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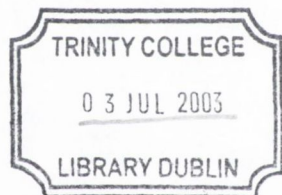
**THE  
FEAR AND  
TREMBLING  
OF  
MALTE LAURIDS  
BRIGGE**

**In Two Volumes: Volume One**

**Daragh Anthony Downes**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor in  
Philosophy**

**The University of Dublin,  
Trinity College  
2002**



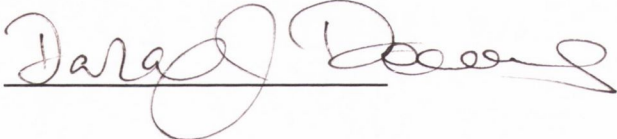
THESIS

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# Summary of Thesis

This thesis attempts to clear a space for a >transcendentalist< reading of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) by querying the >immanentism< of much modern *Malte*-scholarship.

In Chapter One the double argument is advanced that:

- a) critical fixation on the book as a quintessential *Großstadtroman* in the very vanguard of modernist response to a new socio-historical epoch around the turn of the century runs the risk of >paradigm-blindness<, occluding existential, occultistic and spiritual themes;
- b) the formal radicalness of the book has been greatly exaggerated, being in turn perennially enlisted for a reductively socio-historical hermeneusis.

A preliminary case is presented for reading the *Malte* in terms of a Kierkegaardian aesthetic.

Chapter Two scrutinises the earliest Papers in the book for initial clues as to the peculiar grammar of Malte Laurids Brigge's *Sehenlernen* project. Malte's *flâneries* through Paris, as well as his more sedentary moments there, are read as experiments in metanormal perception. From a close reading of these early Papers there quickly emerges the sense of an unfolding epistemological tragi-comedy.

Chapter Three theorises the injection of paranormal motifs into the Papers, leading to a characterisation of Malte as an apprentice magus. The development of transcendental faculties of perception and experience is identified as *the* reigning concern of the book. *Sehenlernen* is shown to signify, at least in part, an apprenticeship in *Hell-sehen*, with Malte pretending to the status of a Graf Brahe-like seer. Yet here too, in a cluster of episodes of Hoffmannesque ambiguity, epistemological humiliation is seen to haunt Malte as he inscribes both his Parisian present and his Danish past.

Chapter Four chronicles the disintegration phase of Malte's apprenticeship in occultism with a textual analysis of two particularly revealing moments - the *Medizinstudent* and *Zeitungsverkäufer* episodes (Papers XLIX-LIII and LIX respectively).

Chapter Five tentatively establishes a Kierkegaardian framework for understanding Malte's crisis and his corresponding textual praxis. The Unhappy Consciousness has failed to bridge the sensuous and supersensuous realms, yet this monistic defeat results not in sheer spiritual collapse but in a passionate enrichment of subjective authenticity. The >experimental< character of the later Papers, as defined in the Kierkegaardian sense, is sketched.

A brief >Conclusion?< section synthesises and problematises the findings of Chapters Two to Five.

## Acknowledgments

Some ten days into my first year studying German in Trinity College, I made an appointment with the then Head of Department, Professor Eda Sagarra, to inform her of my decision to leave the subject. The good-humoured decency with which she dealt with this querulous Junior Freshman certainly left its mark, and some ten years later I am proud to call her an inspiration and a friend. On so many levels, this thesis - and so much more - would have been unthinkable without her. In Dr. Jürgen Barkhoff I have been blessed with a *Doktorvater* of quite uncommon generosity of spirit. Particularly when things were moving more slowly than might have seemed desirable, he encouraged me to keep faith in the project and in myself. (I hope I have not let him down.) Quite apart from the intellectual guidance I have received from him, the deeply humane ethos which he brings to life in and beyond the academy has influenced me beyond measure.

I wish to thank my friends in the Department of Germanic Studies in Trinity College for the supportive and intellectually stimulating environment they have provided me with over the years, in both my undergraduate and postgraduate periods.

I spent 1997-98 advancing this thesis at Konstanz University, whose incomparably student-friendly facilities were a particular boon. That year abroad was generously funded by a scholarship from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst. While at Konstanz I had the good fortune to be co-supervised by Professor Ulrich Gaier, whose seminar there on the Elegies some four years earlier had originally helped to kindle my interest in Rilke.

In 2000-2001, and at a critical juncture for this thesis, I was awarded a scholarship by the Irish Research Council for the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences which made it possible for me to devote the necessary time to academic research.

For their unstinting assistance in making key research materials available to me, I would like to record my sincere thanks to Diplom-Psych. Eberhard Bauer of the Institut für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Naturwissenschaft in Freiburg, Monika Schlenger of the Goethe Institute, Dublin, and Nicola Creighton, a fellow postgraduate student in T.C.D.

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A passion for the formal study of literature was instilled in me by Gerry Haugh, my English teacher and form tutor for six years at Belvedere College, S.J. - and close friend ever since. Always tempering

his advocacy of 'good books' with the cautionary insistence that they are in the final analysis 'a damned poor substitute for life', he prepared me well indeed for future encounters with the conundrums of existentialism.

Finally, and most importantly, I have been graced with the wonderfully 'transitive' love of a remarkable family. I thank my sister Jane and my brothers Paul and John for infinitely more than can be set down here. Thanks too to J.C., for everything. Thank you, Galina, for the joy you have brought.

I dedicate this thesis, it goes without saying why, to my beautiful parents, Terry and Tony; and to the spirit of my beloved grandmother, Pauline O'Connor († 1998) - *so leben wir und nehmen immer Abschied...*



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[...] so ist es dieses Buches [...] Geheimnis und gewissermaßen Entschuldigung, daß seine für viele Augen nur eingebildeten Konflikte, - Mächte in Bewegung setzen, über die kein Zweifel ist [...] -Um dieser großen Einflüsse willen, die darin, ich will nicht sagen, Gestalt annehmen, die möglicherweise nur so vorläufig und faute de mieux auftreten wie etwa ein Gespenst es tut, fang ich meinen Malte Laurids neuerdings selbst wieder an zu lesen mit Erstaunen, mit jenem Erstaunen an der Naivität und Bescheidenheit des Großen, das äußerst unzulängliche Anlässe benutzt, gegenwärtig zu werden, wenn diese Anlässe nur vertrauensvoll nach ihm zu offenstehen [...]

Rainer Maria Rilke to Hedda Sauer,  
January 28<sup>th</sup> 1912

# INTRODUCTION

»Aber die Monna Lisa *nie mehr zu sehen*: Malte Laurids, für den sie, wenn ich mich recht erinnere, von unbeschreiblicher Realität war, würde, wenn er das noch erlebt hätte, aus diesem Umstand wahrscheinlich geschlossen haben, daß er gestorben sei -: so sicher schien sie ihm in ihrem offenbaren Geheimnis, verglichen mit seiner eigenen Existenz. Freilich, er übertrieb immer. -«

Rainer Maria Rilke to Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, August 25<sup>th</sup> 1911.

\*\*\*

»>Wodurch aber unterscheidet sich denn ein Toter von einem Menschen, welcher ernst wird, auf die Zeit verzichtet und sich einschließt, um über etwas ruhig nachzudenken, dessen Lösung ihn lange schon quält? Unter den Leuten kann man sich doch nicht einmal des Vaterunsers erinnern, wie denn erst irgend eines anderen dunkleren Zusammenhanges, der vielleicht nicht in Worten, sondern in Ereignissen besteht. Man muß abseits gehen in irgend eine unzugängliche Stille, und vielleicht sind die Toten solche, die sich zurückgezogen haben, um über das Leben nachzudenken<.«

Rilke

*Das Lied von der Gerechtigkeit.*

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»What is happiness? A ghost which is only when it has been. What is hope? A persistent tormentor one cannot get rid of, a shrewd swindler who holds out even longer than honesty, a quarrelsome friend who always retains his rights, even when the emperor has lost his. What is memory? A burdensome consoler, a knave who wounds from behind, a shadow one cannot sell even if someone would buy it! What is bliss? A desire one gives to whoever will have it. What is faith? A rope by which one gets hung if he does not hang himself. What is truth? A secret the dying take with them. What is friendship? One plague more! What is expectation? A flying arrow which does not take off. What is fulfillment? An arrow which misses the mark.«

Søren Kierkegaard

undated journal entry 1844.

i.

»Möglichst kurz, s'il vous plaît«:

The Matter With Malte Laurids Brigge

»Und nun sollte ich erzählen, wie das eigentlich mit mir wäre. Möglichst kurz, s'il vous plaît. Denn viel Zeit hätten die Herren nicht«. <sup>1</sup> The eponymous notebook keeper in and of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) has been summoned to the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris for an experimental course of treatment in *Elektrisieren*. <sup>2</sup> After a protracted wait, during which he is harried by a receptionist auditioning with steely gusto for a part in Kafka, he is finally ushered into a consultation room where he finds himself faced by a rather supercilious senior doctor and a group of faceless junior medics. Intimidated and embarrassed by the impatiently direct question that is put to him, Malte is on the verge of tears. In response to this clinical gaze, this »überlegenen, fachlichen Neugier, die sie gelernt hatten« <sup>3</sup>, all he can muster is a stiffly worded parry: »>Ich hatte bereits die Ehre, Ihnen, mein Herr, alle Auskünfte zu geben, die ich geben kann. Halten Sie es für nötig, daß diese Herren

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<sup>1</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, in: Rilke, *Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe: Bd.III*, edited by August Stahl, pp.453-635. This edition, including *Nachlaß* texts (pp.637-660) and Stahl's editorial apparatus (pp.866-1053), is hereafter referred to as *MLB*. Here: *MLB*, Paper XIX, p.494. Other texts from this volume to be designated under >KA III<.

<sup>2</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIX, p.492.

eingeweiht werden, so sind Sie nach unserer Unterredung gewiß imstande, dies mit einigen Worten zu tun, während es mir sehr schwer fällt«.<sup>4</sup> The senior doctor obligingly convenes a brief, muted colloquy by the window with his subordinates, bringing them, »mit einer waagerechten, schwankenden Handbewegung«,<sup>5</sup> up to speed on the patient's condition. The consultation comes to a close with Malte's brusque dismissal from the room pending further summons at some stage within the afternoon's tight schedule.

Malte Laurids Brigge as a body and soul in distress. The diagnostic transposition of this incoherent distress into the specifications of a specialist discourse. The deferral of a definitive response... One could be forgiven for reading the above scene as a parable on the academic assimilation, over the past ninety years, of this strange case of *Malte Laurids Brigge*. Or rather: Malte Laurids Brigge. For Malte scholars have relentlessly set themselves the diagnostic task of lingering - though hardly, it must be said, with the words *Möglichst kurz, s'il vous plaît* guiding the typical enquiry - with this simple question: *what is actually the matter with Malte?* Thus the critic's task, like that of the doctor, has become a matter of systematising the patient's subjective testimony by converting it into the cohesion of a hermeneutic response.

*What is actually the matter with Malte?* So powerfully does the Malte-figure beckon to us, like some *Jahrhundertwende* Werther, that we are tempted as readers and critics to suspend our awareness that the words *actually* and

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<sup>3</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.494.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



*Malte* have in fact scant ontological business to be doing with each other in the one sentence. The *Existenzentwurf* which Rilke has shaped in this text, supported as it is by the fictive framework of an *Ich*-testimony sedimented in private notebooks and prepared by a shadowy editorial hand, invites response first and foremost at the level of existential resonance. One is in similar territory to that mapped out by T. S. Eliot in his famous essay on another melancholic young Dane prone to spectral visitations and obsessed with death: *Malte's* near-anagram Hamlet.<sup>6</sup> »Few critics,« complained Eliot, »have ever admitted that *Hamlet* the play is the primary problem, and Hamlet the character only secondary.«<sup>7</sup> Ellen Key's response to the *Malte*-book upon its publication in 1910 registers in not untypical fashion such a felt priority of characterological impact over semiotic system in *Malte*/*Malte* studies: »Niemand wird doch die Begegnung mit dieser im Ringen mit Gott lahm gewordenen Seele vergessen können, einer Seele, die nicht zu den leicht befriedigten Bejahern der >überlieferten Wahrheiten< über Gott, das Leben, den Tod gehört [...] Ein Seelenzustand wie der Brigges birgt ein Leiden, so groß, daß es bei andern Leiden zeitigt.«<sup>8</sup> Rilke himself seems to have been

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<sup>6</sup> The original Hamlet is variously referred to as Amleth, Amled - and Amlet. (But perhaps such musings are best left to the Joyceans.) Rilke had not read Hamlet by April 1910, as an amusing anecdote in Rudolf Kassner's 1926 homage to his deceased friend demonstrates: »So war auch Rilkes Bildung ohne Klischee. Ich sehe noch das Staunen in Geheimrat Bodes militärischem Gesicht, als ihm Rilke in Duino gestand, daß er den >Hamlet< nie gelesen habe« (Kassner, *Rilke. Gesammelte Erinnerungen 1926-1956*, edited by Klaus E. Bohnenkamp, Pfullingen: 1976, p.11). Hamlet does however figure prominently in Kassner's own *Der indische Idealismus. Eine Studie* (München: 1903), which Rilke greatly admired.

<sup>7</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems" [1919], in: *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hamlet. A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by David Bevington (New Jersey: 1968), pp.22-26, here: p.22.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen Key, *Ein Gottsucher* [1910], in: *Materialien zu Rainer Maria Rilke >Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge<*, edited with an afterword by Hartmut Engelhardt (Frankfurt/M: 1974), pp.148-151. Engelhardt's edition hereafter referred to as *MLB-Materialien*. Here: *MLB-Materialien*, p.151.

exercised by the anxious thought that his book might trigger an epidemic amongst impressionable readers akin to the *Werther-Krankheit* of the 1780s.<sup>9</sup>

He writes to one correspondent in 1912:

[...] gleichwohl kann es immer geschehen, daß das Buch einem in einem nachgiebigen Augenblick mit seiner verhängnisvollen Seite sich zukehrt, und ich halte es nicht für ausgeschlossen, daß es dann bis zu einem gewissen Grade schädlich oder doch unnütz betrübend wirken könnte. Ich sehe seit einer Weile ein, daß ich Menschen, die in der Entwicklung ihres Wesens zart und suchend sind, streng davor warnen muß, in den Aufzeichnungen Analogieen für das zu finden, was sie durchmachen; wer der Verlockung nachgibt und diesem Buche parallel geht, muß notwendig abwärts kommen [...]<sup>10</sup>

In 1938, Alfred Vogt goes so far as to publish an article entitled “Ärztliche Betrachtung über >Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge<” in the *Deutsche medizinische Wochenschrift*, in which he intimates that Malte’s psychophysical crisis leaves him needing the intervention of the divine as much as the physic.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bernhard Blume, “Rainer Maria Rilke: Existenz und Dichtung”, in: *Rilke heute. Beziehungen und Wirkungen. Zweiter Band*, [Suhrkamp, no editor named] (Frankfurt/Main: 1975), pp.168-186, here p.182, writes: »Was Rilke von Malte sagt, daß er aus seinen >Gefahren gemacht< sei, hätte genau so Goethe von *Werther* sagen können, und wenn Rilke von sich und Malte sprach und sich als den Überlebenden bezeichnete, so hätte Goethe nicht anders von sich und *Werther* sprechen können, und ungefähr so, nur mit ein bißchen anderen Worten hat er es ja auch gesagt.« Cf Linda Haverty Rugg’s close examination of the parallels and divergences between Rilke and Goethe in their respective relations to their fictions - “A Self at Large in the Hall of Mirrors: Rilke’s *Malte Laurids Brigge* as Autobiographical Act”, in: *Seminar*. Vol. XXIX, Number 1, February 1993, pp.43-54, here pp.47ff. However when, having noted a remarkably similar metaphoric of explosion between each writer’s *Selbstkommentar*, Rugg writes: »whereas Goethe’s work explodes the society around him, Rilke’s explodes the writer himself« (ibid., p.48), Rilke’s anxieties about the effects of his work on vulnerable readers remain regrettably neglected.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Artur Hospelt, 11.2.12, *MLB-Materialien*, p.99.

<sup>11</sup> Printed in *MLB-Materialien*, pp.151-7. Vogt’s article announces a tradition of psychoanalytic approaches to the text which quickly becomes biographically oriented, seeking, as Andreas Huyssen puts it, »to recouple Malte with his author whose symptoms the text would display and displace in narrative form« (“Paris / Childhood: The Fragmented Body in Rilke’s *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*”, in: *Modernity and the Text: Revisions of German Modernism*, edited by David Bathrick & A. H., New York & Oxford: 1989, pp.113-141, here p.116).

For all that, to suggest that scholarly focus on poetological and narratological dimensions of the *Malte* has been missing would be simply aberrant.<sup>12</sup> At least since Ulrich Fülleborn's influential 1961 essay "Form und Sinn der Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge",<sup>13</sup> such issues have been consistently foregrounded with greater or lesser sophistication. Yet it has just as consistently proven impossible to disarticulate the question of the text's form from that of its characterology. If, on the one hand, Malte's existential crisis is frequently viewed as being triggered by an aesthetic crisis, then the converse is equally stressed again and again: Malte's formal eccentricity as an aesthetic expression, by whatever mediations, of his existential crisis.<sup>14</sup> The recourse to what Ellen Key calls Malte's *Seelenzustand* has remained intact as the efficient interpretive fulcrum.

Whether programmatically or pragmatically, then, it seems that one cannot but begin with questions that would have displeased Eliot: *What is actually the matter with Malte? How can the psychological, emotional and existential temper of this troubled figure be ascertained?* It is as though this *matter* must first be fathomed if one is to generate meaningful responses to more theoretically self-conscious questions: *What is actually the matter with the book* >Die

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<sup>12</sup> Pace Birgit Giloy, who opens her study, *Die Aporie des Dichters: Rainer Maria Rilkes >Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge<* (München: 1992), with the complaint: »In der Forschungsliteratur zu Rilkes Buch sind autobiographische, psychologische, theologische, existenzialistische, sozialkritische und philosophische, nicht aber grundlegend poetologische Gesichtspunkte leitend gewesen« (ibid., p.7, emphasis added). If anything, as I shall argue in Chapter One and beyond, critical attention has only too often hypertrophied the >poetological< aspect of Malte's crisis, suppressing other aspects.

<sup>13</sup> Ulrich Fülleborn, "Form und Sinn der Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge. Rilkes Prosabuch und der moderne Roman", printed in: *MLB-Materialien*, pp.147-169.

<sup>14</sup> For the present, I am restricting discussion here to the question of Malte's crisis, and not that of his creator.

*Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*? How does the text's formal character contribute to the generation of characterological disposition along its thematic axis?

