

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Noah P. Soltau entitled “Broken Mirror of the World: Language Crisis and Reflection. Fragment and Experience as Instruments of Truth in Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in German.

Stefanie Ohnesorg, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Daniel H. Magilow

Maria Stehle

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges, Vice Provost and
Dean of the Graduate School

Broken Mirror of the World: Language Crisis and Reflection.
Fragment and Experience as Instruments of Truth in Benjamin,
Hofmannsthal, and Rilke.

A Thesis Presented for
the Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Noah Soltau
May 2009

Abstract

Using a selection of Walther Benjamin's essays as a lens through which to view Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief* and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, I attempt to demonstrate how the three authors dealt with the evolving crisis of representation in the early twentieth century in similar fashion. Specifically, Benjamin refined several methods developed by Hofmannsthal and Rilke--specifically the use of fragment, figurative language, and skepticism toward language--to attempt to combat Fascism and solve his personal crisis of representation engendered by his tumultuous social and political circumstances. Although crises of representation are a relatively common phenomenon in literary history, because of the unique social and political circumstances in which these three authors were living, their writings provide especially meaningful insights into the paradoxes of language and subjectivity.

Table of Contents

Introduction. Ways of Meaning: The Problem of Expressing the Ineffable.....	1
Chapter One. The Mirror's Image: False Reflections.....	7
Chapter Two. Breaking The Mirror: Fragment and Truth.....	24
Chapter Three. Ordering the Shards: Fragment, Image, and Metaphor.....	55
Chapter Four. The Reformed Mirror: Ambivalence and Language.....	84
Conclusion. Trusting the Mirror's Image: Possibility and Truth.....	116
Bibliography.....	121
Appendix.....	128
Vita.....	13

Introduction

Ways of Meaning: The Problem of Expressing the Ineffable

For those concerned with language, the relationship between perception and truth took an interesting turn during the first half of the 20th century. The discussion of this relationship is still ongoing. Although many writers and philosophers began to question the relationship between the signifiers of speech and the signified, Walther Benjamin, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and Rainer Maria Rilke did so in unique and particularly interesting ways. Their undertakings in literature were not, however, isolated struggles from the publication of Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief* (1902) to Benjamin's *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (1939), there was a growing sense of the danger and futility of traditional discourse. Concomitant with research in the field of linguistics, especially Felix Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (1923), language in literature began to be viewed as metaphorical. I wish to confine the philosophical and linguistic context to Mauthner, who was a contemporary of Hofmannsthal and Rilke, because although working in different fields, they shared some of the same views on language. Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke took and used language in their own unique, but related, ways. Benjamin's essays offer a critical lens or rubric not only through which to read these fictional works, or by which to examine their noteworthy literary attributes, but also to demonstrate that the tools Hofmannsthal and Rilke developed were useful to Benjamin, who had survived one World War and feared the second. Though 'language-crisis' is often

discussed when modern German writers are the subject¹, specifically at the turn of the 20th century, the crisis was pervasive, was a crisis of representation, of the relationship between perception and actuality, between perception and truth.

A commonality among Benjamin, Hofmannsthal and Rilke is that they question the efficacy of their own speech and thought, specifically the ability to communicate to others precise meanings through language. This questioning results from social and political uncertainty so overwhelming that it undermines the validity of the relationship between word and meaning, thought and speech. Though the so-called 'language crisis' could be simply a conservative reaction to changing social circumstances, it has a more hopeful facet, namely that a rebirth of language and restructuring of communication might (dis)solve the uncertainty that modernity engenders. The authors' goal is to strive for truth and understanding through the metaphorical use of language, and though their goal is never realized, though they fail, in their failure language has the possibility to remain vital. Like Mauthner, the authors saw language as having become purely utilitarian--useful to invoke a predetermined response, or to produce an agreed-upon set of symbols. By using metaphorical language, they attempted to free language from its utilitarian shackles, and make it, or re-make it, into the vessel of truth. The goal may appear utopian, but Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke attempt to offer ways to achieve it.

Technological advancements, world wars, social and scientific upheaval--these technological and socio-political struggles are the catalysts that lead these authors to

¹ See Macey's *The Look of Things* for a further reading. Citation can be found in the attached bibliography.

question the verity of their societal perceptions and their perceptions of themselves; as Hannah Arendt, an important scholar in her own right, who shared similar deconstructive and poetic tendencies with Benjamin, comments about him, "it is a matter of chance whether an individual forms an image of himself" (Arendt, 158). The authors were all experiencing the great pressures of social change. According to Arendt, Benjamin turns to Baudelaire for an image, a defense mechanism: "Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges himself into the crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy. Circumscribing the experience of the shock, he calls this man 'a *kaleidoscope* equipped with consciousness'" (Arendt, 175). Written into this image is the fundamental importance of fragmentation and reordering. For Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke, despite their separation by space and time, they all see fragment and figurative language as a possible solution to their crises. They were all interested in literary and social tools. Specifically, they were interested in the importance of integrating literature, language, and social life, and most importantly what seemed to be developing contemporaneously--a new way to write, to explain the world, new sciences, and new societies, in short: revolution.

These writers and thinkers felt deeply the inadequacy of language and undertook to address what they saw as language's shortcomings, most notably in Benjamin's search for "die reine Sprache", and his, Hofmannsthal's, and Rilke's use of fragment and figurative language to restructure and rebuild language, as a result of the ambivalence they feel toward language, which stems from their internal crises (Benjamin *AÜ*, 13)². The analysis will be structured as follows: The first chapter will serve as a more detailed

² The appendix lists the titles and corresponding abbreviations of Benjamin's works.

introduction, providing brief, general analyses of the works that will open them up to further examination. The second chapter will examine how Hofmannsthal and Rilke use fragment to convey the meaning that they can no longer trust to words or concepts [*Begriffe*], and Benjamin's essays will support this effort by demonstrating his own revolutionary employment of fragment in his works. In the third chapter, I will expand the focus of the second to deal more generally with figurative language, again as a tool to convey meaning outside the traditional method of form-meaning pairs. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I will demonstrate Benjamin's ambivalence toward language, and show how Hofmannsthal's Chandos and Rilke's Brigge have similar feelings, and analyze how they manage their crises.

One of the authors' efforts at redeeming language was that they attempted to restructure language based, not on abstract concepts, but on figurative language and personal, sensory experience, as ways to combat the alienation, decay, and violent revolution in their societies. In the case of protagonists Chandos, in Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief*, and Brigge, in Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), they had to face their inner selves when confronted with modernity. This is akin to the "dialectic of enlightenment" that was later formulated by the Frankfurt School, which held that while reason and knowledge could free the mind, and free mankind, it opened a door to a reductionist logic that would make man simply a resource or commodity to be exploited (Macey, 97)³.

It was the observations that so-called societal advancements led to the alienation and

³ The "Dialectic of Enlightenment" was written well after all of these texts, in 1947, and in no way informs them. However, the beginnings of this dialectic are present, and I therefore found it worth mentioning. For a further discussion, see the works of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

self-alienation of man that sparked this crisis in the first place.

Of the highest importance to my work is the collective feeling of the inadequacy of language, and ambivalence toward language. Hofmannsthal's and Rilke's protagonists, and Benjamin's theoretical writings, share this disaffection and it leads them to a very modern skepticism toward the world, specifically a loss of spiritual and intellectual anchors. It can also lead, as I contend that it does in the works of Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke, to a more holistic, albeit more difficult, and even noble end: a desire, and subsequently attempts, to reorder, restructure, and remake language.

Skepticism about language leads these authors to examine it, and in turn develop tools to remake it. In a milieu where continuity and totality are crumbling, or are being co-opted by politics or ideology, writers can use fragment as a kind of mirror, a broken mirror, the shards of which reflect the insight of both writer and reader through and behind the illusion of completeness, of authority and tradition. Although Benjamin deals with the theme of fragment--and often writes in a fragmentary style--throughout his works, this form holds particular importance in his essays *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (1939), *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1936), and *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* (1923). These essays provide a rich performative and critical framework in which to discuss fragment, 'Begriffe', translation (of words, as well as thought into language), and the ambivalence toward language created by modern society, in other words, a dangerous and destructive society.

Within this framework, Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief* and Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* reveal the basic tools that Benjamin uses to inform his writing: fragment, image, and ambivalence toward language. While Hofmannsthal and Rilke

make use of these tools in a fictional context, Benjamin puts them to a broad range of critical uses, from art criticism, to political and social critique, to explorations in historical materialism and mysticism.

In addition to these primary sources, my secondary literature will draw primarily, though not exclusively, from the work of Hannah Arendt, a student of Martin Heidegger and well-known translator of Benjamin's work; Klaus Müller-Richter, a professor of Literature at Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, whose writing deals extensively with metaphor and figurative language; Carsten Strathausen, a professor of German at the University of Missouri whose writing focuses on the relationship between words and images from the 1800s to the present, and on twentieth century political philosophy and literary theory; Rolf Tiedemann, an accomplished Benjamin scholar and colleague of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer; Richard Wolin, a highly regarded intellectual historian and accomplished thinker and writer; and finally Martin Zenck, an art, literary, and music historian and writer. I have chosen to use the works of Arendt, Tiedemann, and Wolin because they maintain a less narrow vision of Benjamin than Adorno or Horkheimer, who saw him primarily as a philosopher. However, as a man of letters, as Arendt contended that he was, Benjamin's writings become available to a wider range of interpretations and uses.

With these sources as a starting point, I will attempt to collect the mirrors' fragments from Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke, assemble them, and see what they reflect. The reflection in the mirror, the perception, is tenuous, but these three authors provide guidance and methods for strengthening and clarifying that perception, and pointing the way toward truth. The dialectic of perception and truth is what drives the

crises of representation found in these three authors' works, and it may be useful in revealing their possible solutions to those crises.

Chapter One

The Mirror's Image: False Reflections

The catalyst for the crises of representation that Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke experience is their dissatisfaction with the world as they perceive it. Their challenge is to engage with the means of perception, and either change them, or use them in such a way as to reveal the falsehood of their current milieu, be it Fascist Germany, or turn of the century Paris or Vienna. The central paradox of their attempts to resolve their crises is that they are using language, which is a system of symbols that they do not trust. Not only are they trying to convey the way they perceive their world, but they are also attempting to effect change in their environment, to use language as a revolutionary tool.

Benjamin brings his revolutionary tools to bear in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, where he discusses fragments and their metaphorical uses. Benjamin views history as fragmentary, as demonstrated by the metaphor of the Angel of History and the image of history as an ever-increasing pile of detritus. He then names the oppressed working class as the depository of this history; he says it is powerful, and should not fall victim to the conformism and falsehoods of Fascism. The theses are a collection of loosely related fragmentary paragraphs, which deal in large part with the fragmentary nature of existence and the insidious nature of Fascism or totalitarianism.

In his essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Benjamin shows that fragments can be used to create new order in art, and through art, in politics, and through politics, in essence create a new world. He attempts to use fragment as a tool for revolution and reinvention. A quote from the French essayist and poet Paul

Valéry underscores Benjamin's focus on technological, artistic and aesthetic change:

Der erstaunliche Zuwachs aber, den unsere Mittel in ihrer Anpassungsfähigkeit und ihrer Präzision erfahren haben, stellen uns in naher Zukunft die eingreifendsten Veränderungen in der antiken Industrie des Schönen in Aussicht [...] Weder die Materie, noch der Raum, noch die Zeit sind seit zwanzig Jahren, was sie seit jeher gewesen sind. Man muß sich darauf gefaßt machen, daß so große Neuerungen die gesamte Technik der Künste verändern, dadurch die Invention selbst beeinflussen und schließlich vielleicht dazu gelangen werden, den Begriff der Kunst selbst auf die zauberhafteste Art zu verändern. (Benjamin *KZR*, 472)

Benjamin, by including this quotation from Valéry, and by furthering its assertions, advocates a change in art, and here he means not only the visual arts, but literature, to make it useless to Fascism. The aura, the indefinable in the work of art, its place in a tradition and history that makes it unique, is lost when the techniques of reproduction detach the reproduced object from the domain of its tradition; as Benjamin posits: "Die Reproduktionstechnik [...] löst das Reproduzierte aus dem Bereich der Tradition ab" (*KZR*, 477).

This lack of uniqueness, the idea of ubiquity and sameness and generality, is what Benjamin strives to overcome. Fascism is opposed to a fragmented world, to individuality (Wolin, 161). The aura becomes a tool for looking through or past the illusion of sameness, and the aura clings to the fragment, as a "sonderbares Gespinst aus Raum und Zeit: einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag" (Benjamin *KZR*, 440).

Like the aptly-named utilities, art, too, possesses a utilitarian and manipulative quality. As

Benjamin notes: "Wie Wasser, Gas und elektrischer Strom von weither auf einen fast unmerklichen Handgriff hin in unsere Wohnungen kommen, um uns zu bedienen, so werden wir mit Bildern [...] versehen werden, die sich, auf einen kleinen Griff, fast ein Zeichen einstellen und uns ebenso wieder verlassen" (KZR, 475). Benjamin also argues that this technological reproduction tailors reality to the masses, and the masses to reality: "[Es] drängt den Kultwert nicht nur dadurch zurück, daß er das Publikum in eine begutachtende Haltung bringt, sondern auch dadurch, daß die begutachtende Haltung im Kino Aufmerksamkeit nicht einschließt. Das Publikum ist ein Examiner, doch ein zerstreuter" (KZR, 505). Benjamin talks about the work being grounded in tradition, which would at first glance seem contrary to the idea of newness and revolution presented in the text. He posits: "Die Echtheit einer Sache ist der Inbegriff alles von [sic] Ursprung her an ihr Tradierbaren [sic], von ihrer materiellen Dauer bis zu ihrer geschichtlichen Zeugenschaft" (KZR, 477). However, the tradition to which the work of art belongs is one of critical thinking, critical perception, creativity, and original thought. The topics and creative undertakings discussed here belong to the tradition of Bacon, not Aristotle. Benjamin divides his essay into fifteen sections. In Section XI Benjamin explicitly discusses the totality versus the fragment, and the deception that permeates the life of modern humankind. Section XII offers a discussion of critical reception. Together, the Sections work to develop a theory whereby works of art, and like art, language, can be used to combat Fascism in their original, fragmented state.

In *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, Benjamin holds that the translator's goal is to make language mutable. He discusses the process of taking the fragments of language-- not the terms, or the abstract notions of language, but the incommunicable aspects of

language--and making them mutable, creating a new, 'pure language' [*reine Sprache*], one free of cultural or national connotations. A quote by the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé crystallizes the author's frustration with and the problem of language, and also underscores the ideal of true communication: truth. "Les langues imparfaites en cela que plusieurs, manque la suprême: penser étant écrire sans accessoires, ni chuchotement mais tacite encore l'immortelle parole, la diversité, sur terre, des idiomes empêche personne de profeérer les mots qui, sinon se trouveraient, par une frappe unique, elle-même matériellement la vérité"⁴ (Mallarmé, 218). Benjamin is searching for an echo, a reflection, a piece of the original, not a recreation of language. The task of the translator seems impossible. Translation and original are fragments of a greater language. Translation must accept its fragmentary nature, as the original did, and try its best to reflect the indefinable, the great longing for linguistic complementation. Translation, according to Wolin, "should" be transparent, should allow 'true', 'pure' language to shine through. Benjamin's argument, however, is not that simple. Ideally, fragment augments fragment to point the way to pure language⁵.

As Benjamin uses fragment to bring about change in society and language, so too do Hofmannsthal and Rilke use it to demonstrate the social crises of their narrators, and the mistrust of language as a result of their social circumstances. Hofmannsthal deals

⁴ "The imperfection of languages consists in their plurality, the supreme one is lacking: thinking is writing without accessories or even whispering, the immortal word still remains silent; the diversity of idioms on earth prevents everybody from uttering the words which otherwise, at one single stroke, would materialize as truth" (Arendt, 77). Though the translation provided here is by Benjamin's own definition a bad one, I provide it for the sake of my readers, even though, by translating the text, all of the 'true, inexpressible meaning' it contained is lost. The power of the text is in its untranslatability, which is why Benjamin provided it in his text without one.

⁵ The tension in Benjamin's text is that the task of the translator is quite possibly an impossible one. Wolin simplifies this, and in doing so does an injustice to the text. I contend, as I believe Benjamin does, that only as an ideal is claiming the 'pure language' possible. "Should" implies necessity and eventuality, neither of which are indicated by Benjamin's text.

extensively with the theme of fragment in *Ein Brief*. He sees fragment as a philosophical tool: it inverts Aristotle's Pyramid of Form by making the banal and the mundane vehicles of meaning, even of divine meaning, as opposed to the traditional 'high' notions of philosophy, theology, and morality, which he disregards not merely as empty, but meaningless. He puts this idea into practice in the text, but he also represents it through the relationship between Chandos and Francis Bacon, who was a strong opponent of Aristotelian logic, as when he maintained, in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), that it was only good for contending, and that no real knowledge could be gleaned from it. Hofmannsthal also draws a comparison between Chandos and Henry VIII, and as such identifies Chandos with change, revolution, and reform. Chandos then goes on to discuss the systematic breakdown of his language, in terms of his inability to speak about traditional 'courtly' subjects, and instead focuses on momentary epiphany and metaphor as tools for communication and understanding. In this way he circumvents the need for a 'top-down' philosophy, and instead gains insight into and through the world, though at the end of the letter he is still unsure if he can use this new language, when he says that this new language is "eine Sprache, in welcher die stummen Dinge zu mir sprechen, und in welcher ich vielleicht einst im Grabe vor einem unbekannten Richter mich verantworten werde" (Hofmannsthal, 348).

Rilke, in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, deals with fragment as a way of writing, and of perceiving the world. Sensory experience and memory are guided, not by a plan or goal, not by a subject of thought or a theme, but rather by observing the intruders that find their way into the inner realm of the writer. He takes his cues from this uninvited sensory experience, and the stories of his past are peopled by ghosts, who are

interlopers in their own right. He writes about these interruptions, while simultaneously blaming them for his inability to write. For Brigg, the noises, smells, sights, and shocks of the city are indistinguishable from his own thoughts. He sees fragment as a way of life: the writer builds the sediment of memory and experience until he has enough impetus (meaning) to put into his words. Brigg believes that a writer could live his whole life and write only a few lines of meaningful poetry, and that indeed only with difficulty, because each word contains parts, fragments, detritus from the collected and hard-earned experience of a lifetime, as he posits: "Man sollte warten [mit dem Schreiben] und Sinn und Süßigkeit sammeln ein ganzes Leben lang [...] und dann, ganz zum Schluß, vielleicht könnte man dann zehn Zeilen schreiben, die gut sind" (Rilke, 20). Rilke differentiates between feelings and memories, which are subjective and insubstantial, and experiences, which are meaningful, and the building blocks of all poetry when he writes:

Denn Verse sind nicht [...] Gefühle [...] es sind Erfahrungen [...] und es ist noch nicht genug, wenn man an alles das denken darf. Man muß Erinnerungen haben [...] und es genügt auch noch nicht, daß man Erinnerungen hat. Man muß sie vergessen können [...] und man muß die große Geduld haben, zu warten, daß sie wiederkommen. Denn die Erinnerungen selbst sind es noch nicht. Erst wenn sie Blut werden in uns, Blick und Gebärde, namenlos und nicht mehr zu unterscheiden von uns selbst, erst dann kann es geschehen, daß in einer sehr seltenen Stunde das erste Wort eines Verses aufsteht in ihrer Mitte und aus ihnen ausgeht (20-1).

Here, Rilke suggests that through the collection of fragmented experience, of memories

forgotten and regained, that if there is meaning in words, it is created, not inherent.

In the absence of preexisting meaning, one way to create meaning can be through the use of figurative language. In *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, Benjamin uses metaphor, fragment, and imagery to convey a mode of thought and a concept of constellation [*Konstellation*] that he cannot impart by using traditional concepts [*Begriffe*]. The Theses, seventeen in total, are themselves fragmented, and only related insofar as the reader can form the bridges that connect them. This allows the reader to be critical, to perform the creative functions Benjamin addresses, and also allows the reader not to be exposed to the Fascist idea of totality and conformity to dogma.

In *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, Benjamin conceives of the literary work as living, and as such it is mutable, has an afterlife, can be reborn. In his personification of the work of art, Benjamin points to the idea that the work has a 'soul', and that the immutable, 'pure' kernel can be transmitted through time and across languages, because it belongs to no language. He explicitly uses similes and metaphors to express that which mere description would miss. He uses images to communicate where words alone would fail. Like in a translation, figurative language aids understanding where the original is of no help or, more importantly, not understood.

In *Ein Brief*, words, and more specifically concepts [*Begriffe*], fail Chandos. As a result, he relies with increasing frequency on metaphor and imagery to attempt to convey meaning, and in doing so removes the burden of interpretation from the reader, allowing the reader to experience unmediated [*unmittelbar*] the meaning the author tries to impart. Specifically, everyday objects, and broken, lost, or forgotten things spark Chandos' interest and seem to have an aura about them, an almost holy quality, as when he writes:

[W]as [hätte meine Gefühle] mit begreiflicher menschlicher Gedankenverknüpfung [zu tun], wenn ich an einem anderen Abend unter einem Nußbaum eine halbvollge Gießkanne finde, die ein Gärtnerbursche dort vergessen hat, und wenn mich diese Gießkanne und das Wasser in ihr, das vom Schatten des Baumes finster ist, und ein Schwimmkäfer, der auf dem Spiegel dieses Wassers von einem dunklen Ufer zum andern rudert, wenn diese Zusammensetzung von Nichtigkeiten mich mit einer solchen Gegenwart des Unendlichen durchschauert [...], daß ich in Worte ausbrechen möchte, von denen ich weiß, fände ich sie, so würden sie jene Cherubim, an die ich nicht glaube, niederzwingen [...] (345)

In this rambling, disjointed sentence, there is a potent combination of fragmented object, inspiration, and moment. As Chandos writes: "Denn es ist ja völlig Unbenanntes und auch wohl kaum Benennbares, das in solchen Augenblicken, irgendeine Erscheinung meiner alltäglichen Umgebung mit einer überschwellenden Flut höheren Lebens wie ein Gefäß erfüllend, mir sich ankündet" (343). He focuses on these things over the affairs of state or the moral upbringing of his daughter, because for him, these pieces afford him a view of the world that is new and exciting, although his new insights are debilitating (342).

As Bacon attempts to make his *The Advancement of Learning* a map of knowledge, so does Hofmannsthal use language as a series of images that point the reader in the direction of his thought. As the editor to the 1893 edition of *The Advancement of Learning* notes:

Bacon makes, by a sort of exhaustive analysis, a ground-plan of all

subjects of study, as an intellectual map, helping the right inquirer in his search for the right path. The right path is that by which he has the best chance of adding to the stock of knowledge in the world something worth labouring for; and the true worth is in labour for “the glory of the Creator and the relief of man’s estate.” (Bacon, 2).

