly space

⁵⁴⁸ One can compare the witty Lessing’s reception by a German public used to platitude and homiletic to Martin Luther’s dumbfoundedness at Erasmus’s verbal equivocations and ironic sensibility. Arendt positions the retention of a rhetorical disposition as a revolutionary possibility in an age becoming progressively blind to the critical possibilities of *ethos* and *paideia*.

which comes into being *between* the artist or writer and his fellow men. Significantly for Arendt's own methodology, Lessing's critical and aesthetic mien is neither an external formalism nor a psychologistic hermeneutics.⁵⁴⁹

Lessing experienced the world tragi-comically, in 'anger and laughter'. He was capable of many affect-imbued interpretations, the anger that exposes hypocrisy and cant, and the convivial, pleasurable laughter that binds one to reality, its eccentricities, its differences, its enchanting wealth of types. Lessing was unable and unwilling to judge a work of art 'in itself', as an autochthonous conceit, independently of its effects on the world. Explaining the sources of 'tragic pleasure', Lessing strikingly recalls the Greek doctrines of the passions, which valued the anger that reveals and exposes the world and the laughter that offers reconciliation with its absurdities. Unlike 'hope' which overleaps reality, and the fear which 'shrinks back from it', anger and laughter transmit 'reality' to the soul, they are passions *in media res*. Reflecting on Lessing's legacy of emotional realism, Arendt argues that for similar reasons the reflexivity of shame and proud conviction of honour can be reckoned 'political concepts'.⁵⁵⁰

Arendt's Lessing embodies Friedrich Schlegel's call for a 'higher' polemical sense, sociable rather than *ad hominem*. Lessing's praxis was one of attacking and defending according to criteria such as *how* a matter in question was being judged by the public, regardless of whether it was true or false. Indeed Lessing would understand and judge everything in terms of its 'position in the world at any given time' (8). In these terms, Lessing defended the role of Christianity, in all its complex relational 'senses' or usages, for example as an affective counterweight to a triumphant rationalism, or as the necessity of mystery and passion in a rapidly disenchanting age. For love of a world of temporal rhythms and characteristic differences, Lessing felt the necessity of preserving traditional beliefs in the face of those Enlightenment polemicists who would triumphantly 'trample it underfoot'. Yet he would recoil in horror when a narrow-minded scholastic theologian

⁵⁴⁹ Kristeva, Hannah Arendt, Life is a Narrative: 'Arendt proposes a way of articulating [narration] in a way that differs, in its originality, from both the formalist theories of narrativity and the theories of Paul Ricoeur' (15).

⁵⁵⁰ Arendt, Men in Dark Times, 6.

attempted crudely to ‘prove’ the ontology of God to him: he wanted no coercion, no tyranny of certainty (8).

The tendency of an untimely, dissonant thinker like Lessing is continually to exist at the margins of the ludic and sincere, irony and enthusiasm. Out of sympathy for the oppressed, Lessing in *Nathan der Weise* boldly and provocatively identifies the plight of humanity with the Jew who, with dignity, asserts that ‘he is a man’ (18). Gadfly, irritant, sophisticated provocateur, role player, Lessing’s abrasive distaste for tawdry sentiment will nevertheless conceal a powerful desire to recover the naïveté and intuitive sympathy of the child who exists so comfortably within the marvelous superficialities of this world and keenly feels its stimuli (18). I should again remark that Arendt’s Lessing embodies a narratological *topos* that exercises Nietzsche, which cathects aesthetic sophistication with a responsibility to society.

Lessing’s thought is ‘essentially polemical’ precisely because it anticipates dialogue with others and ‘stimulates’ them to thought, a Witz that seeks to vitalize human relationships and discover worlds of discourse (10). Lessing’s vigilant partiality, in this sense, has ‘nothing to do with subjectivity’; it is a partisanship pregnant with the energy, madness, and texture of the world (29). According to Arendt, Lessing’s famous critical desideratum of *Selbstdenken*, independent thinking, is no rationalism or rarified elitism, ‘by no means an activity pertaining to a closed, integrated, organically grown and cultivated individual’. Rather, Lessing celebrates his own self-contradictions and inconsistencies – incapable of fixing his identity in the world by means of a ‘consistent system’ or school of thought, the inorganic or chemical Lessing ‘scattered into the world ... nothing but *fermenta cognitionis*’ (8).

Lessing’s fermenting critical stimuli were intrinsically related to his capacity for critical modesty, immanent delicacies. I think Arendt’s Lessing belongs to a long tradition dating from Zeno and the Sophists to Nietzsche, whose corrosive paralogisms co-existed with an enlarged common sense, a philosophy of complex assent. Lessing’s polymathic love for worldly detail, suggests Arendt, was the inverse form of his farsightedness and prophetic capacities. He figures paradox and the social ‘sense’ of paradox.