## ii.

### »Tiefendimension unseres Inneren«

### The Matter With Malte Laurids Brigge

It is the goal of the present thesis to offer a systematic consideration of these issues on the basis of a close reading of Rilke's text. First, however, by way of scene-setting prologue, let us entangle ourselves in an intertextual web:

In Paper LIX of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Malte recalls an incident involving a newspaper vendor who stands outside the Jardin du Luxembourg. Malte would hear him calling out the words »La Presse«<sup>15</sup> in sequences of two or three. On the basis of these sounds alone, Malte begins a psychoacoustic experiment: without looking directly at the man, he will attempt to reconstruct his features ex nihilo. When he finally checks his mental picture against the empirical evidence, the result is unequivocal:

Ich wußte sofort, daß meine Vorstellung wertlos war. Die durch keine Vorsicht oder Verstellung eingeschränkte Hingegenheit seines Elends übertraf meine Mittel. Ich hatte weder den Neigungswinkel seiner Haltung begriffen gehabt noch das Entsetzen, mit dem die Innenseite seiner Lider ihn fortwährend zu erfüllen schien. Ich

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<sup>15</sup> *MLB*, Paper LIX, p.600.

hatte nie an seinen Mund gedacht, der eingezogen war wie die Öffnung eines Ablaufs.<sup>16</sup>

Malte goes on to describe the man's attire in detail, paying especial attention to particular colours («wie das Weicheste auf eines Vogels Unterseite»)<sup>17</sup> The contrast between the man as actually seen and Malte's original, virtual, >blind< image of him has drawn from Malte an acknowledgement that the latter was the product not of some praeternatural act of synaesthesia but of a network of unconsciously remembered associations from religious iconography. Malte can in retrospect clinically dissociate the composite image.<sup>18</sup> Having actually seen the man, he will suddenly and unexpectedly elevate the surprising sight to the status of an epiphany.<sup>19</sup>

In his 1778 essay, *Über Physiognomik; Wider die Physiognomen. Zu Beförderung der Menschenliebe und Menschenkenntnis*, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg relates a remarkably similar personal experience:

Der Verfasser [...] hat einen Nachtwächter, der ihn einige Jahre durch aus dem Schlaf hornte und brüllte, um ihm zu sagen wie viel Uhr es sei, nach der Stimme zu zeichnen versucht. Man höre den Erfolg. Seine Stimme erweckte in ihm das Bild eines langen, hagern übrigens aber gesunden Mannes, mit länglichem Gesicht, in die Länge herunter gezogener Nase, strackem ungebundenem Haar, und langsamen, säendem, gravitäischem Tritt. Er ward nach dieser Vorstellung begierig, den Mann am Tage zu sehen, wozu er bald Gelegenheit bekam. Die Abweichung der Zeichnung vom Original war unerhört groß, schlechterdings nichts war getroffen. Der Mann war der Statur nach unter den Mittelmäßigen, munter und geschwind, selbst sein Haar hatte er in ein wegstehendes Zöpfchen zusammen gedreht, worin mehr Bindfaden als Haar

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<sup>16</sup> *MLB*, Paper LIX, p.601.

<sup>17</sup> *MLB*, Paper LIX, p.602.

<sup>18</sup> *MLB*, Paper LIX, p.600.

<sup>19</sup> *MLB*, Paper LIX, p.602.

war. Es ist hierbei eine angenehme Beschäftigung, die dem Psychologen wichtig werden kann, jene Ideen wieder zu dissoziieren.<sup>20</sup>

Lichtenberg, like Malte, proceeds to reconstruct the associative process in retrospect:

Der Verfasser hat seinem Nachtwächter oft nachgespürt, und endlich gefunden, daß er die lange Figur der durchdringenden Baßstimme zu danken hatte, die er in seiner Kindheit einigemal beisammen gesehen: hingegen war das Bedächtige, Hagere, Schleichende, nach genauer Untersuchung, von weit edlerer Abkunft, denn es verlor sich in dichterische Ideen von der Göttin der Nacht, und einiger Gespenster männlichen Geschlechts, mit denen der Verfasser in seiner Jugend bekannt geworden war.<sup>21</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Physiognomik* essay, Lichtenberg offers an epigram on the great works of world literature: »Solche Werke sind Spiegel; wenn ein Affe hinein guckt, kann kein Apostel heraus sehen.«<sup>22</sup> This will become a favourite *bon mot* of the mid-nineteenth-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who uses it as the epigraph to his 1845 work *Stages on Life's Way*.<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard's appreciation stems from the centrality to his theological thought of the figure of the apostle, who alone can be said to have experienced direct revelation from God.<sup>24</sup> The image of an ape looking into a mirror can be found in the *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, several

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<sup>20</sup> Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, "Über Physiognomik; Wider die Physiognomen. Zu Beförderung der Menschenliebe und Menschenkenntnis", in: G. C. L., *Schriften und Briefe Bd.III* (Darmstadt: 1972), pp.256-295, here: p.284.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.280.

<sup>23</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, translated from the Danish and edited by Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: 2000), p.170.

<sup>24</sup> See Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler: The Religious Confusion of the Present Age Illustrated by Magister Adler as a Phenomenon, By Petrus Minor, Edited by S. Kierkegaard*, translated from the Danish and edited with introduction & notes by Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: 1998), pp.173-188.

pages before the *Zeitungsverkäufer* episode. Malte is reflecting on a *Blechbüchse* which he surmises has been reunited with its *Deckel* in the room next to his own: »Ja, sie stehn sogar vor dem Spiegel, so daß dahinter noch eine Büchse entsteht, eine täuschend ähnliche, imaginäre. Eine Büchse, auf die wir gar keinen Wert legen, nach der aber zum Beispiel ein Affe greifen würde. Richtig, es würden sogar zwei Affen danach greifen, denn auch der Affe wäre doppelt, sobald er auf dem Kaminrand ankäme.«<sup>25</sup> In the very next fragment, Malte will translate the *Büchse* whose mirror image the ape has tried to grasp into a symbol of the frustrations of *der Heilige* as he seeks direct mystical experience of God.<sup>26</sup> As for the current episode, Malte has been recounting his psychoacoustic excruciation some time back at the hands of his next door neighbour, a medical student, who had been making a ferocious din with what to all appearances sounds like a *Blechbüchse*. Malte's obsessive attempts to cognitively map the goings on next door induced him to attempt a magnetic transference of will to the medical student to help him in his travails. In the following fragment he will reflect: »Es würde mich interessieren, wie dieses Zimmer eigentlich beschaffen ist. Man kann sich mit Leichtigkeit ein beliebiges Zimmer vorstellen, und oft stimmt es dann ungefähr. Nur das Zimmer, das man neben sich hat, ist immer ganz anders, als man es sich denkt.«<sup>27</sup>

In E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Die Serapions-Brüder* (1819-21), Theodor contributes to a discussion on the controversial claims of Mesmeric

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<sup>25</sup> *MLB*, Paper LI, p.582.

<sup>26</sup> *MLB*, Paper LII, pp.583f.

<sup>27</sup> *MLB*, Paper L, pp.581f.



magnetism a narrative of his own experiences of fraudulence in the field. At one demonstration, he recalls, a young woman placed into a somnambulistic trance by the *magnetiseur* displays purported clairvoyant insight into the goings on in the room directly below:

[Sie] behauptet, daß die Generalin, die den untern Stock des Hauses bewohnte, eben schönen Karawanentee trinke, dessen Aroma sie durch die Stubendecke verspüre, prophezeite auch hellsehend, daß sie in einer Viertelstunde aus dem magnetischen Schlaf erwachen und ebenfalls Tee trinken ja sogar etwas Torte dazu genießen werde.<sup>28</sup>

Moments before this, the principal *Somnambule*, a »vornehme[] gebildete[] geistreiche[] Dame«,<sup>29</sup> has evinced several forms of apparent clairvoyance under the facilitation of the operator. At one point, »[...] sie las einen Brief den er ihr auf die Herzgrube legte [...]«.<sup>30</sup>

In Kierkegaard's *Repetition* (1843), the Young Man writes of his love for the Book of Job: »I do not read him as one reads another book, with the eyes, but I lay the book, as it were, on my heart and read it with the eyes of the heart, in a *clairvoyance* interpreting the specific points in the most diverse ways«.<sup>31</sup> A few lines down, the Young Man describes another intimate mode of relating to the book: »[...] I find my joy in transcribing over and over everything he has said, sometimes in Danish script and sometimes in Latin

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<sup>28</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Die Serapions-Brüder. Gesammelte Erzählungen und Märchen. Herausgegeben von E. T. A. Hoffmann*, edited by Walter Müller-Seidel & Wulf Segebrecht (Darmstadt: 1971), p.267.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.266.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.267.

<sup>31</sup> Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling. Dialectical Lyric by Johannes Silentio / Repetition. A Venture in Experimenting Psychology by Constantin Constantius*, translated from the Danish and edited with introduction & notes by Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: 1983), p.204.

script, sometimes in one format and sometimes in another«. <sup>32</sup> This act of transcription is part of the Young Man's subjective appropriation of Job's words: »[...] Job's tormented soul breaks forth in powerful cries. These I understand; these words I make my own«. <sup>33</sup> His fellow Dane, Malte Laurids Brigge, seeks textual solace after witnessing a particularly traumatic chain of events, involving amongst other things a death in a Parisian *crémèrie*:

Ich habe ja immer noch geglaubt, es könnte eine Hülfe kommen. Da liegt es vor mir in meiner eigenen Schrift, was ich gebetet habe, Abend für Abend. Ich habe es mir aus den Büchern, in denen ich es fand, abgeschrieben, damit es mir ganz nahe wäre und aus meiner Hand entsprungen wie Eigenes. Und ich will es jetzt noch einmal schreiben, hier vor meinem Tisch kniend will ich es schreiben; denn so habe ich es länger, als wenn ich es lese, und jedes Wort dauert an und hat Zeit zu verhallen. <sup>34</sup>

Malte transcribes excerpts from two texts. The first is from Baudelaire's prose poem *A une heure du matin*. The second is from the Book of Job. <sup>35</sup>

In the very next episode of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Malte narrates his terrifying experience in the Salpêtrière hospital. Having returned to the waiting area after his initial consultation, Malte hears electrotherapy being administered to an aphasiac patient in one of the rooms hidden by a partition:

Und da, als es drüben so warm und schwammig lallte: da zum erstenmal seit vielen, vielen Jahren war es wieder da. Das, was mir das erste, tiefe Entsetzen eingejagt hatte, wenn ich als Kind im Fieber lag: das Große [...] Und jetzt war es wieder da. Es war später einfach ausgeblieben, auch in Fiebernächten war es nicht

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.206.

<sup>34</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.491.

<sup>35</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, pp.491f. The Job quotation is extracted from Chapter 30, Verses 8-31, in Luther's version.

wiedergekommen, aber jetzt war es da, obwohl ich kein Fieber hatte. Jetzt war es da. *Jetzt wuchs es aus mir heraus wie eine Geschwulst, wie ein zweiter Kopf*, und war ein Teil von mir, obwohl es doch gar nicht zu mir gehören konnte, weil es so groß war. Es war da, wie ein großes totes Tier, das einmal, als es noch lebte, *meine Hand gewesen war oder mein Arm*. Und mein Blut ging durch mich und durch es, wie durch einen und denselben Körper. Und mein Herz mußte sich sehr anstrengen, um das Blut in das Große zu treiben: es war fast nicht genug Blut da. *Und das Blut trat ungern ein in das Große und kam krank und schlecht zurück*. Aber das Große schwoll an und wuchs mir vor das Gesicht *wie eine warme bläuliche Beule* und wuchs mir vor den Mund, und über meinem letzten Auge war schon der Schatten von seinem Rande.<sup>36</sup>

The Salpêtrière hospital in Paris has, by the end of the nineteenth century, been made famous as the »Mecca of neurology«<sup>37</sup> by one towering figure above all others: Jean-Martin Charcot. Renowned in the field of neurology, Charcot delves into the psycho-physiological nexus, an enquiry that will furnish the community of *médecins alienistes* with pioneering insights into hypnosis and hysteria. In his biography of Charcot, A. R. G. Owen writes of one celebrated diagnosis:

Charcot had recognized various vasomotor disturbances as neurotic manifestations; what are now called *psychosomatic* effects. He was the first to describe in patients the rare condition *blue edema* - swelling with local cyanosis<sup>38</sup> and hypothermia. He also diagnosed it retrospectively among Louise Coirin's symptoms. In 1890, he showed his class an analogous condition produced in a subject by a hypnotic suggestion given four days previously. The symptom was in a mild form and was >cured< on the spot, yielding within minutes to countersuggestion. But it was relevant to >stigmatization< problems as encountered in Louise Lateau and others. A mottled blue swelling, the edema gave a bright red spot when touched.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> MLB, Paper XIX, pp.496f., emphases added.

<sup>37</sup> Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud. Biologist of the Mind. Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (London: 1979), p.29.

<sup>38</sup> >Cyanosis<: »the circulation of imperfectly oxygenated blood« (O.E.D.).

<sup>39</sup> A. R. G. Owen, *Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing. The Work of J.-M. Charcot* (New York: 1971), p.212.

*La Foi qui Guérit*, Charcot's 1892 treatise on the hotly debated issue of faith-healing, discusses in detail the case of Louise Coirin, going back nearly two centuries (1716-31). Charcot catalogues the first wave of symptoms: Louise experiences »vomissements de sang [...]«; her left breast becomes »*dur, enflé et tout violet*«; the surgeon examines her and discovers: »qu'elle avoit une grosse glande qui s'étendoit jusque sous l'aisselle du bras en arrière et une espèce de grosse corde *de la largeur de trois doigts*<sup>40</sup> qui gaignoit jusqu'au bout du sein«; the tumour grows alarmingly: »[...] la mamelle de ce côté étant devenue *grosse comme la tête*,<sup>41</sup> excessivement dure et toute enflammée«. <sup>42</sup> Louise Coirin's condition will finally clear up a full fifteen years later, when, despairing over unavailing medical intervention, she resorts to faith-healing. A novena is said for her, she is brought a shirt which has touched the tomb of Blessed Deacon François, that she may bring it into contact with her wound, and she likewise applies some sanctified earth taken from the churchyard of St. Médard.<sup>43</sup> Charcot, seeking to explain the circumstances and astonishing speed of the recovery, offers his retrospective histology:

Les ulcérations persistantes de la peau ne sont pas rares dans la névrose, témoin les plaies de saint François d'Assise et les stigmates de Louise Lateau. / La demoiselle Coirin présentait au niveau du sein ces phénomènes d'œdème hystérique, mentionnés pour la première fois par l'illustre Sydenham, œdème dur, œdème bleu ou violacé, comme je l'ai appelé [...] <sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot, *La foi qui guérit*. I am quoting from an e-text of Charcot's treatise, downloaded in full from: [www.elseminario.com](http://www.elseminario.com). Thus, in what follows I can refer the reader only to the relevant section of Charcot's treatise: Section IV. Here: Paragraphs 21 & 22.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Paragraphs 28 & 29. Cf Owen, *Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing*, pp.144f.

<sup>44</sup> Charcot, *La foi qui guérit*, Section IV, Paragraphs 34 & 35, emphasis added.

Thomas Sydenham, the seventeenth-century English physician generously mentioned here by Charcot, anticipated later findings as to the subjective, ideogenic and hence polysymptomatic character of hysteria when he called the condition: »the Proteus that cannot be laid hold of«.45 Malte Laurids Brigge, in the *Aufzeichnung* following immediately upon the Salpêtrière episode, writes of the protean illness which has plagued him:

Und jetzt auch noch diese Krankheit, die mich immer schon so eigentümlich berührt hat. Ich bin sicher, daß man sie unterschätzt. Genau wie man die Bedeutung anderer Krankheiten übertreibt. Diese Krankheit hat keine bestimmten Eigenheiten, sie nimmt die Eigenheiten dessen an, den sie ergreift. Mit einer somnambulen Sicherheit holt sie aus einem jeden seine tiefste Gefahr heraus, die vergangen schien, und stellt sie wieder vor ihn hin, ganz nah, in die nächste Stunde.46

The first symptom which Malte mentions is early masturbation: »Männer, die einmal in der Schulzeit das hülflose Laster versucht haben, dessen betrogene Vertraute die armen, harten Knabenhänden sind, finden sich wieder darüber [...]«.47 Sigmund Freud,48 in the wake of his estrangement from Josef Breuer, puzzles over the fact that childhood masturbation is proving such a frequent motif in the anamneses of hysterics. On the grounds that it conflicts with his seduction theory, however, he refuses to allow a direct psycho-neurotic identification of masturbation as an agent of hysteria.49

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45 In Owen, *Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing*, p.56. Cf Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies. Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca & London: 1994), p.34.

46 MLB, Paper XX, p.498, emphasis added.

47 Ibid.

48 Who himself studied at Charcot's Salpêtrière from October 1885 to February 1886.

49 Sulloway, *Freud. Biologist of the Mind*, p.112.

In his conclusions on the Louise Coirin case, Charcot mentions the comparable case of Louise Lateau (1850-1883). The subject of D. M. Bourneville's 1875 monograph *Science et Miracle. Louise Lateau ou la Stigmatisée belge*, Lateau remains until Padre (now Saint) Pio probably the most famous modern stigmatic of the Catholic Church.<sup>50</sup> In the forty-fourth *Aufzeichnung*, Malte Laurids Brigge recalls the figure of Julie Reventlow, as conjured up by his maternal grandfather, Graf Brahe, for the benefit of Abelone, the sister of Malte's mother:

»Morgen schreiben wir von Julie Reventlow«, sagte er und kostete seine Worte: »das war eine Heilige.« / Wahrscheinlich sah Abelone ihn ungläubig an. / »Ja, ja, das giebt es alles noch«, bestand er in befehlendem Tone, »es giebt alles, Komtesse Abel.« / Er nahm Abelonens Hände und schlug sie auf wie ein Buch. / »Sie hatte die Stigmata«, sagte er, »hier und hier.« Und er tippte mit seinem kalten Finger hart und kurz in ihre beiden Handflächen. / Den Ausdruck Stigmata kannte Abelone nicht. Es wird sich zeigen, dachte sie; sie war recht ungeduldig, von der Heiligen zu hören, die ihr Vater noch gesehen hatte. Aber sie wurde nicht mehr geholt, nicht am nächsten Morgen und auch später nicht. - / »Von der Gräfin Reventlow ist ja dann oft bei euch gesprochen worden«, schloß Abelone kurz, als ich sie bat, mehr zu erzählen. Sie sah müde aus; auch behauptete sie, das Meiste vergessen zu haben. »Aber die Stellen fühl ich noch manchmal«, lächelte sie und konnte es nicht lassen und schaute beinah neugierig in ihre leeren Hände.<sup>51</sup>

A primary source for Malte's treatment of Julia Gräfin von Reventlow is Johann Kaspar Lavater's *Briefstagebuch* of his trip to Copenhagen from May to August 1793, in Louis Bobé's 1898 edition, *Johann Caspar Lavaters Rejse til Danmark i sommeren 1793* (which covers the period June 8<sup>th</sup> to July 19<sup>th</sup>).

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<sup>50</sup> For an account of Lateau's stigmatic symptoms see Michael Murphy, *The Future of the Body. Explorations Into the Further Evolution of Human Nature* (New York: 1992), pp.489ff.