As Bacon attempted to provide a map, a guide instead of didactic instructions, so too, through imagery and metaphor, is Hofmannsthal able to penetrate misunderstanding because the relationship between author and reader has changed from a didactic one to a collaborative one. Chandos describes the aura, the tap of higher life that fills the everyday objects of his life, and he does this by simply listing objects, with the understanding that they are imbued with some sort of power:

Denn es ist ja völlig Unbenanntes und auch wohl kaum Benennbares, das in solchen Augenblicken, irgendeine Erscheinung meiner alltäglichen Umgebung mit einer überschwellenden Flut höheren Lebens wie ein Gefäß erfüllend, mir sich ankündet. *Ich kann nicht erwarten, daß sie mich ohne Beispiel verstehen, und ich muß Sie um Nachsicht für die Albernheit meiner Beispiele bitten.* Eine Gießkanne, eine auf dem Felde verlassene Egge, ein Hund in der Sonne, ein ärmlicher Kirchhof, ein Krüppel, ein kleines Bauernhaus, alles dies kann das Gefäß meiner Offenbarung werden (Hofmannsthal, 343). [italics my emphasis]

The relationship becomes one in which the reader helps further the goals of the author by reading and thinking. In this way, the reader is able to participate to some degree not only in experiencing the author's 'language crisis', but also in the possible salvation of

meaning. Hofmannsthal gives a hint at what this salvation might look like when he writes:

Jeder dieser Gegenstände und die tausend anderen ähnlichen, über die sonst ein Auge mit selbstverständlicher Gleichgültigkeit hinweggleitet, kann für mich plötzlich in irgend einem Moment, den herbeizuführen auf keine Weise in meiner Gewalt steht, ein erhabenes und rührendes Gepräge annehmen, das auszudrücken mir alle Worte zu arm scheinen (343-44).

Flashes of inspiration and the banal detritus of the everyday replace traditional literary and aesthetic ideals. The reader is left to interpret and work through Chandos' indifference [*Gleichgültigkeit*], and differentiate between his subjects [*Gegenständen*].

It is the same in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*. The reader must interpret Brigge's musings, metaphors, nervous episodes, and nightmares, in order to understand the protagonist, and through the protagonist, the work itself. Brigge finds himself in a crisis of language, unable to write, hateful of interruptions to his work, but terrified of the silence he needs to write, because it reveals his inner emptiness. The novel consists of personifications of the city, passages where Rilke claims: "Ich lerne sehen", wherein he combines objective observation with fantasy and philosophical musings to create a multilayered tapestry of symbol and image and observation (Rilke, 8). He also makes symbolic use of passages that involve the auditory and olfactory senses. The city becomes a malevolent force, like the ghosts in the stories of his past. The city acts on Brigge, imposing its will on him as well as the other residents. The reader is confronted with a disordered series of images, broken dreams, and a sometimes barely-lucid narrator, who is intent on phantoms and the malevolency of the inanimate. Brigge, the reader's

linguistically crippled guide, needs the cognitive ability of the reader to carry him through the work, using the reader's ability to form connections between the seemingly random collection of episodes, of snapshots into life, to create something resembling a cohesive narrative. One of the traditional qualities of writing is that, by its nature, it allows the writer the opportunity to create a cohesive, logical work. The narrators of *Ein Brief* and *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, both writers, are able only to demonstrate the fluidity of their reality in their works.

This kind of fluidity is not, however, isolated to Hofmannsthal or Rilke, or to protagonists who are men of letters. By way of further example Gottfried Benn's short piece *Gehirne* is of note, wherein the doctor, unable to maintain his grasp on reality, tries to find salvation in the pen and notebook. He worries: "Ich will mir ein Buch kaufen und einen Stift; ich will mir jetzt möglichst vieles aufschreiben, damit nicht alles so herunterfließt" (Benn, 13). This situation makes the reader responsible for interpretation, and relieves the author of the responsibility of making mediated sense, in other words, producing a precise meaning through words directed at a reader, for a specific result. If words cannot produce a specific meaning, then the author is forced out of an authoritative position. He has to let the reader produce meaning, without the structure of a traditional narrative:

Was ist es denn mit den Gehirnen? Ich wollte immer auffliegen wie ein
Vogel aus der Schlucht; nun lebe ich außen im Kristall. Aber nun geben
Sie mir bitte den Weg frei, ich schwinge wieder -- ich war so müde -- auf
Flügeln geht dieser Gang -- mit meinem blauen Anemonenschwert -- in
[sic] Mittagsturz des Lichts -- in Trümmern des Südens -- in zerfallendem

Gewölk -- Zerstäubungen der Stirne -- Entschweifungen der Schläfe (19).

This style of writing brings the reader into a much closer relationship with the text. The series of fragments are the only link between reader and writer, and so the reader must engage them critically in order to determine meaning. The writer has abdicated the responsibility of conveying meaning, but by the same token, in the case of Benn, he gives the reader clues by way of symbol and literary allusion. It can be said that the relationship between reader and writer disappears at a point, and the reader becomes the writer, the conveyer--or more precisely, the producer--of meaning.

The relationship between producer and product is germane to Benjamin's *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. The essay is inundated with figurative language in its treatment of the use and misuse of art in politics. Benjamin confronts this topic through the use of image and the discussion of the 'aura', a symbol for the origin, the soul of art. He also deals with the aesthetics of politics and reality: "Der apparatfreie Aspekt der Realität ist hier zu ihrem künstlichsten geworden und der Anblick der unmittelbaren Wirklichkeit zu der blauen Blume im Land der Technik" (KZR, 458). Not only does Benjamin use the loaded concept "blaue Blume"--a major symbol in German Romanticism, often connected with the idea of striving for the unattainable, the out of reach, but also the eternal--Benjamin uses the image of the flower again later, describing the aesthetics of war: "eine blühende Wiese um die feurigen Orchideen der Mitrailleusen" (KZR, 468). He binds the concept of war--or revolution--and the technical aspects of the reproducibility of art closely together when he writes: "Da kam der Film und hat diese Kerkerwelt mit dem Dynamit der Zehntelsekunden gesprengt, so daß wir nun zwischen ihren weitverstreuten Trümmern gelassen abenteuerliche Reisen

unternehmen" (KZR, 499 - 500). The film, technically reproduced art--the double edged sword--used appropriately, shatters the image of totality and exposes the world we live in as a prison, a cage, and a lie.

A commonality in Benjamin's selected essays and Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief* and Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnung des Malte Laurids Brigge* is a sense of 'hopeful hopelessness'. To rephrase, all the authors have serious misgivings about the effectiveness of language, in terms of its ability to wholly communicate an idea. Despite this, they continue to use language, and attempt at new meanings and new structures by reordering or re-appropriating language, all the while decrying the failings of their medium. Their task would seem futile, except for their hope that it is not. As Kafka said: "[Es gäbe] viel Hoffnung--unendlich viel Hoffnung, nur nicht für uns" (Schmidt, 243)⁶.

Questions abound: What are feasible uses of language? For what purposes can language be used? Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief* casts pervasive doubt over the source of meaning, especially in language, made clear by Chandos' struggle with subjectivity, and whether meaning comes from within, or is imparted from without. A lengthy passage concerning mythological figures, and the title of his proposed book, *Nosce te Ipsum* are prime examples of his struggle with the self, and with his attempt at grasping truth or meaning. He also makes reference to a new language, and expresses both doubt and hope that he can learn it before it is too late (Hofmannsthal, 348). The ambivalence is recognizable, not only in the way Hofmannsthal describes Chandos' linguistic and psychological meltdown, but in the way Chandos writes, because he uses quotes, literary

⁶ This is reportedly taken from a conversation between Franz Kafka and Max Brod in February of 1920 and quoted by Benjamin in his essay *Franz Kafka*. Benjamin provides the quotation, but not a citation. In my research I have come across no direct source, the quote appearing as hearsay in each work I consulted.

references, metaphor, image, and, because it is a letter, he brings cultural and biographical information to bear, all of which the reader can employ in communicating with the work. Chandos does not trust his language, so he is using it in as many different capacities as possible in the hope that he can make himself understood.

In *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Rilke, and by default Brigge, struggle with the efficacy of language, in this case, whether or not one who has experienced little can nevertheless write meaningful prose (Rilke, 20). The text offers a possible solution to this problem, but for Brigge it is one that will take a lifetime, because it requires of him great experience, not merely memory or sensation, but decades of travel, and of taking in the things he senses and remembers, the things that shock him, so that he may one day use that experience to write meaningfully. The world lacks order for Brigge; he tries to impose order on the world, inventing cosmologies, classifying death, and attempting to explain life in a city. However, these attempts merely reflect his inability to use language to improve his situation, and so he continually questions the efficacy and purpose of his prose, as when he laments: "Es ist lächerlich. Ich sitze hier in meiner kleinen Stube, ich, Brigge, der achtundzwanzig Jahre alt geworden ist und von den niemand weiß. Ich sitze hier und bin nichts" (Rilke, 22). These ideas, this interpretation, is underscored by the fear apparent in Rilke's poem, 'Ich fürchte mich so vor der Menschen Wort', which will be examined in Chapter 4. Rilke and Hofmannsthal, working in the fictional milieu, demonstrate their ambivalence toward language through the lens of their narrators. Benjamin, writing in a non-fiction milieu, can address the topic

more directly⁷.

Benjamin sees language corrupted by politics in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, and by way of example he uses the captions of photographs: language which orients the viewer to a work of art, much like propaganda orients the reader/viewer to a worldview. He sees a solution in making language and art useless to politics through fragmentation and reorganization, represented both by the content of the essay and the sections into which he physically divides it. Benjamin deals explicitly with film and captions at the end of Section VI. The dispute over the artistic value of painting versus photography is a metaphor for the conflict between creative, thoughtful and therefore autonomous, image-rich writing, and the technical, political and therefore co-opted writing that was prevalent at the time. In Sections IX and X Benjamin discusses alienation and the strangeness of the mirror. Film replaces traditional art, and image replaces thought. It would appear that Benjamin fears propaganda, and fears that new modes of art and communication will destroy autonomy, which for him is key to expressing oneself fully and accurately.

The epilogue consists of an examination of a quote that deals with the aesthetics of war, alienation, and destruction: all of which are--according to him--caused by an inability to cope, as a society, with new technologies and societal forces. In his view, these problems arise from a lack of understanding and an inability to perceive, which is at bottom an inability to internalize the external world, and also to externalize accurately

⁷ That Benjamin is writing non-fiction is of course not the only difference. His historical situation, having lived through the First World War, and with that knowledge anticipating the second, is vastly different than that of Hofmannsthal and Rilke. However, it is then all the more noteworthy that he used similar devices to express his crisis, given how much the social and political worlds had changed in the time separating their works.

and positively the forces at work in the individual. In other words, it is an examination of communication, an attempt to find ways of meaning that circumvent the utility of language, to convey more directly intent and purpose, not merely information.

In *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* Benjamin's use of quotations and the fragmented, aphoristic style of the work suggest that formal language and thought are not the best ways to impart understanding. On the other hand, and without the word, either written or spoken, there would be no theses to write, no "Begriff" upon which to elaborate. On another level, Benjamin is using fragment and unconventional order to explain a concept [*Begriff*], which demonstrates his belief that ideas need to be expressed in untraditional terms. He also hints at the corruption of history by Fascism, and thus the corruption of history as a concept [*Begriff*]. He implies that all notions are susceptible to corruption, manipulation, and co-opting by hostile entities. Nevertheless, he chooses language as the medium through which to combat this corruption and manipulation, at the same time recognizing that the medium, the tool, is dangerous.

In an essay that deals explicitly with Benjamin's tool, language, in *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* he is centrally concerned with the question of whether or not a work is translatable, or of what makes a good translation. This calls into question the ability of language to convey meaning. Benjamin, himself a translator, believed it was possible to translate, but questions the efficacy of individual languages through a discussion of a 'pure' language: one that has not been discovered (or that has been lost) and that he does not know. This 'pure language' is one in which symbol and symbolized are one, one in which meaning comes to fruition, and is contained in, but by its very nature is beyond, all of human speech. Again, the central thesis is that language fails to convey meaning,

whether through the multiplicity of languages, or through each individual languages' shortcomings.

To conclude my introductory remarks: massive social changes in the first half of the 20th century led to a reexamination of thought and language and ushered in a new literary age, as these three luminaries dismantled the old structure of language and of literary analysis, and left in their passing more questions than answers and more problems than solutions. So little of what was previously conceived as proper literary theory remained after the Second World War. As we look at post-war poetry, and the novels and poetry of today, it seems as though they become more and more subjective, concerned with personal experience, or are of a fragmentary nature. The futile task that is left to the author is to attempt to convey meaning through a corrupted medium, and these three writers--Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke--attempt to do that, through the use of fragment, figurative language, and finally through expressing their ambivalence toward language. Fundamentally, the goal of each author is to use words not only to express their inability to adequately do so, but also to explore new ways of meaning, and thus renew and redeem language. The authors' confrontations with and attempted resolutions of this fundamental paradox are essential components of the works, and indeed are essential to a full reading of the texts, as they are, in my opinion, what keep the works vital to the continued discussion of the language crisis as it has evolved.

Chapter Two

Breaking the Mirror: Fragment and Truth

A major theme that runs through the works of Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke is the idea that it might be possible that the world can be changed by the inherent power of words (Strathausen, 29). For all three authors, words contain an element of danger, but this danger is mitigated by the fragmented nature of language. This sentiment reveals the paradoxical heart of language. On the one hand, language used to represent a monolithic truth is dangerous, but on the other, to reveal that totality as a lie is to call into question the meaning of language, to fragment it and thus reduce its power. Fragmentation, then, is both the savior of language, as it allows for its growth and development, and its weakness, because it lacks an inherent quality of truth. It is with this idea of fragmentation that this chapter is concerned.

In *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, Benjamin compiles a series of theses, fragments that all relate tangentially to the concept of history. The Theses are written as such to bring the reader out of the snares of Fascism and defeat (Benjamin *ÜBG*, 698). In *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Benjamin uses the allegory of film to show first how fragments--frames of film, edited shots--can be used to create a false, seamless whole, and secondly, how the complete act of painting exposes the permeation of man's world by technology, which Benjamin contends is a tool of Fascism. (Benjamin *KZR*, 457). *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* takes a different view of fragment, and, rather than presenting it as a revolutionary tool, as in the aforementioned essays, shows an aspect of it that reveals language as a possible barrier to understanding.

Benjamin contends that human language is fragmented, and the task of the translator is to tap into "die reine Sprache", the 'pure language', in order to convey the ineffable beyond the boundaries of individual languages (AÜ, 13). Here, the goal of the translator is to unite languages, overcome barriers to understanding, and widen the impact of the original work. Benjamin develops a dialectic of fragment in his essays: on the one hand, fragment can be used to combat the forces of political, social, and intellectual totalitarianism and homogeneity, and on the other, it is used by those forces to present a unified image to the masses, a facade of power and legitimacy that constrains the human capacity for thought and understanding (KZR, 504-5).

Benjamin conceives of fragment as having several unique attributes. On the one hand, there is the historical fragment, the piece of the past that has an "Aura" (KZR, 479). This 'aura' can cling to either an object, as in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, or an event, as it does in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (ÜBG, 695). These kinds of fragments lie outside the realm of politics as a result of their 'aura', which binds them to a tradition, and a particular time and place. This 'aura' cannot be removed without the violence of reproduction, and thus auratic objects remain autonomous, standing against totalitarianism, just as Benjamin claims the individual should (KZR, 480). On the other hand, fragments without an 'aura' are susceptible to destruction, corruption, and co-option (KZR, 503, AÜ, 13-4). The duality of fragment means that, because Benjamin conceives of language as fragmented, as he discusses in *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* he sees it both as a redemptive medium, and a dangerous one (AÜ, 14).

Benjamin uses fragment in order to effect change in the concept of history in his

essay, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*. As Benjamin does most clearly in his essay *Zur Kritik der Gewalt*, both in the form and content of his essay, he makes a strong case for the use of fragment in combating negative social forces and maintaining individual autonomy; as Beatrice Hanssen, a well respected comparatist and literary theorist, with extensive work done on both Walther Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, writes of *Kritik der Gewalt*: "Taking literally the term critique, from the Greek *krinien* (to cut, rift, separate, discriminate, but also to decide), [Benjamin] sought to separate categories of legitimate power from sheer force" (Hanssen, 4). Critique is a process of breaking down, of separating. Benjamin uses the "sharp axe of critique" to parcel out his concept of history (Hanssen, 11). The piece is constructed from a series of fragments, his theses concerning the concept or philosophy of history. The fragmentary nature of the piece--fragmentary in opposition to a totality, as in a "Gesamtkunstwerk"--makes it useless to the prevailing socio-political situation in Benjamin's time, namely, Fascism, and also requires a concerted investment on the part of the reader, as opposed to simple passive acceptance, in order for the work to be of use. Benjamin views history as fragmentary, as demonstrated by the metaphor of the Angel of History, which will be dealt with in greater detail later, and the image of history as an ever-increasing pile of detritus (Benjamin *ÜBG*, 697). He then says that the oppressed working class is the depository of this history, and is powerful, and should not fall victim to the conformism and falsehoods of fascism (*ÜBG*, 700). The Theses begin with a fragmentary image of a puppet and a system of mirrors: mirrors that obscure the chess game the puppet is playing, as well as the force controlling the puppet (*ÜBG*, 693). As Rolf Tiedemann notes in an analysis of the essay entitled *Historical Materialism or Political Messianism?*, the puppet, the dwarf

and the chessboard, the table, and the mirrors "are all required to make up the automaton" (Tiedemann, 190). Through the image of the Angel of History and its interpretation, Benjamin succinctly alludes to and explores the relationship between theology and historical materialism (190). Benjamin also makes extensive use of quotes throughout his Theses, using other people's words--fragments within fragments--to make his point using pieces of a "common German literary past" (Arendt, 38).

Arendt, who, unlike Theodor Adorno and Gershom Sholem, thought that Benjamin was more than just a philosopher, that he "thought poetically" and that his works "resist classification" (Smith, viii). As a result, Benjamin was able to see the world as both philosopher and writer. He recognized the impossibility of saying anything: Arendt says that Kafka and Benjamin were confronted with four impossibilities, the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing differently, and the impossibility of writing. She notes:

'the impossibility of not writing', because they could get rid of their inspiration only by writing; 'the impossibility of writing in German' Kafka considered [the Jews] use of the German language as the 'overt or covert, or possibly self-tormenting usurpation of an alien property, which has not been acquired but stolen, (relatively) quickly picked up, and which remains someone else's possession even if not a single linguistic mistake can be pointed out'; [...] 'the impossibility of writing differently' since no other language was available [and finally] the impossibility of writing, for this despair was not something that could be mitigated through writing. (Arendt, 31)

Benjamin collected quotations, collected fragments, because it was only through them that he had any hope of making sense of his past (Arendt, 39). Benjamin's use of fragment, then, can be seen as an attempt at making sense of a situation beyond the writer's understanding or control; as Tiedemann writes: "Indeed the theses are predicated on a political situation that had to seem increasingly hopeless" (192). Fragment does not require totality or originality of the user. On the contrary, this method makes use of the connotations and history of the fragment to say much more than can be communicated through language at all. To that end, Benjamin provides fragments, images, and quotations, to assist the reader in coming to terms with his ideas, with his meaning, and doing so in a manner that invites "the concomitant risk of ambiguity" (177).

In Thesis V of the eighteen that comprise *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, and one concerned with historical materialism, Benjamin states: "Das wahre Bild der Vergangenheit *huscht* vorbei. Nur als Bild, das auf Nimmerwiedersehen im Augenblick seiner Erkennbarkeit eben aufblitzt, ist die Vergangenheit festzuhalten" (Benjamin, 695). Here Benjamin introduces the theme--and tool--of image, which will be discussed later, and also the idea of the moment, the lightning flash of image, the fragment. Just as Rilke's Briggste must experience everything so that he is not irretrievably lost, so the historical materialist must recognize, must understand, the images of the past that flash before him, before they are lost forever. The idea of history as a series of flashing images, as being incomplete, allows Benjamin to give the current generation the "weak Messianic power", not in a religious sense, but in a historical-materialist sense (Arendt, 257). This power can aid the user in rewriting history by holding on to these fragments, and by taking back the power of tradition from the ruling classes, i.e., the Fascists. Through the

use of a 'weak Messianic power', the true power of the word, especially the written word, is revealed.

In Thesis VIII, Benjamin clarifies the position in which not only he, but Hofmannsthal and Rilke, found themselves: "Die Tradition der Unterdrückten belehrt uns darüber, daß der 'Ausnahmezustand', in dem wir leben, die Regel ist" (ÜBG, 697). Whether this 'state of emergency' is the rise of Fascism, the specter of war, or the alienation of a metropolis, what is important is that, like Benjamin, Rilke and Hofmannsthal responded to this it, and in like manner. If this state is the rule, Benjamin seeks to change it. Benjamin does this by suggesting through the fragmented theses ways to reclaim the past--which is itself fragmented, "smashed", a "pile of debris"--and to actively defy the negative forces at work in his intellectual and physical environment (Tiedemann, 178). Benjamin was advocating historical materialism, but clearly his concrete solution was to write, and to write in fragmented images, the most pertinent of which are the image of the automaton in Thesis I and the Angel of History in Thesis IX. According to Tiedemann, Benjamin believed that "in order to recognize communication in what is communicated, the flow must come to a halt. It must crystallize into a shape and be constructed as something immediately present" (Tiedemann, 185).

Immediacy, unmediated experience, is an important concept for all three authors. For the Angel of History in Thesis IX of Benjamin's essay *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, what is immediately present is the pile of debris that is the past. Benjamin describes what the Angel sees: "Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor *uns* erscheint, da sieht *er* eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer und Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert" (Benjamin, 697). As disastrous and hopeless as this sounds,

this pile of debris presents the reader, the historian, the member of the public, with a unique opportunity. If the past is not, as 'we' assume, an unbroken chain of events, if it is instead a mass, a collection of fragments, of events gathered together without causal relation, then each person, each generation, has access to it. This is the "*schwache messianische Kraft*" that Benjamin refers to in Thesis II (695). He denies that the past is a totality, and as such is inaccessible. Instead, if the past is truly a pile of detritus spread out at the Angel's feet--the Angel is a historical materialist, which, according to Benjamin, all of us have the ability to be--then we have access to it, and hence to our own past, and through our past, the ability to reclaim our future (Tiedemann, 177). History is an interpretation, remembered in written word. Benjamin contends that the power over those words belongs to the public, not to institutions, and because of that, the public possesses a great freedom: the freedom to take ownership and responsibility for its past, redefine its present, and keep its future open, undetermined, independent. Very clearly in Thesis IX, Benjamin makes a case for the possibility of reordering the world through the power of words.

Underscoring the concept of fragment, Thesis X is an admonition of the Soviet Union, who Benjamin saw as betraying the cause of Social Democrats by allying themselves with the Nazis, as opposed to Thesis IX, which is a philosophical musing about a Klee painting (Tiedemann, 195). By dividing the work into Theses, Benjamin is able to cover topics ranging from art, to philosophy, to social critique, all without losing sight of his principle goals: true historical materialism, and the power inherent in writing history, and thus the Word--word as generative power, as a divine faculty, a biblical force. Again, the fragments of the essay, the individual theses, are autonomous. It is their

property of reflection, of 'flashing up', that binds them together, that makes a constellation that provides a view to Benjamin's purpose, and unlocks the meaning--and dispels the ambiguity--of the text.

Benjamin extends this concept of "flashing up" in Thesis XVII. The "messianische Stillstellung des Geschehens" or "eine revolutionäre Chance im Kampfe für die unterdrückte Vergangenheit", violently expels the specific from the homogenous, the unique from the general (Benjamin *ÜBG*, 703). This is the process by which the pile of detritus that is history is won from the continuous stream of empty time that tradition holds is behind us. This revolutionary chance is the chance to pick through a history that does not belong to the powers that be, and to construct it anew, and make it meaningful. Benjamin is saying that the process by which fragments are made is constructive, redemptive. Benjamin, the historical materialist, advocates an active deconstruction of the past into fragments, the re-assembly of which offers a chance for the 'oppressed classes' to reclaim what is rightfully theirs. In a very real sense, then, Benjamin believes it is possible to reorder the world through the power of the word.