Lessing saw clearly that ‘those who attempt to dominate thinking by reasoning and ... compelling argumentation’ will prove more dangerous to freedom than orthodoxy and faith and the sensibilities they preserve (8). In love with a form of inquiry Plato was never entirely able to repress or subordinate, a counter-modern Lessing preferred *doxa* to *alethia*, a spectrum of opinion to truth (29).⁵⁵¹ As would Nietzsche he rejoiced that he might gain some respite from his mental powers, that his truths, once uttered, were immediately transformed into merely one opinion, contested, ‘reduced to one subject of discourse among others’, transposed into other themes and critical purposes, re-positioned, divorced from origins.⁵⁵²

Once again, however, there is another Lessing whose desire for a world reborn makes him suffer. I would argue that here Arendt’s Lessing is positioned as a tortured interlocutor to one of Dostoevsky’s sublime and beatific ‘idiot’ figures. I think he is a cynical Ivan remonstrating with Alyosha’s tranquil faith, bothered by the tenacity of doctrinal beliefs. Through the mask of Lessing, Arendt can release *herself* from the rigours of political theory, can ask questions innocent, foolish, naive, and yet profound. Would any doctrine, no matter how convincingly proved, be worth so much as a single friendship between two men? This is poignant; any bar to friendship would have been rejected by Lessing’s ‘untrammelled and unerring conscience’.⁵⁵³

Out of a capacity for friendship, which was not beyond anguish and wonder, Lessing’s discourse resounded with the echoes of ‘many voices’, of answers desired but found wanting. Lessing was incapable of monologism, of authorial certainty, like Seneca he was incapable of ‘sovereign independence’, of a dispassionate retreat into his own self, which could only mean the dire loss of friendship and dialogue. Lessing’s creative independence of thought belied that he never could right the lack of a world between people; a world in which innate intuitions and qualities of sensibility could ‘become visible

⁵⁵¹ One may comprehend Lessing’s surreptitious anti-Platonism as an aspect of his ‘untimeliness’ in an age soon to give itself over to ideo-centric obsessions, moral, epistemological, and ideological. Lessing’s Pagan inclinations are clear in Arendt’s evocation; he (Lessing) was content to belong to the race of ‘limited gods’ as he occasionally called men, Men In Dark Times, 26.

⁵⁵² Arendt, Men in Dark Times, 27.

⁵⁵³ Arendt, Men in Dark Times, 29.

and audible', could illuminate the public arena and transmit themselves to mature critical thinking.⁵⁵⁴

Perturbed, Lessing's thought and his life were inter-related to the last. He died not so much of loneliness, but for love of a world he envisaged but could not attain; for tones, desires, critical sympathies, representational energies he proved incapable in that era of effectively communicating. Polemical to the point of contentiousness, Lessing could no more endure loneliness than the excessive closeness of brotherliness that obliterated all distinction. He wanted to be 'friend to many men' but no man's brother.⁵⁵⁵ His fate was that of in-betweenness, an *ethos*, a vigorous critical course that needed rest points, idylls of friendly intercourse, play, light-heartedness.

Arendt's extraordinary thought-figure, a sign of her many sided critical desires, Gotthold Lessing, is evoked though a tragic narrative, the *pharmakon* expelled by an age which never discovered him as its saviour.⁵⁵⁶ The meaning of a committed action, a life of vigorous relational activities, is best revealed, thinks Arendt, in a story which does not master anything once and for all but keeps the meaning of thought-events alive in an 'ever recurrent narration', a narration that involves us all in it and survives us as an allegory of a cultural situation.⁵⁵⁷ As Kristeva argues, Arendt's narrative figures are represented within a network of human relations; they are destined for a political *inter-esse*, as sign, role, method, perspective, rather than a 'truth' or morality. Inveighing against mere chronicle or empiricism, Arendt, says Kristeva, 'calls upon theatrical gestural action as the *modus operandi* of optimal narration'.⁵⁵⁸ Narrative becomes drama, an allegory of a cultural situation; the unity of a sentimental plot is fragmented into potentiated critical characteristics.

Arendt suggests that no philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compare in intensity and richness of meaning with a 'properly narrated

⁵⁵⁴ Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 10.

⁵⁵⁵ Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 30.

⁵⁵⁶ I again draw attention to Benjamin's 'Fate and Character' essay in his *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Schocken Books, New York, 1986, which argues for the interest of a character in terms of its role within a narrated action and immanent context.

⁵⁵⁷ Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 21.

⁵⁵⁸ Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt, Life is a Narrative*, 18.

story'.⁵⁵⁹ Arendt feels that it is not the eighteenth century's sanguine humanism, polymathy, and freethinking tradition that stands between Lessing and us, but the nineteenth century's 'obsession' with totalising historical schemes and its concomitant 'commitment to ideology'. Creatures of the nineteenth century yet, we are not Lessing but his opponents, relying on history and 'coercive logic' as 'crutches', sectarian instruments, platitudes (8).