<sup>51</sup> *MLB*, Paper XLIV, p.563, emphases added.

Lavater spends two days (July 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>) with Julia von Reventlow at the castle of Graf Friedrich Joseph von Schimmelmann in Wandsbek. Bobé, in the preface to his edition, offers a less than complimentary pen portrait of her: »Reventlows begabte, aber *hysterisch überspannte, stigmatisierte* Gattin Julie, deren Orakelworte in der ganzen Familie geehrt wurden, *wie die einer Heiligen*«. <sup>52</sup> The Swiss pastor's visit to Copenhagen has been motivated by a desire to investigate the so-called *Kopenhagener Phänomene*. An intimate circle of spiritistic aristocrats - Augusta Louise Gräfin von Bernstorff, her husband Andreas Peter Graf von Bernstorff and Carl Prinz von Hessen-Cassel - has since November 4th 1791 been issuing invitations to Lavater to visit Copenhagen and participate in their *Sessionen*. This, they hope, will satisfy him as to the veracity of their claim to enjoy not merely a »moralische[] und religiöse[]«, but a »reelle[], positive[], revelative[] Gemeinschaft« with Christ Himself, whose regular appearances as an »orakelnde[s] Licht[]« they attest. <sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted by Stahl in *MLB* (editorial *Stellenkommentar*), p.972, emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> Johann Kaspar Lavater, *Tagebuchbriefe von der Reise nach Kopenhagen 1793*, edited by Horst Weigelt & Renate Kleiber-Müller, in: J. K. L., *Reisetagebücher Teil II. Reisetagebuch nach Süddeutschland 1778. Reisetagebuch in die Westschweiz 1785. Brieftagebuch von der Reise nach Kopenhagen 1793* [the latter is inconsistently entitled in this edition], edited by Horst Weigelt with the assistance of Roland Deinzer, Tatjana Flache-Neumann, Esther Haas & Renate Kleiber-Müller (Göttingen: 1997), pp.107-363, here: p.310 & p.329. Details about what went on in the Copenhagen sessions themselves are sketchy at best, as participants held a vow of secrecy. The most illuminating archival material in this respect is to be found in the copy made from Lavater's correspondence, under Lavater's own authorisation, by the writer Ulrich Hegner. Generous portions of this crucial *Abschrift*, which is housed in the Winterthur Stadtbibliothek, are printed on pages 308-363 of Weigelt's edition. Importantly, from the point of view of reception in the public domain, *Aufzeichnungen* made by Johann Georg Müller, who had close access to Lavater's correspondence pertaining to the *Kopenhagener Phänomene*, were published by Heinrich Gelzer in 1859 in the Gotha periodical *Protestantische Monatsblätter für Innere Zeitgeschichte* (Bd.13, pp.169-205) under the suggestive title: "Lavater's und seiner Freunde Verkehr mit der Geisterwelt. Beiträge zur inneren Geschichte der Neuzeit". As Weigelt points out, there is a significant overlap between Hegner and Müller (editorial note in J. K. L., *Reisetagebücher II*, pp.119f. See further p.112 on the difficulty of accounting for the full extent of textual dissemination amongst Lavater's acquaintances).

Before the trip, Lavater asks himself: »Was hab ich zu prüfen? - *Ist Christus reell unter diesen Christen wirksam?*«.<sup>54</sup> In his desperate need to experience extranormal phenomena that will bridge the sensuous and supersensuous dimensions, he has already championed the physico-theological theory of physiognomy, founded as it is on the mystical notion of man's *Gottesebenbildlichkeit* in the *mundus symbolicus*. Lavater's four-volume *magnum opus*, *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (1775-1778), compiled with the assistance of Goethe amongst others,<sup>55</sup> makes him the target of Lichtenberg's 1778 essay, cited above. Over the years Lavater has also turned to the occult figures of Emanuel Swedenborg, the giant of European spiritism, Franz Anton Mesmer, the founder-discoverer of *magnetismus animalis*, Johann Jakob Gassner, the exorcist priest, Elisabeth Tüscher, the *Wasserschauerin* from Biel, Franz Joseph Gall, illuminatus of phrenology (physiognomy's sister discipline), and, most damagingly in the eyes of many (including Goethe), Alessandro Conte di Cagliostro (born Giuseppe Balsamo), the charlatanistic *Wundermann* who provides inspiration for Schiller's unfinished serial-novel *Der Geisterseher* (1787) and Goethe's comedy *Der Groß-Cophtha* (1792).<sup>56</sup> In Kopenhagen, where

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.310 (Hegner's *Abschrift*).

<sup>55</sup> Goethe's contribution is however restricted mainly to the first two volumes, his gradual withdrawal from the project an index of growing distance from Lavater.

<sup>56</sup> On Lavater's connections with the occult, see Mary Lavater-Sloman, *Genie des Herzens. Die Lebensgeschichte Johann Caspar Lavaters* (Zürich & Stuttgart: 1955), pp.184ff, 260ff & 367ff. See also Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton: 1982), pp.8ff., setting Lavater in the context of the first seventy years of the eighteenth century in Germany (in particular the *illuministes* under Niklaus Anton Kirchberger, who »sought direct communion with supernatural forces, recovery of the gift of healing, interpretation of signs and numbers«). Cf also Walter Müller-Seidel, "Cagliostro und die Vorgeschichte der deutschen Klassik", in: *Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte. Festschrift für Richard*



he stays from June 18<sup>th</sup> to July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1793, Lavater is devastated at his failure to experience divine revelation at first hand. In a letter to Carl Prinz von Hessen-Cassel of July 29<sup>th</sup> 1800, he conveys the low spirits in which he still looks back at this episode:

Meine körperlichen Umstände sind immer mießlicher u. peinlicher - steigende Schmerzen - schwere Tage, elende Nächte - an Genesung ist nicht zu denken - der Herr erbarme sich nur meiner Seele, vergebe mir meine zahllosen Sünden, u. mache mich noch vor meinem Ende zum Zeugen seines himmlischen Lebens, u. seiner reellen Connexion mit den Sterblichen! (auch dieser Wunsch blieb unerfüllt.) / Ach wenn ich nur wüßte, was den Herrn zu solcher Strenge des Schweigens gegen mich nöthigt! / ... Kein Antwörtchen, kein entscheidendes Spürchen seiner Erbarmung - das drückt mir oft beynahe das Herz ab.<sup>57</sup>

Lavater will go to his grave without having come to a definitive verdict on the *Kopenhagener Phänomene*.

In 1843, Adolph Peter Adler, a pastor of the Danish church, causes consternation in ecclesiastical circles when he publishes *Nogle Prædikener*, a collection of sermons to which is attached an explosive explanatory preface relating an incident from December of the previous year: »One evening I had just given an account of the origin of evil; then I perceived as if in a flash that

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*Brinkmann*, edited by Jürgen Brummack, Gerhard von Graevenitz et al. (Tübingen: 1981), pp.136-163.

<sup>57</sup> Lavater, *Reisetagebücher II*, p.362 (Hegner's *Abschrift*). Auguste Viatte deftly describes Lavater's spiritual desperation: Lavater pleads with God »de lui rendre les privilèges apostoliques; il espère ne pas mourir sans être ainsi favorisé: ses ennemis en font des gorges chaudes, et le ridiculisent. Il épie les moindres rumeurs qui semble annoncer un thaumaturge« (*Les sources occultes du romantisme: Illuminisme, Théosophie 1770-1820. Tome Premier: Le Prérromantisme* [1927], reprint Paris: 1979, p.165). Viatte writes unflatteringly of Lavater as »Le premier vulgarisateur« of *l'illuminisme* (pp.151ff. & pp.165ff.)

everything depended not upon thought but upon spirit, and that there existed an evil spirit. That same night a hideous sound descended into our room. Then the *Saviour* commanded me to get up and go in and write down these words: [...]«. <sup>58</sup> Having dictated a series of statements on eternal life, sin and evil spirits, the >Saviour< directs Adler »to burn my own [Hegelian] works and in the future to keep to the Bible«. <sup>59</sup> Adler claims that, of the present volume, »the sermons from no. VI to the end« have been »written with Jesus' collaborating grace, so that I have been only an instrument«. <sup>60</sup> A second volume, *Studier* (1843), repeats his claims to divine inspiration based upon direct contact with Christ. Adler is brought into dispute with church authorities. The case catches the attention of Kierkegaard, who quickly familiarises himself with the literature on the affair and, by summer of 1846, sets to work on his own response, »an ethical inquiry into the concept of a revelation«. <sup>61</sup> The work, which will not be published during Kierkegaard's

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<sup>58</sup> Printed in Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, p.339.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.340. Compare the testimony given on a piece of paper found after Pascal's death of a mystical experience on the night of November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1654: »From about half past ten in the evening until about half past midnight / FIRE / God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob / not of the philosophers and the scholars / Certainty, certainty: emotion, joy, peace / God of Jesus Christ / *Deum meum et meum vestrum* / Thy God shall be my God / Oblivion of the world and of everything except God«. Translated by Martin Turnell, quoted in Russell Nieli, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language. A Study of Viennese Positivism and the Thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein* (New York: 1987), pp.87f.

<sup>60</sup> In Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, p.340. In the mid-1960s a Professor of Medical Psychology at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City named Helen Schucman becomes aware of a voice in her head directing her to transcribe >a course in miracles<. The voice, which claims to be that of Jesus the Christ, »made no sound, but seemed to be giving me a kind of rapid, inner dictation which I took down in a shorthand notebook. The writing was never automatic. It could be interrupted at any time and later picked up again. It made me very uncomfortable, but it never seriously occurred to me to stop. It seemed to be a special assignment I had somehow, somewhere agreed to complete« (Preface to *A Course in Miracles*, New York & London: 1996, pp.vii-viii). In 1975, some 500,000 words later, the manuscript of this >channelled< communication was published.

<sup>61</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Book on Adler*, p.3.

lifetime, is a searing indictment of Adler on the grounds of elementary religious confusion as to the nature of the Christ-revelation. While Kierkegaard has no difficulty in principle with the notion of direct revelation, he finds in Adler's *post hoc* pronouncements and behaviour no shade of the true spiritual metamorphosis from a Saul into a Paul.<sup>62</sup> Adler is accordingly dismissed as an unconscious satire on the Hegelian philosophy of the day.

Kierkegaard's attack on Adler is in key respects something of a rehearsal of Immanuel Kant's attack some eighty years previously, in *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (1766), on another Nordic figure displaying, as Kant sees it, absurd spiritistic pretensions, only this time on an immeasurably grander scale: Emanuel Swedenborg, »der Erzgeisterseher unter allen Geistersehern, [...] auch sicherlich der Erzphantast unter allen Phantasten [...]«.<sup>63</sup> Kant has no difficulty in accepting in principle the existence of a spirit world. On the contrary, his understanding of things is based upon the postulation of just such an immaterial dimension. The problem, he argues, is epistemological not ontological. For the spirit world is a dimension wholly other to the earthly:

Übrigens mögen die Vorstellungen von der Geisterwelt so klar und anschauend sein wie man will, so ist dieses doch nicht hinlänglich, um mich deren als Mensch bewußt zu werden; wie denn so gar die Vorstellung seiner selbst (d.i. der Seele) als eines

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<sup>62</sup> An *argumentum ad personam* which Rudolf Kassner will redeploy in a spiritistic context in his short fiction "Der Doppelgänger. Eine Geschichte und eine Theorie", in: R. K. *Sämtliche Werke Bd.II*, edited by Ernst Zinn & Klaus E. Bohnenkamp (Stuttgart: 1974), pp.181-213, here: p.189.

<sup>63</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, in: I. K., *Von den Träumen der Vernunft. Kleine Schriften zur Kunst, Philosophie, Geschichte und Politik*, edited by Steffen & Birgit Dietzsch (Leipzig & Weimar: 1981), pp.115-188, here: p.163.

Geistes wohl durch Schlüsse erworben wird, bei keinem Menschen aber ein anschauender und Erfahrungsbegriff ist.<sup>64</sup>

Kant, like Kierkegaard after him, imputes to his spiritistic target not so much deception as delusion, a spiritually vacuous, religiously confused *Schwärmerey*:

Zwar sind die unmittelbaren Anschauungen mehrenteils von mir weggelassen worden, weil dergleichen wilde Hirngespinnste nur den Nachtschlaf des Lesers stören würden; auch ist *der verworrene Sinn seiner Eröffnungen* hin und wieder in eine etwas gangbare Sprache eingekleidet worden [...] es [ist] nur umsonst, es verhehlen zu wollen, weil es jedermann doch so in die Augen fällt, daß alle diese Arbeit am Ende auf nichts herauslaufe. Denn da die vorgegebene Privaterscheinungen des Buchs sich selbst nicht beweisen können, so konnte der Bewegungsgrad, sich mit ihnen abzugeben, nur in der Vermutung liegen, daß der Verfasser zur Beglaubigung derselben sich vielleicht auf Vorfälle von der oben erwähnten Art, die durch lebende Zeugen bestätigt werden könnten, berufen würde. Dergleichen aber findet man nirgend. Und so ziehen wir uns mit einiger Beschämung von einem törichten Versuche zurück, mit der vernünftigen obgleich etwas späten Anmerkung: daß das Klugdenken mehrenteils eine leichte Sache sei, aber leider, nur nachdem man sich eine Zeitlang hat hintergehen lassen.<sup>65</sup>

Kant cites a humorous anecdote about Tycho Brahe, whom he casts as the proverbial unworldly *Schwärmer*: »[...], was dem *Tycho de Brahe* sein Kutscher antwortete, als jener meinte, zur Nachtzeit nach den Sternen den kürzesten Weg fahren zu können: *Guter Herr, auf den Himmel mögt ihr euch wohl verstehen, hier aber auf der Erde seid ihr ein Narr*«. <sup>66</sup> The fame of Tycho (Tyge) Brahe (1546-1601) is earned chiefly from his pioneering work in pre-telescopic astronomy at his Uraniborg Observatory, which he builds on the island of Hven (located

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp.143f.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp.179f. Emphasis added.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.148.

near Elsinore). Like his sister Sophie and his uncle Steen Bille, however, he a practising acolyte of the alchemical school of Paracelsus.<sup>67</sup>

Nearly 150 years after Kant's polemic<sup>68</sup> the names Brahe-Swedenborg will be brought into more explicit, if fictional, association in Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge*. Urnekloster, the manorial home of Malte's avowedly clairvoyant maternal grandfather, Graf Brahe,<sup>69</sup> is a veritable hive of occult experimentation. The Graf is credited with transcendental consciousness:

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<sup>67</sup> Cf Victor E. Thoren, *The Lord of Uraniborg. A Biography of Tycho Brahe* (Cambridge: 1990), p.98, p.206 & pp.210f. The high seriousness with which Tycho studies alchemy is indicated in the fact that he gives it the name »terrestrial astronomy« (ibid., p.211). »Next to astronomy,« writes Thoren, »alchemy was Tycho's greatest intellectual passion« (ibid., p.210).

<sup>68</sup> Carl du Prel, in his occultistic zeal to name Kant as the father of the modern monistic movement, presses the rather dubious claim that the *Träume* do not in fact constitute an attack on Swedenborg in the first place (*Das Rätsel des Menschen. Einleitung in das Studium der Geheimwissenschaften* [1902], edited by Herbert Fritsche, Wiesbaden [no date given; ca. 1950], p.62). Kant's attitude to his transcendentalist shadow from Sweden is, it is true, anything but uncomplicatedly negative. Gottlieb Florschütz shows how a deep and potentially compromising philosophical debt on Kant's side led him from the bad faith of the early *Träume* polemic to an eventual public reconciliation with Swedenborg's system in the later moral philosophy and »rational psychology« lectures: »In Kants Haltung muß im Gegensatz zur kategorischen Ablehnung, die in der Sekundärliteratur üblicherweise zu Unrecht behauptet wird, die Unentschlossenheit, ja sogar die Spaltung in seinem Urteil gegenüber okkulten Phänomenen betont werden« (*Swedenborgs verborgene Wirkung auf Kant. Swedenborg und die okkulten Phänomene aus der Sicht von Kant und Schopenhauer*, Würzburg: 1992, p.173). See also Hartmut Böhme & Gernot Böhme, *Das Andere der Vernunft. Zur Entwicklung von Rationalitätsstrukturen am Beispiel Kants* (Frankfurt/M: 1985), pp.231-273. Note for instance Kant's revealingly defensive rhetoric in the following passage from the *Träume*: »Zudem habe ich das Unglück, daß das Zeugnis, worauf ich stoße und was meiner philosophischen Hirngeburt so ungemein ähnlich ist, verzweifelt mißgeschaffen und albern aussieht, so daß ich viel eher vermuten muß, der Leser werde, um der Verwandtschaft mit solchen Bestimmungen willen, meine Vernunftgründe vor ungereimt, als jene um dieser willen vor vernünftig halten. Ich sage demnach ohne Umschweif, daß, was solche anzügliche Vergleichen anlangt, ich keinen Spaß verstehe, und erkläre kurz und gut, daß man entweder in Schwedenborgs Schriften mehr Klugheit und Wahrheit vermuten müsse, als der erste Anschein blicken läßt, oder daß es nur so von ohngefähr komme, wenn er mit meinem System zusammentrifft, wie Dichter bisweilen, wenn sie rasen, weissagen, wie man glaubt, oder wenigstens wie sie selbst sagen, wenn sie dann und wann mit dem Erfolge zusammentreffen« (*Träume eines Geistersehers*, p.170).

<sup>69</sup> Steffen Arndal, in his article "»Ohne alle Kenntnis von Perspektive? Zur Raumperzeption in Rainer Maria Rilkes *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*" (in: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 1/2002, pp.105-137, here: p.130), has suggested that Graf Brahe is modelled to a significant extent on Lavater's co-spiritist Carl Prinz von Hessen-Cassel. It is worth mentioning that, of the three members of the Copenhagen circle, the Prince would seem to have been the one trusted least by Lavater (see Lavater, *Reisetagebücher II*, editorial introduction p.122).