The Theses are a blue print, a guide for fragmenting and reclaiming the past. It is fitting then, that the theses themselves are assembled as a constellation of fragments, which, though individually meaningful, only when assembled reveal their true power and meaning, in a flash, reflecting one another, unmediated by traditional philosophical discourse. *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* demonstrates the vital and practical application of fragment in literature to advocate, and provide example for, social and political change.

In his essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*,

Benjamin shows that fragments can be used to create new order in art, and through art, in politics, and through politics, in essence create a new world. Fragment can be a tool for revolution and reinvention. Again, Benjamin's quote from Valéry demonstrates his focus on technological, artistic and aesthetic change.

Der erstaunliche Zuwachs aber, den unsere Mittel in ihrer Anpassungsfähigkeit und ihrer Präzision erfahren haben, stellen uns in naher Zukunft die eingreifendsten Veränderungen in der antiken Industrie des Schönen in Aussicht [...] Weder die Materie, noch der Raum, noch die Zeit sind seit zwanzig Jahren, was sie seit jeher gewesen sind. Man muß sich darauf gefaßt machen, daß so große Neuerungen die gesamte Technik der Künste verändern, dadurch die Invention selbst beeinflussen und schließlich vielleicht dazu gelangen werden, den Begriff der Kunst selbst auf die zauberhafteste Art zu verändern (Benjamin, 472, quoting Valéry, 103-4).

Using the quote as a prologue, Benjamin makes known his intention to demonstrate the precipitous changes that took place in Europe in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The stage is set to show how the way that people view art, and also the world, has been irreversibly altered. Benjamin, by including this piece from Valéry, and furthering its assertions, advocates a change in art, and here he means not only the visual arts, but also literature, to make it useless to Fascism. The aura, the indefinable in the work of art, its place in a tradition and history that makes it unique, is lost when the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of its tradition. As Benjamin posits: "Die Reproduktionstechnik [...] löst das Reproduzierte aus

dem Bereich der Tradition ab" (*KZR*, 477). This lack of uniqueness, the idea of ubiquity and sameness and generality, is what Benjamin is striving to overcome, and to see through. (Wolin, 1994; 161).

The aura becomes a tool for looking through or past the illusion of sameness, and the aura clings to the fragment, as a "sonderbares Gespinst aus Raum und Zeit: einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag" (Benjamin *KZR*, 440). Benjamin says that this technological reproduction tailors reality to the masses, and the masses to reality: "[Es] drängt den Kultwert nicht nur dadurch zurück, daß er das Publikum in eine begutachtende Haltung bringt, sondern auch dadurch, daß die begutachtende Haltung im Kino Aufmerksamkeit nicht einschließt. Das Publikum ist ein Examiner, doch ein zerstreuter" (*KZR*, 505). When the cult value of an art object is no longer discernible, the public enters into an unhealthy relationship with said object: "Wie Wasser, Gas, und elektrischer Strom von weither auf einen fast unmerklichen Handgriff hin in unsere Wohnungen kommen, um uns zu bedienen, so werden wir mit Bildern oder mit Tonfolgen versehen werden, die sich, auf einen kleinen Griff, fast ein Zeichen einstellen und uns ebenso wieder verlassen" (*KZR*, 475). Art is made, reproduced, for an audience, and as much as the audience may be critical of the work, they are still influenced by it. The audience may be critical, but as Benjamin says, they are distracted. This distraction, of convenience, of availability, of exposure, reduces not only the efficacy of art, but the public's ability to respond to and be truly critical of it. This numbness toward art, and in turn its acceptance, is what makes the reproduced work of art--especially propaganda, in printed and film form--dangerous.

Benjamin talks about the work of art as being grounded in tradition, which would

at first glance seem contrary to the idea of newness and revolution presented here. He posits: "Die Reproduktionstechnik [...] löst das Reproduzierte aus dem Bereich der Tradition ab. Indem sie die Reproduktion vervielfältigt, setzt sie an die Stelle seines einmaligen Vorkommens sein massenweises" (KZR, 477). The tradition to which the original work of art belongs is one of critical thinking, critical perception, creativity, and original thought, and the reproduction annihilates individuality and encourages mass, codified, and ubiquitous experience.

In the Section IV, Benjamin examines the downfall of art, and he does so by way of constellation, bringing fragments together to create a mental image, a construct, that goes well beyond the text in terms of bearing meaning. He says that an analysis of art in the age of its mechanical reproducibility has to do justice to the relationships between the events and movements mentioned in this Section: "Diese Zusammenhänge zu ihrem Recht kommen zu lassen, ist unerlässlich für eine Betrachtung, die es mit dem Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit zu tun hat" (KZR, 481). Among these movements and events are the idea of secularized ritual, the cult of beauty, crisis, photography, socialism, *l'art pour l'art*, negative theology, 'pure' art, social functions, and categorizing. This constellation of ideas establishes the history of the downfall of art, from a 'sacred' realm, to profane objects designed to control the masses. In other words, according to Benjamin, since the advent of photography, art has been cheapened, sanitized, and made a commodity, and the system is self-perpetuating and destructive.

In form and content, Benjamin is making a statement about the state of society and art: The fragment--constellations of words and ideas, original works of art, which carry their time and place with them into the future--and originality--of critical ideas, and

in art--are the saviors of art and society. Benjamin claims that there is a crisis in both, and he attempts to point at the cause. He claims that one of the failings of art in his time is that the art object is removed from its cult tradition--that is, it loses its uniqueness by being reproduced and displaced from its original milieu--and as such no longer retains its individual meaning, and thus can no longer represent itself. Benjamin writes in Section VII: "Indem das Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit die Kunst von ihrem kultischen Fundament löste, erlosch auf immer der Schein ihrer Autonomie" (*KZR*, 486). If a work of art has no autonomy, it must by necessity be in service to some other entity. Reproducibility has removed the aura, the fragment of the past still attached to the object, and in doing so has rendered it powerless, and to a large extent, meaningless except for political ends (*KZR*, 482). According to Benjamin, it is this idea that makes the traditionless, unauratic work of art dangerous. Stripped of its nature, what should be a fragment of the past--like a shard of pottery that maintains a vital human connection--the work of art becomes merely an object, a piece of a political puzzle to be used in any number of ways. Benjamin highlights this when he writes about photography and film: "Die Direktiven, die der Betrachter von Bildern in der illustrierten Zeitschriften [author's note: as opposed to the titles of paintings] durch die Beschriftung erhält, werden bald darauf noch präziser und gebieterischer im Film, wo die Auffassung von jedem einzelnen Bild durch die Folge aller vorangegangenen vorgeschrieben erscheint" (*KZR*, 485). What film accomplishes is to make a totality out of fragments, and these fragments require explanation. For this reason, Benjamin considers film and photography forms of art that lack autonomy, and that--in his view--makes them susceptible to misuse. In Section IX, Benjamin discusses the fragmented and unauratic nature of the actor's performance, again

highlighting the falsity of film, the degree to which the totality of the film, the continuity it represents, is a lie.

Section XIV offers an explicit discussion of the totality versus the fragment, and of the deception that permeates the life of modern man. Benjamin writes, "Seine [des Films] illusionäre Natur ist eine Natur zweiter Ordnung, sie ist ein Ergebnis des Schnitts" (KZR, 458). According to Benjamin, this is the heart of the deception: Man is surrounded by false totalities, and these totalities are of a Fascist--aesthetic, violent, and powerful--nature (Hanssen, 11; Wolin, 1994; 161). Benjamin states that the world is so permeated with these false wholes, these false realities, that seeing the world without catching a glimpse of technological interference is the height of artifice. He writes: "Der apparatfreie Aspekt der Realität ist hier zu ihrem künstlichen geworden und der Anblick der unmittelbaren Wirklichkeit zu der blauen Blume im Land der Technik" (Benjamin, KZR, 458). Benjamin is revealing the paradox of modern life: art, the height of artifice, is a vista free of technological interference. Painting, according to Benjamin, shows a total or complete picture, which would by necessity include these technological trappings of society. This kind of totality, produced by an individual and maintaining its aura, it acceptable, even encouraged. Conversely, film cobbles a 'complete' picture out of fragments, removing the instruments of technology from the scene, even as they create it (KZR, 458). Benjamin is demonstrating for the reader the ways in which, according to him, fragment should be used, and the ways in which even those auratic objects which Benjamin holds dear can be co-opted by Fascism, if the audience is uncritical.

In Benjamin's view, even criticism, is infected and affected by the unauratic work of art in the age of its mechanical reproducibility, specifically, film. In Section XII,

Benjamin maintains that the less socially significant an art form, the less critical the public is likely to be. The conventional--mass produced film and photography--if accepted without criticism, is vulnerable to being used as propaganda. He writes: "Das konventionelle wird kritiklos genossen, das wirklich Neue kritiziert man mit Widerwillen" (KZR, 497). While Benjamin admits that the public has the ability to be critical, the mass appeal of the type of film that Benjamin had in mind, and one of its functions, to be shown to large audiences, desensitizes the audience in a way not possible with regard to painting. Despite the opening of galleries and museums, painting still does not allow for mass viewings, as in film. Film provides the audience with the opportunity to be exposed to shocking experiences on the one hand, and to escape from the trauma of a destabilized modern world on the other. The heart of the matter is that, because film lacks an aura, a cult value, a fragment of the past, it can be manipulated and forced on an audience en masse. Painting, on the other hand, maintains its individuality, its aura, and reveals the world as fragmented, permeated by technology, and, from Benjamin's perspective, in peril. The aestheticization of politics, which is accomplished by propaganda in film, photograph, and print media, is a prelude to war under a Fascist system (KZR, 482, 506-08). Likewise, desensitizing, distraction, and the goals of the market are all aspects of the totality of the film (KZR, 500, 506-08). Benjamin holds that being critical and conscious of the application of fragments--both negatively, as in propaganda film, and positively, as in cult art--allows one to maintain some degree of autonomy, and thus be aware of, and perhaps be able to affect, social and political changes as they happen.

Just as images can be used to enlighten, educate, and inspire, so too can language. In *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, Benjamin holds that the goal of the translator is to make

language mutable. He discusses the process of taking the fragments of language--not the terms, or the abstract notions of language, but the incommunicable aspects of language--and making them mutable, thus creating a new, pure language, one that is free of cultural or national connotations. Again, the previously cited quote by Mallarmé crystallizes the frustration and the problem of language, and it also underscores the ideal of conveying meaning: truth. He says that languages are imperfect because of their plurality, and that they must be spoken. In their diversity, languages nullify the ability of man to find true meaning, or truth (Mallarmé, 218). Firstly, according to Benjamin, the original work of literature must possess a key feature: translatability. Translatability means that a work contains within it a kernel of truth worth transmitting across and through languages. Without this, without a truth-bearing aspect, the work of literature, in its essence, does not require translation. It is the requirement that the work be translated, and thus continue to evolve, that keeps the work vital, and thus imminently translatable.

Benjamin is searching for an echo, a reflection, a piece of the original, not a re-creation of language. If the original work can be said to have a 'life',--a time of popularity, or of original relevance--then the translation can be said to be a part of its 'after-life'. The translation is wholly distinct from the original, yet it maintains a vital connection with it. In this way, the fragments of the original--the translation of it into many different languages--coalesce to form a separate and distinct body of work, but one which reflects the revelation of the original, and maintains its vitality (Benjamin, *AÜ*, 21). In this way, like the power of the past that Benjamin mentions in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, translation possesses a weak messianic power.

Translation, whatever the purpose of the translator, "ultimately serves the purpose

of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages" (Arendt, 72). This statement clearly sets languages in relation to one another in such a way that the more 'good' translations--which Benjamin defines as not merely communicative but that also convey meaning or intent--of an original appear, the closer the work comes to discovering the "reine Sprache" (Benjamin, *AÜ*, 9, 13). Though translation cannot reveal the relationship, because that is not the focus of translation, it can represent it. Translation can only represent the relationship because, as Benjamin writes: "Es [das Verhältnis der Sprachen] besteht darin, daß die Sprachen einander nicht fremd, sondern a priori und von allen historischen Beziehungen abgesehen einander in dem verwandt sind, was sie sagen wollen" (*AÜ*, 12).

From the well-spring of meaning, of intention, the relationship between languages develops. Just as translation and original are related by means of intention, so too are they fragments of a greater language. As Benjamin hypothesizes:

Wie nämlich Scherben eines Gefäßes, um sich zusammenfügen zu lassen, in den kleinsten Einzelheiten einander zu folgen, doch nicht so zu gleichen haben, so muß, anstatt dem Sinn des Originals sich ähnlich zu machen, die Übersetzung liebend vielmehr und bis ins Einzelne hinein dessen Art des Meinens in der eigenen Sprache sich anbidden, um so beide wie Scherben als Bruchstück eines Gefäßes, als Bruchstück einer größeren Sprache erkennbar zu machen. (*AÜ*, 18)

According to Benjamin, a good translation's fragmentary nature should be readily apparent, as with the original, and it should reflect the indefinable, the great longing for linguistic complementation. Here Benjamin solidifies the importance of fragment to

language. The task of the translator itself is "an ambiguous one, traversed by tensions and conflicts" (Weber, 57). Language is fragmented, but through the unification of these fragments, through the gathered reflection in the broken mirror of language, the shards of which for Benjamin are the individual languages, intention and meaning can be established and expanded. "Translatability", the "essential quality of certain works", is a "quasi-transcendental" quality, a "structuring" possibility that shifts "the emphasis from the ostensibly self contained work to a relational dynamic that is precisely not self-identical but perpetually in the process of alteration, transformation, becoming other", in other words, a constellation of fragments, tangents (Weber, 59). In this way, through translation and the expansion of language, the translator can revitalize, even resurrect a literary tradition, and through that resurrection, change language and the way the public talks about, and hence views, the world.

Translation should be transparent, should allow for the possibility of "true", pure language to shine through (Arendt, 82)⁸. Ideally, fragment augments fragment to point the way to pure language (Benjamin, *AÜ*, 21). It is in scripture that Benjamin's analogy finds its home: "Am Anfang war das Wort" (quoted in Luther, 110). If intention and a revelatory experience are the hallmarks of a good relationship between original and translation, and if there is truly a vital connection between original and translation, then sacred texts are the finest of examples, because "to some degree all great texts contain their potential between the lines; this is true to the highest degree of sacred writings" (Arendt, 82). The relationship of intentions helps the translator to represent the ineffable,

⁸ Arendt grasps the task's delicacy. While the translation "should" be transparent, the reader still negotiates between the translation and the original, the translation deforming the meaning of the original to open up new avenues of meaning. The translator's job is to provide the possibility of understanding, not the understanding itself.

and it is the ineffable that is the essence of the work. Benjamin writes,

Es bleibt in aller Sprache und ihren Gebilden außer dem Mitteilbaren ein Nicht-Mitteilbares, ein, je nach dem Zusammenhang, in dem es angetroffen wird, Symbolisierendes oder Symbolisiertes.

Symbolisierendes nur, in den endlichen Gebilden der Sprachen;

Symbolisiertes aber im Werden der Sprachen selbst. Und was im Werden der Sprachen sich darzustellen, ja herzustellen sucht, das ist jener Kern der reinen Sprache selbst. Wenn aber dieser, ob verborgen und fragmentarisch, dennoch gegenwärtig im Leben als das Symbolisierte selbst ist, so wohnt er nur symbolisierend in den Gebilden (Benjamin, *AÜ*, 19).

Pure language, then, is tied to linguistic elements; it is the symbolizing element, the force behind symbols, but not the symbol itself. It remains undefined, bound to and yet separate from linguistic structures. Finally, as Benjamin writes:

Von diesem sie zu entbinden, das Symbolisierende zum Symbolisierten selbst zu machen, die reine Sprache gestaltet der Sprachbewegung zurückzugewinnen, ist das gewaltige und einzige Vermögen der Übersetzung. In dieser reinen Sprache, die nichts mehr meint und nichts mehr ausdrückt, sondern als ausdrucksloses und schöpferisches Wort das in allen Sprachen gemeint ist, trifft endlich alle Mitteilung, aller Sinn und alle Intention auf eine Schicht, in der sie zu erlöschen bestimmt sind. (*AÜ*, 19)

It is because of this word that the scriptural analogy is so apt. Benjamin is searching for the divine, paradisiacal language, the creative language of scripture. The translation, in so

many words, redeems the "reine Sprache": Benjamin writes, "Jene reine Sprache, die in fremde gebannt ist, in der eigenen erlösen, die im Werk gefangene in der Umdichtung zu befreien, ist die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" (AÜ, 19). This requires much from the translator, because the essence of the original must be understood through the fragment of the translation. The pure language can only be discovered, recognized, or learned through the act of translation, which at its heart simply means allowing the work to speak for itself. The unmediated experience of truth, according to Benjamin, can only be accomplished by understanding, accepting, and using fragments, because the pure language, the totality, is not yet accessible. Benjamin's contention is that through translation--a fragment--we can access our past--which he contends is also fragmentary--and the wealth of meaning in other languages, which, like our own, are fragments of the 'pure language'. These fragments all hold a 'weak messianic power', and this power can deliver our past to us and reveal to us a universal, and therefore presumably unifying, language. As Benjamin uses fragment to bring attention to social crises and the paradoxical nature of language, so too do Hofmannsthal and Rilke use it to demonstrate the social crises of their narrators, and their narrators' mistrust of language as a result of their social circumstances. Hofmannsthal's Chandos in particular tries to use fragment as a way of experiencing the world that will allow him to avoid the linguistic abyss.

For Hofmannsthal's Chandos, fragment is not merely a rhetorical tool, or a weapon in his arsenal of figurative language: it is a way of life. It is an instrument of philosophical revolution, a wedge to drive under the monolith of Aristotelian form and poetics, and turn it on its head. Aristotle's forms of the beautiful and the good dictated for centuries how art should manifest itself, just as his poetics in large part influenced the

way that poetry and literature was written and publicly received. In his narrative, Hofmannsthal inverts Aristotle's pyramid of form by making the banal and the mundane vehicles of meaning, even of divine meaning, as when he writes about the feelings his narrator experiences when he sees the everyday imbued with what were considered 'higher' properties:

Denn es ist ja etwas völlig Unbenanntes und auch wohl kaum Benennbares, das in solchen *Augenblicken* irgendeine *Erscheinung meiner alltäglichen Umgebung* mit einer *überschwellenden Flut höheren Lebens* wie ein Gefäß erfüllend, mir sich ankündet. [...] Eine Gießkanne, eine auf dem Felde *verlassene* Egge, ein Hund in der Sonne, ein *ärmlicher* Kirchhof, *ein Krüppel*, ein *kleines Bauernhaus*, alles dies kann das Gefäß meiner Offenbarung werden. (Hofmannsthal, 343) [italics my emphasis]

What Hofmannsthal creates here is a constellation of images, and these are not images of courtly or beautiful things, but rather of the banal, the everyday. He replaces the 'Begriff' of religion with a poor graveyard, of industry with an abandoned harrow, of beauty with a cripple, of symmetry and geometry with a peasant's hovel. Later Hofmannsthal, through his narrator, describes how vermin, and among other things, the sloughed skin of a snake, become, in moments of inspiration, indescribably lovely to Chandos, as he writes: "In diesen Augenblicken wird eine nichtige Kreatur, ein Hund, eine Ratte, ein Käfer, ein verkümmerter Apfelbaum, ein sich über den Hügel schlängelnder Karrenweg, ein moosbewachsener Stein mir mehr, als die schönste, hingebenste Geliebte der glücklichsten Nacht mir je gewesen ist" (345).

In *Ein Brief*, Hofmannsthal breaks down other hierarchies through his use of

language, as well. His focus in the text on seeing, and on images, leads to a crisis of subjectivity, where Chandos can no longer differentiate from whence his impressions come:

Jeder dieser Gegenstände und die tausend anderen ähnlichen, über die sonst ein Auge mit selbstverständlicher Gleichgültigkeit hinweggleitet, kann für mich plötzlich in irgend einem Moment, den herbeizuführen auf keine Weise in meiner Gewalt steht, ein erhabenes und rührendes Gepräge annehmen, das auszudrücken mir alle Worte zu arm scheinen. Ja, es kann auch die bestimmte Vorstellung eines abwesenden Gegenstandes sein [...] mit jener sanft und jäh steigenden Flut göttlichen Gefühles bis an den Rand gefüllt zu werden. (344)

Chandos cannot determine whether he is responding to the objects themselves, an unknown, inspirational force within those objects, or is experiencing something that originates within himself. Strathausen examines this confusion in *The Look of Things*, and shows the importance and power of vision in reordering aesthetic hierarchies:

This reciprocity of the Aestheticist gaze upsets the Romantic power hierarchy. It reveals the seeing subject as the always already seen object and opens up a whirling abyss that does not lead toward a final self-understanding or coherent meaning, but rather "into an emptiness."

Chandos falls into the nonsignificant space of Being opened up by the look of things, that is, a decentered network of interconnected stares that no longer add up to a coherent whole. (Strathausen, 141).

Chandos' world is made up of a fragmented group of images and impressions, which

embody a way of viewing the world, but that do not form a cohesive whole, a complete system of communication or aesthetics. They impart to Chandos what he sees as the meaning and truth that is missing from his life, although he is never clear what the meaning may be, or whether the truth is understandable or attainable. Chandos expresses his hope for this new language at the end of *Ein Brief*: he has experienced and wishes to understand "eine Sprache, in welcher die stummen Dingen zu mir sprechen, und in welcher ich vielleicht einst im Grabe vor einem unbekannten Richter mich verantworten werde" (Hofmannsthal, 348).

According to Chandos, the discovery of this new language is not a scientific exercise: it is not accomplished systematically, methodically. Instead, in flashes, in moments, in fleeting impressions, the implications of this new language wash over Chandos, often without his intent or consent. The flood of emotions that accompany the flashes of the mundane or the banal are epiphanic. These images, these "Augenblicke", are flashes of his routine experience, but they are the only things he finds meaningful, as these moments engender a "Flut göttlichen Gefühles" (344).

Chandos finds other things less meaningful: he says of politics, "Ich fand es innerlich unmöglich, über die Angelegenheiten des Hofes, die Vorkommnisse im Parlament [...] ein Urteil herauszubringen" (341). A short while later he describes his inability to instruct his daughter as to why she should be truthful, by saying:

Es begegnet mir, daß ich meiner vierjährigen Tochter Katharina Pompilia eine kindische Lüge, deren sie sich schuldig gemacht hatte, verweisen und sie auf die Notwendigkeit, immer wahr zu sein, hinführen wollte, und dabei die mir im Munde zuströmenden Begriffe plötzlich eine solche

schillernde Färbung annahmen und so einander überflossen, daß ich den Satz, so gut es ging, zu Ende haspelnd, so wie wenn mir unwohl geworden wäre und auch tatsächlich bleich im Gesicht [...], das Kind allein ließ, die Tür hinter mir zuschlug und mich erst zu Pferde, auf der einsamen Hutweide einen guten Galopp nehmend, wieder einigermaßen herstellte (341-42).

Hofmannsthal, while describing his narrator's condition, also ironically points to the paradox at the heart of the narrator's crisis: using language, in this case an enormously long sentence, to represent an inability to speak or think.

