Realism after Modernism

The Rehumanization of Art and Literature

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4

A Necrologue of the Ego: Carl Einstein's Autobiography, *Bebuquin II*

Around 1925, the German author Carl Einstein began work on an autobiography that would remain unfinished at the time of his suicide in 1940. He called the project *Bebuquin II* after the earlier novella *Bebuquin oder die Dilettanten des Wunders* (*Bebuquin, or the Dilettantes of Miracle*), the acclaimed Expressionist novella whose serial publication beginning in 1907 had established his celebrity as a modernist writer. His choice of title for the autobiography seems to have been dually motivated. On the one hand, as personal correspondence about the project suggests, he was hoping to trade a bit on his previous publishing success in order to prepare the way for his great comeback to the literary scene from which he had first emerged. After all, since the publication of his *Negro Sculpture* in 1915, Einstein had focused almost exclusively on art criticism, and, now hoping to revive his reputation as a literary author, it didn't seem like such a bad idea to remind audiences of his earlier breakthrough work.

Yet there was also a second motivation behind Einstein's return to *Bebuquin* in the mid-1920s, one that had nothing to do with the pragmatics of marketing. This was the impulse to rewrite his earlier modernist monument. Like many of the texts and artworks produced during the 1920s and '30s, an interval of widespread and intense cultural retrospection, *Bebuquin II* presented its author with the opportunity to return to his roots, as it were, and revisit the legacy and

devices of experimental modernism, this time under different historical conditions. During the interwar period, the purpose of this return was not to reinstate modernist paradigms but to revoke them, we are told, in accordance with what has been called an "aesthetics of stabilization." In Einstein's case the repeal of modernism took the form of a project that reframed the original experimental text within an autobiography, a genre that, in privileging the denotative function of language, disciplines stylized writing and the excesses of metaphor with an emphatic and incontrovertible notion of extratextual reference. In autobiography, reality trumps fiction. This strategy of recontaining a modernist novella within the secure referential framework of a memoir would seem to situate *Bebuquin II* as a work of the New Objectivity, a movement whose literary branch found its quintessential idiom in documentary genres such as reportage and autobiography. Trading in the wrought reflexivity and semiotic interrogations of modernism's literary experiments for the solid ground of objective reality and authentic experience, this positivist impulse found its highest expression in what Leo Löwenthal called, with reference to New Objectivity biography, a "kind of fossilized anthropology" (*eine Art versteinerter Anthropologie*).[1]

By and large, scholars of Einstein have accepted the place of *Bebuquin II* in this narrative of stabilization. Some have suggested, for example, that the turn to reality in this text reflected the author's need for psychological grounding and continuity under the emotionally difficult conditions of exile in France, especially after 1933, when this exile from his homeland became permanent.[2] Regardless of its motivation, *Bebuquin II* indeed shares little of the linguistic exuberance of its predecessor *Bebuquin*. Instead, its tone is sober, detached, and phlegmatic. If before the writing was open and unresolved, the hermeneutic puzzles of *Bebuquin* are now gone. Turning against modernism's self-referentiality, which Einstein now disavows as speculative and solipsistic, *Bebuquin II* seeks a language that is commensurate with reality, a language of consequence, accountability and direct political action. Together with its theoretical complement, the great antimodernist tirade *The Fabrication of Fictions: ~~A Defense of the Real~~*, *Bebuquin II* prepared the way for Einstein's final verdict on belletrism, delivered in 1936:

after joining the anarchist militia of Buenaventura Durruti in Spain that year, he would never publish another work of literature.

To be sure, the characterization of *Bebuquin II* as a realist work in the vein of the New Objectivity is certainly accurate at the level of the individual sentence, where Einstein drastically limits the explosive syntax and lexical ambiguities of the earlier text. But, I would argue, the realist conventions of representation break down at the larger scale of textual dynamics. Taken severally, the smaller units of the text make perfect sense, but, when brought together, a certain hermeneutic alchemy takes place. While the reader's immediate experience is of a work that is lucid and sober, a subterranean current pushes simultaneously against the intelligibility of these individual scenes, a current that gains cumulative force across the 1,300 unpublished pieces of text that are today housed in Einstein's Berlin archive. The issue is not so much that these textual units—some chapters, some just scraps of paper—do not add up, but that they instead add up to *too much*. Often Einstein will repeat an episode from his life, for example, each time recasting it with a different constellation of actors and a correspondingly variable outcome, giving the narrative architecture of *Bebuquin II* an uncannily circular quality. This temporal ambiguity is further compounded by the narrator's tendency to shift back and forth from the here and now of a diary to the departed preterite of fiction. The breaks between these two tenses, in turn, are announced in the text by a grammatical shift from the first to the third person, a shift that sets up an external perspective and ballasts the autobiography with a sense of objective historical reality. And yet at moments the exteriority and neutrality of the third person also gives an impression of extreme mental dissociation, as though Einstein were watching himself from the outside. Throwing off the delicate balance between objective record and psychological interiority that is proper to the genre of the memoir, *Bebuquin II* transgresses a fixed law of autobiographical writing: the document of the ego can sustain only so much objectivity, so much exteriority, before the certitude of its reality lapses into its very opposite, complete psychic derealization. At these moments, *Bebuquin II* sinks into a blurry paramnesia that undermines the reader's confidence in the existence of a hard and fast truth outside the text. Apparently this close feedback

loop between *Bebuquin II* and its author's life began to undermine Einstein's ability to distinguish the two as well, for at one point he even began to sign his personal correspondence with the letter *B*, in reference to his protagonist.

Thus, although the individual episodes in *Bebuquin II* might give the impression of a straightforward and realist work, the view looks quite different on the metatextual register, where we find an autobiography that radicalizes certain precepts of the avant-garde rather than abrogating them. For one thing, the trajectory of *Bebuquin II* does not follow a path of *Bildung*, of self-fashioning through narrative development. Quite the opposite. Here the act of recollection instead serves to scatter the pieces of selfhood in a textual *auto-da-fé*. Announcing a "revolt against the ego," Einstein declared in his notes for the project that "I must disappear."[3] His self-described "necrologue of the ego" (Einstein Archive, 17) would take the form of a mnemonic obliteration, since the ego, he observed, was fundamentally "retrospective, an exhibition of memories" (*Werke*, 3:118) that defines and stabilizes itself through continuities with the past. A sclerosis of memory that blocks direct access to the world, the ego holds the individual psyche in the thrall of its past, foreclosing the possibility of new experiences in the present and of potential change in the future. Thus it was by razing the prison of the ego, a psychic structure that had become overbuilt during the age of bourgeois individualism, that Einstein hoped to clear the way for a more direct, less mnemonically congested encounter with the world. Destroying the ego was the first and most important step toward restoring the dynamic epistemological metabolism between subject and world.

But here an aporia within the operational logic of *Bebuquin II* immediately becomes apparent: if Einstein sought a technique to eradicate the self, why, of all instruments for this campaign, would he choose the genre of autobiography, which for centuries has served as the storehouse of memory and cultural sanctum sanctorum of selfhood? If the task was to shed the strictures of ego, surely it made more sense to flee the textual locus of individuality rather than to embrace it. Indeed, how could a project of self-prospecting ever be brought to work against the conditions of selfhood that it presumes as its very point of departure? Einstein's distinctly dialectical answer to this question is to force

the autobiographical "hypertrophy of personhood" (Einstein Archive, 14) to its uttermost limit, where it lapses into its opposite, a "necrologue of the ego." In his hands, the memoir became a means to disperse the components of subjectivity rather than suture them together, an anamnesis that erased of the psychological core of selfhood through a superabundance of memory. He characterized this paradoxical convergence of recollection and forgetting in his autobiography as an "egoistic forgetting of the self" (Einstein Archive, 19).

The following chapter argues that the curious mnemonic economy revealed in Einstein's *Bebuquin II* also has far-reaching consequences for the issues of representation that are central to this book. Touching upon a number of compositional strategies that are characteristic of interwar art and literature, his project to dismantle the faculty of memory merges with a general critique of mimetic realism. This was the case, Einstein explained, because realism requires the well-ordered retrieval of mnemonic images in order to function: spanned in a delicate field of tension between oblivion and memory, mimetic representation is perturbed if the balance shifts too far towards either of these terms. The conventions of realist art, he thus reasoned, were vulnerable to disturbance from two directions, through the destruction and erasure of memory, but also through its excess and superabundance. As we will see, *Bebuquin II* opts for the latter strategy. Borrowing from the conventions and motifs of the traditional realist text, Einstein repeats these figures again and again until they begin to turn against the text's sense of veracity and to impugn the realist system itself. It was through the surplus of memory in *Bebuquin II*, through an "egoistic forgetting of the self," in other words, that Einstein intended to strike a blow against the foundations of resemblance and verisimilitude.

A Burial in Leaves

Einstein's critical writings on French cubism provide us with an initial sketch of the mechanism through which memory and representational realism collude. In an essay published in the journal *Documents* on analytic cubism (the phase of cubist production between 1909 and 1914), he argued that cubism's greatest

innovation was not its shattering of the viewer's unified and coherent optic or the blow that this visual fragmentation leveled against the integrity of the spectatorial subject. These spatial effects were secondary to cubism's primary vocation, which was to subvert mimetic resemblance through a destruction of memory. Following the neo-associationist school of psychology prevalent in his day, Einstein explained in this essay that the legibility of an illusionistic painting hinges on the spectator's capacity to draw upon a mental stock of previous representations that can serve as a basis for comparison. "Descriptive art," as he called mimetic realism, works by cross-referencing the external phenomenon being perceived with an internal "deposit of a memory" (*Werke*, 4:163). As Sebastian Zeidler explains, for Einstein vision was "a process during which new stimuli are constantly compared to old ones stored in memory, such that their location and extension in space will be identified through an act of syllogistic generalization based on past experiences. This is a model of vision that assumes that a subject's experience of an object is temporally linear, epistemologically cumulative, and deeply backward-oriented, for the subject will always seek to interpret the new as but a variation of the old."[4] According to Einstein, the spectator does not perceive the realist artwork in its empirical particularity, but, turning inward, instead recalls a different object from her past, filtering out mentally the moments where the artwork before her diverges from this memory image. But the line between mental constancy and solipsistic tautology is a fine one. As Einstein explained, the realist system of representation tends toward a closed circle of autoreference in which its image-signs summon the identical memories over and over again. Comparing a realist painting with other memory "deposits" demands a shift from sensation to recollection, the final result of which is a closed loop of "slavish tautology" (*sklavische Tautologie*) that eternally conjures the mental forms from the storehouse of memory.

By severing this relay between optical perception and memory, the analytic cubists subverted mimetic realism's law of identity: "It was the cubists who interrogated the object that was forever identical with itself; which is to say: they interrogated memory, where concepts are brought into order one after the other. Their greatest achievement was to destroy memory's prefabricated

images. . . . The mnemonic legacy of objects had to be destroyed, which is to say, forgotten; thus the image no longer served the fiction of a different reality, but became itself a reality with its own conditions" (*Werke*, 3:33). The program of analytic cubism annihilated resemblance through a campaign of practiced oblivion, Einstein notes here. One symptom of this forgetting, he adds, is the negation of pictorial depth, a perceptual shift toward the surface of the canvas and the material facture of the painting. "The precondition of cubist painting is the surface. One no longer works between two imaginary layers that supersede the canvas. The compass of the picture is achieved through its unverifiability and through the fact that the spectator does not leave the reality of the picture" (*Werke*, 3:34). As an illustration of Einstein's claim, consider one of Braque's analytic cubist works from 1910, which oscillates between the visual sign of a torso and the continuous plane of the canvas itself (fig. 4.1): as this painting shifts from semiotic absence to phenomenological presence, the aesthetic encounter is transformed from a retrospective act of imagining to an immediate event of perception. Here, Einstein notes admiringly, "painting no longer means mnemotechnics" (*Werke*, 3:263).

With its shift from illusionistic depth to painterly surface, Einstein's account of analytic cubism dovetails nicely with now-familiar scholarly narratives that define modernism as an aesthetic tendency that foregrounded the material presence of the artwork over the content it depicts. Realism, as we know from Jakobson, privileges semiotic transparency (the referential function), while modernism privileges the material facture of the sign (the poetic function). But this scheme grows more complicated when, five years after his *Documents* essay on analytic cubism, Einstein turned in a study of Braque's recent work to the subject of late-synthetic cubism. In this text from 1934, he again conceived of the cubist enterprise as a campaign against the mnemotechnics of "descriptive" realism, although now the terms and strategies have been significantly revised, even reversed. Unlike the paintings made during cubism's first phase, which tortuously attenuated the resemblance between the image and its referent, the postanalytic works no longer seek to challenge figuration and resemblance so directly, but instead invoke the tradition of figuration in order

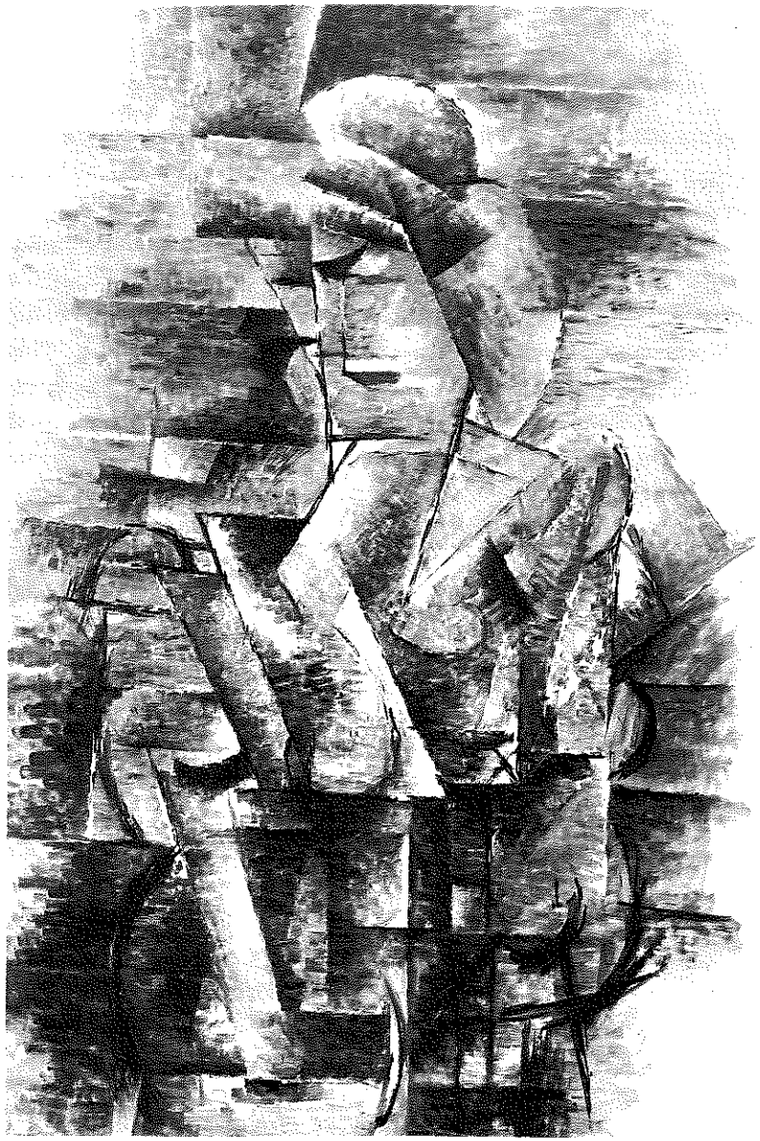

Figure 4.1 Georges Braque, *Torso* (1910). © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

to imbue it with an enigmatic and hallucinatory depth. In *Themis and Hera* from 1934 (fig. 4.2), for example, figural contour has returned to Braque's work, although the forms in these images are hardly the integral gestalts familiar from traditional realist works. These "metamorphotic" figures, as Einstein called them, swell forth and interpenetrate one another. As Braque extends the line used to contour one body into the interior of its adjacent, he draws letters too into the arabesques, compromising the boundaries of each figure and exploding its profile into the surrounding textual space. The strategy of this "mythical realism" (*Werke*, 3:301), as Einstein called it, is to invoke the means of illusionistic representation but then outstrip it by retracing again and again the outlines of the individual forms, completely transforming the figural group with each additional loop of a single continuous gesture. Gazing into this unbroken web of lineation, it becomes impossible for the spectator to distinguish individual objects, or even to make the most basic perceptual differentiation between figures that are contained within the field of vision and the ground of vision itself.