»Die Zeitfolgen spielten durchaus keine Rolle für ihn, der Tod war ein kleiner Zwischenfall, den er vollkommen ignorierte, Personen, die er einmal in seine Erinnerung aufgenommen hatte, existierten, und daran konnte ihr Absterben nicht das geringste ändern.«<sup>70</sup>

An *Oheim*, recalls Malte, »machte [...] in einem mir unbekanntem Raum des Schlosses alchymistische Versuche« and is rumoured to carry out Frankensteinian work on procured cadavers;<sup>71</sup> Mathilde Brahe, »eine entfernte Cousine meiner Mutter«, is said to be in contact with »einem österreichischen Spiritisten« named Baron Nolde;<sup>72</sup> Abelone tells Malte of Graf Brahe's *Kammerdiener* Sten:

Dieser Sten verbrachte die Sonntag-Nachmittage damit, Swedenborg zu lesen, und niemand von der Dienerschaft hätte je sein Zimmer betreten mögen, weil es hieß, daß er zitiere. Die Familie Stens hatte seit je Umgang mit Geistern gehabt, und Sten war für diesen Verkehr ganz besonders vorausbestimmt. Seiner Mutter war etwas erschienen in der Nacht, da sie ihn gebar. Er hatte große, runde Augen, und das andere Ende seines Blicks kam hinter jeden zu liegen, den er damit ansah. Abelonens Vater fragte ihn oft nach den Geistern, wie man sonst jemanden nach seinen Angehörigen fragt: »Kommen sie, Sten?« sagte er wohlwollend. »Es ist gut, wenn sie kommen.«<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> MLB, Paper XV, p.475. Cf for example Helena Petrovna (>Madame<) Blavatsky in her 1877 *Isis Unveiled*: »The human spirit, being of the Divine, immortal Spirit, appreciates neither past nor future, but sees all things as in the present« (*Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology. Vol.1 - Science* (California: 1950), p.185. Blavatsky is here linking the topic of supra-temporal consciousness to kabbalistic and hermetic doctrines. Cf also Karen-Claire Voss, "Spiritual Alchemy. Interpreting Representative Texts and Images", in: *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, edited by Roelof von den Broek & Wouter J. Hanegraaff (New York: 1998), pp.147-181, here p.153: »In spiritual alchemy, time is not experienced as irreversible, but as reversible; not only that, but the >movement< of time is not so much a movement as a *mode* of perception and thus goes far beyond being something that can be conceived of in linear terms, as having a forward or backward motion that could be modeled as occurring on an imaginary line«.

<sup>71</sup> MLB, Paper XV, p.472. Cf Bernhard Arnold Kruse, *Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität. Zu Rilkes >Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge<* (Wiesbaden: 1994), p.26.

<sup>72</sup> MLB, Paper XV, p.472.

<sup>73</sup> MLB, p.559f.

It is in Urnekloster that an apparition scene involving a long-dead woman, Christine Brahe, will occur.<sup>74</sup>

Rilke makes reference to Kant's attack on Swedenborg in letters he writes to the leading occultist Carl du Prel on February 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 1897. Describing himself an »interessierten Laien« in hypnotism, Rilke mentions also the »bedeutende Anziehungskraft« which spiritism holds over him. He tells du Prel that he is currently reading his *Das Rätsel des Menschen* and *Der Spiritismus*, being already familiar with Schopenhauer (presumably the *Versuch über Geisterseherei und was damit zusammenhängt* from *Parerga und Paralipomena*). »Nun werde ich noch Kants >Träume eines Geistersehers< lesen...«, he adds.<sup>75</sup> In du Prel's *Der Spiritismus*, the circumstances surrounding phantom apparitions and hand materialisations are awarded particular attention. In Paper XV of the *Aufzeichnungen*, Malte will recall having seen a ghost, in Paper XXIX a mysterious hand.

In *Das Rätsel des Menschen*, the second du Prel book mentioned by Rilke, a >transcendental psychology< is outlined on the basis of the Kantian distinction between the »Person des irdischen Bewußtseins« and the »transzendente Subjekt«.<sup>76</sup> Man, writes du Prel, is a double being who, although inhabiting two dimensions of experience at once, is in his ordinary waking ego-consciousness quite unaware of the transcendental dimension of his being:

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<sup>74</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, pp.476ff.

<sup>75</sup> In Ingeborg Schnack, *Rainer Maria Rilke. Chronik seines Lebens und seines Werkes 1875-1926*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Frankfurt/M: 1996), p.55.

<sup>76</sup> Du Prel, *Rätsel des Menschen*, p.67.

[...] das Jenseits [liegt] nur jenseits der Empfindungsschwelle [...]; denn wäre es ein anderer Ort als das Diesseits, dann würden unsere beiden Wesenshälften in räumlicher Trennung leben, die eine etwa in der Stadt München, die andere in Wolkenkuckucksheim.<sup>77</sup>

Das Jenseits ist nicht ein anderer Ort, wohin wir auf ganz unbegreifliche Weise im Tode versetzt würden, um dort unter ganz neuen Lebensbedingungen weiterzuleben; es ist nicht räumlich geschieden vom Diesseits, sondern ein bloßes Jenseits des Bewußtseins. / Das Jenseits ist das anders angeschaute Diesseits.<sup>78</sup>

Das Jenseits ist also kein anderer Ort, sondern nur ein Jenseits des Bewußtseins; und weil sich unser Bewußtsein zusammensetzt aus den Eindrücken, deren Reizstärke groß genug ist, um empfunden zu werden, kann man auch sagen, das Jenseits sei ein bloßes Jenseits der Empfindungsschwelle.<sup>79</sup>

Du Prel derives his monistic topos of *das anders angeschaute Diesseits* almost verbatim from Kant's late lectures on >rational psychology<, where the *status animae post mortem* is described as the opening of consciousness to a new world:

Wenn sich aber die Seele vom Körper trennt; so wird sie nicht mehr diesselbe sinnliche Anschauung von dieser Welt haben; sie wird nicht die Welt anschauen, wie sie erscheint, sondern, so wie sie ist [...] Demnach besteht die Trennung der Seele vom Körper in der Veränderung der sinnlichen Anschauung in die geistige Anschauung; und das ist die andere Welt. Die andere Welt ist demnach nicht ein anderer Ort, sondern nur eine andere Anschauung. Die andere Welt bleibt den Gegenständen nach dieselbige; sie ist den Substanzen nach nicht unterschieden; allein sie wird geistig angeschaut.<sup>80</sup>

In Paper IV, Malte declares: »Ich lerne sehen«.<sup>81</sup> In Paper XVIII, convinced that he has just seen a man dying in a *crémérie*, Malte identifies with this

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.119.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp.122f.

<sup>80</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Vorlesungen über die rationale Psychologie*, quoted in Florschütz, *Swedenborgs verborgene Wirkung auf Kant*, p.161.

<sup>81</sup> *MLB*, Paper IV, p.456.



man's departure from the familiar world and consoles himself with the hope, »daß es nicht unmöglich ist, alles anders zu sehen und doch zu leben«. <sup>82</sup>

Rilke, in a letter to Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck of 11<sup>th</sup> August 1924, addresses the subject of spiritistic experimentation by outlining his own monistic *Fundamentalontologie*:

Ich war eine Weile geneigt, so wie Sie es nun scheinen, >äußere< Einwirkungen bei diesen Versuchen anzunehmen; ich bin es nicht mehr in demselben Maße. So ausgedehnt das >Außen< ist, es verträgt mit allen seinen siedlerischen Distanzen kaum einen Vergleich mit den Dimensionen, *mit der Tiefendimension unseres Inneren*,<sup>83</sup> das nicht einmal die Geräumigkeit des Weltalls nötig hat, um in sich fast unabsehlich zu sein. Wenn also Tote, wenn also Künftige einen Aufenthalt nötig haben, *welche Zuflucht sollte ihnen angenehmer und angebotener sein, als dieser imaginäre Raum?* Mir stellt es sich immer mehr so dar, als ob unser gebräuchliches Bewußtsein die Spitze einer Pyramide bewohne, deren Basis in uns (und gewissermaßen unter uns) so völlig in die Breite geht, daß wir, je weiter wir in sie niederzulassen uns befähigt sehen, desto allgemeiner einbezogen erscheinen in die von Zeit und Raum unabhängigen Gegebenheiten des irdischen, des, im weitesten Begriffe, *weltischen Daseins*. Ich habe seit meiner frühesten Jugend die Vermutung empfunden (*und hab ihr auch, wo ich dafür ausreichte, nachgelebt*),<sup>84</sup> daß in einem tieferen Durchschnitt dieser Bewußtseinspyramide uns das einfache *Sein* könnte zum Ereignis werden, jenes unverbrüchliche Vorhanden-Sein und Zugleich-Sein alles dessen, was an der oberen >normalen< Spitze des Selbstbewußtseins nur als >Ablauf< zu erleben verstattet ist.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> MLB, Paper XVIII, p.490.

<sup>83</sup> Cf St. Augustine, as quoted by du Prel in *Das Rätsel des Menschen*: »Da gehen die Menschen hin und bewundern hohe Berge und weite Meeresfluten und mächtig daherrauschende Ströme und den Ozean und den Lauf der Gestirne, vergessen sich aber selbst daneben« (p.76).

<sup>84</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>85</sup> In *MLB-Materialien*, p.128. Compare du Prel's analogies for the transcendental realm in *Das Rätsel des Menschen*: »[D]as transzendente Bewußtsein [faßt], als der größere Kreis, den kleineren Kreis des sinnlichen Bewußtseins mit um[ ]. Wir können also den Menschen mit einer Ellipse vergleichen, deren einer Brennpunkt - das transzendente Bewußtsein - die ganze Fläche der Ellipse beleuchtet, während der andere - das sinnliche Bewußtsein - ein andersartiges Licht aussendet, welches auch nur von halber Ausdehnung ist. Oder wir können ihn mit einer Kugel vergleichen, deren stereometrischer Mittelpunkt den kubischen Inhalt beleuchtet, während an der Oberfläche das Licht des sinnlichen Bewußtseins leuchtet, aber keinen Strahl in das Innere sendet« (pp.94f.). The psychologist William James, in his 1902 *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, celebrates what he sees as major recent developments in

Both the existence of this realm of transpersonal consciousness and the difficulty for an egoic, habituated, space-time-bound consciousness of experiencing an intellectual intuition of this broader reality are explicitly related in Rilke's next remark to one of his own creations in particular:

Eine Gestalt anzudeuten, die Vergangenes und noch nicht Entstandenes einfach als Gegenwärtigkeit letzten Grades aufzufassen fähig wäre, ist mir schon, seinerzeit, im >Malte< Bedürfnis gewesen, und ich bin überzeugt, daß diese Auffassung einem wirklichen Zustande entspricht, mag er auch durch alle Vereinbarungen unseres ausgeübten Lebens widerrufen sein.<sup>86</sup>

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the field of research into the human psyche: »I cannot but think that the most important step forward that has occurred in psychology since I have been a student of that science is the discovery, first made in 1886, that, in certain subjects at least, there is not only the consciousness of the ordinary field, with its usual centre and margin, but an addition thereto in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside the primary consciousness altogether, but yet must be classed as conscious facts of some sort, able to reveal their presence by unmistakable signs [...] In particular this discovery of a consciousness existing beyond the field, or subliminally as Mr. [Frederic W. H.] Myers terms it, casts light on many phenomena of religious biography« (*The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, introduced by Reinhold Niebuhr, New York: 1997, pp.191f.). Yet this theory of an >extra-marginal< field of consciousness is of course a staple of Romantic thought. Thus, for example, Jean Paul's influential lines in *Selina oder die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*: »Wir machen aber von dem Länderreichtum des Ich viel zu kleine oder enge Messungen, wenn wir das ungeheure Reich des Unbewußten, dieses wahre innere Afrika, auslassen. Von der weiten vollen Weltkugel des Gedächtnisses drehen sich dem Geiste in jeder Sekunde immer nur einige erleuchtete Bergspitzen vor und die ganze übrige Welt bleibt in ihrem Schatten liegen [...]« (in: J. P., *Werke. Bd. VI*, edited by Norbert Miller, München: 1963, p.1182; cf Jürgen Barkhoff, *Magnetische Fiktionen. Literarisierung des Mesmerismus in der Romantik*, Stuttgart & Weimar: 1995, p.142).

<sup>86</sup> *MLB-Materialien*, p.128, emphasis added. This *Gestalt* is generally taken to be a reference to Graf Brahe alone: see, for example, Horst Nalewski's editorial note in *Rainer Maria Rilke. Briefe in Zwei Bänden, Zweiter Band: 1919 bis 1926*, edited by H. N. (Frankfurt/M & Leipzig: 1991), p.647, as well as Giloy's reading, *Aporie des Dichters*, p.57. Yet Rilke's letter to Witold von Hulewicz of November 10<sup>th</sup> 1925 makes it clear that the consanguinity of Malte and Graf Brahe in this particular respect is vitally important for an understanding of the former: »Malte ist nicht umsonst der Enkel des alten Grafen Brahe, der alles, Gewesenes wie Künftiges, einfach für >vorhanden< hielt [...]« (*MLB-Materialien*, p.131). See further Beda Allemann, *Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke. Ein Beitrag zur Poetik des modernen Gedichtes*, Pfullingen: 1961, p.120.

### iii.

## Forschung

Somnambulism, physiognomy, spiritism, mysticism, magnetism, medial writing, hysteria, faith-healing, occultism, transpersonal psychology...

*What >on earth< is the matter with Malte Laurids Brigge (the text) and with Malte Laurids Brigge (the figure)?* I believe that the fields of discourse marked out in the impressionistic excursion taken above are in no wise merely incidental to the matter of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*. The thesis of the present thesis can be brought down to five principal assertions:

- a) that Malte Laurids Brigge is a figure driven by the idea of mystical and occult experience;
- b) that this *Grenzbewußtsein* makes him a rich litererarisisation of what Hegel calls the Unhappy Consciousness;
- c) that Malte's psychophysical *Krankheit* can profitably be approached as a case of what Kierkegaard terms *Die Krankheit zum Tode*,<sup>87</sup> itself a deepening of Hegel's idea of the Unhappy Consciousness;

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<sup>87</sup> The title of Kierkegaard's 1849 book *Sydommen til Døden*. The only (non-proper) word in Danish to appear in the *Aufzeichnungen* is *Døden* (as »Döden«: *MLB*, Paper XLVI, p.569) - a fact which draws some curious speculations from Peter Henninger in his essay "Quelques aspects du non-dit dans *Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge*.", in: R. M. Rilke et *>Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge<*: *Écriture romanesque et modernité*, edited by Christian Klein (Paris: 1996), pp.147-164, here: pp.153ff. Dieter Schiller's essay, "Rainer Maria Rilke: *Die Aufzeichnungen des Laurids Brigge. Der Einsame und seine Welt*", in: *Rilke-Studien. Zu Werk und Wirkungsgeschichte*, edited by Edda Bauer, Berlin & Weimar: 1976, pp.138-176, opens with a citation of Kierkegaard's phrase: »In einer minutiös durchgeführten Fiktion des Authentischen führt Rilke in den *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* eine Krankheit zum Tode vor« (ibid., p.138). Yet it soon emerges that Schiller's dialectical-materialist reading understands the >sickness< (as well as the >death<) not as a religious condition but as the subjective reflex of one caught in socio-historical limbo. This uncoupling of the Sickness unto Death from the decisive issue of post-mortem existence - what du Prel calls »das Ob der

Wagner-Egelhaaf's *Mystik der Moderne. Die visionäre Ästhetik der deutschen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert* (1989) is a bold and erudite attempt to explore the aesthetic implications for modern writers of the perennial religio-mystical search for direct spiritual experience, the *cognitio dei experimentalis* of Aquinas.<sup>90</sup> A full chapter on the *Malte*-book, under the heading "Ekstatisches Schreiben: Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge' (1910)",<sup>91</sup> mines the text systematically for its rich mystical vein, particularly with reference to topoi of vision, divine *Diktat* and specularity.

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of Rilke's »gesamte - dichterische wie menschliche - Entwicklung« (*Rilkes Selbstwerdung*, p.169). This is not simply a matter of attention to biography. Rather it foregrounds the *ontological* question which drove Rilke from first to last - the question as to the nature of »letzte Wirklichkeit« (ibid., p.20) and the possibility of making that reality experiential in one's own existence by breaking through the limitations of ego consciousness. The Rilke who emerges is a human being who, slowly coming to recognise »daß die Wirklichkeit durch ein ästhetisch-ideelles Bemühen der Sprache nicht hervorzubringen ist« (ibid., p.169), goes in search of the *state of grace* associated with loss of ego and attunement to transpersonal, transrational, transcendental mind. Rilke, in other words, is examined in terms of his »über alles Konfessionelle hinausweisende[] Religiosität« (ibid., p.13). What impresses me here is that Park does not hedge his bets: *poetology is tied to ontology, with the latter openly treated as primordial*. This is not to say that Park deadens the creative nerve of Rilke's poetics. On the contrary, his paradigm brings out the exquisite play in Rilke's language as it a) problematises ordinary human consciousness, b) thematises the quest for trans-egoic enlightenment, and c), in its moments of >achieved< luminosity, evocatively and expressively crystallises out the numinously transcendental experience. Working on the premise: »Was Rilke *existential* ahnte, lebte er als Dichter *existentiell*« (ibid., p.168, emphasis added), Park draws out the truth of Rudolf Kassner's perceptive comment: »Rilke aber wollte im Grunde mit der Dichtung eines: die Dichtung überwinden, darüber hinauskommen [...]« (Kassner, *Rilke. Gesammelte Erinnerungen 1926-1956*, p.59; quoted by Park himself, *Rilkes Selbstwerdung*, p.169). Park brings his study to a close with the suggestion that Rilke's itinerant, rootless lifestyle »ermöglicht ihm, nicht mehr ein Dichter nach dem geläufigen Weltverständnis, sondern ein Dichter-Mensch zu werden. Der Dichter-Mensch erschafft Dichtung nicht. Er lebt Dichtung, die sich aus seinen mit-freudenden, mit-leidenden, mit-lebenden Welterfahrungen herauskristallisiert« (ibid., p.169). Not the least virtue of Park's study is that, with truly synoptic open-mindedness, it draws meaningful lines of contour between Buddhist and Christian mystical traditions, attending to a common deep structure of religious wisdom. Park's exploration of Rilke's veneration of Francis of Assisi (ibid., pp.114ff.), for instance, convincingly relates the *poverello* figure with the Buddhist ideal of detachment. One unfortunate lacuna in Park's study, however, is the surprisingly superficial attention which Park devotes to the *Malte* - surprising because, as I aim to show, that book pulsates with the ontological question so brilliantly explored by Park himself.

<sup>90</sup> Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Mystik der Moderne. Die visionäre Ästhetik der deutschen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: 1989), p.3.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp.62-107.

d) that theses a), b) and c) above are linked intimately and necessarily via a religio-mystical schematism of *transzendentes Subjekt* and *irdischer Mensch*;

e) that the following contention of Otto Friedrich Bollnow, written nearly a half-century ago, is still waiting to be systematically elaborated with regard to both theme *and* form: »Der *Malte* ist in weiten Teilen die Verarbeitung der durch Kierkegaard gegebenen Anforderungen«. <sup>88</sup>

The present thesis takes its rise from the work of five scholars in particular - Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, Monika Fick, Judith Ryan, Moritz Baßler and Frederick George Thomas Bridgham. <sup>89</sup>

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Unsterblichkeit« (*Rätsel des Menschen*, p.111) - drains it of its original Kierkegaardian signification.

<sup>88</sup> Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Rilke* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Stuttgart: 1956), p.25.