In Bakhtinian terms, we can say that Arendt finds in Lessing a larger than life figure, his writings a joyous, Gargantuan dissemination of creative seed, a carnivalesque celebration of death and rebirth, a journey of the open and unformed, a defiance of the seductions of classical closure in thought and life. Arendt's Lessing anticipates Bakhtin, another untimely thinker, who had a lifelong dislike of ever being agreed with, a fear of his thought being canonized and monumentalized.⁵⁶⁰

In Rosa Luxemburg, Arendt portrays another peripatetic character who crystallises a 'thick' sense of historical time in contradistinction to the ideological obsessions of the nineteenth century.

Rosa Luxemburg

If Lessing was a transcendent, heroic model of the contradictory public intellectual, the twentieth century's gift, Rosa Luxemburg, will signify other possibilities of political representation for Arendt. Luxemburg's portrait will require an overlapping representation of her life, thought, and acculturation. She is best revealed, Arendt suggests, through biography, her life a writing and textual movement.

Arendt's Luxemburg demands a digressive narrative form that combines thorough documentation, a heavy layer of annotations, and a generous 'splash' of quotations, the 'citability' of the vignette and *bon mot*. Bio-graphy, the writing, the semiological

⁵⁵⁹ Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 22.

⁵⁶⁰ See Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. And London, 1984, 4-5, 347.

transposition of a life into many spheres of critical interest, refracts the ‘colourless light’ of historical time through the ‘prism of a great character’, so that a complete unity of life and thought is achieved (33).

Against the backdrop of Hegel and Marx’s confident philosophies of historical evolution, Arendt asks an uncertain retrospective question of Luxemburg’s biography: ‘Will history look different if seen through the prism of her life and work?’ From the perspective of the critical-spectator interested in the fate of character, can it be that the failure of Luxemburg’s efforts ‘as far as official recognition is concerned’ is somehow connected with the dismal failure of revolution in the twentieth century? What ‘unofficial’ illumination does her life and thought cast? What marginal historical elements does she crystallise and what continuums of history does the writing of her life ‘blast open’ in a Benjaminian sense? What unforeseen galaxies of critical interest are opened up by a narrated evocation of her character (34)?

Materialist and Idealistic philosophies of history share a common failure to Arendt’s way of thinking, they fail to capture those ‘personal reactions’, those ‘gut feelings’, which, though ‘seldom publicly admitted’, are among the ‘small, mosaic-like pieces that fall into place in the large riddle of history’. The aftermath to the murder of Rosa Luxemburg, for instance, became the ‘watershed’ between two eras in Germany, the post-war revolution and the Weimar Republic, and the point of no return for the German Left. Those on the Left who had drifted to a disintegrating Communist Party found themselves unable to return and revitalise the ranks of the Socialists they believed had orchestrated her murder (36). Moreover, upon publication of her letters, the ‘Legend’ of a humane, feisty and courageous Rosa Luxemburg would inspire a burgeoning and amorphous ‘New Left’ tired of old ideological politics (37).

Diffuse legend, local cult figure, the ‘Rosa myth’ is the dreaming of a place and a state of mind, a nascent possibility, the overcoming of conventional cognitive frameworks. Arendt’s metaphors tease us with a pluralist Paganism of scattered narratives that might one day assert themselves against the oppressive monotheism, the coercive logics still subsisting from the nineteenth century (36). For Luxemburg is somewhat of a mobile trickster figure requiring the digression and discontinuity of genealogy rather than the unity

of History, authoritative tradition. Like all figures of genuine, joyful, sad, loving humanity, Luxemburg was never a ‘believer’, never used politics as a ‘substitute for religion’. She possessed a subtlety in judgment of people that withheld her from ideological orthodoxies (44).

Arendt’s Luxemburg is a purveyor of Nietzsche’s ‘small deviant acts’, she signals an economy of forces. Through reported observations Arendt anecdotalises Luxemburg’s mordant wit, through evocative *mise en scène* her generous excoriation of mere subjective desires, as on the occasion at an international congress she translated an ‘eloquent’ speech attacking her misguided passions into ‘an equally telling German’ for the audience. In a mediocre and benighted age, orators must recognise each other across the desultory shards of mere personal belief, invest in another, higher plane of evaluation (44). An outsider, a Polish Jew in a country she always disliked, Luxemburg was ‘always out of step’. Even the suffragette movement that could have personally benefited her aspirations provoked intuitive ‘distaste’, and to it she might have been tempted to reply ‘*Vive la petite différence*’ (37, 44). We can argue that for Arendt the outsider Rosa Luxemburg embodies Benjamin’s monadic ‘ideas’ of the ‘Epistemo-Critical Prologue’, which reveal worlds through the accumulated representation, the ‘mediation’ of extremes, antithetical to the averageness and utilitarian functioning of conceptual abstractions and metanarratives.