Chandos' disaffection and alienation does not stop simply at the moral education of his daughter, however. Not only familial bonds, but social bonds in general, baffle Chandos. He has this to say of social affairs: "Es zerfiel mir alles in Teile, die Teile wieder in Teile, und nichts mehr ließ sich mit einem Begriff umspannen. Die einzelnen Worte schwammen um mich; sie gerannen zu Augen, die mich anstarrten und in die ich wieder hineinstarren muß: Wirbel sind sie [...]" (Hofmannsthal, 342). However, despite this apparent collapse of language, Strathausen contends that there is still hope: "Hofmannsthal's denunciation [...] applies only to the reified linguistic system endorsed by modern rationality, and not to language in general. On the contrary, the real experience of life still depends upon the "creation of new terms, powerful, all-conjuring incantatory words whose last, most simple one God knows, God is"" (Strathausen, 168, quoting Hofmannsthal). Hofmannsthal, like Benjamin, is searching for a pure language, one of sublime significance, but at the same time, Hofmannsthal is also referencing the need for radical action in reshaping language, in re-creating language. What's needed is a violent

act of liberation, and this by necessity involves breaking what was, and reforming it into something better. Once more, then, the theme of fragmentation and reunification presents itself: the maelstrom of fragments seems to lead to something discernible and progressive.

Hofmannsthal mentions “Wirbel” twice in the Chandos letter. The first is in reference to the fractured but meaningless notions of professional, family, and social life (Hofmannsthal, 342-3). The second time is in conjunction with epiphanic fragments. He says of these inspiring images: “Es sind gleichfalls Wirbel, aber solche, die nicht wie die Wirbel der Sprache ins Bodenlose zu führen scheinen, sondern irgendwie in mich selber und in den tiefsten Schoß des Friedens” (348). These maelstroms are of a completely different nature: the maelstrom of language contains the possibility to annihilate Chandos, whereas the maelstrom of material thought buoys Chandos up with a deep feeling of peace.

Whereas individual, conceptual words (like morality, society, social mores, duty) are meaningless, even distasteful to Chandos, the fragments of metaphor and image, these ‘Augenblicke’, are shot through with supernatural meaning and form a whirling vortex that, instead of sucking Chandos into nothingness, lead him to a sense of peace (348). Chandos describes his distaste for courtly discourse: “[D]ie abstrakten Worte, deren sich doch die Zunge naturgemäß bedienen muß, um irgendwelches Urteil an den Tag zu geben, zerfielen mir im Munde wie modrige Pilze” (342). To Chandos, words themselves have become meaningless, all equal in that they are all equally incapable of expressing his feelings or revelations. As hopeless as this situation appears, however, there is hope written in to the very expression of despondency. As useless as Chandos claims that

words are, he is still using them to express himself. He has not given up on language entirely. Instead, he is repurposing it, creating a series of images that work in juxtaposition to one another, that create a mood and an emotional reaction in the reader. Thus, Chandos is able to belie his mistrust in words by his trust in images and subjectivity. While the tool remains the same, the goal is different. Chandos moves away from the idea that words have unbreakable bonds with their meaning, and in so doing, he creates his own meaning by writing in a fragmentary style.

In Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief*, the use of fragment is taken beyond the merely incidental, in terms of a literary device, when Chandos is aligned with Francis Bacon and Henry VIII. Not only is the letter addressed to Bacon, but it includes quotes from Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning*, which itself is a critique of Aristotelian philosophy. Furthermore, it cements his relationship with Bacon via this quote from Hippocrates: "Qui gravi morbo correpti dolores non sentiunt, iis mens aegrotat", which means "Those who do not perceive that they are wasted by serious illness are sick of mind" (Hofmannsthal, 338). Hofmannsthal has put Bacon and Chandos on the same intellectual plane, which lends implicit weight to Chandos' attempt to re-imagine language, just as Bacon re-imagined many Aristotelian precepts. Hofmannsthal also mentions Henry VIII in *Ein Brief*, and intimates that Henry VIII and Chandos' grandfather, the Duke of Exeter, were at the very least acquainted, as mentioned by the Duke's notebooks concerning Henry VIII's negotiations with France and Portugal (339). By mentioning Henry VIII, Hofmannsthal brings to mind, not explicitly but rather by association, the destruction of old norms and customs, and the introduction of new order, that defined Henry VIII's reign. By relating Chandos to these two historical figures, Hofmannsthal is creating a

connection between the scientific, political, and religious reformation these men represented, thus elevating Chandos' new world-view to the level of edict, or thesis. In other words, by connecting these three figures, Hofmannsthal gives weight to Chandos' views, because Hofmannsthal presents Chandos as a confidant if not an equal of Bacon, and an admirer of Henry VIII, whose tumultuous biography seems to appeal to Chandos. Thus, the reader is confronted, not only with a fragmented literary work from a broken mind, but, by way of these associations, with a new system of interacting with the world, a system of meaning, a system of language, in short, a new world order.

Hofmannsthal does not lightly use the word "Wirbel", does not flippantly associate his narrator with such towering historical figures. What he posits in *Ein Brief* is a hypothesis for a new social structure and a new way of communication, of conveying meaning. This in turn implies the destruction of the old, and not in a systematic way, but in a storm of shards and debris that open up the potential to replace old, useless, outmoded concepts by a new form of perception and communication. This new 'way of meaning' would not be an intellectual, reasoned, and ethereal one, but a visceral, graphic language based on sudden flashes of inspiration, not stilted philosophical syllogisms and previously agreed-upon meaning. According to Strathausen, Hofmannsthal "pursues the search for linguistic meaning until the imaginary-symbolic space between words and things finally collapses and language itself begins to matter and become 'real'. Rather than the promised apprehension of [...] ultimate meaning, however, Chandos experiences a vortex caused by words that 'stop making sense' (Strathausen, 139). Strathausen contends of Hofmannsthal's work that, "the message is the medium", which he claims goes to show Hofmannsthal's "quasi-religious belief" in language as a creative force

(140). Finally, Hofmannsthal employs fragment and the 'Augenblick', both as a hammer to break apart the old structures of language, and as an anvil on which to re-form it.

Rilke also introduces fragment through 'Augenblicke' in the first paragraph of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, where Brigge writes:

Ich bin ausgewesen. Ich habe gesehen: Hospitäler. Ich habe einen Menschen gesehen, welcher schwankte und umsank [...] Ich habe eine schwangere Frau gesehen [...] Ich suchte auf meinem Plan: Maison d'Accouchement. Gut. Man kann das. Weiter, Rue Saint-Jacques, ein großes Gebäude mit einer Kuppel. Der Plan gab an Val-de-grâce, Hôpital militaire [...] Die Gasse begann von allen Seiten zu riechen. Es roch, soviel sie unterscheiden ließ, nach Jodoform, nach dem Fett von pommes frites, nach Angst. (7)

This first paragraph is filled with things--in the sense of 'Dinggedicht'--and also sensory impressions. These moments, these impressions, are the basis of the novel, as he allows intrusion from the external world to influence the train of his thought and his narration. "From the beginning, Malte is determined to reject no experience that comes to him, and in particular no experience of that overwhelming power, both within and outside himself [...] which he calls 'das Große'" (Gray, 263). In his discussion of "das Große", Rilke makes use of fragment in the text to underscore the way Brigge perceives the import of "das Große", namely as *part* of himself, as a part that he doesn't quite yet understand (Rilke, 56-7). Intrusions, the influx of unmediated experiences, become an integral part of the narrative, and that affects Brigge's psyche, as he allows the noise and proximity of the city to drive him into solitude, and into the depths of his memory. As

demonstrated in the text, sensory experience is guided, not by a plan or goal, not by a subject of thought or a theme, but rather by Rilke presenting Brigge as someone who observes the intruders that find their way into his consciousness. The narrator has no barrier between himself and the shocks of experience: Brigge takes everything as it comes, without prejudice or discrimination. He does this all in service to his writing, but, ironically, it is the constant noise and interruption of these experiences that cause him to be unable to write. Brigge reveals this when he laments: "Elektrische Bahnen rasen läutend durch meine Stube. Automobile gehen über mich hin [...] Irgendwo klirrt eine Scheibe herunter, ich höre ihre großen Scherben lachen, die kleinen Splitter kichern" (8). Brigge is affected by sights, sounds, and smells, and he transforms these small experiences, these minor inconveniences and irritations, into the driving impetus behind his work. Because of the constant sensory assault, Brigge is forced to retreat to memory, and with only ephemeral memory to rely upon, he begins to question the efficacy of his thought and action. Rilke demonstrates this lack of confusion in the absence of a differentiation between Brigge's nightmares, and an afternoon stroll, which has a nightmare pallor of its own (65-8). Brigge deliberately seeks out these unmediated experiences. By experiencing "das Große", he is attempting to experience, and perhaps define, the ineffable.

Brigge takes his cues from intrusive sensory experience, and the stories of his past are fragmented and peopled by ghosts, who are intruders in their own right (24-5, 29). Brigge writes about these intrusions, while simultaneously blaming them for his inability to write (8). For Brigge, the noise, smells, sights, and shocks of the city are indistinguishable from his own thoughts. Burning fat, the smell of fear, and his mild

irritation on an afternoon walk are all of a piece. He sees fragment as a way of life: the writer builds the sediment of memory and experience until he has enough impetus (meaning) to put into his words. This concept matches well with Benjamin's concept of experience, that is, that "Erlebnis", the immediate and fleeting experience, would eventually yield to "Erfahrung" where the collected images of the past would flash up along with the new experience, giving the experience a layered, multifaceted quality rich in unconscious meaning (Hanssen, 92). Rilke allows Brigge to state that a writer could live his whole life and write only a few lines of meaningful poetry, and that only with difficulty, because each word contains parts, fragments, detritus from the collected and hard-earned experience of a lifetime: "Man sollte warten [um Versen zu schreiben] und Sinn und Süßigkeit sammeln ein ganzes Leben lang und ein langes womöglich, und dann, ganz zum Schluß, vielleicht könnte man dann zehn Zeilen schreiben, die gut sind" (Rilke, 20). Rilke differentiates between feelings and memories, which are subjective and insubstantial, and experiences, which are meaningful, and constitute building blocks of all poetry. This suggests that the subject's (Brigge's or Rilke's) impressions are meaningless, but the impact that the outside world has on the subject is not. It is for this reason that Rilke allows Brigge to open himself up to experiencing "das Große" (Gray, 263). Brigge is cut off from humanity, and because of that, he can only find experience [Erlebnis] meaningful, experience which he cannot use because he has no perspective: his world-view is fragmented in an unrelated series of partial philosophies and cosmologies. Brigge's effort to reassure himself of his own existence in and through the process of writing is depicted as an utter failure. His inability to protect himself from his experiences in Paris leads to a process of self alienation whereby he is being written,

being created, by his own hand. The "broken author Malte" is separated from his own work (Strathausen, 208). He has become fragmented. His hand writes independently of the rest of him (Rilke, 50). He has become isolated even from himself; the alienation of allowing his notebooks to be written, of allowing experience [*Erlebnis*] to dictate what appears in his notebooks makes them appear fragmented. These fragments, however, are the culmination of the "sights" his hand "sees" (Strathausen, 208). The fragments, then, do add up to a whole, but it is a whole outside of the traditional realm of literature. The notebooks are not a narrative so much as a collection of images, a picture-book more than a novel, a series of vignettes only held together by the voice and pen of the narrator.

Because of Brigge's fears, and his shaky cosmology, the only meaning that he can find is in the accumulation of experience and the acceptance of the ineffable (Gray 262, 263). These fragments of experience, the parts of "Das Große" that Brigge sees and experiences, are the building blocks not only for his notebooks, and Rilke's novel, but for Brigge's philosophical and spiritual existence. Because of Brigge's crisis of language, demonstrated by his inability to write and his animosity toward the city in which he works, he is forced to find unconventional methods of expressing the things he senses and experiences. (Rilke, 7-8, 20-24).

In Rilke's text, Brigge is constantly struggling to find meaning. This struggle is demonstrated in the narrative and style by the use of fragment. Brigge attempts to develop a cosmology, and his musings on the nature of life and death are scattered throughout the notebooks (17, 29). His narrative is also disjointed as a result of the shifts between his present reality in Paris and memories of his childhood home (12). While this style aims at putting the reader in a mood similar to Brigge's, namely: confused, anxious,

and irritated, it serves a broader purpose, a philosophical purpose, in that it demonstrates that even without a cohesive narrative or a measured style, a writer can produce deep and meaningful prose. By re-appropriating the mode of prose, namely, by *showing*, as opposed to telling, the writer does what eyes do: letting in the chaos of the city, from the perspective of the body (Strathausen, 208).

While Benjamin brings together visual fragments under the term 'aura', Hofmannsthal and Rilke do this through the medium of their writing. All three are attempting to save language from technology, from scientific rationality, and to write visually, that is, to allow the medium, the form of their text, to contribute to its content. Their search for pure language leads them to break apart what they perceive and experience as the old, co-opted language of competing social and political classes, as the language of use, technology, and politics. Their shared goal is to reform it into a living thing, subservient to no cause. Their goal is to resurrect the word, by removing the barriers that separate subject and object, thereby vitalizing and redeeming what they consider the most important function of language.

Chapter Three

Ordering the Shards: Fragment, Image, and Metaphor

Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke confront the paradox of language in several ways beyond using fragment as a narrative and stylistic motif. In addition to fragment, other key elements of creating and interpreting their ideas about language are image and metaphor. With these three elements, they attempt to create a new reflection of the world, and they strive to make it a true reflection, one incorruptible by hostile social forces.

In *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, Benjamin uses metaphor and imagery to convey a mode of thought, of discontinuity, and a concept of 'constellation' that he cannot impart by using traditional discourse. According to Zenck, in his book *Kunst als begriffslose Erkenntnis*, Benjamin uses figures, images, and motifs to discuss history, as opposed to abstract terms:

Figur, Bild, und Motiv sind von Benjamin nach einem ästhetischen Formgesetz um den kristallinen Kern, den Begriff der Geschichte, versammelt. Dieser war für Benjamin nicht kontinuierlich herleitbar, sondern mußte erst der Kontinuität entrissen werden, damit die geschichtlich versprengten Äußerungen den Blick auf den Begriff der Geschichte freigaben. (Zenck, 166)

Benjamin, as Zenck contends, never clearly defines "Begriff"; instead he juxtaposes images and reflections, avoids the use of traditional, rational reasoning in the exploration of his theme, and both in form and content attempts to explore the catastrophe, the discontinuity of 'true' history. As Zenck aptly puts: "Benjamins Thesen bilden keinen

deduktiven Zusammenhang, in dem am Anfang oder Ende die Definition des Begriffs steht, sondern um den dunklen, nur einmal genannten "Begriff der Geschichte" sind die Rätselbilder gereiht, die ihn doch erhellen sollen" (167). The concept of history stands undefined within and the focus of Benjamin's constellation of images, figures, and motifs that make up the theses. He defines the term, the concept of history, by the essay as a whole, not by providing a specific definition in any one place.

As discussed in the previous chapter, just like film, like collage, the essay combines images, which in this case are created with words, to convey meaning. No medium, including language, has escaped the progress of technology. Thus, the constellation that Benjamin creates is one of fragments, theses at whose heart is an image: "There is no discursive element at the center of the text, but an *image* instead" (Tiedemann, 176). Images, whether they be of the puppet/dwarf/mirror automaton of the Thesis II, or especially the Angel of History from Thesis IX, are Benjamin's way of defending aesthetics while at the same time attempting to combat Fascism, which, as he claims, politicizes and co-opts aesthetics, and thus art, toward its own ends (Strathausen, 29).

The images that appear throughout the essay are as follows, as succinctly put by Zenck:

[D]as Bild von Glück, welches von der Zeit tingiert ist (These II), die zitierbaren Momente der Geschichte (These III), das aufblitzende Bild der Vergangenheit, welches vorbeihutscht und verschwindet (These V), der Augenblick der Gefahr (These VI und VII) und die zur Jetztzeit stillgestellte Zeit (These XIV-XVIII). (Zenck, 170)

As opposed to protracted philosophical musings, Benjamin uses this series of images that flash by. Benjamin's images reinforce the concept of the "Augenblick". These moments reinforce what Zenck refers to as a "monadologisch konstruierten Geschichte" (167). Benjamin holds that this creates the true picture of the past, and furthers his aesthetic program, an integral part of which is the concept of monad.

Art outside of the continuity of history does not belong to Fascism, and thus art as fragment, according to Zenck, retains some hope for Benjamin:

Die Kunstwerke können daher weder den glücklichen Ursprung--das liebliche Umfangensein von der göttlichen Natur--imaginieren, noch ihre eigene geschichtliche Gegenwart als unmittelbare, von der Vergangenheit abstrahierte Jetztzeit darstellen, sondern einzig die geschichtliche subkutane⁹ Wirksamkeit der Naturherrschaft, deren unverdrängter Ausdruck sie sein möchten. (Zenck, 29)

As noted, the notion of the 'flashing images', the discontinuity of history, and the unmitigated nature of true art are inextricably intertwined. Benjamin contends that truth can be discovered in the auratic image, the real work of art, because it combines in an unmitigated and thus incorruptible way, the flash of knowledge or wisdom or inspiration --the divine--and the human element that makes the work of art legitimate, as well as fragmentary (ÜBG, 703-4). "Jetztzeit"--according to Benjamin--is like a lightning flash, or the flash of a camera bulb that captures the image: it flashes up in an instant, frozen and preserved for remembrance and contemplation, but for that, is taken out of its

⁹ Zenck provides a footnote on his definition of "Subkutan": "Subkutan heißt hier im übertragenen Sinn unter der Oberfläche einer angeblichen Kontinuität von Geschichte. Benjamins „aufblitzendes Bild" wäre in dieser Übertragung dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß es aus dieser Oberfläche hervorbricht und nach seinem Ursprung schlägt" (Zenck, 29).

historical context, becomes a fragment. According to Benjamin, the openness to critique and contemplation of the fragment, of the work of art, is its saving property. If the work of art cannot be co-opted, or turned into a totality, then art cannot be used toward Fascist political ends, cannot aestheticize politics (*ÜBG*, 698, *KZR*, 435).

The image of the Angel of History, as put forth in Thesis IX, stands at the center--both in form and importance--of *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, much as the Angel stands before the ever-increasing pile of detritus that is history. Tiedemann claims that Benjamin views the real constitution of the world as "eine einzige Katastrophe", and a "Trümmerhaufen" (*ÜBG*, 697-98). His interpretation of the Klee painting is--as Zenck points out--an interpretation of his own circumstances, his own view of history: "Die Thesen entwickeln den Begriff der Geschichte nicht in gesicherter Linearität [....] Die Abfolge der Thesen ist merkwürdig dissoziiert, zuweilen fast von Diskontinuität bestimmt" (Zenck, 167). Benjamin uses a single image to represent both discontinuity and his feeling of overwhelming circumstance: in fact, the image is tri-fold, as it brings to mind the allegories of the 17th Century as well, because it would appear that everything about history up to that point had been "untimely, sorrowful, [and] unsuccessful" (Tiedemann, 177). In this image, Benjamin is bringing attention to the inability to actually talk or write about the catastrophe that is history. The heart of Benjamin's theses in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* is not a linguistic concept or construct; "it is in essence an image, one that the observer can only stare at, condemned to silence, unable to differentiate or to identify details" (177). Furthermore, Benjamin's image of history, as it appears in Thesis IX, is, as Tiedemann points out, a "mimesis of the dead and the smashed: a sign of solidarity with the oppressed, in spite of being--at least at first glance

it seems-- just as helpless as they have been in history thus far, and just as unable to control the future" (177). Benjamin's use of image is not simply a matter of fashion or convenience. On the contrary, his work is based on a constructive principle: thinking involves not only the process, the flow of thoughts, but their seizure, their arrest, as well. As Benjamin writes: "Zum Denken gehört nicht nur die Bewegung der Gedanken sondern ebenso ihre Stillstellung" (*ÜBG*, 702). As Zenck points out, many of Benjamin's Theses are constructed around a turning point: "[Sie] nehmen in ihrer Mitte eine Wendung, setzen eine Zäsur, die durch einen Vergleich oder durch ein Bild bestimmt ist" (Zenck, 168). This change, the juxtaposition, is a device that allows Benjamin to convey or to demonstrate in images much more than he writes. He uses image as one more 'way of meaning'. Benjamin uses the cognitive abilities of the reader to reveal the fullness of the image of the Angel of History, to find the particular in the crush of the storm blowing from Paradise. The image is the arrest of thought, the moment when the pile of detritus becomes recognizable, the moment when word and image coalesce to form a super-linguistic understanding. Tiedemann recognizes this super-linguistic tendency in Benjamin's writings, and how the concept of constellation and allegorical thinking lead to flashes of inspiration when he remarks:

That indeed does describe Benjamin's specific form of philosophizing, which uses thought images (*Denkbilder*) in the attempt to decipher profane existence as the enigmatic form of something beyond existence [...] In the conception of dialectical imagery, Benjamin retained to the end certain motifs of his earlier, allegorical methods of thinking [...] Cognition--as released by the freezing of movement--is something that 'flashes up.'

(Tiedemann, 184-85)

This 'flashing up' is reminiscent of Hofmannsthal's concept of the subject-object dichotomy in *Ein Brief*. Additionally, it is reminiscent of the "Augenblick" as it appears in both Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief* and Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (Hofmannsthal, 343-4, Rilke, 9). These similarities are not coincidental. Using a train of images, like in a film, these authors are able to direct the reader's thought, but conversely, the reader is able to arrest this train in order to examine the individual images. The images are the fragment and detritus of experience [*Erlebnis*], of immediate, new experience, and the reader can eke out meaning because he or she has the cognitive ability and the time to process the "Augenblicke" that 'flash up', thereby gaining a more complete understanding of the text, and, to use Arendt's phrase, to "make whole what has been smashed" (Arendt, 257). Benjamin constructs his images in a performative and transformative way. As Sigrid Weigel contends, in her book *Body- and Image-Space*: "His thought images are [...] dialectical images in written form, literally constellations-become-writing (*Schrift-gewordene Konstellationen*) [...] with the aid of the mimetic faculty, the image, understood as dialectic at a standstill, is transformed into writing" (Weigel, 52). These constellations form a meta-constellation. Like collage, the Theses seen as a whole have a different effect than each Thesis taken individually. Individually, each Thesis has something particular to say, whether it be about history, art, criticism, or politics (*ÜBG*, 693, 697-98, 702). Taken as a unit, a whole, however, the Theses reveal that there is not just a crisis of language preceding and during this time, but a crisis of representation (Strathausen, 9). The fragments of the mirror's shards reflect a different image than the original whole. This crisis of representation affects art, politics, sociology,

even the way history is written. The use of image and "Augenblick" allows the reader to grasp the true nature of history, art, and the inner workings of society.