<sup>89</sup> Alongside the five *Forschungsbeiträge* acknowledged here, it should be stated at the outset that I have drawn especially strong impulses from three further works: Anthony Stephens' *Rilkes Malte Laurids Brigge. Strukturanalyse des erzählerischen Bewußtseins* (Bern & Frankfurt/Main: 1974), Kruse's (already cited) *Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität* and Jinhyung Park's *Rainer Maria Rilkes Selbstwerdung in buddhistischer Sicht: ein literatur- und religionswissenschaftlicher Beitrag zu einem neuen Rilke-Verständnis* (Frankfurt/M: 1990). To my mind, the studies by Stephens and Kruse represent the finest *Malte*-monographs in the field. Stephens' work, still unsurpassed for depth, comprehensiveness and attention to detail, is particularly instructive for the manner in which its exposition of Rilke's *Vorwandsästhetik* (esp. pp.133ff.) trains the reader's eye to attend to Malte's practice and thematisation of *indirect* seeing. This approach has been richly supplemented by Christian Doumet's essay "Malte devant les parois", in: Klein (ed.), *R. M. Rilke et >Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge<*, pp.71-82), which shows how Malte tries to fill in the »vide postulé par la surface verticale« that stands before one unseen sight after another (*ibid.*, p.74). Kruse's mystically-themed series of often meticulously close readings is immeasurably enriched by *Exkurse* on "Elemente zur Interpretation von Maltes Untergang in Paris als >mors mystica<" (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, pp.130ff.) and on "Die Aufzeichnungen in der Perspektive eines alchemistischen >opus<" (*ibid.*, pp.231ff.). The latter excursus is the book's signal achievement, not least because Kruse succeeds in offering a wealth of scholarly insight into alchemical motifs in the *Aufzeichnungen* while judiciously holding back from overly systematic claims for their place in the Rilke material (see Kruse's methodological remarks, *ibid.*, p.233). Park's splendidly fertile general study, with its bold cross-fertilisation of Rilke's work and Buddhist doctrine, can indeed claim to bring us closer to the *neue Rilke-Verständnis* referred to in the title. For Park argues that we must at all times situate the question of the poetic *Werk* within the problematic

spiritism - as well as with hysteria. Hypnotism, spiritism, hysteria: just three discourses of the Unconscious which take their place in an extraordinarily energetic, syncretistic and integrative movement in the fields of psychology,<sup>102</sup> dynamic psychiatry, philosophy, aesthetics, mysticism, occultism, anthropology, biology, physics<sup>103</sup> and the natural sciences in *fin de siècle* Europe and America. With disparate focal points and wildly varying degrees of systematic conscientiousness, the broadly (and often misleadingly) termed >Monistic< enterprise endeavours to make good on the unforgotten promise both of hermetic traditions stretching back to antiquity and of the Late Romantics just a century earlier to heal the assorted post-Cartesian dualities of mind and body, spirit and matter, subject and object, abstract and concrete-sensuous, organic and mechanical.<sup>104</sup> Each side of the respective binary is programmatically brought down to a common denominator, be it energy, *anima mundi*, the Unconscious, will, *Seelenmonade*, et cetera. Traditional dualistic mysticism is accused of having posited two categorically sundered realms - the impermanent-physical and the eternal-transcendental - without having convincingly accounted for their mode of relation.<sup>105</sup> Materialistic monism, the hegemonic worldview of the nineteenth century, is

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<sup>102</sup> Perhaps most importantly, Gustav Fechner's work on the quantitative relation between mental sensation and material stimulus.

<sup>103</sup> In particular the empirio-criticism of Ernst Mach.

<sup>104</sup> Cf Murphy, *Future of the Body*, pp.22f.

<sup>105</sup> An issue addressed in Kant's *Träume*, for instance: »Ich gestehe, daß ich sehr geneigt sei, das Dasein immaterieller Naturen in der Welt zu behaupten, und meine Seele selbst in die Klasse dieser Wesen zu versetzen. Alsdenn aber: wie geheimnisvoll wird nicht die Gemeinschaft zwischen einem Geiste und einem Körper?« (*Träume eines Geistersehers*, pp.129f.). It is important to note that Swedenborg himself does not claim that spirit enters the world of gross matter by a direct influx; rather it reveals itself indirectly, via >correspondences<. This idea will exert an immeasurable influence on the poetic vision of Baudelaire a century later, who will in turn sponsor the symbolist aesthetic.

The lasting value of Wagner-Egelhaaf's treatment of the *Malte* in *Mystik der Moderne* is nevertheless secure: in unprecedentedly systematic fashion it places the category of transcendence (back?) on the agenda of *Malte* studies.<sup>97</sup>

Monika Fick's quite magisterial volume, *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele. Der psychophysische Monismus in der Literatur der Jahrhundertwende* (1993), a study of what she calls »Weltanschauungsliteratur auf monistischer Grundlage«,<sup>98</sup> takes the conversation about *Malte* several critical paces forward. Acknowledging that Wagner-Egelhaaf's general study »beleuchtet das Interesse an der Mystik vom neuzeitlichen Subjekt-Begriff her«, she insists that such vaguely mystical themes need to be contextualised firmly within contemporary discourses of *Lebensphilosophie* and *Monismus*.<sup>99</sup> In a chapter titled "Organologisches Sehen oder die Verdichtung der Welt zur >Umwelt<: Rainer Maria Rilke",<sup>100</sup> she painstakingly reconstructs Rilke's sustained immersion in monistic ideas from the 1890s onwards. In his letter to Carl du Prel, it will be recalled, Rilke signals his interest in hypnotism and spiritism. Now already this constellation is revealing, for hypnotism's mesmeristic and somnambulistic lineage brings it, as a modern »Abkömmling einer Geschichte der Wunder und Ekstasen« (Bettina Gruber),<sup>101</sup> into natural alliance with

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<sup>97</sup> It might, however, be acknowledged that Kruse's *Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität* is based on a series of lectures on the mystical dimension of the *Malte* delivered at the University of Florence in 1987-88: see Kruse's essay "Zur ästhetischen Religiosität in Rilkes *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* oder zur Konstitution der subjektiven Totalität in der Moderne", in: *Malte-Lektüren*, edited by Hansgeorg Schmidt-Bergmann for the Rilke-Gesellschaft (Rilke-Blätter 21/1995, Sigmaringen: 1997), pp.51-68, here: p.63, note 4.

<sup>98</sup> Monika Fick, *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele. Der psychophysische Monismus in der Literatur der Jahrhundertwende* (Tübingen: 1993), p.13.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 182-3, footnote 151.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.184-223, esp. pp.184-191.

<sup>101</sup> Bettina Gruber, *Die Seherin von Prevorst: romantischer Okkultismus als Religion, Wissenschaft und Literatur* (Paderborn: 2000), p.19.

However, in her effort to establish »den religiös-poetologischen Skopus des *Malte*«,<sup>92</sup> Wagner-Egelhaaf precipitously conflates these two fields, all but reducing Malte's mystical discourse to »ein dezidiert poetologisches Programm«.<sup>93</sup> Further, she rather under-reflects the problem that Malte's mystical discourse remains largely just that: *an anticipatory discourse relating to experiences of the unio mystica which seem not to follow*. Wagner-Egelhaaf's closing words in the chapter are symptomatic of both problems. Noting that the text of the *Malte* »>nahezu< das utopisch-ideale Schreiben selber ist«, she comments on this crucial *Nahezu*: »*Nahezu*: weil eine völlige Hingabe des Subjekts, vollkommene Gelassenheit erstens nicht erreicht werden kann und zweitens Subjekterfahrung und Schreiben unmöglich machen würde«.<sup>94</sup> I submit that this explanation of the *Nahezu* does not begin to exhaust the implications of Malte's dearth of mystical experience. For a start, the *Not* which Rilke assigns to Malte<sup>95</sup> may not, as Wagner-Egelhaaf assumes,<sup>96</sup> simply be shorthand for *Schreibnot*. Further, as I shall argue, the species of *Schreiben* in which Malte interests himself (amongst other things) is in fact being *blocked* by what Wagner-Egelhaaf is terming *Subjekterfahrung*. Thus *Subjekterfahrung* and *Schreiben*, in the mystical-spiritistic sense in which Malte writes of it, become mutually exclusive, not correlative.

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106, emphasis added.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.80.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>95</sup> Cf Rilke's letter to Hulewicz of 10.11.25, in which he famously speaks of »*Vokabeln seiner Not*« (*MLB-Materialien*, p.131).

<sup>96</sup> Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Mystik der Moderne*, p.102.



trumped by the observation that it cannot explain human consciousness without recourse to the paradox of >thinking matter<.<sup>106</sup> The monistic *Seelenlehre* of du Prel and others claims to solve this problem by regarding body and brain organologically as part of the one synergetic complex, which is in turn, however, determined by the higher *tertium quid* of transcendental mind: »Nicht das Gehirn denkt, sondern die Seele denkt durch das Gehirn«.<sup>107</sup> Man does not stand in alienation before nature, for they share a common ground. Thus is Schelling's *Weltseele* rehearsed a hundred years on.

The monistic movement's attempts to establish the *demonstrable* action of transcendental mind in its *commercio* with both psyche and physis provide an important, if >scandalous<, counterweight to the rampant positivism of nineteenth century scientism, utilitarianism and materialism, which had, in Jean Starobinski's words, seen to it that »la vérité passa sous la juridiction du physiologiste, du chimiste, du clinicien«.<sup>108</sup> As the word >demonstrable< above indicates, however, the monists often tried to beat the positivists at their own game. Thus, for example, psychical research was undertaken in an attempt to convince a hostile scientific establishment that, in C. D. Broad's words, »the antecedent improbability of paranormal cognition, whether post-

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<sup>106</sup> Nor, as Schopenhauer had been keen to point out, did a naturalistic world-view understand the need to relativise its own empirical standpoint - a phenomenalist blindspot which rendered it »eine Lehre, welche die Erscheinung zum Ding an sich machte« (Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung II. Sämtliche Werke Bd.III*, edited by Julian Frauenstädt, revised by Arthur Hübscher, Mannheim: 1988, pp.193f.)

<sup>107</sup> Du Prel, *Rätsel des Menschen*, pp.64f.

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, p.30. Cf Ernest Hello's diagnosis of nineteenth-century scientism's *Entzauberung* of the world: »La science avait cessée d'adorer: de là le malheur« (quoted by Kassner in *Der indische Idealismus*, p.38).

cognitive, simultaneous, or pre-cognitive« is at least less than infinite.<sup>109</sup> John Beloff writes of the by no means peripheral exertions of such occultistically disposed monists to recover verifiably the Romantic unity of nature and the supernatural:

To prove that everything is, in the last resort, mental, psychical or spiritual is the avowed aim of what philosophers call idealism [...] the paradox [is] that while, in the course of the nineteenth century, science became ever more powerful and materialistic, philosophy, as if by way of compensation, became ever more idealistic. This was true especially of Germany, the natural homeland of romanticism [...] To those who had lost faith in revealed religion but found intolerable the thought of a vast, impersonal universe divested of purpose and meaning in which mankind existed as an accident of evolution, the assurances of idealist metaphysics provided an acceptable refuge. There were some, however, for whom a metaphysical solution of their religious perplexities was not enough, notably for the founding fathers of psychical research in England. It was precisely because they took science and scientific materialism seriously that they were determined either to establish the supernatural by scientific and empirical means or to abandon it once and for all as outworn superstition.<sup>110</sup>

Triggering an experimental dialectic of excitement and perplexity, monism represents an integrative attempt to liberate science and philosophy from the blinkers of reductive specialisation, to re-enchant a world in which the value-spheres of art, morality and science have become splintered, with

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<sup>109</sup> C. D. Broad, "The Relevance of Psychical Research to Philosophy", in: *Philosophical Dimensions of Parapsychology*, edited by James M. O. Wheatley & Hoyt L. Edge, Illinois: 1976, pp.10-29, here: p.19.

<sup>110</sup> John Beloff, "Parapsychology and its Neighbours", *ibid.*, pp.374-387, here p.380. For a scientist like Charcot, the fact that one's field - hypnosis and hysteria - touches on areas of interest to the occultist makes it all the more necessary that one distance oneself polemically from »the esoteric or the extraordinary [...] the unexpected and the mystic« (Charcot, in his 1883 *Exposé de titres et travaux* for the Academy of Sciences, as quoted in A. G. Owen, *Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing*, p.198). Accordingly, Charcot pathologises the hypnotic state as a form of neurosis, to be approached in much the same way as hysteria.

the latter sphere ever threatening to colonise the first two.<sup>111</sup> The refinement of a »moderne Mystik«, as du Prel's somewhat problematical term indicates,<sup>112</sup> generates both a renewed appreciation of older, more esoteric traditions and a bold, although sometimes dilettantish, concoction of new syntheses.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Cf Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology. Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy* (Boston & London: 2000), pp.60f.

<sup>112</sup> Du Prel, *Rätsel des Menschen*, p.40.

<sup>113</sup> The early years of psychoanalysis offer perhaps the most celebrated example of what this uncommon ferment can produce. In the 1913 secession from Freud's Vienna School of the Zurich School of his >shadow<, Jung, we see dramatised the dialectic of rationalist and neo-romantic responses to the hermetic and parapsychological roots of their discipline. In his pioneeringly revisionist *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, Henri F. Ellenberger goes so far as to claim that: »there is hardly a single concept of Freud or Jung that had not been anticipated by the philosophy of nature and Romantic medicine«, by which latter category he refers preeminently to Mesmer and Puységur (*The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, London: 1970, p.205). For a condensed inventory of Freud's debts, see Ellenberger's 1954 lecture "The Unconscious before Freud", printed in: *Sigmund Freud. Critical Assessments. Volume 1: Freud and the Origins of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Laurence Spurling (London & New York: 1989), pp.133-145. Further: Christine Maillard, "Le >mystique< et la psyché. De la philosophie du mysticisme à la psychanalyse", in: *Mystique, mysticisme et modernité en Allemagne autour de 1900 / Mystik, Mystizismus und Moderne in Deutschland um 1900*, edited by M. B. & Hildegard Châtellier, with preface by Antoine Faivre (Strasbourg: 1998), pp.75-93, on Freud's resistance to »la >tentation< mystique« (ibid., p.83) and how Jung »fait de l'altérité de l'expérience mystique une interrogation pour le sujet de la modernité« (ibid., p.90). Maillard usefully identifies »trois approches du phénomène mystique« which, she says, were of great interest to early psychoanalysts not sharing Freud's »réfutation du mystique«: »les théories prépsychoanalytiques de l'inconscient issues du romantisme allemand, la phénoménologie religieuse anglo-saxonne, les études de Breuer's cathartic method, whereby his theory of transference »unwittingly encouraged the >magnetic passion< of the old mesmerists«, see Owen, *Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing*, pp.204f. See also Jaques le Rider, "Freud zwischen Aufklärung und Gegenklärung", in: *Aufklärung und Gegenklärung in der europäischen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, edited by Jochen Schmidt (Darmstadt: 1989), pp.475-496. Bettina Gruber scrutinises the tension from Jung's 1902 doctoral thesis *Zur Psychologie und Pathologie sogenannter occulter Phänomene* onwards between a »szientifisch-distanzierte Erkenntnishaltung« and a deep constitutional receptiveness to the occultistic worldview (*Die Seherin von Prevorst*, pp.220ff.). David J. Hess, "Kardec's Book of the Spirits. Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France", in: D. J. H., *Spirits and Scientists. Ideology, Spiritism, and Brazilian Culture* (Pennsylvania: 1991), pp.59-79, here p.78, goes even further than Ellenberger in his genealogical claims for the importance of spiritism in particular: »Ellenberger argues that Spiritism provided a new source of psychological phenomena for medicine to study, but there is also some evidence that the dynamic theories of the unconscious from the late nineteenth century were themselves at least partially the result of the translation of the doctrine of spirit communication into the language of orthodox medicine«. Hess proposes »a >repressed< origin of at least some variants of the theory of the unconscious as being in fact >dissociated< Spiritist or Spiritualist doctrine [...]«.

Fick dexterously situates the nondual movement of the turn of the century within the general »Aufbruch in offene Horizonte« associated with certain manifestations of *Moderne* around this time,<sup>114</sup> demonstrating in particular how the literature of the period often offers the most seismographically sensitive registration of this *Aufbruch*. At least since Peter Demetz' *René Rilkes Prager Jahre* (1953),<sup>115</sup> and certainly after more recent comprehensive treatments by Andrea Pagni<sup>116</sup> and Fick herself, critical consideration of Rilke's formative years from Prague onwards has occasionally recognised the need to take stock of his pronounced monistic and occultistic<sup>117</sup> leanings. Rilke has slowly begun to take his place in the monistic canon. To neglect this dimension of his thought and work is to risk wrenching the avowed mysticism of so much of his creative output out of a very specifically monistic matrix. Thus, for instance, the earlier >Rilke-avant-Rilke< work will be casually dismissed as little more than the effusion of an anaemically epigonal neo-Romanticism or a naïve and unreflective preciousity - a dismissal that stretches from the formal to the thematic level. This failure to see past the »praeraffaelite mannerism«<sup>118</sup> of the young Rilke to the serious

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<sup>114</sup> Fick, *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele*, p.1.

<sup>115</sup> See Peter Demetz, *René Rilkes Prager Jahre* (Düsseldorf: 1953), pp.27f.

<sup>116</sup> Andrea Pagni, *Rilke um 1900. Ästhetik und Selbstverständnis im lyrischen Werk* (Nürnberg: 1984).

<sup>117</sup> It should however be recorded at this point that Rilke seems not to have encountered Swedenborg himself, at least in primary form, until 1915 at the earliest - if a letter to Marianne Mitford written at the end of January of that year is to be believed: »Ich lese lauter Strindberg und frage mich, ob man Swedenborg lesen könnte« - »a question prompted,« surmises George C. Schoolfield (from whom I draw the citation), »by *Inferno* or *En blåbok* (*Ein Blaubuch*), where Strindberg pays repeated and express tribute to his spiritual master« (*"Rilke and Strindberg: A Doxochronology"*, in: *Modern Austrian Literature*, Volume 15, Number 3/ 4, 1982, pp.145-168, here: p.154).

<sup>118</sup> Brigitte L. Bradley, *"Rilke's Geschichten vom lieben Gott: The Narrator's Stance Toward the Bourgeoisie"*, in: *Modern Austrian Literature*, Volume 15, Number 3/ 4, 1982, pp.1-23, here: p.2.

philosophy underneath extends the dismissal from the formal to the thematic level, resulting in the commonplace equation of >monistic Rilke< with >not-quite-Rilke<. To this reader's eyes, the problem manifesting itself in the early work relates not to philosophic content but to a combined lack of commensurate life-experience and under-developed poetic technique.<sup>119</sup> This lag of existential and aesthetic criteria behind theoretical insight shows up particularly clearly in Rilke's critical prose from the period. The 1898 lecture on *Moderne Lyrik*, for example, attests the nascent poet's impressively erudite monistic credentials. Rilke's tribute there to the *Freie Bühne* journal in its infant years 1890-93 alone indicates a sustained exposure to discourses circulating in that decade.<sup>120</sup> This engagement on Rilke's side is sustained through the turn of the century and, arguably, reaches its peak precisely around the time of the *Malte's* conception and gestation. One need only read Rilke's *Marginalien zu Bichat* of 1909 to appreciate the firm line of continuum: Rilke, coming across as a sophisticated and self-assured reader of Bichat's specialist prose, displays a well-honed proclivity for gleaning powerful spiritual and aestheticist metaphors from Bichat's organological discourse.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Cf for example Bollnow's indiscriminately negative characterisation of the monistic movement around the *Jahrhundertwende*: »Sie alle sprechen in einer ähnlichen Weise vom Leben als einer alles durchdringenden, alles durchwaltenden Macht. Ein gewisser pantheistischer Grundzug ist für sie alle bezeichnend« (*Rilke*, p.27). This movement, continues Bollnow, promotes a decadently mannered body-sensualism, standing as it does »in enger Verbindung mit dem fein empfindenden aber überzarten Formgefühl, wie es in den bildenden Künsten derselben Zeit im sogenannten Jugendstil entwickelt wurde. Das hoch entwickelte Formgefühl dieser Zeit neigt zur Maniertheit, zur ästhetisierenden Kultur des Kostbaren und Erlesenen« (*ibid.*, pp.27f.).