A re-telling of Luxemburg’s life will reveal her attachment to a milieu which had ‘lost all public relevance’ by the nineteen twenties and has now completely disappeared. This milieu consisted of Jews from middle-class families whose cultural background was German, whose political formation was Russian, and whose moral standards in both private and public life were ‘uniquely their own’. This group ‘stood outside all social ranks’, Jewish or non-Jewish, and hence had no conventional prejudices whatsoever, having developed a splendid universal humanity, a code of honour that attracted non-Jews to them in numbers, channelling their desires into the Bolshevik movement (40-41).

Luxemburg’s childhood was a ‘hidden equalizer’, she grew up amongst people who treated one another as equals and possessed a ‘naive contempt’ for social and ethnic distinctions. Luxemburg, even in the pathos of her marginality, would always bespeak the ‘authentic morality’ of this hybrid ‘European’ milieu (42). Luxemburg unwittingly

expressed the values of her background in her ‘moral taste’, her instinctive abhorrence of nationalist patriotism and racist imperialism, stemming from a ‘movable’ sense of home, a diasporic sensibility that did ‘not coincide with any “fatherland”’ (41). Her revolutionary spirit was less ideologically motivated than innocently stubborn, a constant friction with society that considered social prejudice unbearable on ‘moral grounds’, offensive to her sense of justice and freedom, helping her to engage with the ‘destinies of the world’ (50-51). Luxemburg renews Nietzsche’s untimely stance against petty nationalism, she is, as Arendt puts it, ‘one of those whom Nietzsche called “good Europeans”’. Those, like Luxemburg, who loved the humanist tendencies of European culture were the ‘only ones to have a presentiment of the disastrous consequences ahead’, the enormous force of nationalist feeling in a decaying body politic (40-43). Imbued with the subaltern and fragmented currents of history, Luxemburg, like Lessing, is the prophet facing backward.

Intuition as Theory

It was this energetic and capricious moral temperament that led Luxemburg’s thinking beyond the theoretical narrowness of Marxist dialectics, the cause of her political exile. Untamed by party disciplines and orthodox Marxist theory, Luxemburg was open to a kind of heterological empiricism, a discerning ‘realism’: ‘What mattered most in her view’, Arendt feels, ‘was reality, in all its wonderful and all its frightful aspects, even more than the revolution itself’ (39).

Luxemburg realised that capitalism showed no signs of collapsing under the weight of its economic contradictions. Opposing the Marxist-Leninist dictum that in the origins of capitalist expropriation lie the internal seeds, the innate laws of its destruction, Luxemburg in The Accumulation of Capital pointed to the exploitation of pre-capitalist sectors in the West, and, upon their exhaustion, the imperialist search for new markets and the exploitation of a third world proletariat (44).

Anguished by the presence of power and suffering in this world, Luxemburg’s naïveté was also her sophistication. Out of love for a world of differences, she resisted Marx’s theoretical originarity, the notion of capitalist accumulation as ‘original sin’, a

single directing event, a myth of origins (39). In so doing Luxemburg ‘illuminated’ the Eurocentric, passive idea of historical time as one of Marxism’s stultifying orthodoxies. Her ideas were rejected by Lenin, who branded her deviant, heretical. Lenin critiqued her as non-Marxist, yet who today ‘would deny’ that her description of African suffering ‘belonged in a book on imperialism’ (40). Arendt admires Luxemburg as a fluid, polymathic thinker whose tendency was always towards an overlapping of discourses and critical interests; she might equally have been, circumstances permitting, an historian, economist, botanist, zoologist, mathematician (38).

Luxemburg, a cultivated generalist, saw no totality in capitalism, no ‘closed economy’, but fragmented constellations of power and those exploited on the margins (40). The story of her discarding by Marxist theory illuminates the reactionary and elitist traits of the Bolsheviks, she pits model against model, unveils the true colouration of an ideology. Have not events proved her right, asks Arendt? Did she not foresee the ‘moral collapse’ of the Soviet Union due to a political culture of zealous ideologues and professional Marxists rather than people ‘schooled’ in public life, the ‘broadest democracy’ and public opinion (54)? Didn’t she understand, in a lesson she learnt from the historical example of the cyclical terrors of the French Revolution, that a deformed revolution is much worse than none at all? Luxemburg realised that the aridity of a cultural disposition will always translate itself into a disastrous politics, no matter the righteousness of its cause or the momentous social question it attempts to solve (53-4).

For Arendt, Luxemburg’s story, her life and thinking, is material for contemplative times, after the terror of concentration camps and the menace of metanarratives. Arendt hopes that her (re)writing of Luxemburg’s cultural impact will lead to a ‘belated recognition’ of who she was and what she did. An icon and unique example for the political possibilities of democratic aspirations, moral realism, and worldly milieux, Luxemburg might now find her place in the ‘education of political scientists’ in the West (55-56). Luxemburg’s abundant capacity for unorthodox critical engagements, her rhetorical *copia* if you will, suggest for Arendt a propaedeutic for political thought and struggle outside conventional disciplines, obtuse ideologies, isolated doctrines.