Just as Benjamin views the true nature of history as fragmentary, redeemable, and best understood through image and metaphor, so too does he view works of literature. In *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, the literary work is conceived of as living, and as such is mutable, has an afterlife, can be reborn. In his personification of the work of art, Benjamin points to the idea that the work has a 'soul', so to speak, and that that immutable, 'pure' thing can be transmitted through time and across languages, because it belongs to no language. As Strathausen contends, there is an

[u]nfulfilled longing at the heart of modernity that still seeks to establish an immediate, unalienated, and nonsignifying contact among every-thing in the world. And yet, although evoked as the image of a quasi-mythical sense that transcends language and reveals the primordial bond between subject and object, self and other, the 'look of things' [the aura, the past, Begriffe] bespeaks deception nonetheless [...] Aestheticism's central metaphor of visual immediacy immediately deconstructs itself and remains trapped in the prisonhouse of language from which it had hoped to escape. (Strathausen, 30)

Strathausen highlights not only aestheticism's difficulty with language, but the central paradox of language, as well. Because language is a system of symbols, it is impossible to convey meaning through it in a totally unmediated way. At their extreme conclusion, any attempts to use language in an immediate way seem bound to fail. As Strathausen contends, concerning Benjamin's works:

They lament their inevitable failure to realize their utopian visions, yet simultaneously celebrate this failure as their ultimate success. For it is only by failing to re-present the things themselves that language can provide the primordial ground for their very being. In other words, the magical power of language to call forth the presence of things hinges upon its mimetic weakness and its proper self-destruction. Only a nonfunctional language can function as a rejuvenation of life. (30)

Thus, in the current failure of translation to do justice to the "reine Sprache", translation, according to Benjamin, is triumphant in bringing the reader's attention to its failure, illuminating in an obscure or obtuse way, like light coming from another room, the pure language, and true meaning.

Benjamin's use of several languages in the text highlights the break between languages, and the constellation that can be formed from using these pieces of the 'pure language'. Even more telling are the translations of his essay, where not only does the act of translation take place, but the remnants (German, French, and Greek) of Benjamin's original essay are left somewhat intact: "The words *Brot* and *pain* 'intend' the same object, but the modes of this intention are not the same" (Arendt, 74). Benjamin uses *Brot* and *pain* as examples of intent, and they appear in Arendt's English milieu. Each of these words carries with it a set of cultural images, and when combined, lead the reader to a fuller understanding of the concept of bread, through its various and particular incarnations. Benjamin invokes the original Greek to represent the origin of the "word" **ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος** [in the beginning was the Word], and that original is

reflected in Arendt's translation, as well (AÜ, 18). These textual images, these words in other languages, provide the visual basis for Benjamin's metaphor for language. The tangential aspect of translation is key to Benjamin's concept of the pure language. If the 'pure language' is at the center of the circle, then each translation touches it at one point, and one point only. The flash of the original, then, is instantaneous, and the rest of the work is then, in a manner of speaking, original. In this way the many disparate works, the many translations, come together to reflect on the whole, the pure language, the 'thing' that cannot be named.

To underscore the metaphysical aspect of language, represented most clearly by Benjamin's references to Scripture, he creates an analogy, again using figurative language to make a point where he feels traditional discourse is insufficient:

Wenn nämlich deren Wesen es forderte, nicht vergessen zu werden, so würde jenes Prädikat nichts Falsches, sondern nur eine Forderung, der Menschen nicht entsprechen, und zugleich auch wohl den Verweis auf einen Bereich enthalten, in dem ihr entsprochen wäre: auf ein Gedenken Gottes. Entsprechend bliebe die Übersetzbarkeit sprachlicher Gebilde auch dann zu erwägen, wenn diese für die Menschen unübersetzbar wären. (AÜ, 10)

This analogy makes clear what Benjamin considers the essential quality of translatability. Just as some things by their nature cannot be forgotten, so too are things by their nature translatable, even if no one ever has or will. His analogy maintains that the problems of translation lie with mankind, as opposed to the language itself. This attitude is in keeping with those of Rilke and Hofmannsthal, all of whom were attempting in their own ways to

redeem language, to make it safe from rational modernism, politics, and utilitarianism. This attitude toward language allowed the authors to retain some hope for language, even in the face of tarnish or misuse. In fact, Benjamin's hope in language is underscored by the similar views he held with Hofmannsthal and Rilke, because he maintains his hope, despite the horror of the First World War and the ensuing uncertainty about the stability of the human community in the 1920s and 1930s.

Benjamin tries to develop a sense of the eternal qualities of language, both through image and figurative language. He conceives of the original work of literature as having an afterlife and a translation as having a vital connection to the original (AÜ, 11-3). If his hope is a mystical return to a perfect language, a language of Babel, then the vital connection between languages is his vehicle. Only through this connection can that which was lost be regained. Samuel Weber, an American literary theorist and philosopher who has written extensively on Benjamin, offers an assessment of the relationship between the original and translation: "[A] translation is precisely not autonomous, self-contained, integral--it consists in a relationship to something outside of it, to something it is not and yet to which it owes its existence, the 'original' work" (Weber, 57). Benjamin makes the metaphor of the vital connection understood through the ineffable. According to him, that which cannot be translated, spoken, or grasped is the vital aspect of the original, the aspect of the work which makes it immanently translatable, and that part of the work that will eventually lead to its redemption in the 'pure language'. This pure language is represented by the 'Word'. The 'Word' is the symbol, the metaphor for the vital qualities of language that transcend time and linguistic niche. The Word creates a phenomenon in which language and revelation are one, are a single creative entity, where

the signified and the signifier, the text and the reader, are no longer separate entities. This image of melding, this alchemical process, allows the reader to view, as in see, this process, and, as in a film, the reader does so uncritically, allowing Benjamin to better make his paradoxical point. As Weber puts it: "[T]he original work can only survive insofar as it is able to take leave of itself and become something else" (61).

Whereas languages and works of literature are particular, images and symbols are universal. As a device, they are useful and meaningful across all languages, though certainly individual symbols and metaphors will have different meanings across cultures. Thus, when contemplating a pure language, one that recognizes no linguistic boundaries, Benjamin contends that it is best to eschew traditional discourse strategies, and adopt a mode of meaning that lends itself to translation, and that is to some degree ineffable, namely, image and metaphor. According to Weber, even Benjamin's concept of translation is not only a coalescence of fragment, but metaphorical: "The original can be said to outlive itself in its own language, while being condemned to live on and away [as if the original were some anthropomorphic exile] in the foreign language only as a component of its 'history'" (69). As a singular entity, a document, the translation is destined to remain relegated to the "foreign" language (69). However, the *mode* of translation revitalizes the connections between languages; translation "forms the arcade, the passageways[...] that lead not so much back to the original as 'forward' to its medium, language" (74). *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* creates a constellation out of syntax, signified, signifier, past original, and present translation. And the resulting thought image "Denkbild", builds an image of the evolution of language.

Benjamin's essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen*

Reproduzierbarkeit makes use of "Denkbilder" as well. This essay not only includes examples of figurative language and imagery, but its subject is visual, as well. Sigrid Weigel contends that the "Denkbild" is a "representation in terms of a thought-image of a constellation [...] [and] should not be confused with poetic writing [...] [instead it is] the insight that memory and action find articulation in images" (Weigel, 8-9). While Weigel contends that this is not figurative language, in a purely literal sense Benjamin's images remain such, because they go outside the realm of "philosophical discourse as metadiscourse" (8). Unlike Weigel, Arendt contends that Benjamin did operate in a poetic milieu, and was not confined to the realm of pure philosophy. Benjamin makes use of figures, though not necessarily of speech, so that by default he is using figurative language, though in an untraditional manner. Benjamin often demonstrates his figurative abilities through the use of image and the discussion of the 'aura', a symbol he introduces in order to refer to the origin, the soul of art. He also aestheticizes politics: machine guns are orchid blossoms (Benjamin, *KZR*, 507). As Howard Caygill, professor of Cultural History at Goldsmiths University of London, and Benjamin scholar, puts it: "political oppositions are superficially overcome by an appeal to beauty" (Caygill, 38-9). Benjamin explains the concept of aura--in just one of his examples--as follows: "An einem Sommernachmittag ruhend einem Gebirgszug am Horizont oder einem Zweig folgen, der seinen Schatten auf den Ruhenden wirft--das heißt die Aura dieser Berge, dieses Zweiges atmen" (Benjamin *KZR*, 479). Both the aura of the work of art and of natural objects are defined by their distance from the observer. This distance--and along with that, the aura--is destroyed by technology, by mass reproduction, high speed film, and close up photography, for example. All of these technological methods change the distance

relationship between object and observer. This change results in unauratic works of art, which, according to Benjamin, shock and distract the masses, and make them susceptible to Fascist control (KZR, 473, 482, 503-4). The destruction of ritual, cult value, and the aura of originality has led to a precipitous choice: the masses must choose either Fascism or Communism, or risk social collapse (KZR, 508). Benjamin emphasizes his point with a pair of images: "Der apparatfreie Aspekt der Realität ist hier [im Film] zu ihrem künstlichsten geworden und der Anblick der unmittelbaren Wirklichkeit zur blauen Blume im Land der Technik" (KZR, 495). The "blaue Blume" is a German Romantic reference, making the image of unmediated reality seem even more at odds with actuality because of the introduction of a romantic element into a description of the modern. This image, of the new shot through with, and to a certain extent hemmed in by, the old, is mirrored in the second image, which for Benjamin would be the result of a Fascist victory: the aestheticization of war. Benjamin describes the Fascist viewpoint: "Der Krieg ist schön, weil er eine blühende Wiese um die feurigen Orchideen der Mitrailleusen bereichert" (KZR, 507). Technology and human productive power would be used toward destructive ends as a result of the limiting of human potential (KZR, 506). These images, combined with the image of the 'aura', lead the reader to a fuller understanding of the stakes that modernity has required of humanity. The natural, unmediated world has been sacrificed for convenience and accessibility, and the same forces that destroyed the aura, but made art accessible to the masses, are driving those masses to the brink of war. Benjamin writes that their choice is either the politicization of aesthetics--Communism--or the aestheticization of politics--Fascism (KZR, 508). This brings the importance of image into sharp focus. Either image can be used as a creative and productive outlet for

people to influence and direct society, or they can be used by the structures of society-- governments, militaries--to influence the masses, to oppress them and subvert those creative processes toward destructive ends, in other words, war (KZR, 507-8).

Benjamin's politics underscore the importance of image and alternative forms of expression. The contents of *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* make clear that without a plurality and an evolution of ways of expression, society will cease to function (Caygill, 116-17). Caygill clarifies the danger of homogenization when he writes: "One of the consequences of the avoidance of technology was the idealist tendency to spiritualise [sic] the work of art; instead of seeing it as an open site for the discovery and anticipations of new patterns for the organisation [sic] of experience it became the closed domain of aesthetic form" (Caygill, 96). That is to say, changing the way art is viewed and made is a necessity if Fascism is ultimately to fail.

The need to change the ways in which human beings express themselves is an urgent political and social necessity. Looking ahead to the analysis of *Ein Brief* and *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, the images and other forms of expression contained therein are not merely stylistic choices, but devices through which the authors are able to engage with their social environments. The image offers these writers the opportunity to examine the world, and to engage with it outside of predetermined, prescriptive boundaries. As previously noted, language can be seen as mutable and continually transforming, and as such, the author, when using figurative language, participates in that transformation in a productive, nonpolitical manner. In this way the author can experience the aforementioned messianic properties of language, saving

language and art from compartmentalization, misuse, and destruction.

Experience is as important to Benjamin as it is to Hofmannsthal's and Rilke's narrators Chandos and Brigge, respectively. Experience--the processing of visual information; the change the subject undergoes as a result of interaction with the external--allows the writer to overcome enormous social and creative obstacles, in Benjamin's case, specifically technology. With the "affirmation of technology" as opposed to its celebration, avoidance, or mere contemplation, the writer can consider it "functionally in terms of its place within a broader experiential context" (Caygill, 97). Technology is thus liberated from its roles as either a hindrance to the appreciation of art or a tool of its destruction. This figurative way of thinking, as Caygill contends is exemplified best in Benjamin's writing as a constellation, makes *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* a "historical constellation" which serves "both to 'telescope the past through the present' and to allow 'the past to place the present in a critical condition'" (97). It is literally and metaphorically, as Caygill notes by quoting Benjamin, "a 'telescope' pointed at a 'mirage of the nineteenth century that I am attempting to reproduce based on the characteristics it will manifest in a future state of the world liberated from magic'" (98, quoting Benjamin). The constellation, then, consists of the past, the present, and the future, and not just the future of art, but of the world, as Benjamin shows through the intimate association of politics and art in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. As Caygill contends, the "'fate of art' is *symptomatic* of a fundamental change in the structure of experience which may be traced back to broader political and technical developments" (98). It is precisely these "broader political and technological developments" that concern both Hofmannsthal and Rilke, and

they, too, through experience, image and language, attempt to cast an oblique light on the problems facing them, when they write the experiences of their narrators in such a way as to show the redemptive qualities of fragment, image, and figurative language. This style of writing demonstrates as well a practical method of wrestling with the complex problems of technological, political, and social change.

In Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief*, words, and more specifically "Begriffe", fail Chandos, and as a result he relies with increasing frequency on metaphor and imagery to convey his meaning, and in doing so removes the burden of interpretation from the reader, allowing the reader to experience unmediated [unmittelbar] what the author describes. Hofmannsthal, like Rilke, "objectifies language and thus liberates it from the traditional role of representation" (Strathausen, 9). Hofmannsthal does this literally having his narrator attach meaning to everyday objects (watering cans, moldy basements, dying rats), and then by creating images from their juxtaposition. This juxtaposition of objects to create images, which occurs during Chandos' rides through the country side, shows --as Strathausen summarizes--that "[w]ords are being stripped bare of their historical meaning in order to serve as purified building blocks with which to recreate an uncontaminated world and a new reality" (9). Hofmannsthal's narrator ceases to use traditional notions of high society (truth, morality, virtue); instead, he is relying on physical objects, metaphors, and images to communicate, because words--as the narrator points out--"zerfielen mir im Munde wie modrige Pilze" (Hofmannsthal, 342). The juxtaposition of objects, the constellation, to use a Benjaminian term, illuminates for the reader more than what Chandos explicitly writes. The objects on which his attention settles are not beautiful or belonging to any traditional system of aesthetics: "In diesen

Augenblicken wird eine nichtige Kreatur, ein Hund, eine Ratte, ein Käfer [...] ein moosbewachsener Stein mir mehr, als die schönste, hingebendste Geliebte der glücklichsten Nacht mir je gewesen ist. [...] Es erscheint mir alles, alles was es gibt, alles, dessen ich mich entsinne, alles, was meine verworrensten Gedanken berühren, etwas zu sein" (345). The list of objects to which Chandos' attention attaches itself, which inspire him, are not random, despite appearances. The images and objects that inspire Chandos do so because they are the concrete manifestations of a reordering of his language and thought. Chandos language crisis is, according to Strathausen, a 'purification' of language. Strathausen contends: "This purification, however, can only be achieved in and through a gesture of radical annihilation aimed toward established values and norms," values and norms different from those of his contemporaries (Strathausen, 9). The annihilation of the established order is evidenced by Chandos' disinterest in the wrangling of parliament and the necessity of oration, the distaste for the vacillation of social opinion, when he states: "Dies alles erschien mir so unbeweisbar, so lügenhaft, so lächerlich wie nur möglich" (Hofmannsthal, 341). He then continues: "Ich fand es innerlich unmöglich, über die Angelegenheiten des Hofes, die Vorkommnisse im Parlament, oder was sie sonst wollen, ein Urteil herauszugeben" (341). Hofmannsthal offers an even more extreme example of Chandos' lost faith in abstract language when Chandos expresses his inability to continue the moral education of his daughter:

Es begegnet mir, daß ich meiner vierjährigen Tochter Katharina Pompilia eine kindische Lüge, deren sie sich schuldig gemacht hatte, verweisen und sie auf die Notwendigkeit, immer wahr zu sein, hinführen wollte, und dabei die mir im Munde zuströmenden Begriffe plötzlich eine solche

schillerne Färbung annahmen und so ineinander überflossen, daß ich den Satz,so gut es ging, zu Ende haspelnd [...] das Kind allein ließ, die Tür hinter mir zuschlug und mich erst zu Pferde [...] wieder einigermaßen herstellte. (342)

Chandos abstains from participation in abstract linguistic realms: morality, politics, and high society. His deconstruction of language is not only aimed at abstract, courtly speech, but, according to Strathausen, is also aimed toward "traditional linguistic means of signification, and, ultimately, reality itself, which is regarded as the inferior opposite of art and the nascent world it allegedly carries within" (9). Strathausen makes this observation in response to the violence implied in Hofmannsthal's writing. This latent violence toward language is the result of a strong, visceral response to external stimuli on Chandos' part, the result of dissatisfaction with the world as it is, and as it appears to be. This visceral response can be clearly seen in *Ein Brief*: Chandos' fascination with the dying rats in the milk cellar, the maelstroms, both of images and impressions, and of words and language, and most clearly, the physical reaction he has to his inability to critique his daughter's behavior (Hofmannsthal, 344, 347-8, 342).

While Hofmannsthal-as-Chandos may not value the concepts held in high esteem by tradition (morality, logic, rhetoric), the text indicates what Chandos does value, namely: allegory, image, and banal detail, as when he retells the story of Crassus and his fish:

Und ich vergleiche mich manchmal in Gedanken mit jenem Crassus, dem Redner, von dem berichtet wird, daß er eine zahme Muräne, einen dumpfen, rotäugigen, stummen Fisch seines Zierteiches, so über alle

Maßen lieb gewann, daß es zum Stadtgespräch wurde; und als ihm einmal in Senat Domitius vorwarf, er habe über den Tod dieses Fisches Tränen vergossen, und ihn dadurch als einen halben Narren hinstellen wollte, gab ihm Crassus zur Antwort: 'So habe ich beim Tode meines Fisches getan, was Ihr weder bei Eurer ersten noch Eurer zweiten Frau Tod getan habt.'

(347)

This allegory serves to inform the aesthetics of the entire text. Traditional moral, rhetorical and aesthetic roles are undone, remade in allegory and collections of details, constellations of the banal. Chandos does not view the tale as a joke, or a rhetorical flourish, instead he takes the answer to Domitus' query much more seriously, as he writes later: "Mir aber geht die Sache nahe, die Sache, welche dieselbe geblieben wäre, auch wenn Domitius um seine Frauen blutige Tränen des aufrichtigsten Schmerzes geweint hätte. Dann stünde ihm noch immer Crassus gegenüber, mit seinen Tränen um seine Muräne" (347). Hofmannsthal's protagonist refers to Crassus as a "Figur" and a "Bild" (347). Chandos says that the image of Crassus is "zuweilen nachts in meinem Hirn, wie ein Splitter, um den herum alles schwärt, pulst und kocht" (347). Chandos' constant exposure to this image, the moving, unspeakable figure, leads him to a revelation. He writes:

Und das Ganze ist eine Art fieberisches Denken, aber Denken in einem Material, das unmittelbarer, flüssiger, glühender ist als Worte. Es sind gleichfalls Wirbel, aber solche, die nicht wie die Wirbel der Sprache ins Bodenlose zu führen scheinen, sondern irgendwie in mich selber und in den tiefsten Schoß des Friedens. (347-8)

This progression is Chandos' formulation for a new language: he takes images and fragments of a world that no longer makes sense to him--represented by the everyday objects in the environment that inspire him, images of suffering with which he feels a connection, and mythology and history which, though out of context, are still meaningful to Chandos--and which he, through some unnamed alchemical process, transforms into meaningful elements, through which he can attempt to express himself. Image and inspiration inform Chandos' new language, and as he writes, it is a:

Sprache, in welcher nicht nur zu schreiben, sondern auch zu denken mir vielleicht gegeben wäre, weder die lateinische noch die englische noch die italienische und spanische ist, sondern eine Sprache, von deren Worten mir auch nicht eines bekannt ist, eine Sprache, in welcher die stummen Dinge zu mir sprechen, und in welcher ich vielleicht einst im Grabe vor einem unbekannten Richter mich verantworten werde. (348)

This assertion puts the power and danger of language in stark relief. Though he can no longer use the languages he knows--German, Latin, English, Italian, Spanish--to convey meaning, he does not know the words of this new language, either. His new language is an active one, one in which objects and images, speak *to* him. Chandos thus becomes a vessel for language, as opposed to language being a vessel for meaning. The inspiration that Chandos experiences is--as Strathausen claims--the meaning being conveyed between him and this new language: "Hofmannsthal's Chandos pursues the search for linguistic meaning until the imaginary-symbolic space between words and things finally collapses and language itself begins to matter and become 'real'" (139). Instead of piercing texts with his sharp literary abilities, instead of finding solace in language,

Chandos is confronted by language, challenged by it, as he confesses: "Die einzelnen Worte schwammen um mich; sie gerannen zu Augen, die mich anstarrten und in die ich wieder hineinstarren muß: Wirbel sind sie, in die hinabzusehen mich schwindelt, die sich unaufhaltsam drehen und durch die hindurch man ins Leere kommt" (Hofmannsthal, 342-3). It would appear, then, that Hofmannsthal's protagonist, in a very literal way, looks into the emptiness of language, and is horrified at the nothingness that stares back. It is also worthy to note that this precipitous confrontation between reader and text takes place in supposedly meaningful texts (338, 343). Strathausen claims that, like Benjamin, in his essay *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, Hofmannsthal is searching for 'pure language'. He remarks:

The voice of pure language [...] pronounces a death sentence it has always already executed, since otherwise it could not be heard at all. The history of linguistic meaning needs to be silenced before true speech can reemerge, which is to say that the voice of language remains inextricably bound to its own self-negation in the form of silence.

For Hofmannsthal, silence is constitutive of speech. [...] Silence is the ultimate limit and (im)possible fulfillment of speech as well as its lost origin and necessary ground for rejuvenation. (Strathausen, 169)

Chandos' situation, then, is not as dire as it may appear: though he writes to Bacon that this letter is his "letzter Brief", if silence is truly constitutive of language, then this helplessness, and hopelessness, is temporary (Hofmannsthal, 348). Hofmannsthal's narrator's attempt at using a new language is isolating, and may ultimately be a failure. However, through Hofmannsthal's use of image, allegory, and metaphor to convey

meaning, he is expanding and changing the boundaries of his language, shifting the focus of language from a system of relationships between the symbol and symbolized--word and meaning--to a system of relationships between images, where meaning is meant to be conveyed without the medium of empty symbol (343-4, 347-8).

While Chandos is surprised by the effect that external phenomena have on him and he is overcome by inspiration, in Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, the protagonist Brigge moves beyond Chandos' passivity. Rilke's narrator seeks out the experience of shocking external phenomena and actively pursues inspiration that will provide meaning and strengthen the foundation of his experience. Brigge finds himself in a crisis of language and of representation: he is unable to write, hateful of interruptions to his work, but terrified of the silence he needs to write, because it reveals his inner emptiness, his inability to say anything meaningful. Strathausen describes Brigge's situation as follows:

Language no longer merely describes the world, but literally situates it as such. Although this elevation and the concomitant reification of poetic language to the very ground level of Being aims to dehistoricize language, it simultaneously cannot but highlight the epistemological and social crisis it seeks to solve. (9)

In trying to write, Brigge is alienating himself, literally and figuratively painting himself into a corner. The novel consists of personifications of the city, of painterly representations of the world in written images, passages where he 'learns to see', wherein he combines objective observation with fantasy and philosophical musings to create a multilayered tapestry of symbol and image and observation: in his words, "ich lerne

sehen", (Rilke, 8). As Strathausen suggests: "The writer's goal is to learn how to see, and one of the central concerns of the novel is to specify the relationship between writing and seeing" (208). There are several elements that make up this undertaking in the novel. The first is textual: the way in which the writer-narrator, Brigge, sees; the second is narrative: he describes the way Graf Brahe understands the relationship between reading, writing, and seeing physical objects. Brigge forms images of fragments, settles upon objects as would an untrained and distracted eye:

Daß es mir zum Beispiel niemals zum Bewußtsein gekommen ist, wieviel Gesichter es gibt. Es gibt eine Menge Menschen, aber noch viel mehr Gesichter, denn jeder hat mehrere. Da sind Leute, die tragen ein Gesicht jahrelang, natürlich nutzt es sich ab, es wird schmutzig, es bricht in den Falten, es weitet sich aus wie Handschuhe, die man auf der Reise getragen hat. Das sind sparsame, einfache Leute; sie wechseln es nicht, sie lassen es nicht einmal reinigen [...] Gesicht ist Gesicht.