<sup>120</sup> Rilke, *Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe: Bd.IV*, edited by Horst Nalewski (Frankfurt/M & Leipzig: 1996) (hereafter referred to as >KA IV<), p.70.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.653-656.

Accordingly, the salient point in assessing the rôle played in the *Malte* by Rilke's »heterodoxe[] monistische[] Religiosität« (Steffen Arndal)<sup>122</sup> is that any attempt around 1900 to investigate such diverse areas as spiritism, psychology or even neurology will almost inevitably drop one into a bewilderingly broad field. Such is the *Interferenz der Konzepte* (Wolfgang Kaempfer)<sup>123</sup> that it becomes all but impossible to isolate one topic from a forbiddingly dense discursive network. Rilke's reading habits, as described by Siegfried Mandel, bear witness to an enthusiastic entry into this cognitive manifold:

Although librarians can separate neatly books on religion, philosophy, psychology, the natural sciences, sexology, mysticism, spiritualism, occultism, and nature studies, one finds no such categorization in Rilke's collections and readings of books in these fields [...] Rilke's readings - fiction and non-fiction - were directed to *any* source that might shed light on his concerns, the essence of human existence, death as immanence and transcendence, and man's participation in nature.<sup>124</sup>

Malte Laurids Brigge's hybrid transcendentalism, as I hope to show, reflects the instinctive catholicity of his author. Indeed, the modernity of the *Malte*-text may well reside in nothing so much as the almost anarchic *diffusion* of transcendentalist motifs which it hosts: the potpourri on display in this book lends it a peculiarly >late< character.

Fick devotes the eleventh chapter of her study to a comparative study of *Malte Laurids Brigge* and Sigbjørn Obstfelder's *Tagebuch eines Priesters*

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<sup>122</sup> Arndal, "»Ohne alle Kenntnis von Perspektive«?", p.134.

<sup>123</sup> Quoted in Fick, *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele*, p.10.

<sup>124</sup> Siegfried Mandel, "Rilke's Readings and Impressions from Buber to Alfred Schuler", in: *Modern Austrian Literature*, Volume 15, Number 3/ 4, 1982, pp.255-275, here: p.262.

(published posthumously, 1900).<sup>125</sup> »Als die Auseinandersetzung mit der Angst vor dem im Körper inkarnierten Leben kann man die *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* [...] verstehen«:<sup>126</sup> from this point of departure, Fick brings Malte's mystical discourse down into his viscera, so to speak, accounting for his crisis in organological terms, locating it in the constellation *psyche, soma* and *pneuma*. The Rilke-Obstfelder parallelism which is thereby established places earlier findings of Werner Kohlschmidt<sup>127</sup> under a new monistic banner. The results, to which I can hope to add only piecemeal, are often astonishing.

There is, however, one serious shortcoming in Fick's reading of the *Malte*: it proceeds, perhaps inevitably, by means of a somewhat static cataloguing of monistic motifs divorced from the dynamic of a narrative and rhetorical context. As a result, inquiries into textual *strategy* are sacrificed to schematic ends.

If Wagner-Egelhaaf highlights the mystical dimensions of Malte's crisis, Fick the organological, then Moritz Baßler's recent short essay, "Maltes Gespenster",<sup>128</sup> emphatically places the spiritistic events in the book centre-stage, insisting (along with Martine Carré)<sup>129</sup> that they be considered seriously

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<sup>125</sup> This chapter is titled "Die Angst der Kreatur: Obstfelders *Tagebuch eines Priesters* und *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*", in: *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele*, pp. 300-318.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p.300.

<sup>127</sup> Werner Kohlschmidt, "Rilke und Obstfelder", in: *Die Wissenschaft von deutscher Sprache und Dichtung. Methoden - Probleme - Aufgaben. Festschrift für Friedrich Maurer zum 65. Geburtstag am 5. Januar 1963* (Stuttgart: 1963), edited by S. Gutenbrunner, pp. 458-477.

<sup>128</sup> Moritz Baßler, "Maltes Gespenster", in: M. B. & Châtellier (ed.), *Mystique, mysticisme et modernité*, pp.239-253.

<sup>129</sup> Martine Carré, "Des >revenants< dans *Les Carnets de Malte Laurids Brigge* ou: des figures de l'invisible aux encore invisibles *Élégies de Duino*", in: Klein (ed.), *R. M. Rilke et >Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge<*, pp.41-61. I shall engage with some specifics of this important text in the appropriate contexts (particularly Chapter Three).

on their own terms: »Maltes Gespenster sind kein pathologischer Befund, sie bedeuten auch nicht einfach >den Einbruch des Unerhörten<, sie markieren vielmehr den Kreuzungspunkt des Chiasmus zwischen zwei *ordres complémentaires*«. <sup>130</sup> For Baßler, the presence of occultist themes and motifs in the *Malte* is not a mere anachronism, to which only poetological and allegorical significances are to be assigned. Rather, he argues, the text is charged with the »Energie einer aktuellen Diskurskonstellation auf«. <sup>131</sup> Indeed Baßler goes so far as to identify the book's modernity in the very fact that, under an insistent »Responnsionsstruktur«, <sup>132</sup> it presents spectrality as a pressing and unbanished ontological and epistemological problem: »Daß es in Rilkes Text [...] wieder spukt, versteht sich als Ausweis seiner Modernität«. <sup>133</sup> Accordingly, Baßler scrutinises »die den gesamten Roman durchziehende Äquivalenzstruktur von >Gespenst / gespenstisch<« <sup>134</sup> as well as »die mediumistische Rhetorik des Empfangens, des Stimmenhörens und des Diktats«. <sup>135</sup> This approach delivers some particularly sophisticated insights

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<sup>130</sup> Baßler, "Maltes Gespenster", p.248.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p.241.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.243.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p.244. Baßler is contrasting Rilke's praxis with that of Ibsen in *Ghosts*, where the spectral had become a mere *figure* for psychological and cultural categories.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p.241.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p.246. Baßler highlights an important biographical consideration here: »Über den biographischen Parallelen zwischen Malte und Rilke in Paris hat man bislang übersehen, daß Rilkes Lebenswirklichkeit (und zwar vor und nach Abfassung des *Malte*) ihre Entsprechung ja viel eher in dem hat, was im Roman als prägende Kindheit erscheint, in der Umgebung der europäischen Adelshäuser nämlich - die freilich mit seiner eigenen Familie nichts zu tun haben. In diesen Häusern spukt es nicht nur weiterhin kräftig, hier haben vor allem auch die Medien des modernen Spiritismus ihre Auftritte und ihr Auskommen. Daß die Parallelen zwischen ihnen und dem Dichter Rilke sich darin nicht erschöpfen, belegen etwa die Begebenheiten im Umkreis der Fürstin Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe. Rilke nimmt bei seiner Mäzenatin nicht nur mehrmals an Séancen teil, er schreckt auch nicht davor zurück, selber als Medium im spiritistischen Diktat lyrische Texte >aus dem Nachlaß des Grafen C. W.< niederzuschreiben - darunter immerhin so bekannte Gedichte wie "In Karnak wars. Wir waren hingeritten" und "Wunderliches Wort: die Zeit vertreiben!". / Nach dem *Malte* wird



into the text's nexus of spiritism and poetology (complementing Wagner-Egelhaaf's treatment of the mysticism-poetology nexus).

Baßler's achievement here is to have helped recover the *Malte's* spiritism from the margins to which it has traditionally been consigned. I hope in what follows to build on Baßler's corrective by arguing that the book's occultistic-magical orbit is actually far wider than even he allows. Indeed, I believe that Baßler's approach, if amplified, might herald something of a >Copernican revolution< in *Malte*-studies, akin to that described in a rich analogy by Russell Nieli in his study on Wittgenstein:

My personal Copernican revolution as a *Tractatus* interpreter I would later compare to the following: There was a jig-saw puzzle which many competent people had put together to form a clear and coherent picture. A few of the pieces, however, didn't seem to fit into the picture, and so, were generally ignored or discarded. A radical change, however, was seen to take place when one re-arranged the picture. If one took the existing picture and split it in two, thrust the discarded pieces into the very center of the picture, rejoined the two halves to the new center, and took the resulting whole and turned it completely upside down, an entirely new picture emerged [...]<sup>136</sup>

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die Rhetorik des Empfangens dann vor allem für die Entstehung der *Duineser Elegien* und der *Sonette an Orpheus* bemüht [...]« (pp.244f.). Cf Kassner's remarks on »das Glasrücken, die Geisterstimmen, die Geistererscheinungen« in which Rilke engaged in the years of his »Schloßkindschaft« (*Rilke. Gesammelte Erinnerungen 1926-1956*, p.58). Kassner, who remembers Rilke's eyes as the »Augen zugleich des Knaben und des Sehers« (ibid.,p.14) writes elsewhere: »Rilke war auch im Leben viel weniger das, was man einen Träumer nennt, und viel mehr das, was man als medial bezeichnet« (ibid., p.26). Yet Rilke himself suggests otherwise in his letter to Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck of August 11<sup>th</sup> 1924: »Ich bin, zum Glück, medial vollkommen unbrauchbar, aber ich zweifle keinen Augenblick, daß ich mich auf *meine* Weise den Einflüssen jener oft heimatlosen Kräfte eröffnet halte und daß ich nie aufhöre, ihren Umgang zu genießen oder zu erleiden. Wie viele Worte, wie viele Entschlüsse oder Zögerungen mögen auf Rechnung ihrer Einwirkung zu schreiben sein!« (in *MLB-Materialien*, p.129). But all this mediumism - séantistic and poetic - is a post-*Malte* affair (Rilke having first met the Fürstin Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe on 13. December 1909, just days before the *Malte* was finally completed). I will defer until the >Conclusion?< section further consideration of how Rilke's own quest for inspiration might be related to the notion of »Spiritismus als radikalisierte Geniekult« (Gruber, *Die Seherin von Prevorst*, p.200).

<sup>136</sup> Nieli, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language*, p.xii. Nieli's central thesis, contra Russell, Carnap *et al*, is that sometime around 1910 or early 1911 Wittgenstein had a »mystical-ecstatic experience« which went on to »form[ ] the radiating core of the *Tractatus*« (ibid., p.91), the philosophical kernel of which is that the »tools of modern logic« must be used »to establish and secure, against profanation and debasement, the *ganz andere* nature of such

By recasting the *Malte*->jigsaw< from its spiritistic themes and motifs *outwards*, Baßler's essay joins that of Carré in contributing significantly towards such an interpretive *Gestalt*-shift.<sup>137</sup> As well as taking his approach further, I propose at the same time to becloud the new picture with the following suggestion: the paranormal takes us to the heart of Malte's crisis not least because the *ironisation* of Malte's paranormalism drives that crisis.

This latter point brings us to Judith Ryan's powerful hermeneutic intervention, ">Hypothetisches Erzählen<: Zur Funktion von Phantasie und Einbildung in Rilkes >Malte Laurids Brigge<", whose relevance remains undimmed three decades on.<sup>138</sup> Ryan qualifies the direct pathos of Malte's horrified registration of external reality by pointing out the rôle played by subjunctive or hypothetical inflections. Thus Ryan redefines much that goes on in the notebooks as »Übungen der Phantasie«, whereby Malte »interessiert sich eigentlich nicht für das im normalen Sinne des Wortes >Gesehene< oder Erlebte, sondern vielmehr für die eigenen Vermutungen«. <sup>139</sup> Importantly, the Paris observations are not exempt from this gloss: »Der größte Teil der

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an experience and of the translogical Reality which it reveals« (ibid., p.69, footnote 2). Thus, argues Nieli, the early Wittgenstein, far from being a logical positivist, was in fact a negative theologian.

<sup>137</sup> Of course let it be said at once: the jigsaw *Gestalt* evokes a rather dangerously naïve notion of hermeneutic totality, of Gadamerian harmony of *all* details - yet a notion which is rather encouraged by Rilke himself when, in his letter to Hulewicz of November 10<sup>th</sup> 1925, he writes of the *Malte* as a mosaic: »Fragmentarisch haben alle diese Episoden ihre Aufgabe, sich innerhalb des Malte mosaikhaft zu ergänzen« (*MLB-Materialien*, p.135).

<sup>138</sup> Judith Ryan, ">Hypothetisches Erzählen<: Zur Funktion von Phantasie und Einbildung in Rilkes *Malte Laurids Brigge*", originally published 1971, reprinted in: *Rainer Maria Rilke: Wege der Forschung* (Bd.638), edited by Rüdiger Görner (Darmstadt: 1987), pp. 245-284.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., pp. 256 & 283 respectively.

Aufzeichnungen seiner Pariser Zeit besteht aus Vermutungen, die Malte aufstellen muß, um seine Teilwirklichkeit zu ergänzen«. <sup>140</sup> From this, Ryan will draw a rising graph of subjectivism as she tracks Malte's shifting focus from Paris experience to childhood reminiscence to historico-mythical narrative. The implications of this position are far-reaching. Indeed, if one criticism might be levelled at Ryan's paper, it is that it does not go far enough in its interrogation of Malte's perspective. The present thesis, via an amplification of Ryan's seminal insight, shall suggest that any response to Malte's existential crisis must first fully factor into his *Aufzeichnungen* the all-important subjective coefficient. For Malte's affliction does not present itself to the reader >transparently<, innocent of semiotic or rhetorical manipulation from Rilke. When Rilke exhorts Artur Hospelt to read the book *gegen den Strom*, <sup>141</sup> he may in part be gently suggesting that one receive Malte's testimony suspiciously, setting it under the transcendental buffoonery of a Schlegelian *Parekbase*, with its disruptive relativising of narrative and

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p.255. Cf Hartmut Engelhardt, "Die *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*: Der Versuch, wirklich zu werden", in: H. E., *Der Versuch, wirklich zu sein. Zu Rilkes sachlichem Sagen* (Frankfurt/M: 1973), pp.107-129, here p.112, on the formidable hermeneutic challenge which this poses the reader: »Die Ambivalenz des Verhältnisses von Malte den Dingen gegenüber, daß ihre Stärke zwar seine Projektion ist, gleichzeitig aber auch, als undurchschaute, ihre ihnen eigene Eigenschaft, macht Maltes Erfahrung changierend und den Versuch des Interpretieren, der ihr folgt, in sich gebrochen. Der kritische Diskurs schwingt zwischen Wiederholung des Selbstverständnisses Maltes und einer Konstruktion, deren Erklärungswert größer ist als die Maltes, der seine Erfahrungen nur partiell begreift [...] [D]as Unbotmäßigwerden der Dinge [entspringt] paradox ihrer Reduktion auf das Subjekt [...]«. Similarly Dieter Saalman, *Rainer Maria Rilkes >Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge<; Ein Würfelwurf nach dem Absoluten. Poetologische Aspekte* (Bonn: 1975), who productively reads the *Malte* as a symbolist text foregrounding what Northrop Frye calls »the hypothetical germ of literature« (cited *ibid.*, p.72).

<sup>141</sup> Letter to Artur Hospelt, 11.2.12 (*MLB-Materialien*, p.99).

rhetorical integrities.<sup>142</sup> Put simply, there may be an *iron* busily at work in this text.<sup>143</sup>

An enigmatic comment from Rilke on the *Malte*, though one generally underappreciated in the *Forschung* to date,<sup>144</sup> evokes such a textual duplexity in unmistakable terms. In a prospectus for the as yet incomplete *Aufzeichnungen*, which Brigitte von Witzleben convincingly dates to the first half of 1909,<sup>145</sup> Rilke gives the Gräfin Pia Valmarana a remarkable insight into the daunting aesthetic challenge facing him as he enters the final, critical phase of work on the book: »Il faudra faire tous les groupes possibles, pour les placer après dans un vaste ensemble; il faut en avoir une abondance des choses faites pour supprimer le sujet ainsi conçu par *la réalité des documents ingénus qui prouvent sans le vouloir*«. <sup>146</sup> Rilke seems to be bracing himself here for the monumentally difficult poetological task - »Ce sera pour moi ma Porte de l'enfer«<sup>147</sup> - of fashioning an *Ich*-text both naïve and ironic, a text whose force will lie in the dialectic of articulated subjective perspective and

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<sup>142</sup> Cf Frederick Burwick, ">Transcendental Buffoonery< and the Bifurcated Novel", in: *Narrative Ironies*, edited by Gerald Gillespie & Raymond A. Prier (Amsterdam & Atlanta: 1997), pp.51-71, esp. pp.51 & 54.

<sup>143</sup> Giloy alerts her reader to the decisive action of Rilke's »objektiven Ironie [...] gegen seine Figur« (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.15). Kruse suggests »daß die Entwicklung Maltes in den *Aufzeichnungen* einer ironischen Brechung unterliegt« ("*Zur ästhetischen Religiosität in Rilkes *Aufzeichnungen*", pp.51-68, here p.59). For Kruse, however, this is a matter of »Sozialpathologie«, in which Rilke subjects his character to an »ironische[] Relativierung durch die Perspektive der gesellschaftlichen Konvention [...]« (ibid.). I do not agree that bourgeois societal norms are even remotely the normative vantage point of Rilke's *iron* in this text.*

<sup>144</sup> A criticism from which, however, Stephens can most certainly be exempted: see his discussion in *Strukturanalyse*, pp.21f. & 25f.

<sup>145</sup> Brigitte von Witzleben. *Untersuchungen zu Rainer Maria Rilkes >Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge<*. *Studien zu den Quellen und zur Textüberlieferung* (Vaasa & Germersheim, 1996), p. 15.