Thinking across history, about and through and around figures like Lessing and Luxemburg, Arendt evokes the possibility of fragmentary narrations and genealogies which bring into piquant focus discontinuous and complex forms of sensibility and the crucial, yet often neglected, role of cultural histories in the formation of political agency. Through diacritical narrative, sad and humorous scenographies, Arendt creates a fluid and rich sense of historical time, pregnant with repressed historical tendencies (the cosmopolitan European, the Jewish and Gypsy pariah) by which the critical seek release from any one form of identity.

The Revolutionary Power of Political Sociability

In this concluding section, I argue that Arendt's political 'untimeliness', her transhistorical breadth and genealogical pluralism, renews a romantic predilection for liminal political sensibilities continually affected and repositioned by an open conversation with history; imbued with temperaments and historical currents that transcend available modes of identity and belonging.⁵⁶¹ Arendt's idealised mode of political agency is the transfiguration of situation, bound to and floating above the swirls and rapids of public discourse.

In On Revolution, Arendt, in republican mode, argues that the positive content of freedom is an enabling mode of togetherness that invokes 'participation in public affairs and admission to the public realm'.⁵⁶² Political participation does not so much consolidate as transform the animus of a collective cause. Arendt is enamoured of the American Revolution's transfiguration of its initial civic grievance, the argument for 'no taxation without representation', into a revolutionary possibility, the foundation of a new republican body politic and a declaration of inalienable human rights. The crucible of this

⁵⁶¹ This section is based on an article I wrote evoking Arendt's political thought as a forerunner to contemporary debates about historiography and the Holocaust. See Ned Curthoys 'The Politics of Holocaust Representation: The Worldly Typologies of Hannah Arendt', Arena Journal, New Series, no. 16, 2000/1, 49-74.

⁵⁶² Arendt, On Revolution, 32.

radicalisation of purpose in the leading revolutionary figures was the enchanting and seductive experience of participatory freedoms:

... the speech-making and decision-taking, the oratory and the business, the thinking and the persuading, and the actual doing which proved necessary to drive this claim to its logical conclusion: independent government and the foundation of a new body politic.⁵⁶³

The politician as rhetor and public actor is labile, his/her mien and desire transformed through the mixed elements of communication and performance. Arendt argues that the enthusiasm of the eighteenth-century American republic for its constitution was owing to a theatre of pragmatic deliberation and compromise that was coupled with the exhilarating emergence of the charismatic individual onto the stage of public life. Arendt's political subject seeks to enhance a political culture through individual example, oratorical renown.

Arendt, sidestepping distinctions of ideology, rediscovers the participatory power of America's constitutional assemblies in the revolutionary councils and Soviets that emerged in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Germany in the wake of the First World War. While operating as spontaneously formed grass-roots organisations in which equality of participation was guaranteed, Arendt observes that factory councils and the Russian Soviets nevertheless gave rise to an elite of individuals whose political virtues were not in themselves of working-class or 'social' origins. The mobile political agency formed through these councils revivifies Arendt's genealogy of 'realists', who belong among equals, but are outsiders, without a geographical or class-based 'home'. Engendered in the communicative crucible of that 'incessant talk' which alone saves political organisations from the 'futility' of instrumentality, these political leaders revealed active political virtues such as 'personal integrity', an enlarged capacity for 'judgment', and 'physical courage'.⁵⁶⁴

Far from the mundane, if successful, qualities of the manager or administrator, the party-political hack, or the autocratic centralist, Arendt romanticises the failed revolutionary as the natal 'who' disclosed by political action, a kind of self-consuming

⁵⁶³ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 34.

⁵⁶⁴ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 274.

Byronic hero. These rarified political beings, as opposed to private citizens with their economic motivations, their social needs and prejudices, are born of the public realm, of the 'light which exhibits each deed enacted within its boundaries, in the very visibility to which it exposes all those who enter it'.⁵⁶⁵ They are a mixed type, a hybrid of constitutional conservatism and aesthetic imagination.

The importance of a participatory and egalitarian milieu continued to influence Arendt's political enquiries. In The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), Arendt decried the bourgeois attempt, dating from the nineteenth century, to collapse political power into privileged 'social' networks, assuming an identity of political, economic, and social power. Significantly, such a possibility gained ground in the bourgeoisie's experience of imperialist adventurism, racism, and lawless expropriation and exploitation in the nineteenth-century 'scramble for Africa'. A milieu antithetical to authentic political participation, Arendt argues that the colonial ventures of the European bourgeoisie suggested the possibility of similarly anti-democratic exploits in the metropolitan centre. Periphery becomes centre, exploitation on the margins, imperialist peregrinations, crystallise into instrumentalist characteristics, a desire to subordinate and control home populations.⁵⁶⁶ As the analysis of Luxemburg disclosed, seemingly minor cultural traits are the driving force of history. Modes of governance emerge from a *paideia* of contexts.