It is extremely significant that Braque's method in *Themis and Hera*, as elsewhere in the late work, is one that is fundamentally additive. His choice here of the medium of etching reflects this tenet, since the technique of etching is notoriously unforgiving of mistakes: while drawings can be erased and canvases can be overpainted, it is far more difficult to expunge a line from an etching. Here Braque seeks a method that is more indelible, more irreversible than drawing or painting. Yet the lines of the etching do in fact remain open to revision and transformation, albeit only through the addition of still more lines. For Braque, this specific technical exigency of the medium expresses a general poetological principle that is fundamental to post-analytic cubism, a project that Einstein described as the "augmentation [*Vermehrung*], accretion of form [*Gestaltzuwachs*] and the enchantment of the real" (*Werke*, 3:324). In these works, Braque only adds. Subtraction is proscribed. Like a Freudian *Wunderblock*, the resulting "double style," as Einstein called it, presents several conflicting, mutually exclusive pictorial realities simultaneously. In this regard, the strategy of these works is completely different from that of analytic cubism. If, before, analytic cubism had demotivated the mimetic code of realist painting by

Figure 4.2 Georges Braque, *Themis and Hera* (1934). © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

faceting the motif, pressing its image-signs toward the condition of opacity and flatness where they would converge with the plane of the canvas, the synthetic and postsynthetic work no longer tries to neutralize the signifying capacity of the image, but instead multiplies, recasts (*umdichten*), and metamorphoses the symbol (*Werke*, 3:324). These multivalent etchings do not negate the referential function of the sign outright, as was the case with the earlier works of Braque, but instead trigger, through a surplus of reference, a virtually endless string of visual analogies and forms that loop continuously back on themselves. Analytic demotivation is succeeded by synthetic overmotivation.

As Einstein's two essays suggest, each generation of cubist work challenged the conventions of mimetic realism, but they did so through opposed strategies. Analytic cubism is a subtractive art based on strategies of calculated impoverishment, whereas its late-synthetic variant is a hallucinatory art of supplementation and excess. Working centrifugally, analytic cubism dissects the object with formal rigor, splaying and unfurling its multiple facets across the canvas systematically (hence the conventional designation of "analytic" cubism). Synthetic cubism, by contrast, operates centripetally, crowding things together, piling object upon object seemingly without concern for their commensurability. Importantly, this shift from the negation of pictorial illusionism to the lysergic surplus of imagery also reflected a reversal in cubism's mechanism for subverting the collusion between memory and mimetic realism. Unlike analytic cubism, which "destroys" the visual memory-trace, as Einstein put it, synthetic and postsynthetic cubism supercharge this memory-trace through strategies of "augmentation" and "accretion of form." The eradication of the mnemonic image yields to its endless reinscription.

We have examined the reorientation of cubist strategies at some length because it provides us with a map of Einstein's own development as a writer. Indeed, the transition from an analytic to a synthetic method can be observed also in Einstein's literary work, exemplified in the shift from the modernist *Bebuquin* to the realist *Bebuquin II*. Certainly the historical overlap between the two phases of cubist painting and Einstein's *Bebuquin* projects proposes suggestive parallels: just as *Bebuquin*, which he began to write in 1906, reflected the analytic variety of cubism that was its contemporary, *Bebuquin II*, which Einstein

began composing in the mid-1920s, likewise followed the artistic principles of late-synthetic cubism found in Braque's recent work. It is important to note, however, that the developmental parallels between painting and literature are based not upon any claim of morphological resemblance, which, of course, would always fall back on a dubious set of metaphors to connect the two arts. According to Einstein, the correspondence instead resides at deeper structural levels of enunciation. Thus, in his famous 1923 letter to the art dealer Daniel Henry Kahnweiler written shortly before he began work on *Bebuquin II*, Einstein insisted that cubism was a comprehensive cultural phenomenon whose ambit and repercussions could not be limited to the visual arts, since its general critique of mimesis embraced, on an epistemic register, all varieties of symbolic production, including literature.[5]

Like analytic cubism, *Bebuquin* directs the reader to the lateral play of signs on the surface of the language, where, for example, phonetic rhyme schemes dictate the sequence of words. By thus cancelling out the semantic dimension of the word, this technique undermines the mnemonic depth of representation: it destroys the mental image of the signified and, recovering language as pure acoustic value, induces in the subject the same condition of perceptual presence that analytic cubism sought to achieve in its practice of painting as a pure optical value. *Bebuquin II* strives for a similar state of psychological oblivion, although, like Braque's work from the 1920s, it arrives at that state through strategies of representational excess. Layering mnemonic image upon mnemonic image, *Bebuquin II* creates passages of resemblance between these strata that undermine the contours that separate one figure from another. In this respect, *Bebuquin II*'s "desperate attempt to get rid of hoary memory" (Einstein Archive, 8) continues the amnestic project of analytic cubism, but the strategy has changed: forgetting would now be realized not through the eradication of memory and its stock of mental imagery, but through a metastatic augmentation and endless accretion of the figures found in the depths of the mind.

Here *Bebuquin II* follows a mnemonic law fundamental to all signifying processes: the indelibility of the memory-trace. In an essay on the "art of forgetting," the semiotician and philosopher Umberto Eco explained that memories,

once inscribed, cannot be expunged: "every expression determined by a semiotic sign function sets into play a mental response as soon as it is produced, thus making it impossible to use an expression to make its own content disappear. If the arts of memory are semiotics, it is not possible to construct an art of forgetting on their model."[6] Because signs will always inevitably evoke other signs, Eco notes, they cannot also be used to make signs disappear. To the contrary, as we saw in the previous chapter's discussion of paralipsis, the sign that is actively negated, like the phrase that is rhetorically disavowed, is only further reinscribed and affirmed through this very act of erasure. The expression "there is *no* rose," Abelard observed, will never fail to bring to mind a rose.[7] (Or, to cite an example from Einstein's own body of work: ~~*A Defense of the Real*~~ is still *A Defense of the Real*.) Irrespective of whether it is used affirmatively or negatively, then, the sign still continues to posit the existence of its referent, prompting Eco to conclude that there is no active method to forget the memory-trace that connects a signifier to a corresponding concept. Built out of mnemonic deposits that are by nature ineradicable, the human mind, to recall Freud's well-known analogy, is like the Eternal City in which all architectural constructions, no matter when they were built, persist in an impossible condition of simultaneity and spatial coextension.[8]

Despite the fundamental indelibility of the mnemonic inscription, Eco points out that the structures of memory can nonetheless be undermined by our overtaxing them. If the memory-trace connecting signifier and concept cannot be broken, it can still be détourned, blurred, and demented. It becomes possible, Eco writes, "to forget on account not of defect but of excess, just as, though it is not possible to destroy the meaning of an assertion pronounced aloud, it is possible to pronounce another assertion in the same moment, so that the two assertions are superimposed. There are no voluntary devices for forgetting, but there are devices for remembering badly: it is necessary to multiply the semiosis." Thus, he concludes, "one forgets not by cancellation but by superimposition, not by producing absence but by multiplying presences."[9] The mnemonic economy that Eco describes here is, to be sure, quite unlike Augustine's influential model of the human mind as a vast storehouse full of discrete parcel-like memories that

can be referenced and accessed at any time: in contrast to Augustine's notion of memory as a "huge cavern" of empty space, memory is instead understood here like Freud's palimpsestic Eternal City, a compressed jumble in which every new trace is written on top of other preexisting mnemonic deposits.[10] Within the overinscribed space of the human mind, forgetting is achieved not by emptying out the cavern, but by cramming it with still more material.

This is how Einstein's autobiography tries to forget: through an incessant practice of recollection. With every iteration of a memory image, the previous trace is overwritten, inscribed each time into new associative fields that redirect the chain of reference along different lines. The consequences of this cumulative process for the system of mimetic realism are perhaps even more dire than was aesthetic modernism's phenomenological turn toward the materiality of the signifier. By "multiplying presences," to use Eco's phrase, *Bebuquin II* heaps sign upon sign until, collapsing on itself, the entire signifying order undergoes a process of desemanticization. Einstein characterized this strategy as "a remembering of the self taken to the point of annihilation" (Einstein Archive, 14).

The tactics of repetition and reinscription are visible throughout *Bebuquin II*, although most obviously in the system of dramatis personae, where Einstein puts into motion a rolling play of resemblance that blurs the boundaries between the individual figures. At times the protagonist of *Bebuquin II* is a character in the third person—named Beb or Laurenz—while at other moments Einstein constructs the narrative from a first-person perspective. These roles are continuously being recast in the text. In some of the working notes for *Bebuquin II*, for example, Einstein suggested that the birth of Laurenz should be realized "perhaps through the metamorphosis of someone else" (Einstein Archive, 8). This also explains the frequent references to reincarnation throughout his project notes, since the individual characters have no discrete points of origin and no personal fates, but instead beget one another through a series of shifts within the story. The ongoing process of recoding resembles the strategy that Einstein described, with reference to Braque, as an "accretion of form" in which "[e]very new deposit entails the forgetting and displacement of the preceding inventories of consciousness" (*Werke*, 3:283). With each additional

accretion, with each reinscription of attributes, the contours containing the individual character grow less and less distinct and the figure begins to dissolve.

Just as Laurenz comes into existence "through the metamorphosis of someone else," *Bebuquin II* emerges through the metamorphosis of *Bebuquin*. This metamorphosis presents substantial challenges for the archivists and scholars of Einstein who, despite their impressive textological exertions, still haven't succeeded in convincingly outlining the boundaries of this autobiographical project, which was not a creation ex nihilo, but a return to a literary text from 1906, a text that *Bebuquin II* at once built upon and revoked. And if it is impossible to say when exactly Einstein began to write *Bebuquin II* (1925? 1906?), it is equally impossible to say if he ever would have finished it. Indeed, the textual prototype for these 1,300 discrete segments of writing would seem to be not the bound book—with a beginning, middle, and end—but the card catalog or the archival file, two strategies for organizing knowledge that permanently defer systematic conclusiveness. Writing about the note cards used by Michel Leiris, with whom Einstein edited the journal *Documents*, Denis Hollier observes, for example, that a "filing system is infinitely expandable, rhizomatic (at any point in time or space one can always insert a new card); in contradistinction to the sequential irreversibility of the pages of the notebook and of the book, its interior mobility allows for permanent reordering."[11] As Einstein explained in a letter written in 1923, shortly before he began to transform *Bebuquin* into *Bebuquin II*, his own words seemed to him perforce unfinishable, forever open to revision: "Everywhere in my writing I sense the fragment; I could continue revising every sentence that I write for my entire life."[12] And indeed, revisions to this ongoing project would continue until 1940, even then broken off only by its author's death.

Einstein's project to revisit and overwrite his earlier modernist work reflected a poetological impulse that was ubiquitous in the literature and art of the 1930s. As with Einstein, in many cases these authors reclaimed their previous experimental texts in order to embed them a second time within an autobiographical framework. Einstein's friend Gottfried Benn rewrote his legendary *Rönne-Novellen* (1916) as a memoir, *Lebensweg eines Intellektualisten* (*The*

Life's Journey of an Intellectualist, 1934), just as Walter Benjamin repeated many of the avant-garde *Denkbilder* from his *Einbahnstraße* (*One-Way Street*, 1926) in the autobiographical text *Berliner Kindheit um 1900* (*Berlin Childhood around 1900*, 1938).[13] Contemporaneous examples of this type of auto-anthologization can also be found in the visual arts, where Kasimir Malevich recapitulated in the early 1930s the entire artistic development of painterly modernism from Impressionism to cubo-futurism and suprematism at a furious pace, in some cases not just painting in the manner of these earlier styles but actually recreating specific works of his a second time; similarly, slightly later in the decade, Marcel Duchamp assembled a collection of miniature reproductions of his "classic" avant-garde works in a portable museum that he entitled, with reference to the gesture of double containment, the *Boîte-en-valise*.

Within a cultural atmosphere inclined to historical retrospection and aesthetic strategies of paradigm repetition, Einstein undertook a project of autobiographical anamnesis, although the goal of this endeavor was not to reconstruct the past, but to overload the circuitry of memory. If the interwar "return to order" is typically associated with a desire for regulation and submission to the psychic authorities, the repetitions that we find in *Bebuquin II* complicate this model of return-as-containment, suggesting to us that, to the contrary, procedures of repetition, when pushed to utter excess, actually enable an experience of radical novelty. As Einstein explained, the mature ego is propped up by a manageable and orderly mnemonic stock, a "little pension" of selfhood that provides mental continuity through a process of "psychic capitalization" (*Werke*, 3:97) but that also threatens to imprison the subject in a solipsistic loop of "slavish tautology." To escape from the curse of the ever-same and to restore the possibility of novelty and nonidentity, Einstein sought recourse in a state of consciousness unencumbered by this mnemonic pension. "Everything that is new," he wrote, "requires an extinguishing of memory, i.e. of consciousness and of the ego" (*Werke*, 3:305). Like contemporaries ranging from Shklovskii to Benjamin, Einstein elevated the figure of the child as a paradigm of precategorical consciousness, of a phenomenologically pure subject free from the burdens of habit and ingrained mental schemata. Because they haven't yet been disciplined

by the symbolic systems that limit the perceptual world of the adult, children, he averred, are "completely inclined towards anti-naturalism" (*Werke*, 3:292) and therefore immune to representation's fraudulent reality effects.

And so where the typical autobiographical "ego-document" recollects the inchoate experiences of childhood so as to incorporate them into a stable adult narrative of selfhood, *Bebuquin II*, by contrast, revisits these earlier moments in order to commune with their precategorical chaos. Not all returns are returns to order. Einstein characterized the autobiographical exercise as a kind of *Infantiltraining*, a "training in infantilism" (Einstein Archive, 7) that reinstates the mode of consciousness that reigned before the child was subjected to the schematics of grammar, before the normativizing enterprise of education, before the purity of perception was subjugated to the conventions of representation—before, in short, "idiotization through intelligence" (Einstein Archive, 7). Thus it was through mnemonic overinscription that Einstein intended "to reconstitute childhood and to make its origins tangible through regressions" (Einstein Archive, 31). Repetition of the episodes of his autobiography became an instrument for Einstein to "stupefy [himself] back" (*zurückblöden*; Einstein Archive, 29) to a "wordless zone" of "primary experiences beyond language" (Einstein Archive, 7). Einstein's paradoxical model of a psychic economy in which more is less and advanced mnemonic accumulation results in the condition of speechlessness mirrors, moreover, a conclusion reached by Freud in his work on aphasia, namely that, those afflicted by this condition "suffer mainly from reminiscences."[14] They are expelled from the systems of language, from orders of symbolic representation, not because of forgetfulness, as one would assume, but because of a pathological surfeit of recollection that results in the sufferer's inability to erase her stock of memories. It is a psychic model that accounts simultaneously both "for the permanence of the trace and for the virginity of the receiving substance."[15] In the boundless recall of Einstein's anamnesis, the postsymbolic speechlessness of the overcongested adult mind becomes likewise indistinguishable from the presymbolic speechlessness of the child. From this perspective, the forgetting of language found in the aphasic is just the premature and aggravated onset of a natural aspect of senescence. In *Bebuquin II*

the two poles of dotage and youth converge in the *Kindgreis* (Einstein Archive, 14), the oxymoronic figure of the "child-elder" that folds together the tabula rasa of youth and the mnemonic clutter of the aged mind.