<sup>146</sup> Quoted ibid, emphasis added.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

whispered objective counter-suggestion. A text, in short, which says more than its fictive author wishes to say and so leaves itself open to - *eine andere Auslegung*.<sup>148</sup>

In a refreshingly irreverent recent essay, ">Wer jetzt lacht [...] lacht mich aus.< Lachen mit Rilke",<sup>149</sup> Stephan Porombka identifies the cruel and sinister laughter to which Malte is repeatedly subjected by other characters within the book as a metatextual prophylactic designed to *deter readers from joining in*:

Wer also über den Roman oder über Malte lacht, für den hat sich schon alles entschieden: Er steht auf der Seite der anderen, auf der Seite der Grausamen und der Unempfindlichen, die die Qualen des Einsamen, der hinter seiner Maske weint, nur noch vermehren. Will man aber vor dem Roman und vor Malte bestehen, muß man sich genauso empfindlich und empfänglich zeigen. Statt sich zu distanzieren, muß alles so bitter und so ernst genommen werden, wie Malte selbst es nimmt.<sup>150</sup>

For Porombka, Rilke has self-consciously placed this protective layer of existential pathos around both his character and his text:

Auch das gehört zu Rilkes Strategie und gehört ebenfalls zum Erfolgsgeheimnis des Romans, daß der Leser immer wieder und bedingungslos auf Maltes Leiden eingeschworen wird, ohne daß er die Möglichkeit hat, etwa durch Lachen auf Distanz zu gehen. Daß Rilke dabei eher aufs Krasse als aufs Subtile setzt, zeigt allerdings, wie groß seine Angst ist, es könnte das fremde, das obszöne oder das böse Lachen zu hören sein, wenn man die Geschichte des Malte verfolgt.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Stephens cogently relates this »Wechselwirkung von > sujet supprimé < und > choses faites << (*Strukturanalyse*, p.26) to the *Vorwand*-theory which he is to develop later in his study.

<sup>149</sup> Stephan Porombka, ">Wer jetzt lacht [...] lacht mich aus. Lachen mit Rilke", in: *Poetik der Krise: Rilkes Rettung der Dinge in den >Weltinnenraum<*, edited by Hans Richard Brittnacher, Stephan Porombka & Fabian Störmer (Würzburg: 2000), pp.63-83.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

This *Angst* Porombka sees as typical of Rilke, who, particularly after *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke* (1899), tries to achieve a »Selbstinszenierung als ewig Werdender«<sup>152</sup> by imposing upon himself and his readers a »Lachverbot« or »Lachkontrolle«<sup>153</sup> that will promote »das Bild vom Dichter jenseits des Lachens [...]«.<sup>154</sup> Rilke, terrified of being laughed at either personally or through reader-response to his texts, extends his defensiveness to his fictive alter ego.

On this last point, I beg to differ. It seems to me that the closer one inspects the ironic skew in the *Malte*-text the more the thought impresses itself that Rilke is quite mischievously and knowingly *sending his fictive proxy out to suffer the risk of being laughed at*. If Parombka is correct in what he writes about Rilke's personal fears in this area - and he makes a rather convincing argument - then is it not possible that Malte takes the comic heat for some of his author's own tendencies?<sup>155</sup> If so, then might it not be that Rilke, far from forbidding his readers from laughing at Malte, is ever so subtly *inviting* them to do so?

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p.77.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., pp.75 & 71 respectively.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p.81.

<sup>155</sup> Citing Beda Allemann's decades-old claim that the *Malte* can be read as Rilke's self-parody (Allemann, *Ironie und Dichtung*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Pfullingen: 1956, p.24), Ulf Zimmermann, "Malte Ludens: Humor, Satire, Irony, and Deeper Significance in Rilke's Novel", in: *The Germanic Review*, Volume 68, No.2, Spring 1993, pp.50-59, argues that Rilke is every bit »the consummate craftsman« in the way he deploys »an irony that penetrates the superficial self-deceptions« put forth by his first-person narrator: »In narratives like Malte's, the reader is constantly called upon to make comparisons between what is done and what is said, between earlier and later statements, not to mention the classic ironic comparison between what is said and what is meant, and is asked to draw conclusions from their contrast« (ibid., p.56). While Zimmermann himself does not, in my view, significantly demonstrate how Malte's Papers ironise him, his call here to a close reading alert to the operations of authorial irony behind the first-person discourse is well made.

To >diagnose< in Malte Laurids Brigge a case of *Krankheit zum Tode*, therefore, will not be to respond in naïve immediacy to the existential resonance of the text. It will instead involve a registration of textual irony, on the basis of which the >diagnostic< decipherment of the Malte-figure's travails can proceed in more differentiated fashion.<sup>156</sup> I hope to show that we must cultivate a certain mistrust when dealing with Malte and his texts, and that a hermeneutics of suspicion is part - though not all - of the >diagnostic< task. From this, I shall tentatively nominate Kierkegaard's *Sickness unto Death* as a *synthetic* model for the development of *all four* perspectives on *Malte* / Malte outlined above: mystical disposition (Wagner-Egelhaaf), monistic affectivity (Fick), paranormalism (Baßler) and subjunctive mood (Ryan).

I have been greatly emboldened in my Kierkegaardian approach to the *Malte* by the remarkable opening chapter of Frederick George Thomas Bridgham's unaccountably neglected *Rainer Maria Rilke: Urbild und Verzicht* (1975). Bridgham examines »the impact which Kierkegaard's life and writings made on Rilke, an influence which dates from the year 1904«.<sup>157</sup> Building on

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<sup>156</sup> Thus, Kruse is only half-way correct when he writes: »Ist die >realistische Perspektive< für die innere Logik Maltes unwichtig, so doch nicht für den Leser« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.38). For all that the first part of Kruse's assertion is deeply questionable (I shall argue that Malte is for most of the *Aufzeichnungen* quite obsessed with issues of mimesis and epistemological realism), he does mobilise a play of Malte's perspective and that of the reader. That this perspectival play is ironic in character is also identified by Kruse who, like Ryan, stresses »der Einbildungscharakter der Erlebnisse« and connects it with a relativising dialectic of »>realistische Wirklichkeitsperspektive< in ironischer Funktion« (p.39).

<sup>157</sup> Frederick George Thomas Bridgham, *Rainer Maria Rilke: Urbild und Verzicht* (Stuttgart: 1975), p.1.

the important enquiries of Werner Kohlschmidt<sup>158</sup> and Otto Bollnow,<sup>159</sup> but superseding both in depth and sensitivity of analysis, Bridgham demonstrates

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<sup>158</sup> Werner Kohlschmidt, "Rilke und Kierkegaard", in: W. K., *Die entzweite Welt* (Gladbeck: 1953), pp.88-97. Kohlschmidt's essay makes an excellent case for seeing a »Wahlverwandschaft« (ibid., p.92) between Rilke and Kierkegaard, based on an influence more deep and radical even than that of Rodin (ibid., p.96) and involving »eine Gemeinsamkeit in der Aporie und in dem Versuch, sie auszustehen, ohne ihr auszuweichen [...]« (ibid., p.93). Rilke, writes Kohlschmidt, »erkennt mit ähnlicher Schärfe wie Kierkegaard die Schwächen des humanistischen Fundamentes in den Aporien des menschlichen Daseins [...]« (ibid., p.91). The weakness of this otherwise credible claim is that Kohlschmidt applies it exclusively to Rilke's work after 1910, drawing a timeline that separates a) »der Rilke vor 1910 (der Rilke des *Stundenbuchs*, der *Geschichten vom lieben Gott* und des *Malte*)«, a Rilke who is caricatured as a vacuously sensualistic blend of »romantisch-pantheistisch[ ]« (ibid., p.96), sub-Nietzschean monism in the vein of what Kierkegaard calls the >aesthetic< phase, from b) the unflinching »Dichter des Scheiterns« of the »Spätwerk, soweit es mit den *Duineser Elegien* zusammenhängt« (ibid., p.89). To sustain this narrative, Kohlschmidt posits an *Umschlag* around the time of the earliest genesis of the Elegies (winter 1911/12): »Nun schlägt er [Rilke] um in eine Verlorenheit, die plötzlich den Menschen als ausgeliefert erkennt« (ibid., pp.89f., emphasis added). Having opened his essay with an account of the immediate post-*Malte* period, Kohlschmidt fails to inspect seriously the possibility that the Kierkegaardian *Umschlag* may already be inscribed in the *Malte* itself - indeed, that the story of Malte Laurids Brigge may be the most Kierkegaardian story that Rilke will ever tell. The ironic result of Kohlschmidt's periodisation is that his descriptions of the Kierkegaardian condition in the *Spätwerk* applies rather more to the *Malte* than to that *Spätwerk* - the *Duino* breakthrough marking the beginning of Rilke's post-Kierkegaardian phase, in which, for all Rilke's continued admiration for the Dane, the latter's characteristic *melancholia* comes to be viewed as overly dualistic spiritual ballast rather than as spiritual leaven (of which more in the >Conclusion?< section).

<sup>159</sup> Dating the first impact of Kierkegaard on Rilke as far back as 1903 (and the writing of the third book of the *Stundenbuch*), Bollnow argues forcefully that Kierkegaard's unsettling ideas lent existential sobriety to Rilke's »unverbindlich schwärmenden Lebensenthusiasmus« (*Rilke*, p.24) and »wuchernde[n] Lebensmystik« (ibid., p.25). (This argument ties in well with Andrea Pagni's overall narrative in *Rilke um 1900* of a deepening crisis in Rilke's monistic outlook from the second half of 1900 onwards, except that Bollnow dates Rilke's first adult crisis a little later than Pagni.) For Bollnow, the encounter with Kierkegaard represents nothing less than »die entscheidende Wendung in Rilkes Leben« (ibid., p.24) - a *Wendung* coinciding almost exactly with Rilke's first work on the Nordic *Malte*-figure (ibid., p.25). Bollnow, however, seems not to allow that the Kierkegaardian schooling is as much *theological* as existential. In this repudiation of Kierkegaard as a religious thinker, Bollnow is in good existentialist company. Anthony Rudd remarks how the recognition of Kierkegaard as the father of twentieth century existentialism has come at the cost of abbreviating him down to: »[...] the existentialist Kierkegaard, the spokesman for the free, lonely, responsible individual, whose voice, taken up and amplified by so many, from Ibsen through Sartre to the present day, has resonated so powerfully in our culture. What has largely been put aside has been the religious background to that individualism [...] But, for Kierkegaard, this background is crucial« (*Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, Oxford: 1993, p.118). Bollnow's secularisation of Kierkegaard, at least as a figure of influence, is consistent with his general approach to Rilke's texts, in which he endeavours to replace >metaphysical< with anthropological-existential »Auslegungsmöglichkeiten«: »nur auf diesem Weg ist es möglich, Rilke wirklich verbindlich ernst zu nehmen [! D.D.]« (*Rilke*, pp.98f.). Thus, for instance, Bollnow's dimming of the supramundane horizon of the *Duineser Elegien* with the argument that the *Engel* is a useful fiction, an »ideale[r] Bezugspunkt« (ibid., p.105), a purely notional, criterial cipher (»Maßstab«: ibid.): »So heißt der Satz: *Preise dem Engel die Welt*, wenn wir ihn im Sinn der



that the affinities between Kierkegaard and Rilke are not just superficially striking but also thematically profound. In no sense do I envisage a need to modify Bridgham's findings, which relate predominantly to the theme of love. Rather, in exploring the harmonics between Kierkegaard and the *Malte*-book, I hope in Chapter Five to offer an at once more thematically wide-ranging and more *Malte*-specific supplement.

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letzten existentiellen Verbindlichkeit nehmen, nichts anderes als: Preise die Welt! Wir dürfen den Begriff des Engels hier streichen ohne Wesentliches zu verändern, ähnlich wie wir ihn auch in den Eingangsworten streichen dürfen: *Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn?*« (ibid., p.106). To take away from Malte Laurids Brigge the religious horizon of his consciousness is to do him no less a violence, distorting him into an existentialist *confrère* of Sartre's Roquentin. For all Sartre's evident borrowings from Rilke's text for *La Nausée*, the two fictions have, I believe, a good deal less in common than meets the eye (as evidenced in the complete and openly programmatic suppression of Malte's mystical horizon in Inca Rumold's comparative reading, *Die Verwandlung des Ekels. Zur Funktion der Kunst in Rilkes >Malte Laurids Brigge< und Sartres >La Nausée<*, esp. p.66, p.86 & pp.133f.).

# CHAPTER ONE

## I.i: *Dunkle Himmelfahrt?*

What is the matter with Malte Laurids Brigge? His *via dolorosa* invites spontaneous comparison with the predicament of another lamenting *Ich* in Rilke - that of the *lyrisches Ich* of the *Duineser Elegien*. The present study was inspired originally by my curiosity at what I found to be a discrepancy in different constituencies of Rilke-*Forschung*. My first intensive engagement with Rilke centred on the *Elegien* (soon incorporating the *Sonette an Orpheus*). When my attention was subsequently turned to the *Malte*, a shift in scholarly temper became apparent. Compared to the literature on the two late masterpieces, *Malte-Forschung* seemed all too often to pinch the valve of a transcendentalist vocabulary. With the *Elegies*, the full force of Rilke's concern with questions of a fundamental, >onto-theological< nature - a concern culminating in the great *Ontodizee* of the Ninth and Tenth *Elegies* and on through into the affirmations of the *Sonnets* - was granted as a thematic given. The way was clear, it seemed, for critics to respond to this open transcendentalism as they saw fit - whether in affirmation or in demystification (deconstructive or otherwise). Crucially, Rilke's letters would be cited generously in an effort to reconstruct the frame he chose at various points in the long genesis of the *Elegies* to place around the poems. With the *Malte*-book, by contrast, a lack of fit could quickly be encountered between the silhouette of the *Malte* cast by Rilke's letters and that thrown by so many

critics. One often sensed that the *Malte's* status as a post-*Stundenbuch* text was making readers reluctant to see too much shared religiosity between the >effusive< earlier work (even including its third part) to the subsequent >critical< prose. A pathos of breakthrough from >monistic< *Naïvität* to >modernist< *Sentimentalität* carried the received narrative, with any genuinely visionary gleam in the *Malte* seeming to be dimmed before the discussion had even got underway.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the contributions of Wagner-Egelhaaf, Kruse and Fick earned value precisely on account of their minority status.

Intrigued, I was moved to investigate whether the seeming anomaly might be explained either as an extreme symptom of the intentional fallacy at play in Rilke's own *Selbstdeutungen*, indicating that the *Malte* and the later works address two radically different conditions through which Rilke's epistolary rhetoric draws misleading lines of contour; or as a wrong turn taken somewhere in the broad trend of *Malte*-studies. Here is Rilke:<sup>2</sup>

Der arme Malte fängt so tief im Elend an und reicht, wenn mans genau nimmt, bis an die ewige Seligkeit; er ist ein Herz, das eine ganze Oktave greift: nach ihm sind nun nahezu alle Lieder möglich [...];<sup>3</sup>

[...] ich weiß nicht, dieses Buch, das ein unendlicher Schmerz war, ging überall, in einer gewissen Welt bis ans Ende [...];<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This pathos may even be related to nothing more sophisticated than genre stereotype. Thus Wagner-Egelhaaf can note in 1989: »bisher [wurde] fast ausschließlich den mystischen Elementen in Rilkes Lyrik nachgespürt« (*Mystik der Moderne*, p.63).

<sup>2</sup> I confine myself for the present to letters written post-*Malte*.

<sup>3</sup> To Anton Kippenberg, March 25<sup>th</sup> 1910 (*MLB-Materialien*, p.80).

<sup>4</sup> To Antonie Baumgarten, June 27<sup>th</sup> 1911 (*ibid.*, p.87).

[...der Malte Laurids] erschien mir die längste Zeit [...] nicht so sehr als ein Untergang, vielmehr als eine eigentümlich dunkle Himmelfahrt in eine vernachlässigte abgelegene Stelle des Himmels [...];<sup>5</sup>

[...] Daß der arme Malte daran [an den Trostlosigkeiten, D.D.] zugrunde geht, ist eine Sache und braucht uns nicht weiter zu bekümmern. Wichtig ist nur, daß das Übergroße nicht verschmäht, sich so vertraut mit uns einzulassen, dies ist, wie man in einer gewissen Zeit würde gesagt haben, die Moral des Buches, die Rechtfertigung seines Daseins. Diese Aufzeichnungen, indem sie ein Maß an sehr angewachsene Leiden legen, deuten an, bis zu welcher Höhe die Seligkeit steigen könnte, die mit der Fülle dieser selben Kräfte zu leisten wäre [...];<sup>6</sup>

[...] auch heute noch [begreife ich] die Verfassungen dieses vereinsamten jungen Menschen [...] und mit ihnen die ganze vorläufig noch bestehende Hoffnungslosigkeit alles Menschlichen. Nie hat sich die Religion mehr ihrer inneren Demütigkeit begeben, nie ist sie anmassender geworden, als wo sie meint trösten zu können. Das Einsehen unserer Trostlosigkeit wäre zugleich der Moment, in dem jene eigentliche religiöse Produktivität einsetzen könnte, die allein zwar nicht zum Troste, aber zum redlichen Entbehrenkönnen aller Tröstung führt! [...].<sup>7</sup>

The Malte who emanates from these commentaries is a character in profoundest crisis, the depth of which (*Elend, Untergang, Trostlosigkeit*) somehow, paradoxically, is recast into a metaphors of ascension (*Himmelfahrt, Seligkeit*).<sup>8</sup> Where such unabashedly soteriological language would be grist to the mill of *Elegie* or *Sonette* scholars, much *Malte* criticism seems not to want to take Rilke at his word, so to speak. Critical discomfiture reveals itself through either a neglect of such epistolary *Selbstkommentar* or, in those instances where attention is paid, a certain tendency towards

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<sup>5</sup> To Lou Andreas-Salomé, December 28<sup>th</sup> 1911 (*ibid.*, p.88).

<sup>6</sup> To Ilse Sadée, February 24<sup>th</sup> 1912 (*ibid.*, p.100).

<sup>7</sup> To Rudolf Zimmermann, February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1921 (*ibid.*, pp.125f.)

<sup>8</sup> Cf Rilke's description, in his letter of February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1923 to Ilse Jahr, of the dark night of the soul: »Erst zu dem, dem auch der Abgrund ein Wohnort war, kehren die vorausgeschickten Himmel um, und alles tief und innig Hiesige, das die Kirche aus Jenseits veruntreut hat, kommt zurück« (quoted in Lorenz, *Schweigen in der Dichtung: Hölderlin - Rilke - Celan: Studien zur Poetik deiktisch-elliptischer Schreibweisen*, Göttingen: 1989, p.147).

misprision. It is almost as though such passages have in a certain sense proven unmanageable as a hermeneutic resource in *Malte* studies, so vaultingly hyperbolic does their rhetoric seem to be.<sup>9</sup> One might put the matter very broadly: what Rilke calls Malte's *dunkle Himmelfahrt* has time and again been subjected to a *Feuerbachian, Freudian or Nietzschean paraphrase*. If Malte is seen as a >modern Job<, then the word >modern< seems to neutralise out the religious content of the analogy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Huiru Liu, citing Anthony R. Stephens' remarks, in a 1977 paper, on the unfortunate development in *Malte*-studies of a »quasi-theologischer Streit, in dem die Kontrahenten einander mit Rilke-Zitaten bekämpfen«, suggests that this is due not least to »Rilkes orakelhafte Selbstdeutung« in the letters (*Suche nach Zusammenhang: Rainer Maria Rilkes >Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge<*, Frankfurt/M: 1994, p.30). Liu suggests a degree of confusion on Rilke's part as to the character and fate of his own creation: »>Himmelfahrt< versus >Untergang<, diese Inkongruenz Rilkes, die in der *Malte*-Forschung nicht selten Verwirrung wie Verlegenheit verursacht, charakterisiert auch sein eigenes problematisches Verhältnis zu seiner fiktiven Gestalt Malte« (ibid.). As I hope to show, the *Inkongruenz* which Liu diagnoses is only apparent.