Andere Leute setzen unheimlich schnell ihre Gesichter auf, eins nach dem andern, und tragen sie ab. Es scheint ihnen zuerst, sie hätten für immer, aber sie sind kaum vierzig: da ist schon das letzte. Das hat natürlich seine Tragik. Sie sind nicht gewohnt, Gesichter zu schonen, ihr letztes ist in acht Tagen durch, hat Löcher, ist an vielen Stellen dünn wie Papier, und da kommt dann nach und nach die Unterlage heraus, das Nichtgesicht, und sie gehen damit herum. (Rilke, 9-10)

Brigge describes these faces as masks, as disposable, as facades. He uses simile and metaphor to create images of the passersby, as opposed to merely describing them. In this

sense, the passage is painterly: a depiction of a strange object, humanity, by an untrained eye. The depiction thus not only demonstrates Brigge's mode of representation, but the product of that mode, namely, alienation.

To the second point,--the demonstration of the relationship between writing and seeing--Rilke has Brigge record an interaction between Graf Brahe and Abelone, which transpires as follows: 'Sie [Abelone] kann es [was er sagt] nicht schreiben,' sagte er scharf, 'und andere werden es nicht lesen können. Und werden sie es überhaupt nicht *sehen*, was ich da sage?'" (127).

Brigge's challenge is to convey meaning, and to do so, he combines the faculties of writing (a function of speech) and seeing. Because speech lacks the necessary integrity and emphasis to convey meaning independent of other means, the writer must support it with an external element. According to Strathausen, for the Count, writing is metaphorical. "the paradox of a vision that needs to have been experienced before it can be written down, yet must be written down in order to be experienced, haunts the memoirs of the old Brahe" (Strathausen, 208). The combination of writing and experience leads the Count to view writing as a vital process: "'Die Bücher sind leer,' schrie der Graf mit einer wütenden Gebärde nach den Wänden hin, 'das Blut, darauf kommt es an, da muß man drin lesen können'" (Rilke, 128). While Brigge is still bogged down in his writing exercises, the Count transcends writing as an impenetrable or effete mode: "The flow of blood within the body relates to that of language within books. For Brahe, the body is like a book. If we look at them as material objects, they are empty, yet their insides are alive. Seeing things means to look through bodies and read their entrails as a kind of language that dissolves the gaze within its flow and carries the reader along"

(Strathausen, 209). The Count explicitly makes the metaphorical leap from body to text: "Er nahm Abelones Hände und schlug sie auf wie ein Buch" (Rilke, 130). The melding of vision and writing--the corollary of which is reading--allows Graf Brahe to, in Strathausen's words, experience "a freedom of vision that allows him to 'read' the hands and eyes of those around him. Words and things alike take shape in the eye of the beholder and not in the mind of educated readers" (Strathausen, 209). This gives the reader the ability to 'see' people's experiences, and creates a link between image and knowledge; as Brahe remarks: "Ich aber merkte mir seine Augen.[...] Ich habe allerhand Augen gesehen, kannst du mir glauben: solche nicht wieder. Für diese Augen hätte nichts da sein müssen, die hatten es in sich" (Rilke 127-8). It would seem that what the Count sees belongs to the eye itself, not simply a reflection of objects in the eye. The eyes carry in them everything they have seen, in other words, their experience, and as discussed earlier, in the Hofmannsthal text and selections from Benjamin, experience is perceived as a prerequisite for writing meaningfully.

When Brigge decides that he will learn to see, that he will write visually, that he will experience, his first observation is painterly:

Unten ist folgende Zusammenstellung: ein kleiner Handwagen, von einer Frau geschoben; vorn darauf ein Leierkasten, der Länge nach. Dahinter quer ein Kinderkorb, in dem ein ganz Kleines auf festen Beinen steht, vergnügt in seiner Haube, und sich nicht mag setzen lassen. Von Zeit zu Zeit dreht die Frau am Orgelkasten. Das ganz Kleine stellt sich dann sofort stampfend in seinem Korbe wieder auf, und ein kleines Mädchen in einem grünen Sonntagskleid tanzt und schlägt Tamburin zu den Fenstern hinauf.

(19)

Brigge is looking at a composition. What is missing from the composition to make it meaningful is the experience of a life-time, the vital connection between word and object, between subject and object. From the beginning, Brigge composes images in an attempt to express meaning. However, he realizes that without the added element of experience [*Erfahrung*], of taking in the external, these images cannot bear the weight of meaning.

Brigge's experience beings when external forces affect his thought processes. This phenomenon can be seen from the very beginning when Brigge personifies the city, making it a malevolent force that acts against him: "Elektrische Bahnen rasen läutend durch meine Stube. Automobile gehen über mich hin. [...] Irgendwo klirrt eine Scheibe herunter, ich höre ihre großen Scherben lachen, die kleinen Splitter kichern" (8).

Technological objects invade his personal space and objects become anthropomorphized. A brief while later, Brigge anthropomorphizes the street below his room, claiming that it intentionally amplifies the sound of shoe strikes on pavement to torment him: "Die Straße war zu leer, ihre Leere langweilte sich und zog mir den Schritt unter den Füßen weg und klappte mit ihm herum, drüben und da, wie mit einem Holzschuh" (10). These experiences are the catalysts that drive Brigge to do something against the fear that is inside him, namely, to write. He is afraid of action, afraid of experience, as demonstrated by the way he allows his environment to act on him. In Brigge's world, he is malleable, not his environment. However, if Graf Brahe's paradox is true, and things must be written before they can be experienced, then Brigge's cycle of being acted upon, writing, and thereby experiencing may be a way to meaning. By making an image of the city, he can process external phenomena within himself, produce them in written form, and thereby

gain access to them. Strathausen summarizes this as follows:

the thing must first become an object of digestion and must be 'translated,' or decomposed [....] 'Pure things,' in this thingly physiology, are only those that have been expelled by the process of metabolism. [...] The poet needs to use his words as enzymes digesting and dissolving things within his own body before they can be reborn as poetic language (Strathausen, 211).

This digestion produces a "pulp of signification", with which the writer can express himself as would a painter, by juxtaposing pieces of the pulp on the page, as an artist would objects on a surface or color on a canvas (211). This kind of text "sweeps away all stable references and speaks a language beyond decipherable meaning"; what remains then is to 'learn to see', to blind "common vision in order to develop eyes that 'have it in them' and look from the inside out" (211). Brahe demonstrates this with his daughter as his subject: "'Siehst du ihn?' herrschte er sie [Abelone] an. Und plötzlich ergriff er den einen silbernen Armleuchter und leuchtete ihr blendend ins Gesicht. Abelone erinnerte sich, daß sie ihn gesehen habe" (Rilke, 129). Abelone is blinded; her 'common vision' has been undone, and she is able to see by way of experience. This sort of vision would appear to be a sort of radical subjectivity, but alternatively, the senses are being used to construct images, and these images bear meaning for the reader/writer. Not only vision, but the olfactory and auditory senses are used to construct images, when sight is not enough or not available:

Es roch, soviel sich unterscheiden ließ, nach Jodoform, nach dem Fett von pommes frites, nach Angst. Alle Städte riechen im Sommer. [...] Das Kind schlief, der Mund war offen, atmete Jodoform, pommes frites, Angst. Das

war nun mal so. Die Hauptsache war, daß man lebt. Das war die
Hauptsache. (7)

Then, on the next page, Brigge is assaulted this time, not by visual means, but by auditory, through the thin walls of his room:

Dann plötzlich dumpfer, eingeschlossener Lärm von der anderen Seite,
innen in Hause. Jemand steigt die Treppe. Kommt, kommt unaufhörlich.
Ist da, ist lange da, geht vorbei. Und wieder die Straße. Ein Mädchen
kreischt: Ah tais-toi, je ne veux plus. Die Elektrische rennt ganz erregt
heran, darüber fort, fort über alles. Jemand ruft. Leute laufen, überholen
sich. Ein Hund bellt. Was für eine Erleichterung: ein Hund. Gegen Morgen
kräht sogar ein Hahn, und das ist Wohltun ohne Grenzen. Dann schlafe ich
plötzlich ein.

Das sind die Geräusche. (8).

In both cases the sense perceptions form a collage, a composition. These individual parts add up to a whole: life in Paris. Synecdoche is here taken to its extreme: Jodoform, French fries, and fear comprise life. The sounds of streetcars passing and feet on stairwells represent the whole of human enterprise. To hear animals is a surprise and pleasure, because the whole world seems overrun by humans and their industry.

Rilke's narrator thus joins Hofmannsthal's and Benjamin in their mutual dissatisfaction with the societal status quo. Benjamin and Rilke share ambivalence toward technology, and Brigge and Chandos, Rilke's and Hofmannsthal's narrators, are both cut off from their social milieus. To expand my metaphor of the mirror: the images that appear in the fragments of the broken mirror each reflect a part of a larger whole. The

task these authors have set for themselves is to reorder these fragments in a meaningful way. Each of the authors attempts in their own way to bring an aesthetic system to bear on the problem of language. They even use some of the same elements: fragment, image, and figurative language. The other commonality that the works share is that their authors and--in the case of Hofmannsthal and Rilke--their narrators, only *attempt* a solution. The problems of language appear to be intractable, and as such there is a current of ambivalence that runs through all of the texts. How this ambivalence appears in the texts will be the subject of my next chapter.

Chapter Four

The Re-formed Mirror: Ambivalence and Language

Benjamin's, Hofmannsthal's, and Rilke's attempts to redeem or reorder language remain attempts, as opposed to solutions, because of a basic shared ambivalence toward their medium, language. Even after they break the mirror of the world, collect the shards and reorder them to form a new image, the image that confronts them is one upon which they cannot entirely rely, because it, too, is constructed from the same mode of meaning as the original: language. Nevertheless, the authors perform their attempts to make language vital, each in his own unique way: Benjamin by claiming that language can evolve when recognized as fragmented and employed toward achieving the goal of 'pure language'; Hofmannsthal by writing in flashes of images with which the reader can engage in an unmediated fashion; and Rilke by attempting to bind language and vision, and thus bypass language's system of symbols, and make language visual.

Benjamin creates constellations of fragments, ideas, and images in order to redeem language:

It is [...] the *redemption* of the phenomena under investigation that Benjamin's theory of knowledge desires: if not their *actual* redemption, their *symbolic* redemption. The method he employs to achieve this end he describes as thinking in 'constellations.' By regrouping the material elements of phenomena in a philosophically informed constellation, an idea will emerge and the phenomena will thereby stand redeemed. In this way Benjamin seeks to transpose the technique of redemptive critique

from the domain of criticism to that of epistemology. (Wolin, 1994; 92)

After breaking the mirror of the world, Benjamin gathers the shards, collects them, and re-assembles them to form a new image. In this way, Benjamin renews and redefines the established concepts he confronts by reordering them outside of their traditional epistemology, thus providing the reader access to the subject that before was lacking, namely, to a world inside the mirror, the inaccessible purview of totality and Aristotelian tradition¹⁰. Wolin claims that Benjamin warps Aristotle's concept of form to serve his own redemptive ends when he writes about *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels*:

‘Ideas are timeless constellations, and by virtue of the elements' being seen as points in such constellations, phenomena are subdivided and at the same time redeemed,’ [...]. Ideas thus acquire a paradoxical status insofar as they are said to emerge from the empirical world, and yet at the same time they are deemed full-fledged members of the intelligible world. In this dual status of ideas rests the fundamental contradictory striving of Benjamin's theory of knowledge: to force the phenomenal sphere itself to yield to noumenal truth. (92)

"Contradictory striving" is a term that could be applied to much of what Benjamin wrote. He strove against Fascism, blind aestheticism, Futurism, and the accepted progression of history and time itself. Language, too, was an arena in which Benjamin strove toward a revolutionary goal: to redeem it from politics and utilitarianism.

"Contradictory striving" could characterize the actions of Hofmannsthal's and Rilke's

¹⁰ I say "a" world inside the mirror instead of "the" world, because the subjectivity that allows one to break "the" mirror, is the cause of irresolvable doubt over the truth of the reconstituted image. By breaking the mirror, the author, or the subject, opens the world up to interpretation, and can no longer stake any claim to truth, except from his or her own point of view.

narrators as well. The narrators demonstrate this element of paradox, of simultaneous use and mistrust of language, through their mutual need to write their crises of language.

In *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Benjamin sees language corrupted by politics, but sees a possible cure for the corruption in making language useless to politics through fragmentation and reorganization. By examining concepts from multiple view-points, by examining the problem of language and thought through the mediums of painting, photography and film, in other words, by visualizing language, Benjamin attempts to allow for understanding directly, without the need for explanation. As Weber maintains:

Perhaps it is the convergence of looking-at, looking-away, and looking-up that explains why the primary of Benjamin's -abilities is readability. And also why the now of knowability--*das Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit*--is also the moment in which readability parts company with determinate meaning and knowledge, not by dissolving its relation to it, but by acknowledging the irreducible immediacy--the *Un-mittel-barkeit*--of its medium of language to be the greatest -ability of all. (Weber, 18)

The unmediated aspect of language is its strength against misrepresentation, but paradoxically, Benjamin mistrusts language to such a degree that he cannot express himself in conventional terms, because he maintains that those terms have been corrupted. He deals with this corruption by beginning a process of alteration, of becoming, that, by allowing language, or art, to change *ad infinitum*, allows him to save it. Benjamin does this first of all in the title of his essay, by using the nominalized verb 'reproduce' [*Reproduzierbarkeit*]. Reproduction is not a primary function. It is, by

definition,

ancillary, secondary, supplementary. To therefore define [this process] as [a] quasi-transcendental, structuring [possibility] is to shift the emphasis from the ostensibly self-contained work to a relational dynamic that is precisely not self-identical but perpetually in the process of alteration, transformation, becoming-other. (Weber, 59)

Benjamin makes use of the "becoming-other" motif in *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* as well, but here it involves the redemption of art from Fascism:

Die im folgenden neu in die Kunsttheorie eingeführten Begriffe unterscheiden sich von geläufigeren dadurch, daß sie für die Zwecke des Faschismus vollkommen unbrauchbar sind. Dagegen sind sie zur Formulierung revolutionärer Forderungen in der Kunstpolitik brauchbar. (Benjamin, *KZR*, 473)

From the very first page of the essay, Benjamin sets out his goals: to provide revolutionary tools to fight the specter of Fascism. As promising as that sounds, however, the fact remains that Benjamin is attempting a coup of a political system by means of strangely constructed essays using new and untested rhetoric and devices. The weight of this enormous task is evident in the text: "Indem das Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit die Kunst von ihrem kultischen Fundament löste, erlosch auf immer der Schein ihrer Autonomie" (*KZR*, 486). Benjamin is fighting a difficult battle against overwhelming opponents: Fascism, tradition, history, even time. He recognizes that he is setting his new theories against these forces: "Das Konventionelle wird kritiklos genossen, das wirklich Neue kritisiert man mit Widerwillen" (*KZR*, 497). Benjamin

knows that Fascism has the masses under its sway, and that it is using the same media that Benjamin is engaging--film, and photography--to do so. Benjamin shows that there is consequently ambivalence toward and a wariness of art and language that is a direct result of his experiences with Fascism. Benjamin best demonstrates this when he quotes a Fascist source, clearly demonstrating the link between art, language, and Fascism, and poignantly elucidating the struggle in which he is engaged:

Der Krieg ist schön, weil er dank der Gasmasken, der schreckenerrgenden Megaphone, der Flammenwerfer und der kleinen Tanks die Herrschaft des Menschen über die unterjochte Maschine begründet. [...] Der Krieg ist schön, weil er eine blühende Wiese um die feurigen Orchideen der Mitraillleusen bereichert. Der Krieg ist schön, weil er das Gewehrfeuer, die Kanonaden, die Feuerpausen, die Parfums und Verwesungsgerüche zu einer Symphonie vereinigt. (KZR, 507)

The aestheticization of war is, in terms of Benjamin's concept of art, an abomination. It reverses the role of art as a human endeavor and makes human enterprise the material of art, which gives aesthetics unlimited power and simultaneously devalues the importance of human life.

The destructiveness of war is proof for Benjamin that technology and society have not developed far enough for them to come together peacefully: "Der imperialistische Krieg ist ein Aufstand der Technik, die am 'Menschenmaterial' die Ansprüche eintreibt, denen die Gesellschaft ihr natürliches Material entzogen hat" (KZR, 507-8). Instead of being constructive, humanity has diverted its resources into the waging of war, and has found new and terrible ways to do it: "und im Gaskrieg hat sie ein Mittel gefunden, die

Aura auf neue Art abzuschaffen" (KZR, 508). By mentioning the 'aura', Benjamin draws a clear line between the ruination of art as a positive social construct, the horror of war, and the willingness of the Fascists to use technically derived art objects to control the 'human material'. That the same language and art that Benjamin values could be used to produce Fascist art, to aestheticize politics, is frightening and repugnant to Benjamin; he recognizes what will happen if the concept of *l'art pour l'art* is adopted by the Fascists: "'Fiat ars - pereat mundus'¹¹ sagt der Faschismus und erwartet die künstlerische Befriedigung der von der Technik veränderten Sinneswahrnehmung [...] vom Kriege. Das ist offenbar die Vollendung des *l'art pour l'art*" (KZR, 508)¹². Here Benjamin ties war, sense perception, and technology together to reveal the true dangers and horror of Fascism. Benjamin takes aim at Dadaism when he claims that film replaces the shock value of the genre, and it does so to a distracted audience. The audience becomes accustomed to shock, is desensitized to it, and is therefore more accepting of violence and the program that the Fascist film follows, namely that war is beautiful and good.

Art for art's sake, when taken to this extreme, negates the value of human life. To that end, Benjamin writes: "Ihre [der Menschheit] Selbstentfremdung hat jenen Grad erreicht, der sie ihre eigene Vernichtung als ästhetischen Genuß ersten Ranges erleben läßt" (KZR, 508). The language of art, the syntax of images arranged in a film, the captions of pictures, have devolved in such a way as to render humanity unrecognizable to itself. Benjamin wants to change this, but his task is so daunting, that he knows he cannot accomplish it on his own. Even though he can clearly see what political systems

¹¹ Let there be art - let the world burn.

¹² Benjamin felt that *l'art pour l'art*, or art for art's sake, was dangerous because it removed the human and historical elements from art that make art useless to Fascism.

can do to art and language, he, too, must rely on politics to redeem art, and by way of art, humanity. In the final sentence of his essay, he turns to Communism: "So steht es um die Ästhetisierung der Politik, welche der Faschismus betreibt. Der Kommunismus antwortet ihm mit der Politisierung der Kunst" (KZR, 508). Benjamin provides no explanation, no support for this claim; he does not examine his own assertion. He has put his faith in Fascism's opposing political system, because to do otherwise would mean abject failure and despair (Wolin, 2004; 62).

Although Benjamin is able to trace the development of art via its reproducibility, and subsequently demonstrates its advantages and pitfalls, he falls short of being able to claim a victory for art. On the contrary, Fascism appears to have taken hold of art, and the only force left to Benjamin to redeem it is politics. Benjamin, in the end, must abandon his philosophical and literary undertaking to politics. Art, however, is not the only cultural front that Benjamin perceives as under attack from Fascism. History, too, faces Fascist assimilation.

In *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, Benjamin's use of quotations and the fragmented, aphoristic style of the work suggest that he thought formal language and traditional modes of thought are not the best ways to impart understanding. However, without the word, either written or spoken, there would be no theses to write, no 'concept' [*Begriff*] upon which to elaborate. Consequently, ambivalence, crisis, is written into the structure of the work, as Julian Roberts, author of *Walther Benjamin*, appearing in renown sociologist Anthony Giddens' series *Contemporary Social Theory*, notes:

The text is clearly fragmentary [...] the Theses are a meditation inspired by the sudden collapse of valued organisations [...] Benjamin himself

commented that the Theses were a response to the new constellation of factors brought about by the [Second World] war. [...] [The Theses] were thoughts he had kept concealed 'for some twenty years', not only from others, but even from himself. He was anxious that they not be published in that [fragmented] form since they would lay themselves wide open to 'enthusiastic misunderstanding' (Roberts, 197-8)¹³.

The collapse of these "valued organizations" puts Benjamin in crisis. His image of the world was broken. Benjamin's response to the shattered image of his world, the use of constellation, is an effective response to crisis as well as an active method of 're-vision', of seeing things differently. However, even this re-vision of the world does not guarantee that the image created is a viable one. Roberts contends that Benjamin's work contains elements of Utopianism, which Roberts defines as "the view that there is a fundamental discontinuity between the world as we know it and any world that is good for human beings," (199) which has philosophical consequences, as Roberts explains:

Philosophically it results in agnosticism of some kind, the assertion that matter and knowledge never fully coincide [...] Only in utopianism could the mind break its enslavement to a failed conception of an object, and thus potentially be *more* realistic than in drab delusions of empiricism. It is from this background that Adorno tries to see in Benjamin 'the paradox of the possibility of the impossible' (199-200).

There is a degree of ambivalence associated with these kinds of reconstructions, because

¹³ As noted, Benjamin contends that only the auratic fragment is out of danger. Like film and photography, Benjamin feared that, taken out of context, his Theses would be misused and misinterpreted.

the material, language, with which they are constructed is fundamentally unsound. The Utopianism evident in Benjamin's work is, according to Roberts, a result of language's inability to fully communicate truth: if these structures are based in language, they seem to be, for Benjamin, by definition untrue and thereby philosophical failures. His only hope is to redeem language through unmediated meaning, namely image (200-202).

Benjamin makes use of the "picture" in his Theses, specifically, in Thesis V. Roberts claims that the picture was a way for Benjamin, like the philosopher Ludwig Klages, to clarify his distaste for abstraction and conceptual theories of knowledge. As Roberts writes:

It will be remembered that Klages introduced the 'picture' as a way of underlining his hostility to conceptual theories of knowledge. The traditional categories of epistemology--'universals' 'forms' 'ideas' and the like--were all regarded [...] as abstractions [....] Pictures were a way of representing knowledge as *something independent of language* and the conceptual apparatus of the mind; 'sayable things' were opposed to 'unsayable pictures', the more fundamental level of knowledge [...] the picture was something that flashed momentarily in an 'ecstatic vision'.