The curious structure of *Bebuquin II*, in which self-inscription coincides with self-erasure, reminds us that the faculty that we call memory has a Janus-face. Indeed, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel insisted that there are two fundamentally different modalities of this retrospective consciousness, a difference that he parses using the terms *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung*, memory and recollection. On the one hand is *Erinnerung*, the dense and organic cache of mental experiences from which the subject crafts his psychological identity; in his gloss of Hegel's lectures, Paul de Man described this mode of symbolic internalization as an "inner gathering and preserving of experience."[16] On the other hand, memory (*Gedächtnis*) is a quasi-mechanical function that operates through "notation," "inscription," and "writing down," de Man proposed. If *Erinnerung* internalizes experience, *Gedächtnis* reverses this directionality, projecting and objectivizing the contents of the mind onto the external world. And far from enhancing our capacity to recall, the mnemonic aides and technics of inscription that serve *Gedächtnis* in fact inhibit the mental life of the subject, in Hegel's view, for they outsource recollection and thereby deaden the imagination, the faculty that governs the mental ordering of symbolic thought. Thus, according to Hegel, an excess of memory, of *Gedächtnis*, results not in total recall, but in its opposite, total forgetting. This deconstructive logic is encapsulated by de Man using a formula that is virtually identical to Einstein's own characterization of *Bebuquin II* as a "remembering of the self taken to the point of annihilation": "memory," de Man wrote, "effaces remembrance (or recollection) just as the I effaces itself." Thus, "in order to have memory, one has to be able to forget remembrance and reach the machinelike exteriority, the outward turn, which is retained in the German word for learning by heart, *aus-wendig* lernen."[17]

For this reason, the best way to forget something is to write something down and memorize it. Einstein designated this process as a *Veräußerung der Schrift* (Einstein Archive, 7), a phrase that captures at once both the physical act of inscribing

and giving material form to a memory (an "*exteriorization* through writing") as well as the experience of psychic estrangement that results from an act of exteriorization that gives memory a life independent of its author (an "*alienation* through writing"). For Einstein, the autobiographical enterprise entailed a double gesture of commemoration and annihilation,[18] with each of the 1,300 sheets of paper that accompanied him during his wanderings in exile blotting out another moment of his own biography. Thus it is that consigning memory to writing does not impede forgetting, but enables it, even actively undermines the fitness of organic recollection and hastens the author's progress toward a state of mental oblivion. This rule, in fact, was corroborated by the early comparative anthropological researches that informed Einstein's writings on non-Western art and culture. As Lucien Lévy-Bruhl pointed out in his study *How Natives Think* (*Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, 1910), a book of immense importance to Einstein, members of societies that do not rely on written language for the transmission of cultural knowledge have much more powerful faculties of memory than those who have writing at their disposal.[19]

Einstein characterized his autobiographical "training in infantilism" as a "search for a lost childhood between leaves and a forgetting of what has been learned" ("die suche nach der verlorenen kindheit zwischen blaettern und vergessen des erlernten"; Einstein Archive, 7). There is a telling ambiguity in these words. On the one hand, the "leaves" in this phrase, the *blaetter*, would seem to refer specifically to the pivotal episode in *Bebuquin II* that Einstein called the *blaetterbegraebnis*, or the "burial in leaves." In this scene of primitive sacrifice, which was inspired by the accounts of anthropologists such as Lévy-Bruhl, the children in the story gather together in the forest to smother the child prince beneath a mountain of decaying organic matter. But, beyond this reference to a particular episode within the narrative, the phrase *blaetterbegraebnis* also contains a metapoetic reflection on the project of the autobiographer, for in German, the *blaetter* are of course also leaves of paper. Einstein's *blaetterbegraebnis* thus refers not just to the sacrifice of the child prince, but also to the suffocation and burial of the author's ego under 1,300 pages of dead biographical matter. The phrase

"die suche nach der verlorenen kindheit zwischen blaettern und vergessen des erlernten" thus assumes a second aspect: translating the word *blaettern* in this phrase as a verb rather than a noun—entirely permissible, since here, as in almost all of the typewritten segments of *Bebuquin II*, Einstein avoids using capital letters—the project becomes a search for a lost childhood that is conducted by leafing through sheets of paper and, in this act of leafing, forgetting all that he has learned.

Einstein's characterization of *Bebuquin II* as a "search for lost childhood" is also an unambiguous nod to Marcel Proust's monumental anamnesis *In Search of Lost Time*, a book that exhibits a similarly perilous proximity between memory and forgetting. In a 1929 review of the novel, Benjamin struggled to come to terms with the puzzling structure of Proustian *mémoire involuntaire*, a mental process that is unconscious and thus, it would seem, highly subjective, and yet also exhibits profoundly machinelike qualities. Memory belongs to an apparatus of language that is both psychologically alien and physically exterior to the thinking subject. "The important thing to the remembering author," Benjamin wrote in his review, "is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection. Or should one call it, rather, a Penelope work of forgetting? Is not involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involuntaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory? And is not this work of spontaneous recollection, in which memory is the woof and forgetting the warp [*in dem Erinnerung der Einschlag und Vergessen der Zettel ist*], a counterpart to Penelope's work rather than its likeness?" (*Schriften*, 2:311; *Writings*, 2:238). The curious image proposed by the final sentence of this quote can be translated two ways. By referencing the *Einschlag* ("woof") of recollection and the *Zettel* ("warp") of forgetting, Benjamin invokes the conceit of the "fabric" of remembrance, a metaphor consonant with the image of Penelope at work at the loom. Remove the thematic connotations of weaving, however, and the words present a different picture, one closely aligned with Hegel's analysis of recollection (*Er-innerung*) as an inner psychic process and memory (*Gedächtnis*) as a written, external record that facilitates forgetting: in *mémoire involuntaire* the organic act of *Erinnerung*, which produces an

Einschlag (an impact, an internalized trace), is interlaced with *Zettel* (a slip of paper, an external memory-trace) and thus, for Benjamin, comes precariously close to the process of forgetting (*Vergessen*).

The Dead Zone of Modernism

Earlier we observed that Einstein's account of the transition from analytic to synthetic compositional practices, which he described critically in his writings on cubism and realized textually in his autobiography, can be mapped onto the relationship of modernism to interwar realism more generally. These widespread structural transformations in the aesthetic field were the subject of his devastating theoretical broadside against modernism, *The Fabrication of Fictions*. Written at the same time as *Bebuquin II*, this text despairs of the political failure of the modernist project, whose great error, Einstein observed, was to have placed too much faith in the faculty of the imagination and its cultural agent, fiction, as resources for transforming reality. If once the imagination had provided a noninstrumentalized space of fantasy and subjective freedom that was distant from the pressures of the present and, for this reason, could function as a preserve of potentially revolutionary impulses that were unrealizable in everyday life, this faculty had, under the modernist regime of *l'art pour l'art*, distended inordinately to the point of severing all connection to reality. The imagination, Einstein explained, had become like a "bacillus" that breeds in the hiatus between the subject and the external world, its symbols and metaphors reproducing uncontrollably until they eclipse all external referents (Einstein Archive, 9). Under these conditions, which elevated fictionality as an autotelic value, the sign ceases to function as a mediator of experience. Under the aesthetic rule of modernism, Einstein wrote, the "poems and pictures of the imagination are stored in a dead zone; they exist only as long as one renounces reality."[20] With the establishment of this dead zone, "there is in fact no correspondence between the impressions that enter consciousness and the sequence of hallucinated signs" (*Werke*, 3:21). To be sure, Einstein came to write with such insight and passion about the failure of modernism's poetics of the imagination because it was a failure that he recognized in his own vita, where the romance with fictionality had trapped its

author in a simulacral existence, cut off from the world and lacking a collective language. Looking back from the 1930s, Einstein lamented the fact that he had "lived in metaphors and never had contact with primary existence" (Einstein Archive, 38).

The collusion that Einstein discerned between the imagination and the practices of aesthetic modernism appears in the texts of his contemporaries as well, most notably the phenomenological analyses of the imagination that Jean-Paul Sartre published in the late 1930s. Central to Sartre's theory of the imagination was the notion that this faculty is invariably a negative one. Against the models of consciousness proposed by Descartes, Hume, and Leibniz, who asserted the identical nature of image and sensation, Sartre argued in *The Imagination* (1936) and *The Imaginary* (1940) that mental images do not correspond causally to any sensory content and, indeed, can be formed only by severing the connection with the outside world. For this reason, the imagination is structurally incompatible with, and even opposed to, the phenomenological act of perception.[21] Sartre illustrated this "privative, negative character of the image"[22] by analyzing the act of imagining his friend Pierre: "My image of him is a certain manner of *not* touching him, *not* seeing him, a way he has of *not being* at such [and such] a distance, in such [and such] a position. The belief, in the image, posits the intuition, but does not posit Pierre. The characteristic of Pierre is not to be non-intuitive, as one might be tempted to believe, but to be 'intuitive-absent,' [which is to say] given as absent to intuition. In this sense one can say that the image has wrapped within it a certain nothingness" (*Imaginary*, 14). For this reason, Sartre explained, the act of mental representation should not be mistaken as "presentifying" an object that just happens to be absent (*Imaginary*, 182), since the process of imagining actively negates and absents the real, existing referent that it represents. "The negative act is constitutive of the image," he observed (*Imaginary*, 183). For Sartre, then, imagining Pierre was a way of obliterating his friend's actual being and presence. Thus, in contrast to the perceiving consciousness, which posits its object as existent and present, the imagining consciousness posits its object as a nothingness, or *le néant*. It "nihilates" things (*néantiser*) in order to represent them. "To posit an image," Sartre summarized, "is to . . . hold the real at a distance, to be freed from it, in a word, to deny it" (*Imaginary*,

183). Through this process of cognitive subtraction, the phenomenal world is delivered over to that of mental representation and the perceiving subject is transformed into a thinking one, a manipulator of signs. But in this process, she is also denied the condition of ontological presence in the world that Sartre calls, following Heidegger, *in-der-Welt-Sein*.[23]

Like Sartre, Einstein considered the imagination to be a fundamentally negative faculty. It is by definition subtractive, he argued, and for this reason cannot posit, invent, or create. But whereas Sartre celebrated the imagination's challenge to the empirical exigencies of the present, discovering within its shattering of the world "as totality" (*Imaginary*, 184) a basis for liberation from matter and the pressures of *in-der-Welt-Sein*, Einstein, by the 1930s, had lost faith in the imagination as a vehicle of such liberation. For him, the imagination had instead become a prison house, a tautological grid in which signs continuously refer only to other signs. The imagination's strategies of mental "abbreviation" (*Abkürzung*), Einstein wrote, always entail an "omission" (*Weglassen*; *Werke*, 5:60) and an impoverishment of empirical experience that prompts "a flight from the present, a dearth of actuality" (*Fictions*, 120). Einstein discovered in the Sartrean mechanism of nihilation not subjective freedom but objective violence, an obliteration of experiential reality.

As Einstein drifted away from applied art criticism in the 1930s—his monograph on Braque from 1934, for example, has only the most tenuous relationship to the actual artworks he was commissioned to discuss—he grew increasingly invested in more general, sociological frameworks for understanding how the institutions of art function. And increasingly he came to see these institutions as fundamental obstacles to radical political transformation. Having become the locus for the imaginary enactment and neutralization of subversive revolutionary impulses, art played a social function that, according to Einstein, was inevitably reactionary.[24] Like Herbert Marcuse, whose 1937 essay "The Affirmative Character of Culture" argued that all art perpetuates alienated social relations because it provides a site for the symbolic resolution of repressed needs,[25] Einstein saw art as a conservative, socially stabilizing force. Even works with a pronounced social-critical stance perpetuate the status quo, he argued.

"The fact is that [artists] diverted important energies into the aesthetic instead of allowing the art event and its energies to pour into life" (*Fictions*, 66). Because these revolutionary impulses had been redirected away from the real sites of political conflict, people have become "incapable of revolt," their subversive impulses having already been "abreacted aesthetically." As a means to sublimate dissent, symbolic critique had become an ersatz for actual political change, prompting Einstein's final and unambiguous conclusion: "despite its revolutionary gesture, all art is conservative" (*Fictions*, 244).

Thus although Einstein and Sartre both provide a similar analysis of the functioning of modern art, their respective assessments of the political consequences of these imaginary acts of negation could not be more different. Nowhere is this disagreement more evident than in their contrasting stances on Stéphane Mallarmé, whom each crowned as the premier poet of modernist negativity. While Sartre exalted Mallarmé's hermetic lyrics and even credited the poet as the source of his philosophical concept of nothingness,[26] Einstein condemned these structuralist language games as socially solipsistic and semantically tautological, as a life-negating intrusion of *der Néant*. The "socially negative character of this poetry is obvious," he observed (*Fictions*, 113). Having abandoned the communicative function of language, Mallarmé valorized punning over meaning, endophoric allusion over external reference. "Mallarmé leaps from a tenuous motif to a remote metaphor in order to separate himself and his poem from the current reality and from the *sensus communis*" (*Fictions*, 113).[27] Modernists such as Mallarmé "were very proud of their negative orientation and their sterile solitude," Einstein wrote. "Opposing the imagination to the real, they elevated the former far above every naïve experience" (*Fictions*, 322). Such poets "absorbed (annihilated) individual positive experiences (in the interval of the imagination) and positive facts in abstract formulations ever more violently. Hence modern liberal culture became shapeless [*gestaltlos*]" (*Fictions*, 79).

To explain the mechanisms of the imagination and contextualize its ascent in recent art, Einstein offered his own phenomenological account of the reader's encounter with the modernist text. Here too his analysis is consonant with that

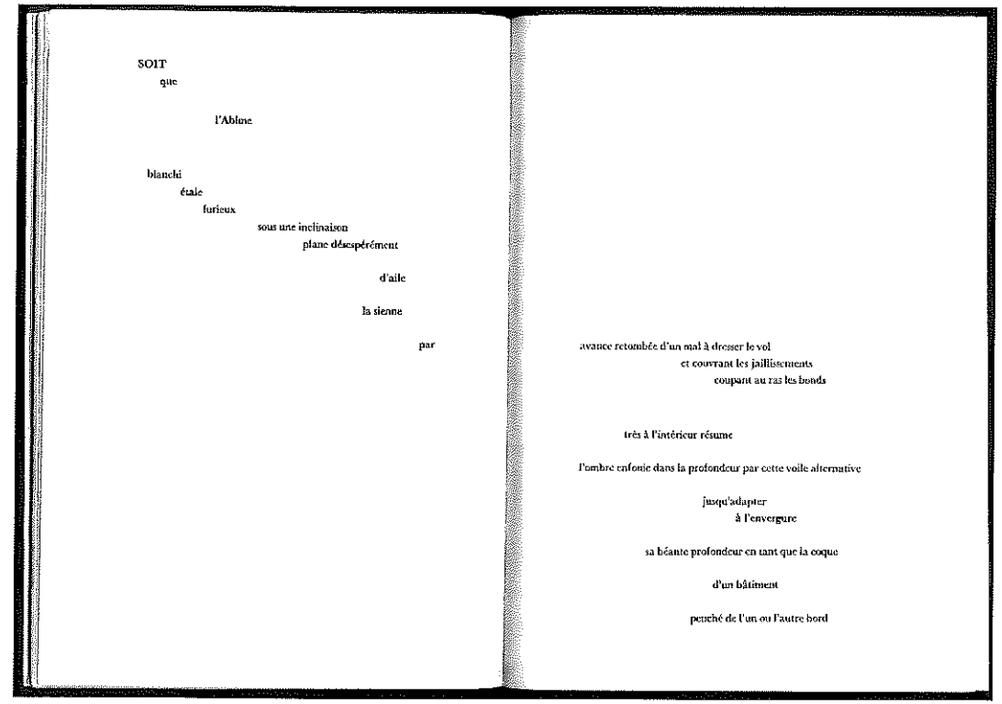
SOIT
que
l'Abîme
blanchi
étale
furieux
sous une inclinaison
plane désespérément
d'aile
la sienne
par
avance retombée d'un mal à dresser le vol
et couvrant les jaillissements
coupant au ras les bonds
très à l'intérieur résume
l'ombre enfonie dans la profondeur par cette voile alternative
jusqu'adapter
à l'envergure
sa béante profondeur en tant que la coque
d'un bâtiment
penché de l'un ou l'autre bord

Figure 4.3 Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un coup de dés* (1897).

of Sartre. Composed in a language attenuated to the point of silence, a poem by Mallarmé, for example, provides the reader with little sensuous data, prompting his retreat into the interior spaces of the mind (fig. 4.3). Confronted with these spare and rarefied lines, a "limited piece of positive reality is then supplemented by the imagination" (*Fictions*, 111). It is the labor of the imagination, in other words, to ink up the white page and, by filling in the text's omissions virtually, to reconstruct an absent aesthetic totality out of the heap of ambiguous fragments. "Every linguistic or visual communication contains organic or factual gaps [*organische und faktische Lücken*]; [in this regard, every artwork is a fragment that continues to

have an effect by being completed by the observer]. It is precisely the sparseness of description that gives the intellectual the chance to fill out the patchy depiction through the imagination, through metaphor" (*Fictions*, 263).[28] As Einstein observes here, the process by which the imagination reconstitutes absent information is in no way specific to aesthetic experience alone. To the contrary, all "linguistic or visual communication" is invariably riddled with some "organic or factual gaps," hermeneutic omissions that require the addressee to connect the dots, as it were, in order to reconstruct the original message. In both art and other forms of communication, meaning is constituted subtractively, a law that the author Arno Holz illustrated in 1891 with the formula *art* = *nature* − *x*.[29]

Yet, as Einstein also insisted, under the rule of modernism, this quantity *x*—the "gap" (*Lücke*)—had become the very element that defined the artwork: "all artistic creation is characterized (negatively), by nihilism" (*Fictions*, 321). On this score, Einstein knew what he was talking about, having himself once been a leading voice in the school of modernist nihilism. *Bebuquin*, one reviewer noted in 1914, is uncompromising in its "resolute emphasis on the negative."[30] Its wrought and self-referential idiom demands extraordinary interpretive effort on the part of the reader to reconstruct the meaning of the lines. Like Mallarmé's poetry, *Bebuquin* provides a perfect illustration of Wolfgang Iser's dictum that "epistemologically fiction remains a blank."[31] Once the concrete basis for a *sensus communis*, the aesthetic encounter is privatized by these blanks, which, by triggering a flight from reality and a shift from perceiving to imagining, privilege the mental interior of the individual over collective experience. As an indication of the success and influence of modernism's paradigm of subtractive art, one need but glance at its contemporaneous aesthetic philosophy, which apotheosized the faculty of the imagination in important theoretical treatises such as Hans Vaihinger's 900-page *Philosophie des Als-Ob* (*Philosophy of As-If*, 1911).