In The Origins of Totalitarianism Arendt develops a Nietzschean analysis of representative types, and the milieux they figure, as the condition of totalitarian rule. To do its bidding, totalitarianism will seek to co-ordinate two quite different types or personae, both ardent followers of the Führer's capricious will and visionary propaganda: the fanatical idealist and adventurous bohemian; the youthful storm trooper, or the Nazi leader like Goebbels. The idealist and bohemian hate the mediocre norms and duties of bourgeois society and search for the heroic, nihilistic, and exhilarating.

Yet totalitarianism, unable to simply extinguish prior mores and natural human sympathies all at once, also makes use of the narrow-minded philistine who organises the bureaucratic machines of domination and extermination, the Adolf Eichmanns. The

⁵⁶⁵ Arendt, On Revolution, 253.

⁵⁶⁶ Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1951, 336.

philistine is capable of even greater crimes than so-called professional criminals, provided only that these crimes are well organised and ‘assumed the appearance’ of routine jobs. It was for the philistine, dominated by private imperatives, that a sanitised language of ‘final solutions’ and ‘special measures’ was created to dissimulate hellish violence as a routine bureaucratic task.⁵⁶⁷

Arendt ‘s Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (1963) is a remarkable study of totalitarianism as the aberrance of individuals and the exemplary dangers of a diminished civil society.⁵⁶⁸ This book was initially published in a series of reports for the *New Yorker* journal on the 1961 Israeli trial of Adolf Eichmann for ‘crimes against the Jewish People’. What intrigues Arendt is not Adolf Eichmann the empirical individual, but Eichmann the hybrid persona of totalitarianism, the anti-type to the ‘political’ ‘who’ with all their capacities for novelty, spontaneity, pathetic distance and communicative élan.

Arendt’s method of evocation is narratological, biographical – even Eichmann’s trial will be reported through vignettes and episodes, a ‘splash of quotations’ illuminating a stunningly unimaginative and depoliticised personality, the outcome of modernity’s innermost tendencies, not simply its abortion.

An upwardly mobile, career focussed ‘parvenu’, a petit-bourgeois disaffected with a society that shunned his mediocre status, Eichmann’s motivations for joining the S.S. ‘typically’ lacked the conviction of a public interest or common cause. Eichmann is a version of Arendt’s atomised ‘mass man’, a philistine dominated by the instrumentalism of private initiative, whose only worldly attachments are to power and success as embodied in an adventurously expansionist state.⁵⁶⁹ The philistine narrowness of Eichmann, deprived of urbane social interaction and its pluralist recognitions, lends itself to a kind of semiotic solipsism, a complete inability to utter ‘a single sentence that is not a cliché’ or ‘stock phrase’.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁷ Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 337.

⁵⁶⁸ Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil, Faber and Faber, London, 1963, chapter 2.

⁵⁶⁹ Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, chapter 2.

⁵⁷⁰ Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, 44.

In the philosophically stern terminology of Arendt, Eichmann's aphasia, his inability to 'speak', is closely connected with his inability to 'think', which means to think from the standpoint of somebody else. Living in a circumscribed imaginary of normatively sanctioned symbolic manoeuvres, Eichmann continues even under heated courtroom interrogation and powerful testaments to incredible suffering, to be 'safeguarded' against the words and presence of others, against 'reality as such'.⁵⁷¹ Imbricating Eichmann's solipsism with his epoch, Arendt argues that he remained impervious to suffering for particular reasons.

Eichmann's conscience spoke with a 'respectable voice', that of 'respectable society', as he noted the zeal and eagerness with which 'good society' everywhere reacted as he did to the Nazi crimes. Thus the transformation of Eichmann into a criminal of unprecedented proportions is enabled by that incremental destruction of legality and inversion of social ethics that creates a 'world-upside down', a 'total moral collapse in respectable European society', from which the unimaginative philistine can establish no critical distance.⁵⁷² Here we have, *in nuce*, Arendt's methodological response to modernity, an analysis of the linguistic subject in its reaction to the breakdown of perspective and communication in a completely de-politicised society.

In her observance of Eichmann during his trial, Arendt felt that she also caught a glimpse of some 'idealist' traits. Eichmann's use of self 'elating' clichés such as his grandiloquent end of war claim that he would 'jump into his grave laughing' about the murder of the Jews being on his conscience, was a boast only apparently contradicted by his self-important statement in the Jerusalem court that he would 'gladly hang himself in public as a warning example for all anti-Semites on this earth'; or by his great respect for the Zionist leader of the Hungarian Jewish Council Rudolf Kastner, a fellow 'idealist' willing to sacrifice people and resources for the sake of an idea, the preservation of the best 'biological material'. Arendt's Eichmann is a terrifying doppelgänger of the political rhetor, lacking both a 'realistic' prudence and a communicative ability to transpose

⁵⁷¹ Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, 44.

⁵⁷² Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, 111.

received signs into other idioms. He is utter mediocrity and deluded fantasist, unable to mediate these dangerous extremes.