(211) [my italics]

Removing meaning from the realm of language was the only way Benjamin could safeguard truth. However, he was forced to formulate this idea in writing, which is different from traditional discourse insofar as it is performative. Benjamin attempts to demonstrate what he hopes to accomplish with the Thesis through his style, namely, an expression of skepticism toward language and causal history, in other words, in established order, and

the proposed solution to the cause of that skepticism, a "re-vision" of history and renewal of language. As Roberts contends: "The [principle] philosophical component [of the Theses] is skepticism, first towards time as an absolute and objective component of all events, and second towards the 'causal chain' of regular and objective sequences within time" (219). Benjamin's skepticism is not limited to objective and causal time, however. He is equally skeptical of the language and structures used to frame traditional discussions of time, which he fears can be co-opted by adverse political forces, i.e., Fascism:

Die Gefahr droht sowohl dem Bestand der Tradition wie ihren Empfängern. Für beide ist sie ein und dieselbe: sich zum Werkzeug der herrschenden Klasse herzugeben. In jeder Epoche muß versucht werden, die Überlieferung von neuem [sic] dem Konformismus abzugewinnen, der im Begriff steht, sie zu überwältigen. (Benjamin, *ÜBG*, 695)

Roberts maintains that Benjamin uses two different tactics to clarify his skepticism toward traditional concepts of time: "The Theses' tactic in the first instance [of time as being objective and absolute] is to develop a critique of progress, positing time as 'internal' to the essential reality and crystalline simultaneity of the 'monad' . From that point of view, time is a mode of appearance, but not of essence" (Roberts, 219). By introducing the topic of appearance, Benjamin can call into question the veracity of any claim. By removing the essential quality of time from events, Benjamin reduces any claim to history as merely superficial. By fragmenting history, Benjamin hopes to redeem it. In an attempt to interpret Benjamin, Roberts contends that "the Theses posit a theory of 'construction' in opposition to causality. According to this argument, historiography is not

based on observation and induction, but on the magical flash of the 'dialectical picture', the sudden redemptive memory which emerges complete at the instant of danger" (219). This constructed aspect of history, a collage technique, provides Benjamin access to history in an unmediated way, history that 'flashes up', that isn't corrupted by the narrative of linear, causal history:

Vergangenes historisch artikulieren heißt nicht, es erkennen >wie es denn eigentlich gewesen ist<. Es heißt, sich einer Erinnerung bemächtigen, wie sie im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt. Dem historischen Materialismus geht es darum, ein Bild der Vergangenheit festzuhalten, wie es sich im Augenblick der Gefahr dem historischen Subjekt unversehens einstellt.
(Benjamin, *ÜBG*, 695)

The problem of narrative in the Theses is that there is no narrative, because Benjamin does not trust it to do his subject justice, nor does he accept it as a legitimate mode for discussions of history and time. If time and history were linear, they would be subject to a single interpretation, a single truth. By fragmenting time and history, by imposing a different syntax, Benjamin can alter their meaning into one that redeems the 'oppressed classes' and reclaims history from Fascism.

In all of this, syntax is the key to these tactics: *how* the monads are set in relation to one another, *how* the "dialectical pictures" are arranged, how the shards of the broken mirror are reset to provide a new picture of the world. Benjamin's skepticism toward the linearity of time and history is skepticism about causality. If one event does not necessarily lead to another, if there is no linear order in time or events, then time and history are open to re-interpretation and re-writing. Benjamin performs this skeptical

philosophy by writing in fragments. Language has syntax, and this syntax, this order, reinforces an ordered, rigid view of time and history. By writing in non-traditional structures, Benjamin reclaims syntax, and develops a competing philosophy of history opposed to that of Fascism. If syntax is related to appearance and not essence, then the essence of something, its true nature, can be exposed by forming a new syntax that reflects it. This power of reflection makes evident the power of language, namely that language can be used to present epistemologies that both confirm and countermand the world view of the ruling social classes.

Whether or not language is purely utilitarian is a question Benjamin approaches in *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*. The translatability of a work, or the quality of a translation, brings into question the power of language. Benjamin, himself a translator, believed it was possible to translate and to produce a 'good' translation, but in this essay he expresses his contradictory reservations through a discussion of a 'pure language', one that has not been discovered or that has been lost, and that he does not know. This concept of a 'pure language' is also evoked in Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief*, which seems to indicate that the search for this language was not an individual undertaking, but rather can be viewed as the product of a dissatisfaction with the ability of language to fully express meaning. For both Benjamin and Hofmannsthal, language in their societies was becoming utilitarian, no longer a creative force, but rather one that simply communicated. Hofmannsthal attempted to access this 'pure language' by means of unmediated experiences with objects. Benjamin attempts to access it through translation.

The relationship between the existing languages, i.e. German, English, etc., and the 'pure language' that Benjamin writes about is a tangential one: each language meets

the 'pure language' at a single point, and the lines intersecting those points travels to an unseen linguistic horizon, where they supposedly converge. As Richard Wolin contends:

The oblique relation between [the existing plurality of impure languages and the divine *Ursprache*], the conception of the latter as the distant horizon of a linguistic-critical method of literary exegesis, in which the lost paradisiac [sic] language of names contains within itself the hidden script of redeemed life, becomes the focal point of Benjamin's critical energies. The pure language of names is the "origin" that has become the "goal," inasmuch as its affinity to the divine language of creation lends it the greatest proximity to a state of redemption. (Wolin, 1994; 43)

Wolin here emphasizes the redemptive qualities of Benjamin's linguistic critique. As in *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, Benjamin is attempting to redeem what he sees as a lifeless social construct by finding the hidden vital elements therein and by bringing them together to point to what he considers truth. As Wolin writes: "The act of redemptive critique is [...] a work of *remembrance*: it is a process of preserving the truth content or Idea of a work from the ever-threatening forces of social amnesia to which humanity has over the ages become inured" (45). This struggle highlights the constant flux in which the use of language and engagement with literature finds itself: a struggle between discovering or redeeming meaning, and a decent into silence and gibberish. According to Wolin, the redeeming quality of remembrance is evident in *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*: "The main object of the 'Task of the Translator' is to establish the original paradisiacal language of names [...] as the theological foundation of the ultimate kindredness of all languages, which should in turn provide the divine basis for the translation of any one

language into another [...]" (45). Benjamin is writing of a social and theological redemption, where mankind not only strives to redeem language from the meaninglessness of utilitarianism, but also works to reclaim man's Adamic powers and relationship with the divine. Benjamin makes the relationship between language and theology clear when he writes:

Wenn nämlich deren Wesen es forderte, nicht vergessen zu werden, so würde jenes Prädikat nichts Falsches, sondern nur eine Forderung, der Menschen nicht entsprechen, und zugleich auch wohl den Verweis auf einen Bereich enthalten, in dem ihr entsprochen wäre: auf ein Gedenken Gottes. Entsprechend bliebe die Übersetzbarkeit sprachlicher Gebilde auch dann zu erwägen, wenn diese für die Menschen unübersetzbar wären. (AÜ, 10).

While Benjamin's argument appears strong, bolstered by divine power, a telling feature of Wolin's commentary on Benjamin's assertions about language is the equivocal vocabulary Wolin uses, though his language perhaps imparts more certainty to Benjamin's writings than Benjamin had intended. The relationship between languages "should" lead to a solid basis for translation (Wolin, 1994; 45). Wolin contends that Benjamin's ideas about language do not necessarily predicate language's redeeming power. Wolin's assertion mimics Benjamin's own reservations about the feasibility of rediscovering the "reine Sprache". He contends that it may be possible to rediscover this language through translation, even as he admits that some works may never be translated, and thus redeemed, by humankind. However, Benjamin claims, despite his reservations, that translation has a holy aspect to it (AÜ, 10, 14, 21). As Peter Ives notes

in his book *Gramsci's Politics of Language*, in a chapter concerned with the revolutionary aspects of Benjamin's theory of translation, translation has a higher calling than merely re-writing:

As opposed to the lateral direction of 'trans-', 'über-' is a preposition for 'up' and 'over' as well as 'across.' [...] The vertical movement--coupled with the metaphor of height with the divine, the heavenly, progress, achievement, and a general positive sentiment--carries with it very different resonances than the English or Italian term for translation (Ives, 103-4).

This vertical, as opposed to horizontal, mode of translation has clear revolutionary qualities: it can move across language barriers, overcome obstacles to understanding, and move toward truth and meaning. It was--as Ives emphasises--a revolutionary idea: "Benjamin [was] arguing for a concept of translation that [...] requires broader social and cultural analyses", and in reference to the work of noted literary historian Edward Genzler, he continues: "Clearly there is a shift of focus at this moment [...]; one might describe it as a move away from looking at translations as linguistic phenomena to looking at translations as cultural phenomena" (Ives, 111). While making translation a cultural phenomenon ingrains the literary work more deeply into the societal fabric, it puts the work and the translator at the relative mercy of the society in which he or she is working. If the social climate is receptive to and cooperative in the evolution of language, then translation may indeed be a redemptive mode (111). However, the society in which Benjamin was living at the time was not inclined to agree with his philosophy. As discussed, the events of modernity had left the individual alienated from himself and

others. Commensurate with the development of new technologies and social orders, language had been subordinated and abused to attempt to convey the meaning of these new social conditions (123). In this context Ives points out that Benjamin saw the change in language biblically, when he writes:

With the knowledge of judgment, subjective names become less and less related to their objects as language becomes increasingly instrumental and concerned with evaluations of good and evil rather than names. This is the root of Benjamin's critique of the bourgeois theory of language as an instrument for transmitting information, and of the fact that such theory is based on the arbitrary relation between word and thing. Benjamin argues that this is the origin of abstraction and of the increasing use of language for merely instrumental purposes of transferring information, with increasing neglect of the [biblical] name. (124)

Benjamin holds that the transmission of information is inessential: "Ihr [die Übersetzung] Wesentliches ist nicht Mitteilung, nicht Aussage. Dennoch könnte diejenige Übersetzung, welche vermitteln will, nichts vermitteln als die Mitteilung--also Unwesentliches" (AÜ, 9). If simply communicating is indeed inessential, then much human interaction falls under that category. Benjamin contends that in order for language to be redeemed it has to express the inexpressible, it must convey meaning in an unmediated fashion, not representing meaning, simply being meaningful. He writes: "Während nämlich alle einzelnen Elemente, die Wörter, Sätze, Zusammenhänge von fremden Sprachen sich ausschließen, ergänzen diese Sprachen sich in ihren Intentionen selbst" (AÜ, 13-4).

Benjamin juxtaposes intention with what is actually said, an unexpressed impetus, a goal,

set against the signifiers that actually appear on the page. As Benjamin writes elsewhere, in *Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen*: "Innerhalb aller sprachlichen Gestaltung waltet der Widerstreit des Ausgesprochenen und Aussprechlichen mit dem Unaussprechlichen und Unausgesprochenen" (ÜSSM, 146).

This conflict is basically one of essence and appearance: the essence is what is intended, the appearance the individual words. One of Benjamin's difficulties with language is that when it is used, it separates the user from the world. In attempting to communicate, the writer is necessarily misunderstood. At the moment when the creative 'Word' is made symbolic, is used to represent a thing, it no longer serves as a part of the 'pure language'. As Roberts puts it:

Benjamin is not claiming that there is a barrier to understanding between world and cognition, for the world, being 'spiritual essence', is itself essentially linguistic. The point is rather that language in *use*, for communication or whatever, can never be the same as language in creation, which is the only point at which the 'essence' of the world is fully taken up into 'language' (112).

Benjamin does believe that language is a creative and redemptive force. The ambivalence evident in the text, the question of whether or not language can ever return to its pure, un-fallen state, is as much a religious one as it is linguistic. For this reason, Benjamin can never answer it, because it is not a question of sociology or science or criticism, but rather a divine problem, one whose longevity Benjamin recognizes as being more than likely greater than his own.

Unanswerable questions, as they appear in Benjamin's essays, are reflections and

evolutions of questions first asked by Hofmannsthal and Rilke. Just as Benjamin struggles later with the efficacy of individual languages and critical theories, which at their center are questions about individual abilities, so too was efficacy the central concern of Hofmannsthal's and Rilke's earlier-developed narrators. The characters of Chandos and Brigge both experience epistemological crises of identity, and their authors express this crisis through the characters' relationship with language. In *Ein Brief*, Hofmannsthal develops a sense of pervasive doubt over the source of meaning, especially in language, exemplified by Chandos' struggle with subjectivity, and the question of whether meaning comes from within, or is imparted from without. A lengthy passage concerning mythological figures, and the title of Chandos' proposed book, *Nosce te Ipsum*, are prime examples:

Ich entsinne mich dieses Planes [die mythischen Erzählungen zu spüren].

Es lag ihm ich weiß nicht welche sinnliche und geistige Lust zugrunde:

Wie der gehetzte Hirsch ins Wasser, sehnte ich mich hinein in diese

nackten, glänzenden Leiber, in diese Sirenen und Dryaden, diesen

Narcissus und Proteus, Perseus und Aktäon: verschwinden wollte ich in

ihnen und aus ihnen heraus mit Zungen reden. Ich wollte. Ich wollte noch

vielerlei. (Hofmannsthal, 339-340)

This passage deals with a host of mythological figures: Chandos describes an alchemical process, a becoming, complete with sirens and dryads which have influence over human will; a mention of Narcissus who falls so deeply in love with his own image, his reflection, that he dies at the reflecting pool for want of food and water; Proteus, the mutable god; Perseus, who succeeds in his quests only with divine aid, and finally

Acteon, who saw Diana in her godhood, and was transformed, then torn to pieces by his own hunting dogs. By juxtaposing these images, Chandos is indicating that he wants to see, to commune with, and to feel divinity. He wishes to be mutable, to become the gods, the myth, and speak through and for them. With this passage, Hofmannsthal is demonstrating that for Chandos, the barrier that divides the subject from the object, the face of the mirror that divides the 'real' from the reflection, does not exist. Chandos then goes on to describe a collection he had wanted to produce. Chandos' proposed collection, *Nosce te Ipsum*, puts the reader in mind of Benjamin's later and very real--although never finished-- collection, *Das Passagen-Werk*:

Ich gedachte eine Sammlung 'Aphorismen' anzulegen, wie deren eine Julius Cäsar verfaßt hat: Sie erinnern die Erwähnung in einem Briefe des Cicero. Hier gedachte ich die merkwürdigsten Aussprüche nebeneinanderzusetzen, welche mir im Verkehr mit den gelehrten Männern und den geistreichen Frauen unserer Zeit oder mit besonderen Leuten aus dem Volk oder mit gebildeten und ausgezeichneten Personen auf meinen Reisen zu sammeln gelungen wäre; damit wollte ich schöne Sentenzen und Reflexionen aus den Werken der Alten und der Italiener vereinigen, und was mir sonst an geistigen Zieraten in Büchern, Handschriften oder Gesprächen entgegenträte; ferner die Anordnung besonders schöner Feste und Aufzüge, merkwürdige Verbrechen und Fälle von Raserei, die Beschreibung der größten und eigentümlichsten Bauwerke in den Niederlanden, in Frankreich und Italien und noch vieles andere. Das ganze Werk aber sollte den Titel >Nosce te ipsum< führen.

(340)

This excerpt is particularly performative. Both in form and content, Hofmannsthal is demonstrating mutability of subject and object, the meaninglessness of words, and the importance of the fragment. The title of the proposed book suggests that the individual is simply a collection of things made by other people: quotations, anecdotes, works of art, crimes of passion, and architectural features. The way this long, digressive sentence is constructed puts each of these things on the same value plane. The subjects are listed in no order of importance, simply as they come to the narrator's mind. Finally, the sentence reveals the importance of detail to Hofmannsthal, and of detail taken out of context. This list foreshadows later depictions of Chandos' rides through the countryside, precipitated by his realization that the things in his life that should be important are at best equivocal, and during which banal details from his environment become imbued with the divine power of inspiration (345). These inspirational objects then form the constellations upon whose meaning Chandos' new language is predicated (348).

The idea that knowing oneself can be accomplished by reading, traveling, learning, and seeing enough is also mirrored in Rilke's narrator's--Brigge's--actions. Like Chandos, Brigge believes that with enough experience, the writer can produce meaning, and grasp the truth behind the words he uses. Chandos, however, abandons this line of reasoning: he does not write the book. Instead of looking to the past and its values, Chandos instead relies entirely on his environment and the arbitrariness of inspiration to further his new philosophy of language and representation, and thus of meaning.

Chandos experiences his environment mimetically; in other words, the connections he formed with the things he found meaningful, whether it be ancient

mythological figures or rats dying of poison in a cellar, were vital ones. The vitality comes from Chandos displacing himself, putting himself in the dying rats' position, not in a sympathetic way, but rather in a manner that allows him to experience the subject and object simultaneously, to pass through the barrier of reflection that the mirror of his world presents to him. Chandos' thoughts can be conceived of as pictorial. Narcissus loses himself in an image. Perseus kills Medusa with a mirrored shield, reflecting her image back to her. The sirens use their victims' self-image, their vanity and desires, to draw them into destruction. Proteus could take on the form, or image, of others. Chandos' desire to be inside them, to speak from their mouths, is representative of the esteem in which he holds the image. In *Ein Brief*, it can be argued that Hofmannsthal's goal is to attempt to use language visually, to use images in language, and to create images from language.

Hofmannsthal says of language in his own notebooks:

Die Sprache (sowohl die gesprochene als die gedachte, denn wir denken heute schon fast mehr in Worten und algebraischen Formeln als in Bildern und Empfindungen) lehrt uns, aus der Alleinheit der Erscheinungen einzelnes herauszuheben, zu sondern; durch diese willkürlichen Trennung entsteht in uns der Begriff wirklicher Verschiedenheit und es kostet uns Mühe, zur Verwischung dieser Klassifikationen zurückzufinden und uns zu erinnern, daß gut und böse, Licht und Dunkel, Tier und Pflanze nichts von der Natur Gegebenes, sondern etwas willkürlich [sic]

Herausgeschiedenes sind. (Hofmannsthal, 1979; 324)

Arbitrariness is a key element in *Ein Brief*. It is a leveling force in the work, making

everything equal in the narrator's eyes. Arbitrariness is the tool used to break the mirror that reflected the world of Aristotelian ideals. If each word is a separate entity, with no historical context, with no history of meaning, then it is only in relation to one another, in a visual matrix, a constellation, where they find their meaning. If each word represents a concrete object, then those objects must be set in relation to one another to make sense; they must form an image, such as the random banalities that flash up to Chandos in moments of inspiration on his afternoon rides. Müller-Richter discusses the binary relationship between word and meaning in his book, *Kampf der Metapher!*. He writes:

Die unmittelbare Durchsichtigkeit des Sinns auf das Sein--Hofmannsthal nennt es [...] Alleinheit--und der semantische Bezug der Zeichen auf ihre Denotante ist immer schon im Augenblick ihrer Genese getrübt. Doch auf den Augenblick dieser Genese und ihrer Struktur kommt es an. Der Chandos-Brief wird das deutlich machen. Zeichen verstellen diese Alleinheit, aber sie erschließen sie zugleich. Hier zeigt sich, wie Episteme, Semantik und Ontologie ineinandergreifen: 'Alles was ist, ist, Sein und Bedeuten ist eins; folglich ist alles Seiende Symbol' (Müller-Richter, 289, quoting Hofmannsthal, 1979; 391).

If being and meaning are one, then meaning no longer requires concepts to be conveyed; rather, a juxtaposition of images and objects can accomplish, without traditional syntax, what traditional discourse has failed to do. The singularity, the 'alone-ness' of objects and images allows them to convey meaning without context or history. This is akin to the method Benjamin uses in his constellation, but in a much further-reaching epistemological and philosophical system than Hofmannsthal likely envisioned.

Hofmannsthal retains hope in this rebuilding of language because, for him, the failings of language are not at their core an existential or essential problem, they are a systemic problem. As Müller-Richter writes, "Jeder Term bleibt von daher vage aufgrund der willkürlichen Abgrenzung seiner Denotante. Dies ist freilich kein Problem der Existenz, sondern ein Problem der Klassifikation. Die gesamte Sprache, auch und gerade die der Wissenschaft, ist so auf extreme Weise von der Erfahrung her unterdeterminiert" (Müller-Richter, 289). The problem of language then is a problem of an arbitrary assignation of meaning and of experience. This experience is the "Erfahrung" of the moment, the moment [*Augenblick*], which has direct and therefore valid meaning for the individual, unlike "Erlebnis", which is new and unfamiliar experience, which must be internalized to retain meaning. Only through repeated exposure to "Erlebnisse" can the "Erfahrung" be developed, which illuminates once more to the central paradox of language, which is that experience must be expressed, and language lacks the adequate means to do so. However, by having meaningful experiences [*Erfahrung*], the individual does not need to rely on the arbitrary classification of traditional concepts; in other words, he or she can remake language based on the actual, not the symbolic. This system is blatantly paradoxical: it is a system of symbols transformed into a system of images or concrete objects, which are then used as the no-longer-arbitrary symbols of language. Müller-Richter makes the connection of a paradoxical language between Hofmannsthal's Chandos and Rilke's Brigge clear when he writes:

Nun läßt sich leicht zeigen, daß eine Sprache, die auf die Erschließung des
rein Individuellen und des nur für den Augenblick Gültigen abstellt,
aporetischer Natur ist und gerade das, was sie einzulösen antritt,

semiotisch verfehlen muß. Hofmannsthal hat die aporetische Struktur der neuen Sprache, die er zu finden hoffte, wohl eingesehen. Er hat dieser Aporie (wie Rilke im *Malte Laurids Brigge*) in der Figur des Lord Chandos ein Exempel geschaffen, gleichsam als Legat an die nachfolgende Moderne. Der Chandos-Brief ist somit auf der einen Seite deutbar als Legitimationsdiskurs einer neuen Sprache und eines neuen Sehens, das 'jedes Ding jedesmal zum erstenmal sieht' (294).

This "aporetic structure" is the new language that the narrators Chandos and Brigge hope to find. The paradox lies in expressing the new language in a way that is communicable. While Hofmannsthal intimates that the new language may be meaningful to Chandos, Hofmannsthal cannot express how it is meaningful through his narrator in any identifiable way. The revelation cannot bear the transmission into words. Hofmannsthal attempts to circumvent this by writing in images and constellations, equating this new language with a new mode of sight. Making language sensory removes the necessity for words, but in doing so, it also negates the possibility that this new mode can be explained to others. It holds true then, that Chandos' problem is not a problem of existence, because he believes in and can see his new language, but rather a problem of classification, because he cannot transmit his revelation in a meaningful way. So on the one hand, in *Ein Brief*, Chandos experiences the new language in moments, "Augenblicken", and in so doing performs, through writing, his crisis of representation and the subsequent possible solution. However, as Müller-Richter notes:

.Auf der anderen Seite ist der Chandos-Brief der subtile Nachweis der Unmöglichkeit dieser neuen Sprache. So nimmt es nicht wunder, daß diese

Sprache stets auf paradoxe Weise benannt wird. Lord Chandos nennt sie die gänzlich unbekannte Sprache, 'in welcher die stummen Dingen zu mir sprechen' (295)

The image of silent objects speaking *to* a subject stands in direct contravention to the traditional concept of a subject speaking *about* said objects. Imbuing objects with the powers of speech nullifies the subject/object relationship, thereby rendering meaning and language impossible. This is precisely Hofmannsthal's point and problem: though the abolition of the hierarchy of subject and object allows the possibility of expression from a nontraditional viewpoint, namely, from the object's perspective, it is precisely this turn that renders the subject incapable of expression. This circumstance is cause for doubt and worry on the part of the narrator, Chandos, to whom this change has occurred. Müller-Richter elucidates the depth of ambivalence that this crisis engenders:

Wir wollen vielmehr den Nachdruck darauf legen, daß es sich hier [im Chandos-Brief] um eine Verzweiflung nicht nur an der Sprache handelt, sondern auch um ein Verzweifeln daran, daß ohne die in der Sprache grundgelegten Taxonomien der Verlust epistemischer Auslegung und der in ihr verbürgten Sicherheit total ist (303-4).