According to Einstein, modernist negation took two forms, one sensory and one epistemological. The first is evident in the austerity of this art, its tendency to sparseness and abstraction. In Mallarmé's poetry, for example, this sensory negation is evident in the *néant* of the empty page and the rigorous

constraint of the words themselves, which transpose the site of the aesthetic event from the artwork to the imagination of the reader. Modernism's will to anesthetize is even more manifest in the case of painterly abstraction, which, Einstein wrote, pushed the withdrawal of sensuous experience to its absolute limits. In contrast to his great enthusiasm for analytic cubist painting, which still maintained at least some degree of connection to external referents, Einstein never accepted the radical break with pictorial resemblance taken by Mondrian or Malevich, nonobjective painters whom he dismissed as "hygienists" and "ascetics," and whose works he derided as "ideals of a washroom civilization" (*Werke*, 5:238).[32] In an effort to purify the senses, he wrote, these strategies of "absolute" abstraction confined the body of the subject to a limited set of discrete sensory channels: "The effect of today's artworks is based on restricting the field of vision and the spectrum of sensation" (*Fictions*, 78). This process of sensory confinement—a perceptual constriction that would soon find its most brilliant advocate in that great hygienist of vision and enthusiast for pure opticality, Clement Greenberg—was, according to Einstein, the aesthetic corollary to those baleful and soul-destroying processes of rationalization that were choking the life out of modern culture. Having followed to its conclusion the morbid drive to optical purity, movements such as neoplasticism and suprematism had arrived at a state of sensory autism. "Seeing was now idiotized into a specialization," Einstein summed up (*Werke*, 3:219).

This sensory rarefaction had deleterious effects on the human organism, Einstein wrote. By restricting aesthetic experience to a limited number of perceptual channels, modernism had resulted in what he called *Organverengung*, the confinement of sensation to a single organ. This "purely optical encounter," he wrote, cripples the "meaningful complexes of consciousness," resulting in the "pathogenic overloading of one [particular] organ" and the "partial destruction of the individual" (*Werke*, 3:230). As one perceptual psychologist similarly observed in 1930, the experience of pure opticality is fundamentally *widersinning*—literally, "contrary to the senses"—and leads not to a condition of phenomenological presence or grace, but to a state of delirium and psychic dissociation.[33] Its "no-space of sensory deprivation" drove embodied

experience underground, into the unconscious.[34] Against painterly abstraction's will to sensory specialization, which he derided as mere "sight" (*Sicht*), Einstein's later writings championed a composite mode of perception that he called "vision" (*Vision*), an intersensory chiasmus that ballasts perception with bodily substance and embeds experience in the firm ground of reality.[35]

Modern art's sensory negation was matched on an epistemological register by strategies of semiotic demotivation, methods that we have already encountered in the previous discussion of analytic cubism's subtractive logic. Enabled by the negative faculty of the imagination, modernism was by its very nature critical, Einstein argued, and thus incapable of creating new forms or positing new realities. As evidence for his claim, consider one of the cornerstones of modernist poetics, the device of "estrangement" made famous by Shklovskii as *ostranenie* or by Brecht as *Verfremdung*, whose purpose is to distort, and thus call awareness to, the mechanisms of signification that would remain otherwise unnoticed in mimetic artworks. In this operation, the modernist text constitutes itself as an inflected, or denaturalized, version of a realist one in which resemblance functioned intuitively and unproblematically. Thus the fragmentary construction of *Bebuquin*, for example, can be understood as the determinate negation of the integral totality of the realist novel, just as the same text's syntactic *glissement* across the surface of language also operates as the determinate negation of the psychological depth found in nineteenth-century narratives of *Bildung*. For this reason, Fredric Jameson has argued that "all modernistic works are essentially simply cancelled realistic ones." They are "not apprehended directly, in terms of their own symbolic meanings, in terms of their own mythic or sacred immediacy, . . . but rather indirectly only, by way of the relay of an imaginary realistic narrative of which the symbolic and modernistic one is then seen as a kind of stylization."[36] Because they are by their constitution beholden to the tradition of realist texts that precede them, all modernist texts are, in essence, simply realist texts of a different order. Thus, it is not the case that modernism has given up mimetic reference, only that its reference is one of a higher order: instead of pointing to extra-aesthetic reality, it points to the realist artwork. Behind every Proust is a Balzac, behind every Malevich a Repin. And so, for all its rarefaction

and hermetic obfuscations, Mallarmé's blank page still cannot fail to be meaningful against the background of a literary tradition that has shaped the reader's interpretive horizon.

For this reason Einstein often compared modernist art to an apophatic theology, a structure of knowledge that arrives at truth through strategies of negation. In the same way that "one can speak of a negative theology, one can also speak of an art that is oriented toward negation," he observed in his book on Braque (*Werke*, 3:206); and in *The Fabrication of Fictions*, he similarly took note of "the affinity between [a] nihilistic aesthetic and the negative theology of mystics" (*Fictions*, 113). As Lyotard has argued in a series of essays, modernism's eschewal of embodiment and positive knowledge aligns it with the Kantian sublime, a borderline experience that, in contrast to the affirmative apprehension of the beautiful, is disclosed through a "negative presentation, or even a non-presentation."[37] Einstein's comparison of abstraction to negative theology is echoed, moreover, in Pavel Medvedev's contemporaneous polemic against aesthetic modernism, which the Russian literary critic dismissed as an "apophatic method" (*апофатический метод*), a mode of negative knowledge. In his 1928 study *The Formalist Method in Literary Criticism*, which took aim at the critical methods of the Russian formalists as well as the artistic production of their futurist allies, especially the *zaumniki*, Medvedev discussed strategies of modernist apophasis in a series of chapters on the subject of "negation" (*отрицание*). There he took issue with the opposition that futurism and formalism had established between everyday, communicative language and its negative image, poetic language: the "definition of the distinctive features of poetic language was developed in such a way that each of the basic indicators [*признаки*] of communicative language would have an opposite sign [*знак*] in poetic language. The basic concepts of the formal method—'transrational language,' 'deautomatization,' 'deformation,' 'making difficult'—turn out to be merely negations that correspond to the various indicators of everyday, practical language." "Thus," he reasoned, "the formalists did not define poetic language by what it is, but by what it is not." Medvedev's conclusion, like that of Einstein, was that this parasitic approach to aesthetic form could never be "creative," since, as he puts

it, the "lexicon, grammar, and even the basic themes of the message have already been prepared beforehand."[38]

To be fair, the modernist paradigm of negative aesthetics had already reached a point of exhaustion even before Einstein and Medvedev rendered their verdict on modern art. After decades of use the same old devices of estrangement, deformation, and so forth had lost their critical function and devolved into a blind, contentless reflex. Or, to be more precise: their critical function was intact, but critique itself had since forfeited its privileged relationship to radical politics. As Brecht put it in 1930, "the avant-garde has capitulated, but it has not died." Even Adorno, that die-hard defender of negative aesthetics, would admit in a piece on the aging of modernism that, by 1927, this art's critical method had become ritualized and was recuperated as status quo. With the formalization of dissonance and estrangement as standard procedures in art, modernism's critical posture had turned into a "radicalness for which nothing is any longer at stake," as Adorno put it.[39] Indeed, if anything is to be learned from the illustrious career that modernism enjoyed in the West during the cold war, where abstract art was enlisted as a cultural cipher for the "values" of freedom, democracy, and consumer capitalism, it is that there is nothing inherently progressive about strategies of aesthetic negation, which are just as susceptible to dogmatization and political instrumentalization as was the realist art of the Eastern Bloc. But as we have already seen, Einstein's indictment of modernism goes even further than this, arguing that symbolic critique, by sublimating subversive tendencies within the contained sphere of art, comes to function as a substitute for actual political transformation. Modernism, in other words, is reactionary not despite but because of its radical posture. Thus, in his later writings, Einstein argued that this art had engendered "heroes of critique and dwarves of will" (Einstein Archive, 43), a race of artists whose submissiveness paved the way for the rise of totalitarianism.[40] Indeed, for Einstein, National Socialism was the very embodiment of modernist negativity. Taunting those who continued to enthuse about painterly abstraction, he predicted in *Bebuquin II* that if "Hitler were a cubist—and he will become one—then you would all be exhilarated" (Einstein Archive, 41).

According to Einstein, the apophatic logic of modernism doomed its art to cultural passéism. For all its avowed commitment to artistic innovation, and for all its bluster about breaking radically with the past, modernism remained structurally beholden to the preceding aesthetic models that it challenged. The artistic legacy circumscribed virtually every move of the modernist, whose deconstructions and demotivations of the aesthetic field, Einstein argued, were carried out automatically and without reflection. These artists "had an enormous capital of memories and visual traditions at their disposal, which stirred within them like shadows," he wrote. "The rebellious heirs were shadowed by a blurry mass of artistic forms, faded symbols and formulas that rolled along mechanically" (*Fictions*, 23).[41] One of the most obvious symptoms of the historicist character of modernism, Einstein observed, was the movement's stylistic heterogeneity. Barred from inventing new aesthetic constructions or positing affirmative form, the retrospective modernists, he wrote, were "forced into unholy eclecticism" and into rearranging "the second-class leftovers of multiple styles" (*Werke*, 3:202). These epigones were the "late descendants" of an "overformed" and "overeducated" civilization (*Werke*, 3:303). Modernism's negation of style was subsequently radicalized in the 1920s by its successors, the avant-garde movements that were distinguished aesthetically by their stylistic plurality. And while modernism and the avant-garde cannot be equated, for Einstein the two movements nonetheless shared the same logic of negation, a logic that, in both cases, was reflected formally in an absence of stylistic markers. Indeed, one encounters the same constitutive absence across the individual avant-gardes, irrespective of national context or political agenda: writing about Gruppe 1925, one of the most important constellations of German New Objectivity writers, Helmut Lethen, for example, confirms the very "impossibility of forming a coherent unity under the sign of 'Objectivity'";[42] likewise, Rosalind Krauss notes that the "formal heterogeneity" of French surrealism presents the critic with a "series of contradictions which . . . strike one as being irreducible" and concludes that "it is precisely *style* that continues to be a vexing problem for anyone dealing with surrealist art";[43] and already in 1923, Sergei Tret'iakov observed that Russian futurism "was never a school. It was a socioaesthetic tendency,

the strivings of a group of people whose shared point of contact was not even positive tasks [*положительные задачи*], not a precise understanding of their 'tomorrow,' but rather a hatred for their 'yesterday and today," an inexhaustible and merciless hatred."[44]

Rather than work to create new collective forms of expression, the avant-garde had instead created a consciousness of style as such. As Peter Bürger noted in his influential account of this cultural formation, "[t]here is no such thing as a Dadaist or surrealist style. What did happen is that these movements liquidated the possibility of a period style when they raised to a principle the availability of the artistic means of past periods."[45] Indeed, the growing awareness of style as such in the 1920s prompted the birth of stylistics, a discipline that emerged at this time as the academic corollary to the avant-garde's metahistorical consciousness and took as its object of study those orphaned aesthetic devices that had lost their motivated relationship to society. For Einstein, the condition of stylistic pluralism reflected the general processes of cultural transvaluation set in motion by bourgeois liberalism, whose specious ecumenism and ahistorical universalism served to cover up the historical fact of the subject's atomization. "Liberal society could not develop a style," he wrote, "since it excluded the collective from the process of artistic production" (*Fictions*, 136). In contrast to those societies in which the psyche of the individual is "completely exteriorized" and "objectivated [*versachlicht*]" (*Werke*, 4:336) in a collective and culturally binding artistic style, the clearing-house of bourgeois liberalism relativized each individual artistic device as just one means among many. Like the commodity form upon which liberal society is based, these styles—all equally available and interchangeable—became subject to the rule of universal equivalence. In this regard, Einstein considered the deterioration of cultural norms and lack of community within liberal society to be a precondition for the stylistic pluralism of the avant-garde.[46] A "loosely knit fabric of paradoxical and contradictory tendencies inserted itself in the place of a unified culture," he observed (*Fictions*, 59).

Thus, when Einstein denounced modernism and the avant-garde in the 1930s, his attack was aimed not at any particular technical feature of these artworks (abstraction, facture, etc.) but at the loss of a coherent cultural matrix that

would render these devices meaningful, the loss of a spontaneous correspondence between artistic style and social norms. As previous chapters of this book have shown how, after modernism, artistic devices such as linear perspective and narrative portrayal no longer possessed the spontaneous, privileged relationship to the subjective categories of experience and structures of consciousness that they enjoyed in previous epochs. Unmoored from their cultural fundament, such devices now lacked a corresponding *Weltanschauung*, as Einstein noted, and were no longer current. The "*endurance* of [artworks] resides in a succession of interpretations that are each current at their given moment. Herein lies the question of whether they can once again be made 'current,' i.e. whether they can be adapted to the present, to today's *Anschauung*. But the old [artwork] degenerates now into a phenomenon that is merely aesthetic" (*Werke*, 4:433). With their decommissioning as cultural *dispositifs*, these techniques were downgraded to mere aesthetic "style," "device," or "method." Thus, in 1923 Shklovskii, like Einstein, connected the autonomization of aesthetic devices with processes of social transvaluation and its resulting existential disorientation: "Once there was a top and a bottom, there was time, there was matter. / Now nothing is certain. Method rules over all else in this world. / Method was devised by man. / Method. / Method left home and started living on its own. [. . .] In art, too, method leads an independent life."[47] Under modernism, art grew defiant and self-willed, taking on a life of its own and becoming thoroughly alien to its creators.

Strictly speaking, there is no evolution within artistic method, Einstein argued, no linear development from cave painting to photography, since the technical arsenal of devices has remained fundamentally the same since the dawn of art. Artistic devices do not themselves change. What changes, rather, is the social formation that activates particular artistic techniques at certain historical intervals and removes them from cultural circulation at others. "We observe mutations," Einstein wrote in 1939, "although we still haven't ever found an explanation for why men become bored, discard one heritage, one inventory of forms, and accept a different trend. Obviously most of the time the new trend is celebrated as an improvement; and yet we are hardly more advanced than the painters of Altamira. The only thing that has changed is attitude and intention

[*Haltung und Absicht*]" (*Werke*, 4:371). For the scholar of art, understanding this historical dynamic required a methodological reorientation from formalist analysis to a sociology of art, a reorientation that was reflected in Einstein's own turn in the 1930s toward art as a document of "collective social history" (*Werke*, 4:354). To be sure, formalist analysis could provide a useful catalog of artistic strategies, but it could not locate these devices within the totality of culture or explain the social interests that drove the symbolic territorialization of aesthetic form.

For Einstein, then, drawing formal contrasts between, say, abstraction and figuration was ultimately irrelevant, or at least secondary, since the more fundamental question concerned the social motivation of these devices and whether these devices were organized in a style that was culturally binding and collective. Style, he insisted, was a "meta-artistic phenomenon," the authority of which transcends issues that were merely aesthetic in nature (*Werke*, 4:336). Recalling Shklovskii's observation from chapter 1, we are reminded that terms such as modernism and realism are just red herrings: "There is no such thing as nonobjective art. There is only motivated art or unmotivated art." Thus, when texts such as *Bebuquin II* and *The Fabrication of Fictions* call for a new "mythical realism," Einstein has in mind not a particular form of figuration or specific strategy of narration, but the emergence of a general style that, by interlocking subjective categories of thought and objective structures of sensation in single epistemic edifice, could overcome the liberal society's anomic condition of "masses without a collective culture" (*Werke*, 4:319). Artistic style had in fact always been closely intertwined with the expression of collective identity. During the era of the great nation-states in the nineteenth century, for example, the "search for style was identical with the desire for national identity."[48] Given the close connection between artistic style and mechanisms of social belonging, it makes sense that the deterioration of the nation-state toward the end of the century, followed by its complete ideological delegitimation in the First World War, would be reflected in the stylistic eclecticism of modernism, an avowedly 'internationalist' movement. After the implosion of the nation-state paradigm, the search for style and aesthetic motivation—which is to say,

the search for a new realism—became, for Einstein, an urgent political project, even if it was unclear to him which configuration of community—trade union, class, race, generation, family, tribe, etc.—was robust enough to succeed the nation as the guarantor of collective identity. This connection between style and community in fact reappears across the populist discourses of interwar realism, from the appeals to *Volkstümlichkeit* in German Popular Front circles to the consecration of *народность* as one of the four conceptual pillars of socialist realism in Russia.