Arendt argues that the most disturbing aspect of evil is that incrementally, and without purposive intent, it can spread like a 'fungus' and lay waste to civilised life: 'It was the most banal motives – a consciousness of duty and powerful self-identification as an honest job-holder – not especially wicked ones (like sadism or the wish to humiliate or the will to power) which made Eichmann such a frightful evil-doer'.⁵⁷³ Arendt's (in)famous conception of 'evil' is a decisive shift from theological considerations of radical evil, to a theory of dispositions, a comparative assessment of types, a Nietzschean mourning for the loss in modernity of thinking's communicative imperative.

Arendt's modernity is dystopian. For all its totalising claims to the truth of history, for all its thin universalism, it has lost a feeling for situation, for nuance, for the middle degrees between binary extremes and logics of identity. Rhetoric as realism and untimely prophecy, as micro-critique and philosophy of history, offers Arendt a critical propaedeutic from which to displace hegemonic norms.

⁵⁷³ My immanent approach to Arendt's portrait of Eichmann is sympathetic to her concerns for the lack of relational arts and rhetorical skills in the modernist imaginary. I would entirely agree with those critiques of Arendt that criticise and complicate her portrait of Eichmann as a cog in a vast bureaucratic machine, neither ideologically zealous nor particularly anti-Semitic. The evidence seems to suggest that he was ruthless in the prosecution of his task of organising the deportation and extermination of Jews, and a motivated anti-Semite, as most selected Nazi leaders were. Arendt is ironically misled by the 'performative' pathos of Eichmann's presentation under the extremely different circumstances of defeat.

Conclusion

I originally wanted to entitle this thesis ‘Rethinking Formalism: Refractions of Classical Rhetoric in Literary, Cultural and Political Theory’, as my purpose has been to rethink the cultural politics of deconstructive formalism. In doing so I’ve adopted a critical strategy similar to other thinkers in this thesis. I’ve asked questions about recent critical theory as a discursive mien in conversation with other historical theories of critical representation. I’ve tried to deploy an historiographical principle of Friedrich Schlegel and later Nietzsche’s, that all schools of thought can, after the dust settles, be characterised as sensibility, *ethos*, enacted within a spectrum of forces. John Guillory’s sophisticated assessment of deManian deconstruction, influential in recent debates, is one such attempt to comment on the historical significance of deconstruction and rhetorical reading, its bid for power within an institutional habitus. As regards Paul de Man, Guillory revives the alarmist tone of Frank Lentricchia’s After the New Criticism.⁵⁷⁴ This powerful polemic suspected de Man and his ‘New Critic’ confrères of a reworked aestheticism that sought, by elaborating a privileged textual universe, to close down political and ethical argument; formalism as closure, a linguistic turning away from the harshness of reality.

Guillory’s charge is equally momentous, accusing de Man’s dry, technical methodology of displacing rhetoric as an historically situated discourse with an important social function. This is a serious accusation, because all discourses carry a certain relational charge, a structure of feeling that can be adapted and renewed through history. Discourses are the materials of history; they speak of collective affects, of culture and sub-culture, conservatism and revolution. This thesis has suggested that to characterise the history of ideas requires nuance; like Nietzsche we need to be aware that acculturation has always required both violent discipline and small deviant acts. Discourse requires counterpoints, other powers against which to exert itself. In this sense even seemingly extreme perspectives have a certain performative ‘sense’ about them, they play a role within a rich tapestry of habits, memories, effects. The Sophists and their legacy of differential senses,

⁵⁷⁴ Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism, The Athlone Press, London, 1980.

have taught us that there can be a lot of commitment in artistry, and Nietzsche reminds us that it is not conformity or averageness that binds us to a culture.

Which is as much to say that the deconstructive revival of rhetoric does pose the problem of discourse, but as paradoxical, as a combination of imperatives. More specifically, deconstruction wanted to revive the paradoxes of immanent reading, to release the emancipatory power of deferring hermeneutic assumptions about intention and will. This is not a turn against history; it is the problem and possibilisation of historical discourse, of thinking historically in the present. *Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*, there is no outside to the text, is Derrida's famous dictum. It has the traces of an Husserlian epochê, a phenomenological suspension of what we take to be a settled concern, something exterior to and immune from our own activities, affective interpretations, historical becoming. Indeed, one might argue that Derrida's provocation to the guts of the way we understand is a moment of speculative joy, not a definitive program for thought. Derrida's textuality offers a temporary skepticism that foresees, at the end of certainty, the recovery of the positive role of feeling, material practices, and communicative forms in the history of ideas. I have argued in this thesis that the universal solvent of critique fragments in order to recompose historical sense and critical *paideia*.