The doubt that Chandos expresses is enormous. Though he professes to have seen and experienced a new language, he is writing his last letter, and has, by his own admission, lost his ability to say anything. His only hope is that he can understand the new language before it is too late. He expresses his fear of not learning the new language at the end of the letter to Bacon. It is "[eine Sprache] in welcher ich vielleicht einst im

Grabe vor einem unbekannten Richter mich verantworten werde" (Hofmannsthal, 348).

Though Chandos has experienced a new language, and opened himself to the flashes of inspiration that come to him in his everyday life, he cannot make sense of, cannot quantify, his experiences. Rilke's narrator Brigge experiences a similar struggle, wherein he must open himself to spontaneous experience in order to 'learn to see', and thereby redeem language from being merely communicative and utilitarian (Rilke, 8).

In *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Brigge struggles with the efficacy of language, specifically, whether or not one who has experienced little can nevertheless write meaningful prose. Brigge's solution is one that will take a lifetime to achieve, because it requires of him great experience, not merely memory or sensation, but a lifetime of travel, and of taking in the things he senses and remembers, the things that shock him, so that he may one day use that experience to write meaningfully.

Brigge gains access to experience [*Erlebnis*] by allowing external forces to affect him through sensory experience. This means that Brigge has radical aesthetic rules governing the experiences that he writes about. He simply allows himself to be acted and intruded upon. Benjamin's formation of the key concepts "Jetztzeit", "Augenblick", and "Konstellation" is a more refined collection of aesthetic and philosophical tools, can already be traced in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*. As Müller-Richter writes of Rilke's poetics:

Die Regellosigkeit jedoch--und hier erkennen wir die positive Kehrseite der Sprach- und Erkenntniskritik--hat ein Gutes: Sie stößt ein Tor auf zu einem nicht an den vorab konstituierten Deutungsschemata der Welt orientierten schöpferischen Grundgeschehen. (Müller-Richter, 240-1)

This lack of rules means that Brigge has no system to codify his experiences and observations. He has only fragments. However, fragments, according to Müller-Richter, have the advantage of providing a perspective different than that of a traditional aesthetic or epistemological system:

Die Kunst-Bilder beziehen demnach ihren Wahrheitsgehalt und ihre Geltungsgründe aus einem anderen Prinzip als aus dem Paradigma der Empirie, die Aristoteles zwar nicht in ihrer hyletischen Aktualität zum Vorbild der Kunst erhob, aber doch in ihrer universalen Wahrscheinlichkeit bzw. Möglichkeit als Orientierungspunkt der künstlerischen Tätigkeit verstanden wissen wollte. (241)

Like Hofmannsthal's Chandos, Rilke's Brigge operates outside the realm of Aristotelian aesthetics, giving credence to his own impressions and his disjointed flashes of inspiration over the traditional methods of poetry and aesthetics. Brigge's ambivalence toward language is evidenced by, on the one hand, the possibility that his experiences may imbue a dead language with meaning and eventually bear poetic fruits, and on the other hand, that the lifelong task of experiencing in this fragmented manner may never overcome the arbitrariness and emptiness of language. As Brigge laments: "Man sollte warten [um Verse zu schreiben] und Sinn und Süßigkeit sammeln ein ganzes Leben lang und ein langes womöglich, und dann, ganz zum Schluß, vielleicht könnte man dann zehn Zeilen schreiben, die gut sind" (Rilke, 20). Rilke attempts to bypass this possibly fruitless, endless task by writing visually, by internalizing and actualizing language. He writes of the efficacy of experiences and memories:

Erst wenn sie Blut werden in uns, Blick und Gebärde, namenlos und nicht

mehr zu unterscheiden von uns selbst, erst dann kann es geschehen, daß in einer sehr seltenen Stunde das erste Wort eines Verses aufsteht in ihrer Mitte und aus ihnen ausgeht. (21)

Inherent in Rilke's work is a "valorization of vision as superior to language" (Strathausen, 207). His use of sight, of the momentary visual image [*Augenblick*], over traditional aesthetic and philosophical discourse belies the fact that he trusted objects, whose physicality is palpable, more than words, which merely represent those objects. His goal then is to make those 'things' mutable and available in such a way that through language, the 'real' can be expressed. He attempts to affirm himself through language; as Strathausen points out, he begins a process of "self-alienation affected by writing [...:] [Brigge's] effort to reassure himself of his own existence in and through the process of writing is depicted as an utter failure" (207-8). Brigge is aware of this self-alienation: "Noch eine Weile kann ich das alles aufschreiben und sagen. Aber es wird ein Tag kommen, da meine Hand weit von mir sein wird, und wenn ich sie schreiben heißen werde, wird sie Worte schreiben, die ich nicht meine" (Rilke, 47). Immediately afterward he describes his fear of a linguistic collapse, when all meaning will be gone from language:

Die Zeit der anderen Auslegung wird anbrechen, und es wird kein Wort auf dem anderen bleiben, und jeder Sinn wird wie Wolken sich auflösen und wie Wasser niedergehen. Bei aller Furcht bin ich schließlich doch wie einer, der vor etwas Großem steht, und ich erinnere mich, daß es früher oft ähnlich in mir war, eh ich zu schreiben begann. Aber diesmal werde ich geschrieben werden. Ich bin der Eindruck, der sich verwandeln wird. [...]

Nur ein Schritt, und mein tiefes Elend würde Seligkeit sein. Aber ich kann diesen Schritt nicht tun, ich bin gefallen und kann mich nicht mehr aufheben, weil ich zerbrochen bin. (47-8)

Here, Brigge's sense of the power and danger of language comes into focus. He has the power to express events and impressions, but in doing so, he loses it. Because Brigge cannot give meaning to his words, he cannot write what he means, and thus cannot write. This sense of increasing alienation, even from his own body, leads him to think that it is he who will be written, thus trapping himself in a meaningless paradox of language and its practice, negating all meaning.

Brigge recognizes that language is flawed, and that in using it to try to express himself, he, too, is flawed. He writes, "ich [bin] zerbrochen" (48). He is broken by the fickle nature of language, by the realization that the words he uses do not hold a universal and steadfast meaning. In Brigge's understanding, the use of language causes meaning and signifier to grow increasingly apart, and though he tries to mitigate or delay this by using collage techniques and figurative, that is, non-descriptive, non-utilitarian, language, he recognizes that his struggle may be futile.

To shed light on Rilke's attitude toward language leading up to the writing of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, it may prove fruitful to examine his 1898 poem 'Ich fürchte mich so vor der Menschen Wort':

Ich fürchte mich so vor der Menschen Wort.

Sie sprechen alles so deutlich aus:

und dieses heißt Hund und jenes heißt Haus,

und hier ist Beginn, und das Ende ist dort.
Mich bangt auch ihr Sinn, ihr Spiel mit dem Spott,
sie wissen alles, was wird und war;
kein Berg ist ihnen mehr wunderbar;
ihr Garten und Gut grenzt grade an Gott.
Ich will immer warnen und wehren: Bleibt fern.
Die Dinge singen hör ich so gern.
Ihr rührt sie an: sie sind starr und stumm.
Ihr bringt mir alle die Dinge um. (Rilke, 1930; 353)

Here, in poetic form, Rilke elucidates the destructive power of language: to attach names to things is to destroy them. Language destroys the object, and it is the object with which Rilke desires to be in communion. As a result, he writes *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* in such a way that his narrator can attempt to circumvent the naming of things, can avoid using "Begriffe", by writing figuratively, in collage, giving the reader access to images and scenes through fragment, symbol, and juxtaposition, as opposed to telling, which--according to Rilke--destroys what it seeks to describe. To name a thing is to rob it of its meaning and power.

In the poem, Rilke plays with the sounds of words, the representations of ideas and things, to show how similar words make the ideas of 'Gut', 'Gott', 'Garten', 'grade', and 'grenzt', though their identities are not so. Were it left to Rilke, he would allow objects, ideas to speak for themselves, and not have human language interfere with and make banal the self-expression he wishes to experience. Brigge's goal, and his undoing as

a writer, is to facilitate this self-expression. He wants unmediated experiences [*Erlebnisse*], which thought by themselves they are not useful, he believes they are true, and that their collection [*Erfahrung*] can result in a philosophy not predicated on abstract language and cultural memory or history. He writes in a painterly fashion because he wants his reader to learn to 'see' what he is saying, just as the narrator himself 'learns to see'. However, this process alienates the writer from himself and from the world he knows, for even as he attempts to grasp the thing he writes, it is destroyed by his grasping:

Ich sage mir: es ist nichts geschehen, und doch habe ich jenen Mann nur begreifen können, weil auch in mir etwas vor sich geht, das anfängt, mich von allem zu entfernen und abzutrennen. [...] Wenn meine Furcht nicht so groß wäre, so würde ich mich damit trösten, daß es nicht unmöglich ist, alles anders zu sehen und doch zu leben. Aber ich fürchte mich, ich fürchte mich namenlos vor dieser Veränderung. Ich bin ja noch gar nicht in dieser Welt eingewöhnt gewesen, die mir gut scheint. [...] Ich würde so gerne unter den Bedeutungen bleiben, die mir lieb geworden sind, und wenn schon etwas sich verändern muß, so möchte ich doch wenigstens unter den Hunden leben dürfen, die eine verwandte Welt haben und dieselben Dinge. (Rilke, 47)

This fear of an irreversible change, one which will render the world unrecognizable, is an enormous burden for Brigge. He would prefer that he, rather than the world, be changed, so that the meaning of it, and the things in it, would stay the same. This fear illuminates the central tension that Rilke's and Hofmannsthal's narrators feel; namely, that language is

making the world they live in unrecognizable, and it is their task to find a way to rescue the things they value from the undifferentiated arbitrariness of utilitarian language.

The representational crisis that Hofmannsthal and Rilke attempted to solve through their narrators, Benjamin attempted to resolve in the very real realm of social criticism and politics. Benjamin refined the tools used to solve the crises of representation manifested in Hofmannsthal's and Rilke's writing as the Fascists took power in Germany. That Benjamin could develop and refine Hofmannsthal's and Rilke's methods is the most telling and pertinent link between the three, as it demonstrates the enduring power of language, as well as its continued existence as a paradoxical medium, one which may ultimately redeem and provide clarity for the user, or be his undoing.

Conclusion

Trusting the Mirror's Image: Possibility and Truth

Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke attempt to discover truth through the use of fragment, image, and experience [*Erfahrung*]. They do this by taking an active role in the development of their epistemological standpoint. They do not merely accept the world as it is presented to them, whether by society or politics, and instead deconstruct it and create from its remnants a world that they see as true. This process in turn creates a paradox with no solution. By actively dismantling an established order, and rebuilding it based on new and individual rules or criteria, they effectively isolate themselves from the rest of humanity, because they create an image of the world that is drastically different from the one they destroy, the one presumably shared by the society in which they live. In addition to being alienating, by structuring their epistemologies around their own set of principles, they add to their new image irresolvable doubt. Their version of the 'truth' can never be verified or corroborated. They have only the image they construct to stare into, and the image stares back, and gives no answers.

There is one bright spot that appears in each of their images, however; one fragment set in the restructured mirror that keeps the authors from spiraling into the linguistic abyss: Faith. Although in the selection of Benjamin's writings examined here, this sometimes takes the form of an actual religious sentiment, by in large the way the authors demonstrate their faith lies in their aesthetic tools. They believe in the power of their methods to generate change. It is only their belief that their methods may prove to be effective that keeps them writing. As the narrators Chandos and Brigge eloquently

demonstrate, even if the individual is forced into silence as a result of self-alienation and linguistic collapse, they still persist in hoping that the new, not-yet-understood language of objects, symbols, and metaphors with which they were confronted can yet be understood, even if not by them. Benjamin, too has this hope for his 'pure language', a hope based not merely in his desire to redeem and evolve language, but in a religious desire, a desire for salvation in which he believes humanity can take an active role, by rediscovering the divine language of naming, and thus bring back a state of paradisiacal truth and grace.

The three authors put their trust in their critical methods. They cannot or will not write outside of the parameters they have set for themselves, and as a result are able to form new aesthetics and epistemologies. That they cannot bring their chosen critical methods to bear on the new image of the world that they have created is the source of the doubt, ambivalence, and resignation that appears throughout the works discussed. The writer cannot turn the pen upon himself, nor the photographer or film-maker the lens. As Hofmannsthal and Rilke make use of visual techniques in their writing, so do they frame their work as one would frame a photograph: by composition and by necessity exclusion. Benjamin, in turn, fully aware of the techniques used in photography and film, chooses similar methods with which to shape his arguments, his images of possible worlds, and possible histories.

Possibility is what the re-made mirrors of these authors reflect. It is the key-hole through which the trapped writer can escape his social or political milieu, the single beam of light in the linguistic and intellectual night. The three, in their own way, foresaw Adorno's retraction of his famous maxim: "Nach Auschwitz noch ein Gedicht zu

schreiben, ist barbarisch" (Frühwald, 147). Language is a malleable entity. It needs only the smallest of openings, and like water, it will escape, react, reform. The possibility the authors intimate in their writing carried through even the horrors of the Second World War. People still wrote poetry. Language did not fail, nor was humanity consigned to silence.

The authors recognized the potential of language, not the ends it was being used for while they were writing, but ideal ends, possible ends. This idea of potential is reflected in Benjamin's concepts of translatability and reproducibility. But all of Benjamin's '-abilities' can be grouped under one heading: possibility. Likewise for Hofmannsthal and Rilke, who attempted to develop new aesthetics of language in the face of its devaluation and utilization by their societies. They saw the potential of language to be as visceral as unmediated sensory input, to directly and faithfully express meaning. For people under duress, as these writers were under social, political, and epistemological duress, possibilities represent hope. It was in hope that they wrote, in the hope that their attempts to discover truth and meaning may lead to the salvation of language, and through language, humanity.

The central paradox, the heart of their crises, is the fallibility of language. The imperfection of language is the center of a crisis that spans centuries and involves many literary movements. However, the upheaval that began at the beginning of the twentieth century and continued through the end of the Second World War put in stark relief the social causes of philosophical, aesthetic, and even epistemological crises. Though the history of the language crisis is a long one, the global events of the First and Second World Wars put representational crises in the starkest relief. The value of human life, and

by extension the value of language, was being continually challenged, redefined, and negotiated. The uncertainty prevalent at this time in particular sheds the most acute light on the tenuous grasp humanity has on language and its power, and the degrees to which language can be corrupted and misused. What is notable about these three authors is their ability to overcome their fear of the fragility, even uselessness, of language on the one hand, and of its power to deceive on the other. They then use language in attempts to strengthen it and make it a vehicle for truth.

This constant tension between perception and truth, between the strengths and weaknesses of language, is the vehicle for the evolution of the language crisis. Though not within the scope of this project, the extended evolution of the language crisis is a fascinating one, and one deserving of further exploration. What began in the works of Hofmannsthal and Rilke as the philosophical tools of fictional characters become legitimate critical tools in the works of Benjamin, and further evolve in post-war poetry and prose to become methodological doctrine in some movements.

Of utmost importance in the preceding analysis were the ways in which the authors attempted to articulate the essential paradox of using language to resolve representational crises through the use of visual techniques and an emphasis on experience. By articulating the crises of representation with which they were each faced, they were able to provide possible solutions to the crises of those that came after them, furthering the development of language and literature through an unbroken engagement with some of the intractable problems of language. What the authors were able to accomplish, unlike the narrators Chandos and Brigge, was a revitalization of language through close examination, inspired use, and a well-articulated philosophy to inform their

use of language. Because the authors documented their crises and their attempted solutions, it was possible for later authors to inform their own writing and philosophies with the results of Benjamin's, Hofmannsthal's, and Rilke's collective striving. The results of their struggles became bricks which could in turn be hurled at the facade of any seamless structure, any reflection of totality, and because of Benjamin, Hofmannsthal, and Rilke, those that came after them had the ability to remake their worlds anew.

Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor. Über Walther Benjamin. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970.
- Arendt, Hanna. Illuminations. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- Bacon, Francis. The Advancement of Learning. London: Cassell & Company, 1893.
- Benjamin, Walther. The Arcades Project. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.
- . Gesammelte Schriften. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972.
- . Das Passagen-Werk. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982.
- Benn, Gottfried. Prosa und Szenen. In Gesammelte Schriften. Ed. Dieter Wellershoff. 4 vols. Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1962.
- Böker, Uwe. "'A Raid on the Inarticulate': Hawthorne, Hopkins and Hofmannsthal." In Self-Reflexivity in Literature. Ed. Huber, Middake, Zapf. Frankfurt am Main: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005, pp. 75-85.
- Bredeck, Elizabeth. Metaphors of Knowledge: Language and Thought in Mauthner's Critique. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992.
- Briese-Neumann, Gisa. Ästhet-Dilletant-Narziss : Untersuchungen zur Reflexion der Fin de Siècle-Phänomene im Frühwerk Hofmannsthals. Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang, 1985.
- Bürger, Jan. Benns Doppelleben oder wie man sich selbst zusammensetzt. Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2006.
- Caro, Adrian del. Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Poets and the Language of Life. Baton

- Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1993.
- Caygill, Howard. Walther Benjamin: The Colour of Experience. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Demetz, Peter. Reflections. New York: Schocken Books, 1978.
- Drees, Hajo. "Repressed Childhoods: Rainer Maria Rilke's and Christa Wolf's Quest for a New Poetic Style in 'Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge' and 'Kindheitsmuster.'" Diss. The University of Nebraska, 1994.
- Ferguson, Mark Alan. "The Memory of Malte: Crisis of the Remembered Self in Rilke's 'Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge.'" Diss. The University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1993.
- Fischer, Markus. Augenblicke um 1900: Literatur, Philosophie, Psychoanalyse und Lebenswelt zur Zeit der Jahrhundertwende. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1986.
- Frühwald, Wolfgang. Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur. Tübingen: Max Niemayer Verlag, 2000.
- Gacs, Adam. "Zwischen Sprachekstase und Sprachkrise?: Utopische Sprachreflexionen bei Novalis und Hofmannsthal." Thesis. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2006.
- Göttsche, Dirk. Die Produktivität der Sprachkrise in der modernen Prosa. Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1987.
- Gray, Ronald. The German Tradition in Literature 1871-1945. London: Cambridge University Press, 1965.
- Guthrie, Neal Patrick. "Rainer Maria Rilke and 'Sprachsepsis': The Role of Metaphor in Saying the Unsayable." Diss. Georgetown University, 1997.

- Hamilton, Niel. "Spatial Form in Modern German Prose: The Tradition of Abstraction in Prose from Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 'Ein Brief.'" Diss. Rutgers, 1987.
- Hammond, Charles Henry, Jr. "Blind Alleys: Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Oscar Wilde and the Problem of Aestheticism." Diss. University of California, Irvine, 2006.
- Hanssen, Beatrice. Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory. Routledge: London, 2000.
- Hofmannsthal, Hugo von. Ausgewählte Werke in zwei Bänden. Ed. Rudolf Hirsch. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1961.
- . Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden. Ed. Bernd Schöller and Rudolf Hirsch. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979-80.
- Hofmannsthal, Hugo von, and Rudolph Kassner. Briefe und Dokumente. Samt ausgewählten Briefen Kassners an Gerty und Christiane von Hofmannsthal. Ed. Klaus E. Bohnenkamp. Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2005.
- Ives, Peter. Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin School and the Frankfurt School. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.
- Klieneberger, H.R. George, Rilke, Hofmannsthal and the Romantic Tradition. Stuttgart: H.-D. Heinz, 1991.
- Kovach, Thomas A. A Companion to the Works of Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002.
- . Hofmannsthal and Symbolism: Art and Life in the Work of a Modern Poet. New York: P. Lang, 1985.
- Lauster, Martina. Die Objektivität des Innenraums: Studien zur Lyrik Georges, Hofmannsthals und Rilkes. Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag H.-D. Heinz, 1982.

- Löwenstein, Sascha. Poetik und dichterisches Selbstverständnis: Eine Einführung in Rainer Maria Rilkes frühe Dichtungen (1884-1906). Frankfurt am Main: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004.
- Luther, Martin. Die Bibel mit Apokryphen. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1999.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. Divagations. Geneva: Skira, 1943.
- Mauthner, Felix. Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache. Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1923.
- McKay, Llewellyn Riggs. "The Problem of Death in the Viennese School as Represented by Schnitzler, Rilke, and Hofmannsthal." Diss. Stanford University, 1940.
- Militello, Joseph F. "The Post-Modern 'Laokoon': The Influence of Symbolist Synaesthesia on the Development of Modern Aesthetics, Poetics, and Thought." Diss. State University of New York at Buffalo, 1994.
- Müller-Richter, Klaus. "Kampf der Metapher!": Studien zum Widerstreit des eigentlichen und uneigentlichen Sprechens: Zur Reflexion des Metaphorischen im philosophischen und poetologischen Diskurs. Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996.
- Nienhaus, Stefan. Das Prosagedicht im Wien der Jahrhundertwende: Altenberg - Hoffmannsthal - Polgar. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1986.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge. New York: Fredrick Ungar Publishing Company, 1922.
- . Gesammelte Werke. Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1930.
- Roberts, Julian. Contemporary Social Theory: Walther Benjamin. Ed. Anthony Giddens. London: The MacMillan Press, 1982.

- Scholem, Gerschom. Walther Benjamin--die Geschichte einer Freundschaft. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975.
- Schonlau. "Das (Groß-)Hirn in der Krise: Zu Hofmannsthals 'Chandos-Brief' und Benns früher Prosa unter der Großhirnrinde." KulturPoetik 5.1 (2005): 51-64.
- Schmidt, Friedrich. Zur Deutungsproblematik bei Franz Kafka: Dargestellt in einer kritischen Analyse der Türhüterlegende. Frankfurt am Main: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007.
- Smith, Gary. Benjamin: Philosophy, History, Aesthetics. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Strathausen, Carsten. The Look of Things: Poetry and Vision around 1900. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Tiedemann, Rolf. "Historical Materialism or Political Messianism?" from Benjamin: Philosophy, History, Aesthetics. Ed. Gary Smith. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 175-209.
- Valéry, Paul. Pièces sur l'art. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.
- Wannamaker, Patricia Walker. "The Call of the Poet in Modern German Literature as Reflected in the Writings of Stefan George, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and Rainer Maria Rilke." Diss. The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1964. .
- Weber, Samuel . Benjamin's -abilities. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Weigel, Sigrid. Body- and Image-space: Rereading Walther Benjamin. London: Routledge, 1996.

Wiethölter, Waltraud. Hofmannsthal oder die Geometrie des Subjekts: Psychostrukturelle und ikonographische Studien zum Prosawerk. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1990.

Wolin, Richard. The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004.

---. The Terms of Cultural Criticism: The Frankfurt School, Existentialism, Poststructuralism. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

---. Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption. University of California Press, 1994.

Zenck, Martin. Kunst als Begriffslöse Erkenntnis. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1977.

Appendix

Abbreviations of Benjamin's Essays:

AÜ - Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers

KZR - Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit

PW - Das Passagen-Werk

ÜBG - Über den Begriff der Geschichte

ÜSSM - Über die Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen

ZKG - Zur Kritik der Gewalt

Vita

Noah Soltau was born in Chattanooga, TN on October 27, 1984, where he was raised and attended junior high school and high school at The Baylor School, graduating in 2003. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in German and Comparative Literature from the University of Georgia, Athens, GA in 2007. He then went to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville to pursue his Master's Degree, and after spending a year abroad at Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, in Tübingen, Germany, he received his Master of Arts degree in German in 2009.

Noah is currently a Spivey Fellow and pursuing his doctorate in Modern Foreign Languages at the University of Tennessee, in Knoxville, TN.