Mythical Realism and the Trampling Gesture of Representation

In his efforts to understand the new patterns of collective identity emerging within modern industrial society after the collapse of nationalist ideology, Einstein was increasingly drawn, as we know, to the methods of anthropology, a discipline already familiar to him from his research on non-western art. Like his *Documents* colleagues Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris, who enlisted ethnographic methods to analyze the collective myths, sacred geographies, and tribal filiations operating just below the surface of proper bourgeois society,[49] and like the British Mass Observationists, who founded a movement of "ethnography at home" in response to the 1936 abdication crisis of the "tribal leader" King Edward VIII,[50] Einstein turned to anthropology as a framework for developing a materialist theory of culture. Thus, an interview with the author about his recent work yielded the following report, which appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* in January 1931: "While making his ethnological study of the African negro, Dr. Einstein conceived the idea of applying the same scientific methods to the European white man, and among several new books he is at present engaged in writing is an *Ethnologie du Blanc*, in which he investigates, very seriously though perhaps a trifle sarcastically, the creation of myths, superstitions and erotic customs among the Europeans, treating them as if they were an extinct race."[51] The *Ethnologie du Blanc* mentioned in these lines was none other than *Bebuquin II*, of course, a text that was at once both an archaeological excavation of an "extinct race" and an autobiographical "necrologue of the ego."

Einstein patterned his autobiography after the speech genre of myth. Beyond his general enthusiasm for 'primitive' paradigms, there were three concrete reasons for his decision to follow the model of myth, one narratological, one tropological, and one textological. At the level of narrative design, myth observes a circular temporal structure that Einstein, following cubist parlance, called *das Simultané*. As he proposed in several of the outlines for *Bebuquin II*, his autobiography was to open with a "cosmogony," which is to say that the story would have no proper, discrete point of origin, no actual narrative beginning. As we saw earlier, Einstein proposed that the protagonist of his autobiography come into being not punctually, through the defining event of birth, but "perhaps through the metamorphosis of someone else." Cosmogonic myth similarly complicates the conceptual category of origins, since it is neither within nor outside historical sequence, but is instead situated at the zero hour of temporality and spans the transition from a cyclical state of eternal recurrence to linear, calendrical time. This cosmogonic paradigm was particularly important for the author of autobiography, Einstein observed, because of its close approximation of the primary processes of the Unconscious, which "take place in different and conflicting strata at the same time, i.e. they form a polymorphic *simultané*" (*Werke*, 3:325).

Since *Bebuquin II* was never completed, we can only speculate about how Einstein envisioned depicting this "cosmogonic" time in the final work. Nonetheless, the last piece of prose that Einstein published, a 1930 "fragment of a novel" that belongs to the constellation of texts around *Bebuquin II*, offers us a clue.[52] The fragment in question culminates in a series of psychosexual tableaux focusing on Persephone, queen of the underworld and daughter of Demeter. It is a significant choice of conclusions, for the cosmogonic myth of Persephone concerns the advent of worldly time as dictated by the solar cycle: as a consequence of Persephone's abduction, her mother Demeter divided the seasons and set in motion historical time, establishing the basic rhythm of human labor. With one foot in the eternal time of divine existence and the other in the linear time of human endeavor, the myth spans two incompatible conditions of experience. This conflicted temporality is visible in the Homeric hymn that served as Einstein's

source, exemplified in the scene where Demeter hears the cry of Persephone as she is carried off by Hades:[53]

> Against her will he seized her and on his golden chariot
> Carried her away as she wailed; and she raised a shrill cry.
> Calling upon father Kronides, the highest and the best
> . . .
> The peaks of the mountains and the depths of the sea resounded
> With her immortal voice, and her mighty mother heard her.
> A sharp pain gripped her heart, and she tore
> The headband round her divine hair with her own hands.
> From both of her shoulders she cast down her dark veil
> And rushed like a bird over the nourishing land and sea,
> Searching . . .

To the modern reader, the most puzzling aspect of this scene must be the fact that Demeter already wears a black veil, a sign of grief, when she hears Persephone's cry. Paradoxically, she is in the process of mourning her daughter's loss at the very moment that she learns of Persephone's abduction, and casts down her veil in order to search for her.[54] In this cosmogonic time events take place in a state of "drunken simultaneity" (*besoffene Gleichzeitigkeit*; *Werke*, 3:113), to use Einstein's phrase.

"All time flows in both directions—full of contradictions," Einstein once observed early in his career in 1908 (*Werke*, 4:122). But if before, in a negative inversion of the unidirectionality of realist novel, Einstein's modernist texts insisted upon the reversibility of linear time—an appropriation from relativity theory popular in the modernist literature of the early 1900s—*Bebuquin II* instead overlays temporal strata on top of one another in the manner of ancient myth. In his autobiography, time is distinguished not so much by its reversibility as by its simultaneity. The narrative complexes in the text depict several phases of action at once, giving rise to what Einstein called, in an analysis of Hesiodic myth, "polymorphic event-ensembles" (*Werke*, 3:273). For Einstein, the

objective here was not, as before, to cancel out the unidirectional linear design of the realist text through a determinate temporal inversion, but to repeat and reinscribe the individual episodes of his life, each time with a new variation, giving rise to a *simultané* that muddled the causal schemes of time-based narrative. The author's stand-in Beb is murdered as a child, for example, only to commit suicide later in life. At the text's syntactical level, Einstein demanded that the "concatenation of words must fuse together contrasting temporal strata" (*Werke*, 4:163). Needless to say, this cosmogonic circularity complicated the task of the storyteller immensely, who had no place to begin his narrative. So rather than open his autobiography with a punctual and distinct beginning, Einstein instead began with a metamorphosis, titling the first chapter "The Second Coming and Reincarnation" (Einstein Archive, 7). "The end overtakes the beginning," he wrote in 1930 (*Werke*, 3:94). As a result of this scrambling of the temporal priority of events, it becomes unclear to the reader at moments in the text whether Einstein is writing, for example, of his youth in Karlsruhe in the 1890s or of his recent exile in Paris in the 1930s. As if to symbolize this suspension of linear time through a concrete motif, Einstein writes into *Bebuquin II* a scene depicting the destruction of a watch—not once, but three times. It is what Einstein called a "vacation from causality" (*Werke*, 3:232).

The circularity of Einstein's text reflects a structural law of the autobiographical anamnesis, which, strictly speaking, can never have a precise and localizable origin. Within an autobiographical account, the beginning is always receding from sight, since the author's own birth is a vanishing point that can never be recalled and, by its very nature, is excluded from depiction. As the autobiographer comes closer to her origin, subjectivity falters, and the perspective becomes more eccentric and exterior. Like a bending hyperbola, the narrative line traced backward is diverted outward as it approaches the earliest years of life, which are available only secondhand, through narratives offered by relatives or documentary records such as photographs. At the very point of psychogenetic origin, therefore, we encounter an enigmatic absence of selfhood, a purely passive object that can be known only obliquely, in the third person. Thus, like myth, autobiographical inquiry forecloses the possibility of narrative

beginnings, and is consequently forced to repetition and circularity. And it is the same at the other narrative pole of autobiography, where the hyperbola bends outward yet again, this time away from a conclusive ending. Autobiographies are perforce unfinishable, Philippe Lejeune writes, since concluding such an account would in effect require documenting one's own death.[55] By the very logic of his inquiry, then, the autobiographer—a "non-novelist," Einstein insisted (*ein Nichtromancier*)[56]—is denied two of the most basic elements of narrative form, a beginning and an end. As a result, autobiographies are necessarily cyclomythic by design, and cannot partake of the linear plotted structure of the novel.

The same patterns of contradiction and excess that were realized in narrative terms through the devices of temporal synchrony and circularity appear as well in the text's tropological system, where Einstein superimposes figures one upon the other to create what he called, in his study of Braque, a "*simultané* of rationally discrepant figural signs" (*Werke*, 3:325). Searching for ways to mitigate the ineluctable linearity of verbal language, Einstein made extensive use of poetry, which, as is well known, privileges the metaphoric image (paradigmatic axis) over narrative metonymy (syntagmatic axis).[57] In the roughly thirty poems that were integrated into this "lyrical novel," as he occasionally called his autobiography, Einstein took full advantage of the combinatory potential of the German language, connecting substantives to one another to form bizarre and internally contradictory compound nouns that seem, in many cases, to describe events rather than objects: *Fruchtgetöte* ("fruit-kill"), *Genitalienmeeting* ("genital-meeting"), *Scheibentrübung* ("pane-clouding"). With words such as these Einstein gives an impression of spatial simultaneity that is otherwise available only the visual arts. Indeed, he discovered similar strategies of temporal compression in the later etchings of Braque, especially his illustrations of Hesiodic myths such as *Themis and Hera*: "These figures are pure condensations," Einstein observed, in which "an ensemble or a *simultané* of mythical complexes are collected in a single figure that breaks through rational conventions of figuration" (*Werke*, 3:325). Appropriating this method for *Bebuquin II*, Einstein reinscribes again and again scenes and figures that are similar, although never perfectly identical, and in the process of replaying them undermines the reader's certainty whether

the second appearance is an iteration at all or if it instead comprises an entirely different scene.

The tropological overinscription of *Bebuquin II* establishes a network of correspondences linking characters to one another in a continuous play of likeness and difference that blurs the contours separating individual figures. But it is not just the distinct identities of the figures that is erased through these rolling metamorphoses. The repetition also suspends the basic distinction between character and setting, since, with each transformation, the character is embedded into additional fields of association, incorporating new attributes and objects into the figure. For this reason, the spatial setting of *Bebuquin II* was immensely important for Einstein, who drafted several key sections of the book under the heading "Landscape." No mere background for the story, these topographic inventories served as hieroglyphs of *Bebuquin II*'s characters and, at many moments in the text, even displace the actors themselves. Time and narrative event become absorbed into space, rendering "all phases from prehistory to a visionary future in a single landscape" (Einstein Archive, 7). By depicting "[i]ndividuals e.g. as landscape," and, conversely, "objects and trees and rivers as actants," as Einstein proposed in one working note for the project (Einstein Archive, 10), *Bebuquin II* would sabotage the conceit of integral personhood upon which traditional narrative was based. Within the context of an autobiography, moreover, this dissolution of narrative character into landscape takes on a more profound aspect, since the character being dissolved is none other than the author himself. The geological self-portraits of *Bebuquin II* reflected Einstein's "desire . . . to sink back into a mineral existence" (Einstein Archive, 18). With reference to the famous essay by Roger Caillois, Einstein's autobiography could thus be described as a "psychaesthenic" narrative, a story that assimilates its author into a surrounding setting composed of mineral formations, landscapes, and architectural spaces. This spatialization of character was an appropriate device for a necrologue of the ego, since, as Einstein wrote in *Documents*, "exteriority of a landscape signifies the destruction of the self" (*Werke*, 3:41).

Like Braque's etchings, in which the addition of each new line threatens to throw the entire composition into a state of delineation, Einstein's repetition

of figures in *Bebuquin II* ultimately leads to a state of disfiguration. "Time is amassed over the course of reading," he explained in his letter to Kahnweiler: time "functions as differentiation. Which means no repetition of events" (*Werke*, 4:161). Anticipating Deleuze's analysis from *Difference and Repetition*, which, as we saw in the introduction, describes iteration as a challenge to the fixity of conceptual identity and an event that unmoors the grid of representation, Einstein explains in his letter that perfect formal identity does not in fact exist, since the repetition of forms leads to the perception of difference, not of sameness. Within *Bebuquin II*, the process of reinscription opposes the work of realist representation by destabilizing the contours of the figures and draining them of their vividness. Through continuous repetition and transformation, Einstein mobilizes representation against itself, troping its figures into a state of oblivion and conceptual nonidentity, a state of semiotic collapse from which it becomes possible to break through the mnemonic screen of signs into an authentic perception of the world. "The only means to grasp the living [is] through an acceleration of metamorphoses," he observed.[58] It is precisely because he erases nothing from his autobiography that the cumulative effect of these metamorphoses is, paradoxically, that of erasure. "Ultimately every excessive addition to memory triggers an automatic forgetting" (*Werke*, 3:277). This convergence of overinscription and oblivion, of archiving and expunging, was a mechanism that, moreover, Einstein claimed to discern everywhere in interwar European culture, which, in a kind of autoimmune reaction to "civilization overload" (*Werke*, 3:303) and being "historified to death" (*tödlich vergeschichtet*; *Fictions*, 140), had begun to delete its own record and return to a state of primitive *in-der-Welt-sein*.[59]

Thus, as Einstein wrote to Kahnweiler, reading is not simply a process of accumulation, since at the same time it also entails a "corollary forgetting or wearing out of what has already been read" (*Werke*, 4:161). To read, in other words, is also to overwrite. This is a process that de Man characterized as a "trampling gesture," a gesture that undermines the faithfulness of memory and that subverts the primary violence of figuration. The repetition of tropes, he explained, "enacts the necessary recurrence of the initial violence [of positing a figure]: a figure of thought, the very light of cognition, obliterates

thought. . . . Each of the episodes forgets the knowledge achieved by the forgetting that precedes it. . . . The repetitive erasures by which language performs the erasure of its own positions can be called disfiguration." The end result of this reinscription is "the form of a pseudo-knowledge which is called forgetting."[60] Figuration works the same way in *Bebuquin II*: first in an act of positing and then in an act of "corollary forgetting," first as inscription and then as "wearing out." Here Einstein reveals just how fragile is the tropological economy of mimetic realism, which requires figuration in order to produce the illusion of verisimilitude, but which can tolerate only so much figuration before it lapses into irreality.

Neither properly modernist nor realist, the strategies of figuration found in *Bebuquin II* are instead closer to a poetics of the grotesque, a method in which, as Einstein explained in 1926, a "closed figure" is opened up, "cleaved apart by contrasts" (*kontrastierend zerspalten*) and made nonidentical with itself (*Werke*, 4:171). Although Einstein's words here may appear to invoke the strategies of aesthetic fragmentation used by modernist authors such as Mallarmé, the figural dehiscence that we find in the grotesque is in fact utterly inimical to the modernist fragment, which works by invoking an absent aesthetic totality in the reader's mind and thus, in the end, exercising the faculty of the imagination. To the contrary, the grotesque's surfeit of figuration overwhelms and paralyzes the imagination. This was why Benjamin contrasted the excess of the grotesque with the subtractive powers of the imagination in a short note of 1921. He observed there that "genuine imagination is unconstructive, purely de-formative [*rein entstaltend*]—or (from the standpoint of the subject) purely negative" (*Schriften*, 6:115; *Writings*, 1:280). It "creates no new nature," he continued. "Pure imagination, therefore, is not an inventive power" (*Schriften*, 6:117; *Writings*, 1:282). By contrast, the grotesque "does not de-form [*entstaltet*] in a destructive fashion but destructively over-forms [*überstaltet*]," Benjamin proposed (*Schriften*, 6:115; *Writings*, 1:280). The distinction that Benjamin draws here maps onto the transition, within Einstein's work, from *Bebuquin* to *Bebuquin II*, a transition in which *Entstaltung* becomes *Überstaltung* and the negations of the imagination give way to the accumulations of the grotesque.

Again and again in the art and literature of the interwar period we encounter this same "trampling gesture" of representation, this same process of *Überstaltung*. If modernism interrogated mimesis through calculated sensory impoverishment and epistemological critique, interwar art, by contrast, supercharged mimesis, as it were, but in ways that were no less inimical to the traditional realist enterprise. Whether in the eclectic miscellany of characters that populate its novels, in the motivic jumble of late-synthetic cubism, or, as we will soon see, in the "overcoding" of Heartfield's photomontages, the art of this period aspired not to strip down reality but to outstrip it. All of the phrases that circulate around socialist realism, for example—"Life has become better, comrades, life has become more joyous" or "more alive than the living"—reflect an extravagant, technicolor, hypersaturated art that strives to be more "real" than reality itself.[61] If, according to Arno Holz, the formula for art in 1891 was *art* = *nature* − *x*, the formula in 1930 would now read *art* = *nature* + *x*, as the author Alfred Döblin proposed in a talk on Holz and the "new naturalism."[62]

Through strategies of repetition Einstein cultivated a form of representation that dismantles the primary opposition between sensation and semiosis upon which modernism and realism were both equally based. As de Man noted, the process of figural reinscription "does not fit within the symmetrical structure of presence and absence,"[63] a structure that, as we have already seen, was fundamental to the Sartrean opposition between perception and imagining. But, far more than Sartre, the name that must be mentioned here is that of Ferdinand de Saussure, whose structuralist doctrine can be read as the poetological breviary of the modernist project, whether in the visual or the verbal arts: just as analytic cubism illustrates perfectly the structuralist model of signification in painting,[64] the work of Mallarmé, the great poet of the *Néant*, provides a consummate literary example of Saussurian doctrine, which defined the sign negatively, as a purely relational unit whose meaning is predicated on its difference from other signs in the same system. As Einstein points out, this apophatic structure of knowledge means that experience and cognition can never coincide. "We moderns are maniacs of distinction [*maniaken der unterscheidung*]," he wrote with disgust (*Werke*, 4: 234). Indeed,

Einstein's endless tirades against the imagination and negative modernism read like attacks on the model of consciousness posited by structural linguistics, in which the "prison-house of language," to use Jameson's apt phrase, precludes the possibility of a primary encounter with reality or history: "Arrested concepts give rise to moribund contrasts," he writes, "which is how language hurls us into a much more intense existential conflict; like images, words intensify conflict (dialectics). Thus the dialectics of being are intensified conceptually through linguistic expression and grammatical contrasts that cannot be reconciled. On the other hand, with its mechanisms, language degrades us into speaking machines, just like the mechanicity of ideas that is reflected in philosophy" (Einstein Archive, 12). Against the modernist "mania" for structural distinction, Einstein argued that the real world lacks this grammar of contrasts: in actuality there are no binary oppositions, "there are only transitions [*Übergänge*]" (Einstein Archive, 12).