The Frühromantiks thought a recursive emphasis on representation would imbricate thought and world, communicate ideas. I have discussed the importance, for Derrida, of repositioning Plato's role in the history of ideas, a non-Platonic Plato. If we discuss Derrida within the historicity of rhetoric, as a discourse of displacement and renewal, we're tempted to think that Derrida, like his romantic forebears, wanted to recover the genius of a culture, not only the centre of thought but its peripheries, its zones of contact with its putative outside. Derrida's Plato is not a unity, the sum of his experiences or intentional acts, but this critical gesture is not designed to sterilize or relativise his intellectual labours. Plato elaborates his thought through the mask of Socrates, through mythic fiction, genealogy, and rhetorical performance. Derrida augments a discourse of communicative restraint, arguing that Plato speaks according to 'necessity', of circumstance, available modes of representation, and discourse practices. For Derrida, to read Plato immanently, without prior assumptions as to his 'ideas', is to engage with that in his *logos* which is still virtual, potential.

Immanent reading wants worldliness rather than insulated logics, it wants dissemination, relations, a pharmakological *situation* or dilemma for thought. Immanent reading is interested in the redemptive power of particulars, sub-generic energies, qualities invisible to historicisms, whose claimed realism is only a mask for schematism, the presumption of progress, the denial of multiple genealogies. Derrida made this point early in his oeuvre. In 'Violence and Metaphysics', Derrida suggested that for there to be discourse there must be character and orientation, a certain violence, a force of signification, impression, that gathers power to it.⁵⁷⁵ Derrida suggests that Levinas's supposedly irenic ethics of the other materialises itself as a discourse of phonocentrism, just as it retains the 'traces', a Derridean theme, of a Judaic monotheistic theology of alterity and divine power. Out of necessity, *logos* has its mythemes, its narratives and imaginaries; it communicates other idioms, it is open to historical interpretation.

A discourse is not a simple act of will, it is in excess of itself, it is dynamically expressive in Spinoza's sense and holistic, monadological in a Leibnizian sense. Derridean deconstruction always wanted representation to open up worlds of discourse, subaltern attributes, and other histories. An essay called 'Genesis and Structure' in Writing and Difference said as much, its flavour is Arendtian. Natality, unpredictability, creativity in history comes, ironically, from structural considerations, from a meditation on theme, convention. Form is history as possibility. Derrida's claim to deconstruction as a 'method' might have qualified deconstruction as a prudent and deliberative critical discipline. But Derrida is also a Sophist and conceptual persona, engaged with but settling on no territory, a medium of new births.

De Man too, reveals the paralogic of immanent method, this thesis has suggested that his rhetoric mediates rigorous attention and expansive desires. De Man spurned traditional History and its poetics like the Frühromantiks and Benjamin before him. The genealogy I have illuminated draws attention to de Man's semiology, which performs itself as rigorous technique but also seeks out a signification that only communicates and creates interesting themes once intention is suspended. Accused of a dystopian modernism, there are traces in de Man's non-referential rhetoricism of the prelapsarian Adamic naming that

⁵⁷⁵ 'Violence and Metaphysics' in Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass, the University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978.

inspired Benjamin's weak messianism. De Man is like Nietzsche, he loves the hybrid chronotope of rhetoric, he wants the false totality of the work or book as an historical datum to segue into various rhetorical modes, the necessarily rich historicity of representation.

I have intimated that de Man wanted to potentiate forms, that rhetoric is historically a discourse of possibility, a sense for the almost and unresolved. We should now be aware that the critique of originarity or genetic directives was targeted not at truth as such, but hermeneutic and periodising critical philosophies that resisted the translatability of the text, its plurality of characteristics. De Man wanted to be the lacuna of intellectual history, the 'gap' in critical pedagogies, a constellation, rather than identity, of past and present, a *paedeia* of critical purposes. His rhetoric is discourse as *ethos and paideia*, intensive reflection, extensive feeling.

I think a restored contextual appreciation of the rhetorical *ethos* of de Man and Derrida, irreducible to methodological claims, might enable a closer conversation between the theory and historiography of rhetoric. Once revitalised as a broad discourse, rhetoric might help critical representation respond to a Frühromantik demand, that criticism should have a positive element of a creation, a fluid economy of usages, which is only possible if divorced from any single locus or genetic determinism. In the interstitial umbrella of rhetoric this thesis has articulated, I would like Deconstruction to converse with pragmatism, for a praxical discourse to converse with critical genealogy, urbane conversation to encounter untimeliness.

I think that conceiving of rhetoric as a sensibility and acculturated tendency, that has seized hold of artistic and philosophical personalities, opens our interpretative horizons, allowing us to move beyond disciplinary lassitude and analyse, without reification, the influence of rhetoric on literary history, political practice and political theory. Rhetoric brings power into focus, but it is also a peripheral vision, a sense for the subaltern tendency. As a broad propaedeutic of culture, rhetoric can re-energise cultural studies as a heightened conventionalism, alert to the overlapping of discourses, the interpenetration of genres. It is time to welcome rhetoric, to learn from this stranger in our midst.

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