The repeated operation of inscription that is evident in the imagery of *Bebuquin II* can also be observed also at the textological level of Einstein's work, where we discover another "trampling" of representation. Here again he draws inspiration from the speech genre of myth, which lacks a point of origin. An inherently collective textual form that is attributable to no particular author, myth emerges as if through an emanation of the communal psyche. As a result, it is not ratified by the "author function" that, as Foucault showed, has served in the modern era to secure the meaning of the text by limiting the "dangerous proliferation of signification."[65] Indeed, proliferating is something that myth does extremely well. As its passes from mouth to mouth and across generations, myth adapts with each new formulation to the exigencies of the present, a fact that makes it at once both timeless and utterly contemporary. By nature textually promiscuous, its protean and robust archetypes—"floating signifiers," as Lévi-Strauss called them[66]—resurface in all sorts of collective representations from folk tales to urban legends. It was precisely for this reason that André Jolles, with reference to myth's second-hand nature, translated *μῦθος* as "transmitted narrative" ("überlieferte Erzählung") in his *Basic Forms* of 1930.[67] These transmissions have neither author nor Ur-text, and thus thwart attempts to prioritize

any single version of the text as the original. The textological puzzle that results is exemplified by Franz Kafka's treatment of the Prometheus myth in the early 1920s, which recounts four different and mutually incompatible accounts of the Titan's exploits and produces through their juxtaposition the kind of exegetical surplus—the "dangerous proliferation of signification"—for which his work is so famous. Like *Bebuquin II*, which, in a single stroke, both retold and erased its predecessor *Bebuquin*, Kafka's treatment of myth makes clear that the act of narrative transmission invariably entails not just retelling previous versions of the story but also modifying and thus *un*telling them in the very act of narration.

In addition to its inherent collectiveness, myth also appealed to Einstein because of its peculiar cognitive structure, a structure that the philosopher Friedrich Schelling called "tautegorical." Myth, Schelling wrote, "has as its object that of which one can only say that it is."[68] Since sign and concept are inseparable, indeed identical, in mythical speech, its contents cannot be assimilated to codes and meanings external to it. It contains no abstract message, but is instead valid only in and for itself. In this regard the tautegory of myth differs essentially from allegory, a mode of interpretation that is exemplified in the Bible, whose bipartite structure sets up a closed circuit of prefiguration and fulfillment, and which generates meaning by eliding the discrepancies between the individual narratives of the Old and New Testaments. In the narrative syllepsis of allegory, all divergences are reconciled within a third master plot. By contrast, myths cannot be resolved with one another to produce a definitive and final version, but can only be described in their own terms. There is no master narrative behind Kafka's four renditions of Prometheus's story, only a continuous play of similarity that connects the texts laterally. According to Samuel Coleridge, whose thought about myth developed in close exchange with Schelling, allegory thus expresses "a different subject but with a resemblance," whereas tautegory expresses "the same subject but with a difference."[69]

Given its tautegorical structure, all attempts to divest myth of contradiction, difference, and inconsistency—all efforts, in other words, to convert *mythos* into *logos*—are fundamentally misguided, because they misconstrue the function of myth, whose purpose is not to be universal and abstract (in the manner of

conceptual logic), but to be constructive and useful. "Through its syntactical and semantic organization," the anthropologist Jean-Pierre Vernant observed, "the language employed by myth in itself represents a way of arranging reality, a kind of classification and setting in order of the world, a preliminary logical arrangement, in sum an instrument of thought."[70] In this regard, the mythical sign follows a mode of thinking that is fundamentally dissimilar from that of modern rationalism. Instead of operating vertically, connecting material sign to abstract concept, tautegory operates laterally, linking signs to other signs in a network of similitude. It was a mode of thought that Lévy-Bruhl famously characterized as *prélogique*, and that he juxtaposed to conceptual abstraction: "Prelogical mentality is essentially synthetic. By this I mean that the syntheses which compose it do not imply previous analyses of which the result has been registered in definite concepts, as is the case with those in which logical thought operates. In other words, the connecting-links of the representations are given, as a rule, with the representations themselves."[71]

Picking up on Lévy-Bruhl's account, Einstein argued for the utter contemporaneity of mythical thinking in society today: "there exists not only the *prélogique* which governed man before his hypertrophic rationalization; there also exists a *postlogique* that swells with the damming of forgotten forces" (*Werke*, 3:308). Despite belonging to opposite poles on the hierarchy of cultural evolution, these two systems of thought were, for Einstein, indistinguishable. "In this way two opposed phases bear an astonishing resemblance to one another," he observed about the curious convergence between the earliest configurations of human society and the most advanced technical civilization (*Fictions*, 111). Like the *prélogique* of the "early primitive," the *postlogique* of the "late primitive" tends toward a synthetic mode of signification that is fundamentally inimical to the structuralist sign, with its analytic system based on contrast, distinction, and critical reason. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, this apparently premodern mode of signification, which privileges lateral patterns of similitude over vertical relations of reference, is in fact the sign-structure that comes to dominate systems of representation at the moment of historical transition into spectacle society during the 1920s.

To be sure, there were also concrete political exigencies that precipitated Einstein's turn to mythical thinking in the 1920s and '30s. Confronted with the successes of fascist political formations across Europe, artists of the Left—those "heroes of critique and dwarves of will"—were forced to reconsider their apophatic methods, since, as was becoming increasingly clear, this one-sided allegiance to the negative had ceded powerful resources to politically reactionary groups. Critique, it seemed, was incapable of animating the hearts of humanity as myth can.[72] Recognizing that leftist art had been too slow in mobilizing the forces of fantasy and libido, voices within the Popular Front such as Ernst Bloch insisted that mythical schemes should not simply be dismissed as regressive and irrational primitivisms, for these collective utterances potentially also contained blueprints for new social configurations, even if their utopian wish-contents were often articulated in distorted idioms. Myth "does not belong to the order of comprehension, as the sign does, but rather to that of affectivity and desire," noted Vernant.[73] It was for this reason that Einstein deemed myth to be more viable a platform for revolutionary activity than the negations of aesthetic modernism. "Only a positive doctrine that provides a clear goal . . . can lead to revolution ([can] engender actions, since actions are determined by their end)" (*Fictions*, 33). Although modernism's critical project may once have served a progressive political agenda, this art's negations had devolved into contentless and reactive *épater la bourgeoisie* tactics, when it needed instead to be fomenting revolution. The final lines of *The Fabrication of Fictions* thus proclaim that the task of art is not "to reject reality, but to recreate it collectively. Art will once again have place in this project if it participates humbly in the production of a new reality" (327).

In its renewed concern with the affective dimension of revolutionary art, Einstein's program of "mythical realism" aligned with the objectives of socialist realism, even if its author never accepted the formalization of socialist realism as academic neoclassicism, which he derided as an "embarrassing" "comedy of revenants" (*Fictions*, 91, 254).[74] Indeed, one of the sources for the socialist realist program had been the so-called philosophy of god-building (*богостроительство*), proposed already decades before by Maxim Gorky and Lunacharsky in an effort to breathe life into the rarefied philosophical

abstractions of dialectical critique. Founded not upon the promise of salvation in the hereafter but upon humanist values to be realized within the living rituals of an ethical community, this antitranscendental religion included a mythological pantheon of embodied socialist values. In contrast to Lenin, an inveterate disciple of the dialectic who, in his faithfulness to the *Bilderverbot* of Marxist theory, eschewed positive figurations of sociabst utopia and instead measured objective political progress only in negative terms (e.g. as the atrophying of the state apparatus), Gorky and Lunacharsky sought to provide concrete representations of the society to come.[75] And so, just as Schelling had once championed the foundational rautology of myth as an alternative to Hegel's apophatic method, whose march to truth and certitude proceeds along the path of logical negation, these early architects of socialist realism established mythical figuration as a cornerstone of a positive revolutionary philosophy.[76] Even if Lenin managed officially to eradicate god-building from the Bolshevik agenda, this secularized theology nonetheless returned after his death in the "positive heroes" (*положительные люди*) of the socialist realist pantheon[77] and in the importance that this art places on highly ritualized behaviors.[78] Indeed, mythological tautegory is at the very core of the socialist realist project, whose pageant of fatuous ideologemes, empty slogans, and formulaic epithets is closely related to the forms of phatic speech found in religious ritual. Such "floating signifiers" may be the "disability of all finite thought," Levi-Strauss explained, but, as sites of collective libidinal investment, they are also "the surety of all art, all poetry, every mythic and aesthetic invention."[79]

In an attempt to uncover these communal sites, Einstein embarked on an *Ethnologie du Blanc*, a personal autobiography that was at the same time a collective psychomythography. As he proceeded to inventory the contents of memory, peeling away its sedimented layers one by one, he discovered that he was writing not a personal memoir but a "novel about a generation or an epoch" (as he once characterized *Bebuquin II*).[80] Confirming in this way the structural law of autobiographical inquiry, whose vantage, as we saw earlier, is paradoxically deflected outward as it progresses into the deeper recesses of the individual psyche, Einstein descended into a world made of Jolles's "transmitted speech," a world of authorless clichés and secondhand utterances. In the course of writing, Einstein

again and again likened himself to a phonographic record, a mechanical medium for an inauthentic language whose origin lies elsewhere. Speech is not expressive in *Bebuquin II*, but is rather a kind of haunting, a dispatch from the preceding generations now long dead. Beb becomes a "phonograph for spirits, a haunted house, a passageway for spirits," Einstein wrote (Einstein Archive, 48). Like the other "lifetime prisoners of a phonographic society that has long been bankrupt," Beb is but an echo of voices that preceded his entry into subjectivity and selfhood (*Werke*, 3:114).

This reliance on the prefabricated schemes of myth connects Einstein's "necrologue of the ego" to another autobiographical project undertaken in the mid-1930s, Michel Leiris's *Manhood*. Like *Bebuquin II*, Leiris's book effaces the "authentic" author of autobiography, replacing him with a subject whose behavior is rigorously schematized and whose language is likewise fashioned out of readymade phrases. From its very first lines, which initiate a cold and radically unfeeling inspection of Leiris, *Manhood* seeks to repatriate the most intimate contents of his psyche to a presubjective condition of reified exteriority. Echoing Einstein's "desire . . . to sink back into a mineral existence," Leiris thus characterized *Manhood* as a "symbolic attempt at mineralization."[81] This petrification of the self commences with an exposition of a set of mythological themes, "the frame—or the fragments of a frame—within which everything else has been set."[82] A series of rigid, impersonal postures, these archetypes establish the ineluctable course that his life must take. Everything that follows upon them unfolds as if prophesied. So, for example, when Leiris falls in love, his object choice has already been anticipated, indeed exhaustively diagrammed, by the mythical figure of Judith. Whether in his childhood infatuation with "Tante Lise," in the first adult love that he experiences for his "initiatrix" Kay, or in his later obsessions with certain prostitutes, Leiris, "throat cut" and "penis inflamed," is always destined to play Holofernes to their Judiths.

Such "classical themes," as Leiris called these archetypes, are standard tropes in the figurative idiom of the return to order. But if critics of interwar art have hastily condemned these revenants as regressive nostalgia, as the primitivizing reaction of a technical civilization longing to recover some authentic

mode of existence, the neoclassicism that we find in *Manhood*, by contrast, is neither authentic nor originary but profoundly clichéd and counterfeit. Leiris transforms the archetypes of antiquity into a morbid statuary. "Marble attracts me by its glacial temperature and its rigidity," he wrote. "I actually imagine myself stretched out on a slab (whose coldness I feel against my skin) or bound to a column. Sometimes it seems to me I could formulate my desire by saying I lusted after a body 'cold and hard as a Roman building.'"[83] These antique themes provided Leiris no vitality. A devotee of Baroque theater, he staged his neoclassical statuary as a Racinian play of frozen tableaux that were propped up by mechanical reproductions and secondhand fictions. Leiris's deepest, most personal desire, he confessed, is to live alongside a trompe-l'oeil wife in a trompe-l'oeil house with a trompe-l'oeil log that burns in a trompe-l'oeil fireplace.[84]

In this regard, the myths and classical themes that populate Leiris's psyche are no different than the debased industrial commodities that play a central role in structuring the desire of the Western subject. And these too appear at the beginning of the text, where they are cathected by the young Michel in the manner of tribal fetishes, at once both collective and public but also deeply personal and secret. From the heraldic emblem that brands the stove *La Radieuse* to the hypnotic image of a rajah taken from a popular illustrated magazine, his fantasy life is pieced together from mass-produced articles "as a sort of photomontage," the author proposes.[85] These mundane commodities are objects of intense psychic investment, sites of what Leiris famously identified as "the sacred in everyday life."[86] In the same way that his romantic pursuits will recapitulate the story of Judith and Holofernes, his understanding of infinity—one of the deepest metaphysical enigmas of his being—was already prefigured by a Dutch cocoa tin that sat on his childhood breakfast table and featured on its label a picture of the same cocoa tin, and on the label of that tin yet another tin, and so on, in infinite regress.[87] The matrix of individual comportment and even of the structures of thought itself conform to the contours established by industrial commodities and the idiom of advertising, which, as the basic units and language in the collective mythology of the modern world, provide the preliminary architecture for young Michel's developing ego.

Thus, in *Manhood*, as in *Bebuquin II*, the author's archeological quest to discover his own unique point of origin yields only an exhibit of artifacts and ideologemes that predated his arrival in the world. For both writers, this venture to recover the collective contents of the individual psyche would become an ongoing process, interminable like the psychoanalysis that first prompted Leiris to write *Manhood*. Both projects in fact set their authors on a course of endless self-auditing—and self-erasure—that ended only with their respective deaths. In the case of *Bebuquin II* this enterprise was cut off by its author's suicide in 1940 as he was fleeing the Nazis, but for Leiris the process of autobiographical inventorying continued for another fifty years. Tellingly, the next volume that Leiris would publish after *Manhood* bore the title *Biffures*, a word that means both "scratches" and "erasures" and that, in an echo of *Bebuquin II*'s poetics of *Überstaltung*, or "overformation," suggests the dual process of writing on top of an existing record while simultaneously crossing out, canceling, the previous installment through the very act of reinscription.

Einstein and Leiris's discovery that autobiography does not recount a personal story, but, to the contrary, disintegrates into a collective narrative recalls the position of the philosopher Georg Misch, whose introduction to the epochal eight-volume *History of Autobiography* (1907–1969) quotes Dilthey's observation that, "[a]s a species, man dissolves into the process of history."[88] Approaching his origin, the author of *Bebuquin II* begins to blend psychaesthenically into the surrounding environment and events of the society from which he emerged. "I will become this epoch, these people," he wrote of the project (Einstein Archive, 4). Einstein depicts this dissolution into the collective process of history through the endless chains of metamorphosis that continuously modify his character's contours. He writes, for example, of the "manycreaturedmanydestiniedmanysexed body of little Laurenz" (Einstein Archive, 19), an open creature who merges with the figure of Lissi in a blur of "transvestism" and "hermaphroditism" (Einstein Archive, 4). Together these human transformers discover an eroticism that exceeds the sexual encounter, an ecstatic transport made possible by the innate plasticity and indeterminateness of the human form. Whereas all other organisms on this planet are confined to a closed anatomy that is alterable only by the

slow hand of evolution, humans "are able to sprout like plants or be inert like minerals, to radiate like stars or extinguish like moons. Which is to say that man is the acrobat of the worldly states that emanate from him. . . . man is the play of ceaseless metamorphoses that emerges in dreams" (*Werke*, 5:268).

Einstein borrowed this notion of the human as a structurally open, undefined being from contemporary biology, which, as we have already seen, also informed the constructivist paradigms of philosophical anthropology. If animal species dissolve into the process of morphological evolution, man, by contrast, dissolves into the process of history, as Dilthey observed. "[D]estabilized by the basic discoveries of biology" (*Werke*, 5:158) and recent scientific "efforts to alter and modify man" (*Werke*, 3:579), the classical humanist image of the body as closed, universal and timeless had been definitively overturned, Einstein argued. Once a being with a fixed essence, man "was no longer [an] image of order, no longer a stable model, but a bundle of processes" (*Werke*, 5:163) and an "an aggregate of functional relations" (*Werke*, 5:158). With the deterritorialization of man's image, the human body went from being a fixed substance to being a "passage" (*Werke*, 3:339), from a hierarchically organized and integral totality into a historical "hodge-podge" of disparate parts (Einstein Archive, 19). Here too Einstein discerned a resemblance between advanced industrial civilization and primitive cultures, who also viewed the human form as a tentative project. Like his distant ancestors, contemporary man "does not believe in the constancy of his body," he wrote (*Werke*, 3:338). The only difference, he continued, is that primitive man dissolves the individual body through totemic identification and ritual magic, whereas modern man modifies the human form through surgical enhancement and technical prostheses.

But man's biological indeterminacy is not just a physical or anatomical matter. Indeed, when Bataille wrote in a 1930 *Documents* article that "[m]an's architecture is not simple like that of animals and it is not even possible to say where he begins [*où il commence*]," he identified an anthropological enigma that was temporal as well.[89] As impossible as it is to say *where* the plastic body of man begins and ends, it is no more possible to say *when* the individual subject begins

historically, Einstein observed. "At first the individual contains 1000 destinies" (Einstein Archive, 19), which society bequeaths to her in the form of "mnemonic matter" (*Erinnerungsmassen*; *Fictions*, 140). As we observed in chapter 2's discussion of Leroi-Gourhan's "operational sequences," human beings inherit from their social milieu not just an abstract syntax of time, hut also the determinate contents of this temporal edifice, a cache of collective and transindividual memories. Building on Leroi-Gourhan's analysis, the philosopher Bernard Stiegler consequently observes that the "temporality of the human, which marks it off among other living beings, presumes exteriorization and prostheticity: there is time only because memory is 'artificial,' becoming constituted as already-there *since* its 'having been placed outside of the species.'" Man, he concludes, is an animal whose "historial, nonlived past can be inherited inauthentically."[90] In Einstein's *Ethnologie du Blanc*, this inauthentic mnemonic legacy takes the form of the collective scripts, myths, and symbols that reduce autobiographer to a human phonograph. The more this machine turns inward, the more its self-auditing is deflected outward and dissolves into the process of history.

Freud had encountered the same core enigma of "where man begins" while investigating infantile amnesia, a phenomenon that enshrouds early experiences up to around the seventh year. According to Freud, this curious absence of memory was attributable to a law of human development that he called the *zwei-zeitiger Ansatz*, or "beginning twice over." This theory, which reappears in a number of Freud's texts, proposes that the human child, unlike other young animals, undergoes a second birth years after its first, when the individual enters into the collective social frameworks of family and community. In contrast to the first, biological birth, which marks the infant's punctual arrival into the world, the second is the culmination of an exceptionally long period of physical development and psychic enculturation. This protracted period of "extra-uterine gestation," to use the term of the Swiss zoologist Adolf Portmann, gives the human multiple points of origin. Like Nietzsche, who defined man as the "not yet determined animal," Freud argued that this diphasic developmental structure is the evolutionary innovation that distinguishes humans from other creatures:

"postponement and the beginning twice over are intimately connected with the history of hominization [*Geschichte der Menschwerdung*]," he wrote. "Human beings appear to be the only animal organisms with a latency period and sexual retardation of this kind" (*Werke*, 16:180; *Standard Edition*, 23:75). For Freud, this notion of a "beginning twice over" explained the phenomenon of early childhood amnesia, which stems from the adult's incapacity to recall the period before her birth into society and history, that is, to recall a purely organic, creaturely existence before the acquisition of productive gestures, technology, and symbolic thought. It is an amnesia, moreover, that appears in Einstein's autobiography as an absence of narrative origin, an absence that imposes a cyclomythic structure on his text.

According to this diphasic developmental law, the life span of the subject is both longer and shorter than her organic existence in the world: longer, because this second birth inducts the subject into collective cultural technics whose historical duration far exceeds that of individual; and shorter, because this second, social birth recommences development years after physical birth. Like many of his contemporaries, Einstein used the word "generation" to designate these social frameworks into which the individual is born. With this key term, which recurs throughout *The Fabrication of Fictions* but especially in *Bebuquin II* (a "novel about a generation or an epoch"),[91] Einstein identified both an organic process of individual procreation ("the act or process of reproducing a living organism") as well as the larger social units into which people are assimilated ("all of the people born and living at about the same time, regarded collectively"[92]). It is a word whose use exploded during the interwar period in an attempt "to understand, by borrowing directly from the realm of biology, the exchange of forms between mental and social currents."[93] As Karl Mannheim noted in his famous 1928 essay "On the Problem of Generations," the phenomenon of generation is a key concept to understanding the unique developmental pattern of the human, whose course of growth and individuation proceeds by "incorporating itself into a group" (*das Hineinwachsen in eine Gruppe*).[94] If the duration of every other animal on this planet is measured exclusively in terms of organic life spans, only the human's is also measured in terms of generations. As Dilthey had explained, man alone dissolves into the process of history.

According to Freud, the evolutionary facts of man's premature birth and extra-uterine gestation constitute the biological foundation of the need for love and intimacy.[95] As a naturally relational being, the human organism requires for its ontogenetic development an affective community, a generation of peers. But, Einstein observed, something in this evolutionary program had miscarried in recent history, and with catastrophic results: "This generation was incapable of experiencing community in any form," he noted in *Bebuquin II* (*Einstein Archive*, 7). It is indeed significant that the conservative philosopher Arnold Gehlen, when confronting this same evolutionary pattern, came to a very different conclusion from Freud, arguing in his 1940 opus *Man* that the human infant's entry into the world in an unfinished state was the psychogenetic origin not of the desire for intimacy but of the need for authority and regulation. If, for Freud, the unfinished animal required community for completion, for Gehlen, the "deficient being" (*Mängelwesen*) was a "being of discipline" (*Zuchtwesen*) and a creature driven by a compulsion for constraint (*Formierungszwang*).

The two widely divergent conclusions that Freud and Gehlen drew from the same evolutionary mechanism reflect, with remarkable precision, the historical transition that Germany faced during the interwar period, when the biological capacity for intimacy and collective experience was channeled into the masochistic desire to submit to a totalitarian order defined by "Blood and Soil." In his famous study of the behavior and mental life of the National Socialist male, Klaus Theweleit defined these fascist subjects as the "not-yet-fully-born" (*die nicht zu Ende geborenen*).[96] Raised in a Wilhelminian society that denied them the possibility of realizing the desire for intimacy within secure social relations, this generation was left with an unstable drive economy that made them susceptible to fascist demagoguery. As Theweleit explained, these subjects responded to the overwhelming anxiety about the dissolving contours of selfhood with a pathological fortification of the ego that only further inhibited the possibility of experiencing stable affective bonds. Refused a second birth into that form of social collectivity known as "generation," this group's capacity for love was deformed into a need for discipline. The result, to repeat Einstein's conclusion, was that "this generation was incapable of experiencing community in any form."

It was in search of these collective forms that Einstein initiated his autobiographical project in the mid-1920s, hoping through this *Ethnologie du Blanc* to arrive at the cultural myths that defined his generation. As we have seen, this project was also an exercise in self-erasure. As time went on, Einstein's desire for collective experience grew increasingly radicalized until the point when, disclaiming his literary pursuits entirely, he joined the Durruti Column, in whose ranks he fought for two years during the Spanish Civil War. It is uncertain whether or not Einstein continued to work on *Bebuquin II* during these years, but his descriptions of existence within the syndicalist commune certainly reflect the desideratum of his autobiographical project. In one of his final published texts, Einstein praises Buenaventura Durutti for banning the pronoun *I* from language: "The Durutti Column knows only collective syntax. These comrades will teach the academics to restore the collective meaning of grammar. Durutti understood profoundly the power of anonymous labor. Namelessness and communism are one and the same" (*Werke*, 3:459). In the same way that, as Einstein explains here, Communism strives toward a state of anonymity, autobiography repatriates the *I* to a "collective syntax." Communism and autobiography are parallel projects of self-effacement, as Il'ia Ehrenburg proposed in 1925, when he observed that "good communists have no biography."[97] For this reason, Einstein explained, the destruction of the self, this auto-thanatography, was not a morbid impulse, since, to the contrary, the death of the ego is a birth into community. It is a form of socialization, registered in the shift from the *I* to the *we*. Just as the individual undergoes multiple births into society, so too are there multiple deaths, equally social, that precede the final gasp of breath. "In our language, then, we should say that death, like birth, is accomplished in stages," Lévy-Bruhl explained.[98] For Einstein, *Bebuquin II* was one of these stages.

5

The Secret Always on Display: Caricature and Physiognomy in the Work of John Heartfield

When socialist realism first appeared, nobody knew quite what to make of it. It may be difficult for us today to imagine that this artistic movement, which eventually became so rigorously schematized and so ruthlessly administered, could have originally been so provisional in its conception, but at the time of its appearance few people understood the meaning of this aesthetic departure. Emerging out of a miscellany of realisms that circulated in the aesthetic discourses of the interwar period, this new variety of realism triumphed over these various rivals, from "proletarian" to "romantic" realism, to receive the official imprimatur of Soviet state institutions in 1932, the year that all independent artistic organizations were officially liquidated. With the subsequent backing of the Comintern, socialist realism was vigorously promoted internationally, although there too the exact provisions of this aesthetic fiat remained elusive and open to an array of interpretations. Thus, in a letter to his friend Brecht written immediately after the August 1934 First Soviet Writers' Congress in Moscow, Sergei Tret'iakov, for example, attempted to summarize the proceedings of this congress, where the tantalizing phrase "socialist realism" had been invoked again and again, but, failing to provide a workable synopsis of the new doctrine, wrote simply, "I am afraid that my German doesn't permit me to express myself clearly enough. But I must emphasize that there are a series of essentially new positions which need to be discussed and studied."[1]

19:202; *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, trans. Edward Aveling (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1907), 29.

82. Eisenstein, "Vystuplenie," 2:118.

83. Charles Scott, "The Middle Voice of Metaphysics," *Review of Metaphysics* 42, no. 4 (1989): 749; 75281. See Philippe Eberhard, "The Middle Voice as Hermeneutic Key," in *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebek, 2004), 7–30.

84. In section 9.9, Aristotle notes that "for deeds many things are needed, and more, the greater and nobler the deeds are." *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. William David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

85. On this untranslatable term, see Fredric Jameson, "On Negt and Kluge," *October* 46 (autumn 1988): 151–177.

86. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 1981). English translation forthcoming from Zone Books in 2013.

87. "Die Geschichte der lebendigen Arbeitskraft: Diskussion mit Oskar Negt und Alexander Kluge," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 13, no. 48 (1983): 91. Fritz Todt was a leading Nazi engineer who oversaw the construction of the Autobahn using forced labor.

4 A Necrologue of the Ego: Carl Einstein's Autobiography, *Bebuquin II*

1. Leo Löwenthal, "Die biographische Mode," in *Schriften*, 1:235.

2. Heidemarie Oehm, for example, notes that "Einstein's preoccupation with his own biography in the increasing isolation of exile was . . . a way for him to secure his identity." "Carl Einstein: Leben und Werk im Exil," *Exil* (1982): 42.

3. Carl Einstein Archive, *Akademie der Künste Berlin*, file 17. Hereinafter abbreviated and referenced in text as Einstein Archive, followed by the file number.

4. Sebastian Zeidler, "Totality against a Subject: Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik*," *October* 107 (2004): 20–21.

5. In his letter to Kahnweiler, Einstein writes that "I have already known for a long time that the phenomenon known as 'cubism' extends far beyond painting." This observation then prompts, *inter alia*, a discussion of cubist literature (*Werke*, 4:153). Einstein concludes this letter by reiterating his doubt that "cubism is only an optical specialization; if this were the case, then it would be flawed, because it wouldn't be fundamental. As a valid experience [cubism] embraces much more than this; I believe that it is only a question of our power to grasp [cubism]" (*Werke*, 4:160). As we will soon see, this critique of "optical specialization" became fundamental to his general critique of visual modernism.

6. Umberto Eco, "An Ars Oblivionalis? Forget It!," trans. Marilyn Migiel, *PMLA* 103, no. 3 (May 1988): 259.

7. Ibid., 258.

8. Freud too observes that memories can only be transformed, not eradicated: "Since we overcame the error of supposing that the forgetting we are familiar with signified a destruction of the memory-trace [*eine Zerstörung der Gedächtnisspur*]—that is, its annihilation—we have been inclined to take the opposite view, that in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish—that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances . . . it can once more be brought to light." *Werke*, 16:426; *Standard Edition*, 21:16.

9. Eco, "An Ars Oblivionalis?," 260.

10. See especially book ten of *Confessions*: "Memory's huge cavern, with its mysterious, secret, and indescribable nooks and crannies, receives all of [my] perceptions, to be recalled when needed and reconsidered. Every one of them enters into memory, each by its own gate, and is put on deposit there." Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 186.

11. Denis Hollier, "Notes (on the Index Card)," *October* 112 (2005): 40.

12. Letter to Tony Simon-Wolfskehl of Jan. 25, 1923. Quoted in Manuela Günter, *Anatomie des Anti-Subjekts: Zur Subversion autobiographischen Schreibens bei Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, und Carl Einstein* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1996), 180.

13. On the practices of self-citation and rewriting in Benjamin's later work, see Michael W. Jennings, "Double Take: Palimpsestic Writing and Image-Character in Benjamin's Late Prose," forthcoming in *Benjamin-Studien* 2 (2011).

14. On Freud and aphasia, see Daniel Heller-Roazen, "The Lesser Animal," in *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 129–148.

15. Thus Derrida's characterization of the convergence of dense inscription and beatific stupor in Freud's model of the "Mystical Writing Pad," or *Wunderblock*. Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 200.

16. Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*," *Critical Inquiry* 8 (summer 1982): 771.

17. Ibid., 773. In his reading of de Man's text on Hegel, Derrida observes that hypermnesia is effectively indistinguishable from amnesia. See Jacques Derrida, "The Art of Mémoires," in *Memoires for Paul de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 86.

18. On the archive and deletion, see Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

19. Lévy-Bruhl describes the process of outsourcing memory thus: "in prelogical mentality memory plays a much more important part than it does in our mental life, in which certain functions which it used to perform have been taken from it and transformed. . . . The preconnections, preperceptions, and preconclusions which play so great a part in the mentality of uncivilized people do not involve any logical activity; they are simply committed to memory. We must

therefore expect to find the memory extremely well developed in primitives, and this is, in fact, reported by observers." Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 92–93.

20. Carl Einstein, *Die Fabrikation der Fiktionen*, ed. Sibylle Penkert (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1973), 111. Hereinafter referenced in text and abbreviated as *Fictions*.

21. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imagination: A Psychological Critique*, trans. Forrest Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 40.

22. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. Jonathan Webber (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13. Hereinafter referenced in text *Imaginary*.

23. This understanding of the imagination as the determinate negation of the world would subsequently become the basis for Sartre's definition of consciousness as negation, advanced in his book on existential ontology from 1943, *Being and Nothingness*.

24. See Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Von der erkenntniskritischen zur linksradikalen Metamorphose der Romantik in der Moderne: Carl Einstein als Paradigma," *Kulturrevolution* 12 (1986): 62–67.

25. Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in *Negations*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 88–133.

26. In addition to a 500-page study of Mallarmé, which was destroyed when Sartre's apartment was bombed during the Algerian war, materials were published posthumously as *Mallarmé, or the Poet of Nothingness*, trans. Ernest Sturm (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988).

27. Writing in a mixture of German, French, and English that is typical of his exile years, Einstein uses the phrase "common sens" here.

28. The editor of *The Fabrication of Fictions* sets Einstein's handwritten passages in brackets.

29. Arno Holz, *Die Kunst: Ihr Wesen und ihre Gesetze* (Berlin: Wilhelm Issleib, 1891), 58.

30. Ernst Stadler, "Ein Urteil über Bebuquin," reprinted as an appendix in Einstein, *Werke*, 1:499. Niel Donahue summarily observes that the character Bebuquin "consists of negations." "Analysis and Construction: The Aesthetics of Carl Einstein," *German Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (1988): 429. Following Donahue, Dirk Heißerer has placed all of Einstein's work under the sign of negation, titling his 1992 study of Einstein *Negative Dichtung: Zum Verfahren der literarischen Dekomposition bei Carl Einstein* (Munich: Iudicium, 1992).

31. Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 129.

32. Einstein insisted, for example, on a crucial distinction between cubism and suprematism, arguing that the latter, in abandoning reference entirely, had severed all connection with extra-aesthetic reality. Because cubism, unlike suprematism or neoplasticism, would never take the leap into pure nonobjectivity made by Malevich and Mondrian, it would be spared the full fury of

Einstein's later critique of abstract art. Through their schematic, "low-budget clarity," nonobjective paintings "stand in opposition to the complexity of psychic processes," Einstein wrote (*Werke*, 3:53).

33. *Widersinning* is the word used by the gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Metzger in assessing his Ganzfeld ("total field") experiments. "Optische Untersuchungen am Ganzfeld. II. Mitteilung: Zur Phänomenologie des homogenen Ganzfelds," *Psychologische Forschung* 13, no. 1 (Jan. 1930): 7. See also the other findings, which appeared in Willy Engel, "Optische Untersuchungen am Ganzfeld. I. Mitteilung: Die Ganzfeldordnung," and Wolfgang Metzger, "Optische Untersuchungen am Ganzfeld. III. Mitteilung: Die Schwelle für plötzliche Helligkeitsänderung," both in *Psychologische Forschung* 13, no. 1 (Jan. 1930): 1–5, 30–54. The components of this experiment read like an assay of Greenbergian modernism: immobilized and thus allowed no forms of intersensory stimulation such as proprioceptive movement (= "pure opticality"), the spectator was placed before a giant luminous screen that wholly encompassed his field of vision (= "all-overness"). The idea of the Ganzfeld experiments, writes Brian Massumi, "was that if you could experimentally isolate the physical and physiological conditions of vision at their purest—at their simplest and at the same time at their fullest—you would discover the elementary nature of visual perception." And yet what Metzger instead discovered was that pure opticality was literally *widersinnig*, contrary to the senses. Rather than restoring a perceptually pure and primordial mode of vision, Metzger's optical reduction instead caused the test subjects to hallucinate. As he reported, after a long exposure to the screen, the test subjects could no longer even tell whether their eyes were open or closed. Metzger concluded from his experiments that the visual could not be separated from other senses, and that, indeed, there was no experience that was purely visual in nature. See Brian Massumi's discussion of the Ganzfeld experiments in "Chaos in the 'Total Field' of Vision," in *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 144–161; previous quote from 144.

34. Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 2. In this book, Krauss explores modernist painting's "need to abstract and reify each of the senses in a submission of human subjectivity to the model of positivist science" (8). This reification of the senses, Krauss writes, expressed "modernist culture's ambition that each of its disciplines be rationalized by being grounded in its unique and separate domain of experience. . . . For painting, this meant uncovering and displaying the conditions of vision itself, as these were understood, abstractly" (7). A similar account of pure opticality is elaborated by Caroline Jones, who situates Greenbergian formalism within those modern "regimes of sensory isolation and purification" that pursue the "general segmentation and bureaucratization of the body." Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), xxvii, 390.

35. See especially his outline for his *Traité de La Vision* from 1939 and his notes on "The Transvisual" in *Werke* 4:236–266, 368–386.

36. Understanding a modernist work "is always a two-stage affair," Jameson continues: "first substituting a realistic hypothesis—in narrative form—then interpreting that secondary and invented or projected core narrative according to the procedures we reserved for the older realistic novel in general." Fredric Jameson, "Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism," in

The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971–1986, vol. 2: *The Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 129–130.

37. In his discussion of the sublime and modernism, Lyotard notes that Kant "cites the Jewish law banning images as an eminent example of negative presentation: optical pleasure when reduced to near nothingness promotes an infinite contemplation of infinity. Even before romantic art had freed itself from classical and baroque figuration, the door had thus been opened to enquiries pointing towards abstract and Minimal art." "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," in *The Inhuman*, 98. In the same volume, see also "After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetic": 135–143.

38. Pavel Medvedev, "Formal'nyi metod v literaturovedenii," in *M. M. Bakhtin (pod maskoi)* (Moscow: Labirint, 2000), 265, 275; trans. Albert J. Wehrle as *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 87, 96. Christoph Menke, an expert on Adorno and negative aesthetics, offers an explanation of modernism fully in concert with Medvedev's analysis: aesthetic difference, Menke writes, "can thus only be defined as the result of that event or happening which takes up . . . initially nonaesthetic qualities and negatively transforms them." *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, trans. Neil Solomon (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 14.

39. "Das Altern der neuen Musik," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, 20 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), 14:148; hereinafter abbreviated and referenced in text as *Schriften*, followed by volume and page number. "The Aging of the New Music," in *Essays on Music*, trans. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 185.

40. On modernism and fascism, see Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); and Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

41. Similarly, Niklas Luhmann notes in a discussion of aesthetic strategies in modernity that the "movement that, strangely enough, calls itself the avant-garde has taken this backward-looking manner to an extreme—like oarsmen, who face the direction they are coming from and have the goal of the journey behind their backs." *Art as Social System*, trans. Eva Knodt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 122–123.

42. Helmut Lethen, "Der Habitus der Sachlichkeit in der Weimarer Republik," in *Literatur der Weimarer Republik 1918–1933*, ed. Bernhard Weyergraf (Munich: Hanser, 1995), 383.

43. Rosalind Kranss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 91.

44. Sergei Tret'iakov, "Otkuda i kuda?" *Lef* 1 (1924): 13; "From Where to Where?" in *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestos*, ed. and trans. Anna Lawton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 206.

45. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michal Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 18.

46. Bürger concurs that the avant-garde "presupposes that means are freely available, i.e. no longer part of a system of stylistic norms where, albeit in mediated form, social norms expressed themselves." Ibid., 17.

47. Viktor Shklovskii, "Zoo: Pis'ma ne o liubvi, ili Tret'ia Eloiza," in *Gamburgskii schet* (Saint Petersburg: Limbus, 2000), 33; *Zoo: Or Letters Not about Love*, trans. Richard Sheldon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 34–35.

48. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Schwindende Stabilität der Wirklichkeit: Eine Geschichte des Stilbegriffs," in *Stil: Geschichten und Funktion eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Diskurselements*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 766.

49. See the documents in *The College of Sociology 1937–1938*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

50. For an introduction to Mass Observation, see Nick Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

51. B. J. Kospoth, "A New Philosophy of Art," in *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, January 17, 1931. Reprinted in Einstein, *Werke*, 5:860.

52. Because this 1930 text, "Schweißfuß klagt gegen Pfurz in trüber Nacht," shares with *Bebuquin II* kindred imagery and the same dramatis personae (Laurenz and Lissi), I would argue this text belongs to the *Bebuquin II* project.

53. In the Persephone section, Einstein makes reference to the lyrical structure of the Homeric version of the myth, namely hexameter. This suggests that, of the various versions of the myth, it was the Homeric Hymn specifically, written in dactylic hexameter, that he used as the source for his narrative about Persephone.

54. *The Homeric Hymns*, ed. and trans. Apostolos Athanassakis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 2–3.

55. In his essay "How Do Diaries End?" Philippe Lejeune discusses "the impossibility . . . of grasping this death of writing." "It wouldn't occur to anyone to explain how to end a diary," he writes, since "it would be like writing a treatise on suicide." *Biography* 24, no. 1 (winter 2001): 100.

56. Quoted in Klaus Kiefer, *Diskurswandel im Werk Carl Einsteins* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1994), 481.

57. Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956).

58. Carl Einstein, "Zusammenhängendes unzusammenhängendes: Bruchstück aus Bebuquin 2," in *Offene Literatur*, ed. Helmut Heissenbüttel (Munich: text + kritik, 1977), 9.

59. Elsewhere Einstein observed that the "history of man is almost simply too long for man. He has already created so many mental and formal variants that he must forget and primitivize in order not to go insane" (*Werke*, 4:382). Along similarly lines, Andreas Huyssen has argued that it was during the interwar period, specifically, that thinkers first began "to think memory and amnesia together rather than simply to oppose them." At this moment emerged a "mnemonic

fever" that threatened "to consume memory itself." *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 7.

60. Paul de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Continuum, 1979), 65, 51.

61. On aesthetic supersaturation in socialist realist art, see Alla Efimova, "To Touch on the Raw: The Aesthetic Affections of Socialist Realism," *Art Journal* 56, no. 1 (1997): 72–80.

62. Alfred Döblin, "Vom alten zum neuen Naturalismus: Akademie-Rede über Arno Holz" (1930), in *Schriften zu Ästhetik, Poetik und Literatur*, ed. Erich Kleichschmidt (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1989), 263–270.

63. De Man, "Shelley Disfigured," 51.

64. On the structuralist sign in analytic cubism see Yve-Alain Bois, "Kahnweiler's Lesson," *Representations* 18 (spring 1987), 33–68; and Rosalind Krauss, "The Motivation of the Sign," in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, ed. Lynn Zelevansky (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 261–286.

65. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. and trans. Donald Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 118.

66. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (London: Routledge, 1987), 63.

67. André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1958), 91.

68. F. W. J. Schelling, quoted in Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 144.

69. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 206.

70. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The Reason of Myth," in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 255. In the West, Vernant observes, myth "is either defined negatively in terms of what it lacks or fails to offer, as non-sense, non-reason, non-truth, non-reality or—if it is granted any positive mode of being—it is explained away as something other than itself. It is as if its existence depended upon it being transposed or translated into some other language or type of thought. Sometimes . . . it is credited with a truthful meaning but this is immediately interpreted as the truth purveyed by philosophical discourse, and in this case myth is presented as no more than a clumsy gesture toward the latter or an indirect allusion to it." "The Reason of Myth," in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 223.

71. Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 90.

72. In contrast to figurative art, which canalizes and binds the libido, abstract art, as Lyotard points out, repulses desire and redirects the aesthetic encounter to a "space of anguish" that he identifies with the Freudian death drive. Thus abstract art provides "no recognition, representation or

connotation; there is no point where we are able to link communication and participation to an 'erotic' unity. The forms presented are situated well short of discourse and action. They are silent because they break the illusory fulfillment of desire, the lure by which Eros gives itself to seeing and hearing as reality." In abstract art, desire "meets the screen and is reflected on it. . . . It lacks objectification and object recognition. The plastic space is a space of anguish." He concludes that abstract artists like Malevich and El Lissitzky "were not an *artistic* avant-garde," but were instead "anti-art," focused on a "critical overturning": "What is important is that today they give us and artists and politicians a chance to reflect on a critical aesthetic, an aesthetic of the death drive (which, moreover, Freud suggests in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) in its relation with revolutionary critique." These final lines on the critical aesthetic of "anti-art" resonate powerfully with Einstein's analysis of avant-garde negation. "Plastic Space and Political Space," trans. Mark S. Roberts, *boundary 2* 14, no. 1–2 (autumn 1985): 221–222.

73. Myth "is assimilated, as by Freud, with other forms of the 'symptomatic' expression of unconscious desires; it is connected with the products of the affective impulses as manifested in the imagery of dreams, and the fantasies of certain neuroses that are occasioned by the condensation, displacement, and symbolic representation of the objects of the libido." Vernant, "The Reason of Myth," 237.

74. In a 1932 essay, Einstein mocked as "academic reactionary Socialism" the new Latinity being touted by Anatoly Lunacharsky in Russia and explained that "a new social form, renewed by Revolution, would bring with it an equally revolutionary culture and new human type, which would have absolutely nothing in common with Hellenism" (*Werke*, 3:538). If there were an art of antiquity that Einstein would endorse, then it certainly would not be the "embarrassing classicism" of this "optical cliché," but the Dionysian, oriental antiquity that was celebrated by Nietzsche (*Werke*, 3:300; 4:360). The latter much more closely corresponds to the "metamorphotic" and "mythical realism" that, for Einstein, represented a third term that was neither apophatic modernism nor academic naturalism.

75. In his book, *Religion and Socialism* (1908 and 1911), Lunacharsky echoed Gorky's call for the production of a socialist religion that, without abandoning reason, could establish new myths and embodied socialist values.

76. Although the source for Gorky and Lunacharsky's doctrine of god-building was not Schelling, but that other great dissenter from the dialectic, Friedrich Nietzsche. "And how many new gods are still possible?" Nietzsche had asked. "Is it necessary to elaborate that a god prefers to stay beyond everything that is bourgeois and rational?" *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), 534.

77. Gorky eventually became the major proponent of a *polozhitel'naia estetika*, or "positive aesthetic," launching at the end of the 1920s a journal entitled *Our Achievements* (*Наши достижения*), which was dedicated to pursuing this affirmative poetics.

78. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2000).

79. Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, 63.

80. Quoted in Günter, *Anatomie des Anti-Subjekts*, 163.

81. Michel Leiris, quoted in Denis Hollier, "Poetry from A to . . ." in *Absent without Leave: French Literature under the Threat of War*, trans. Catherine Porter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 71.

82. Michel Leiris, *Manhood: A Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility*, trans. Richard Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 14.

83. Ibid., 26.

84. Ibid., 121.

85. Ibid., 161.

86. Michel Leiris, "The Sacred in Everyday Life," in *The College of Sociology 1937–1938*, 24–31.

87. Ibid., 11.

88. Georg Misch, "Begriff und Ursprung der Autobiographie," in *Geschichte der Autobiographie*, 4 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1907), 1:7.

89. Quoted in Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 76. Original French in *La prise de la Concorde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 141.

90. Stiegler, *Technics and Time I*, 172, 5.

91. See also Einstein's extensive notes on generation in "Generations" and the "Biology of Ideas," in *Werke*, 4:437–445.

92. "generation, *n.*" *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. 2009; online version December 2011. http://oed.com/view/Entry/77521.

93. Sigrid Weigel, *Genea-Logik: Generation, Tradition, und Evolution zwischen Kultur- und Naturwissenschaften* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 2006), 114.

94. Karl Mannheim, quoted in Weigel, *Genea-Logik*, 116.

95. In his 1926 essay on "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety," Freud noted that the "intra-uterine existence [of the human] seems to be short in comparison with that of most animals, and it is sent into the world in a less finished state. As a result the influence of the real external world upon it is intensified and an early differentiation between the ego and the id is promoted. Moreover, the dangers of the external world have a greater importance for it, so that the value of the object which can alone protect it against them and take the place of its former intra-uterine life is enormously enhanced. The biological factor, then, establishes the earliest situations of danger and creates the need to be loved which will accompany the child through the rest of its life." *Werke*, 14:200; *Standard Edition*, 20:154–155.

96. See Klaus Theweleit, "Collected Observations on the Ego of the Not-Yet-Fully-Born," in *Male Fantasies*, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 2:252–271.

97. Il'ia Ehrenburg, *Ruach* (Paris: 1925), 178.

98. Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 276.

5 The Secret Always on Display: Caricature and Physiognomy in the Work of John Heartfield

1. Letter to Brecht from September 8, 1934, reprinted in the appendix to Fritz Mierau, *Erfindung und Korrektur* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1976), 263. In her seminal discursive analysis of the speeches delivered at the 1934 First Soviet Writers' Congress, Régine Robin has demonstrated that the use of the phrase "socialist realism" was not yet standardized at this time. To the contrary, it seems that each time the phrase was invoked at the conference, it signified something different. See Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

2. Scholarship has pointed out that the central categories of socialist realism have little purchase in the field of aesthetics proper. So, for example, Katerina Clark writes that "socialist realism is not to any marked degree performing an aesthetic function," and Leonid Heller suggests that its "categories are in essence deeply ideological and not simply 'aesthetic.'" In, respectively, "Socialist Realism *with* Shores: The Conventions for the Positive Hero" (27) and "A World of Prettiness: Socialist Realism and Its Aesthetic Categories" (51). Both of these essays appear in *Socialist Realism without Shores*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

3. See the documents in *Die Expressionismusdebatte: Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption*.

4. P. Iudin and A Fadeev, "Sotsialisticheskii realizm—osnovnoi metod sovetskoi literatury," *Pravda* (May 8, 1934), n.p.

5. Thus Leah Dickerman explains that "despite its anachronistic look[,] socialist realism in the visual arts must be understood as a post-photographic practice." "Camera Obscura: Socialist Realism in the Shadow of Photography," *October* 93 (summer 2000): 140.

6. Louis Aragon, "Adolf Hoffmeister et la beauté d'aujourd'hui," *Lettres françaises* (Paris), January 14–20, 1960, quoted in *John Heartfield: Der Schnitt entlang der Zeit: Selbstzeugnisse, Erinnerungen, Interpretationen*, ed. Roland März (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1981), 351. Hereinafter abbreviated and referenced as *Schnitt*.

7. Ernst Bloch, "Der Nazi und das Unsägliche," in *Gesamtausgabe*, 16 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 11:190.

8. Louis Aragon, "The Challenge to Painting," in *The Surrealists Look at Art*, ed. Pontus Hulten (Venice, Calif.: Lapis Press, 1990), 63. Aragon takes this quote from Isidore Ducasse.

9. Adolf Hoffmeister, a friend of Heartfield and fellow photomonteur, observed that speaking with Heartfield "is not easy. Johnny speaks the same way that a flea jumps. A leap here, a leap there, and after a while the topic has grown and acquired contours, and then after two hours one no longer knows where the conversation started." "Dadamonteur John Heartfield," in *Schnitt*, 68.