<sup>10</sup> Cf for instance Dieter Schiller, "Der Einsame und seine Welt", p.142.

## I.ii: Erschriebene Moderne?

One recent high-profile contribution, to take a concrete example, opens with a quotation from a letter written by Rilke in 1915:

»Wie ist es möglich zu leben, wenn doch die Elemente dieses Lebens uns völlig unfaßlich sind?« So hat Rilke in einem Brief vom 8. November 1915 die Fragestellung seines Romans *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* und mithin das Zentralproblem der Moderne umrissen. Rilkes einziger Roman, den er am 8. Februar 1904 in Rom begann und erst am 27. Januar 1910 in Leipzig beendete, markiert für sein Werk eine selbstreflektorische Zäsur und darüber hinaus für die Geschichte des Romans in Deutschland eine epochale Veränderung. Mit der Erkenntnis, daß die Welt sich so radikal verändert hat, daß sie mit herkömmlichen Mitteln unsagbar geworden ist, beginnt aus dem Bruch mit der Erzähltradition ein neues Erzählen, dem ein Schwellenbewußtsein inhärent ist. Denn die Unfaßlichkeit des Lebens zur Darstellung zu bringen, bedeutete Rilke nicht nur selbstaufgestellte Aufgabe, sondern erwuchs ihm als Forderung der anbrechenden Epoche, die sich selbst nicht mehr als »epochale Einheit« [Hans Robert Jauss, D.D.] zu erfassen vermag. Sie erwuchs ihm als Forderung einer zu gewinnenden literarischen Moderne, zu deren Bildner er mit seinem Roman wurde.<sup>11</sup>

A great deal of ground is covered in Ortrud Gutjahr's opening paragraph. The virulence of the word *mithin* in her first sentence, as it is set to work in the phrase *und mithin das Zentralproblem der Moderne*, is quite unmistakable, for one detects at once in the treatment of the inaugural Rilke quotation a robust double movement. *Firstly*, Rilke's question, *[W]ie ist es möglich zu leben, wenn doch die Elemente dieses Lebens uns völlig unfaßlich sind?*, is historicised by positing the newness, the modernity of the crisis which it is articulating. Thus,

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<sup>11</sup> Ortrud Gutjahr. "Erschriebene Moderne. Rainer Maria Rilkes *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*", in: *Die literarische Moderne in Europa. Bd.1: Erscheinungsformen literarischer Prosa um die Jahrhundertwende*, edited by Hans Joachim Piechotta, Sabine Rothemann & Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow (Opladen: 1994), pp.370-397, here: p.370.

from the words: *wenn doch die Elemente dieses Lebens uns völlig unfaßlich sind* is drawn the paraphrase: *...daß die Welt sich so radikal verändert hat, daß sie mit herkömmlichen Mitteln unsagbar geworden ist...* This smuggles into the equation the vicissitudes of historical process and decodes Rilke's *uns* as the collective *wir* of the modern world.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, one must assume on this presentation that the problem Rilke diagnoses in his letter is in the first instance sociohistorical, to be ascribed to changed social or cultural dynamics, and hence that this particular problem, this uniquely modern malaise did not appear on the horizon in earlier - that is, >pre-modern< - times. Gutjahr would have Rilke respond to something essentially unprecedented. *Secondly*, what at first blush appears a preeminently existential problem (*Wie ist es möglich zu leben, wenn doch die Elemente dieses Lebens uns völlig unfaßlich sind?*) is modulated into a fundamentally aesthetic one (*...mit herkömmlichen Mitteln unsagbar ... Bruch mit der Erzähltradition ... die Unfaßlichkeit des Lebens zur Darstellung zu bringen*) - the better to present Rilke's *Fragestellung* as an expression of a *Forderung einer zu gewinnenden literarischen Moderne*. Already we see accruing around Rilke's quotation a vocabulary imported tendentiously from the categories of time (*epochale Veränderung*, etc) and aesthetics (*Erzählen*, etc). Inevitably, these two fields are conflated in the one clear critical manoeuvre of literary periodisation, as signalled in such phrases as *das Zentralproblem der Moderne ... die Geschichte des Romans in Deutschland*

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<sup>12</sup> Liu gives the words a similar direction: »de[r] Zerfall[ ] der bis dahin für heil gehaltenen Welt« (*Suche nach Zusammenhang*, p.34). Anthony Stephens too seems to follow this line, when, having quoted from the Hepner letter, he speaks of »die Hauptelemente des unfaßlich gewordenen Lebens« and the »Unfaßlich- oder Problematisch-werden des eigenen Ich« (*Strukturanalyse*, pp.31f., emphases added).



[sic] ... *Bruch mit der Erzähltradition ... ein neues Erzählen, dem ein Schwellenbewußtsein inhärent ist ... Forderung einer zu gewinnenden literarischen Moderne.* (Note the shift in the sense of *Moderne* as we work our way down the chain.)

*Wie ist es möglich zu leben, wenn doch die Elemente dieses Lebens uns völlig unfaßlich sind?* There is quite a distance to be travelled from these words of Rilke to Gutjahr's chief paraphrase of the *Aufgabe* which Rilke claims retrospectively to have set himself - and/or his Malte figure - in his prose book: *die Unfaßlichkeit des Lebens zur Darstellung zu bringen*. At stake in Rilke's formulation seems to be nothing less than a challenge to meet existentially the utter disorientation facing an existing human being. The task declared in Gutjahr's words, by contrast, is that of *giving expression* to an existential and cultural crisis which of itself admits of no ultimate solution.<sup>13</sup> There is a revealing ellipsis in Gutjahr's phrase *die Unfaßlichkeit des Lebens*. For Rilke imputes *Unfaßlichkeit* not to *Leben* itself but to *die Elemente dieses Lebens*, with precisely this giving point to his problematisation of the verb *leben* in the main clause. Such an ellipsis is surely no small matter, for it tempts one to place Rilke's question *Wie ist es möglich zu leben...?* so decisively under the governance of *unfaßlich* that it all but degrades any talk of *Möglichkeit* into the nullity of *Unmöglichkeit*. In other words, Gutjahr runs the rather large risk of reducing Rilke's question, *Wie ist es möglich zu leben...?*, to the status of an

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<sup>13</sup> Similarly Liu: »[...] die wirkliche Krise besteht für Malte, der sich zum Schreiben berufen fühlt, im wesentlichen darin, seinen eigenen Ausdruck [...] nicht finden zu können: *Maltes existentielle Not ist schließlich eine künstlerische*« (*Suche nach Zusammenhang*, p.56, emphasis added).

absurdist, near-tautological and vehemently rhetorical question (>How is it possible to live when life is incomprehensible?<) - whose impossible answer it now becomes the good modernist's task to thematise in all its rich impossibility.

In order to clarify the topos of the quotation, let us situate it in its original context - a letter to Lotte Hepner written on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1915. After an opening paragraph, in which Rilke despairs of doing justice to his correspondent's infinitely searching, infinitely ramifying questions, we find in a longer second paragraph the turn to the topic of the *Malte*-book:

Was in Malte Laurids Brigge (verzeihen Sie, wenn ich dieses Buch nochmals nenne, da es nun gerade zwischen uns zum Anlaß geworden ist) ausgesprochen, nein, gelitten steht<sup>14</sup>- das ist ja eigentlich nur *dies* mit allen Mitteln und immer wieder von vorn und an allen Beweisen *dies: dies: Wie ist es möglich zu leben, wenn doch die Elemente dieses Lebens uns völlig unfaßlich sind?*<sup>15</sup> Wenn wir immerfort im Lieben unzulänglich, im Entschließen unsicher und dem Tode gegenüber unfähig sind, wie ist es möglich, da zu sein? Ich bin nicht durchgekommen, in diesem unter der tiefsten inneren Verpflichtung geleisteten Buch, mein ganzes Staunen auszuschreiben darüber, daß die Menschen *seit Jahrtausenden*<sup>16</sup> mit Leben und Tod<sup>17</sup> umgehen (von Gott gar nicht zu reden) und dabei diesen ersten unmittelbarsten, ja genau genommen, einzigen *Aufgaben*:<sup>18</sup> (*denn was haben wir anderes zu tun*) *noch heute (und wie lange noch?)*<sup>19</sup> so neulinghaft ratlos, so zwischen Schrecken und Ausrede, so armselig gegenüberstehen. Ist das nicht unbegreiflich? meine Verwunderung über diese Tatsache drängt mich, sooft ich mich ihr überlasse, zunächst in die größte Bestürzung hinein und weiter in eine Art Grauen; aber auch hinter dem Grauen ist etwas Nächstes und Übernächstes, etwas so Intensives, daß ich mit dem Gefühl nicht entscheiden vermöchte, ob es glühend oder eisig sei. Ich habe schon einmal, vor

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<sup>14</sup> Rendered as »ausgesprochen eingelitten« in *MLB-Materialien* version, p.110.

<sup>15</sup> »Wie [...] sind?«: emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> »und Tod« missing in *MLB-Materialien* version, p.110.

<sup>18</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> Emphasis added.

Jahren über den Malte jemandem, den dieses Buch erschreckt hatte, zu schreiben versucht, daß ich es selbst manchmal wie eine hohle Form, wie ein Negativ empfände, dessen alle Mulden und Vertiefungen Schmerz sind, Trostlosigkeit und weheste Einsicht; der Ausguß davon aber, wenn es möglich wäre, einen herzustellen (wie bei einer Bronze die positive Figur, die man daraus gewönne) wäre vielleicht Glück, Zustimmung; - genaueste und sicherste Seligkeit. Wer weiß, ich frage mich, ob wir nicht immer sozusagen an der Rückseite der Götter heraustreten,<sup>20</sup> von ihrem erhaben strahlenden Gesicht durch nichts als durch sie selber getrennt, dem Ausdruck, den wir ersehen, ganz nah, nur eben hinter ihm stehen; aber was will das anders bedeuten, als daß unser Antlitz und das göttliche Gesicht in dieselbe Richtung hinausschauen, einig sind; und wie sollen wir demnach aus dem Raume, den der Gott vor sich hat, auf ihn zutreten?<sup>21</sup>

This paragraph clarifies much, even as it gives us a renewed sense of the formidable metaphysical ambition which Rilke associates with the *Malte*. The *Elemente dieses Lebens*, whose *Unfaßlichkeit* forms the burden of the complaint cited by Gutjahr, are named as *Lieben*, *Entschließen* and *Tod*. Let us note five points which emerge immediately and reasonably unproblematically from Rilke's discussion of these *Elemente*.

*One.* We can confirm that the discussion is framed transhistorically, Rilke making it clear that he sees inadequacy in love, uncertainty in decision and inability in the face of death as perennial features of the human condition, existential perplexities *seit Jahrtausenden*. His *Staunen* at the fact that human beings are still - *noch heute (und wie lange noch?)* - grappling with these fundamental problems in all their primitivity, still facing them as apprentices in the art of living, simply leaves no grounds for a firmly historicist reading.

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<sup>20</sup> »herantreten« in *MLB-Materialien*, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Lotte Hepner, 8.11.15, in: *Briefe in zwei Bänden. Erster Band: 1896 bis 1919*, edited by Horst Nalewski (Frankfurt/M & Leipzig: 1991), pp.599f.

Rilke quite explicitly stresses the continuity between his age and all previous ages down the millenia. If the *novum* of a modernist *Kulturkrise*, of an *anbrechende Epoche*<sup>22</sup> relating to itself in all its fragmentariness (*nicht mehr als >epochale Einheit<...<sup>23</sup>*) is in fact what is being registered by Rilke in *Malte*, then Rilke's words here bear no witness to this registration. Now let it be stressed: a thesis of the *Malte's* >modernity<, however one understands that intimidating term,<sup>24</sup> is not in principle being ruled out of hand here. Rather its relevance to the letter under scrutiny is what is being explored here. (Nor, whatever the results of this inspection, will the spectre of intentional fallacy be laid to rest: Rilke's own interpretive intervention must not be treated as the sacrosanct last word.)

*Two.* The *Aufgaben* which preoccupy Rilke here are not - or not yet - of a discernibly poetological nature. They touch rather upon the very quintessence of the existential: *die Menschen [gehen] seit Jahrtausenden mit Leben und Tod um [...] (von Gott gar nicht zu reden) und dabei diesen ersten unmittelbarsten, ja genau genommen einzigen Aufgaben: (denn was haben wir anderes zu tun) noch heute (und wie lange noch?).* The questions *Wie ist es möglich zu leben...?, wie ist es möglich, da zu sein...?*, could just as conceivably have issued from the pen of a philosopher or a theologian - or, for that matter, from

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<sup>22</sup> Gutjahr, "Erschriebene Moderne", p.370.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Gutjahr's use of *Moderne* seems to encompass both >modernity< and >modernism<: in her essay, the latter will be understood as an aesthetic response to the disorientations brought on by the industrial, metropolitan >modernity< of high capitalism: *ibid.*, pp. 371f. Certainly this offers a very different *Psychogramm* of modernity to that offered by Monika Fick, for instance, throughout whose study connotations of *Neuromantik* and panpsychism predominate. Naturally, one might bring these two models into dialectical relation.

the mouth of a parent, prisoner or plumber. They have no necessary or exclusive connection to the artist, let alone the writer, let alone the poet whom Rilke understood himself to be - and let alone the failed poet whom the Malte figure understands himself to be.<sup>25</sup> As we have seen, Gutjahr reads into Rilke's commentary the thought that *die Welt [...] mit herkömmlichen Mitteln unsagbar geworden ist*. This attributes to Rilke the idea that *die Welt* used to be *sagbar* with *herkömmlichen Mitteln*, but that now >we< are all labouring under an unprecedented Chandos-type *Sprachkrise*.<sup>26</sup> Yet this idea simply does not feature in Rilke's extended passage. To import it is to miss entirely the primordial passion behind Rilke's almost Greek inquiry into the perennial first principles of existence.<sup>27</sup>

*Three.* Rilke recalls having several years earlier invited someone who had found the *Malte* a terrifying read to understand the intimate relation between the surface negativity of the book's themes and situations and the grandly affirmative spiritual enterprise for which this negativity has been pressed into service. As is made clear in Rilke's simile of the bronze figure and its exact, though negative, correspondence to the mould in which the

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<sup>25</sup> Cf *MLB*, Paper XIV, pp.466ff.

<sup>26</sup> While the phrase: *mit allen Mitteln und immer wieder von vorn und an allen Beweisen*, indubitably includes a poetological dimension, it refers to Rilke's own struggle to do justice to the existential theme - rather than referring to the theme itself, which enjoys a discrete consideration.

<sup>27</sup> Cf Park's discerning commentary on the passage: »Nicht nur existentiell, sondern schon ahnungsvoll existential sagt das Zitat: Rilke, der als Dichter stets an jenem unlösbaren Urkonflikt zwischen Leben und Kunst litt, hat Grundfragen des menschlichen Daseins wie Leben, Liebe und Tod, aber auch Gott in einem ausgedehnten Zusammenhang als die >ersten und einzigen Aufgaben< verstanden. Noch wichtiger scheint, daß Rilke darüber hinaus die Ergründung und Richtigstellung der menschlichen Einstellungen bezüglich dieser Probleme um jeden Preis anstrebte. Was Rilke existential ahnte, lebte er als Dichter existentiell« (*Rilkes Selbstwerdung*, p.168).

molten bronze is cast and from which the solid figure emerges, the intense suffering and extreme tribulation of the Malte figure, the *Schmerz* [...], *Trostlosigkeit und weheste Einsicht* which are his lot, are somehow to be understood as necessary preconditions for an ultimate spiritual emergence that would lead to *genaueste und sicherste Seligkeit*. Rilke tries to impress upon Hepner that the positive spiritual impetus within the existence and circumstances of Malte may break through not in spite of the traumata of his existence, but precisely because of them. There is, insists Rilke, some mysterious process at play through which the positive is to be found *ex negativo*, such that the *positive Figur* can *only* be incubated by the *hohle Form*. In other words, Rilke is here testifying to a profound metaphysical and spiritual ambition which, far from turning the question, *Wie ist es möglich zu leben...?*, into an abyssal, proto-Beckettian meditation on existential aporia, instead turns this very question into spiritual project, existential enterprise, whose ultimate hope is nothing less than the sheerest enlightenment or salvation or beatitude. Let us reiterate: by neglecting to consider the possible significance of this utopian spiritual teleology which Rilke is indicating, Gutjahr has already decisively lowered the stakes being claimed for the book by its author.

*Four.* The figure of divinity makes a parenthetical entrance into Rilke's discussion by way of a gentle *occupatio* - ...*daß die Menschen seit Jahrtausenden mit Leben und Tod umgehen (von Gott gar nicht zu reden)*... -, only to re-enter the paragraph towards its close in the guise of the *Götter* whom we at present can

see only from behind.<sup>28</sup> The significance of this for the spiritual scope of Rilke's remarks need hardly be laboured: Rilke first places the human relationship with *Leben* in contiguity with the God-relationship, thereby linking the existential and the spiritual realms, while further down he intensifies this question of the God-relationship by plotting *unser Antlitz* and *das göttliche Gesicht* onto the same plane.<sup>29</sup> If Rilke's first formulation of the problem literarised in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* came in the form of a question, *Wie ist es möglich zu leben, wenn doch die Elemente dieses Lebens uns völlig unfaßlich sind?*, then his second key formulation bears a similarly interrogative form: *wie sollen wir demnach aus dem Raume, den der Gott vor sich hat, auf ihn zutreten?* That the figure of a transcendent being, or of transcendent beings, has been introduced into Rilke's account brings us face to face with a central interpretive challenge: do we respond to such images under the sign of sacralisation or secularisation or both at once?<sup>30</sup> That is, by what procedures do we decide whether to approach Rilke's mention here (and elsewhere) of *Gott* and *Götter* as a) the >faithlessly< figural language of a >spielende Metaphysik<,<sup>31</sup> b) a play of signifiers carrying the full referential ambition (or >faith<) of a devotional discourse or c) a semantic limbo between both of the above? Is the topos of the post-Nietzschean European modernist

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<sup>28</sup> The understated entrance of God into the text will be a feature of the *Aufzeichnungen* too, as Kruse points out: »Gott wird zunächst meist in gängigen Redewendungen [wie z.B. *Mein Gott* und *Weiß Gott*, D.D.] verborgen präsent gehalten« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.24).

<sup>29</sup> An anticipation of the Sphinx image in the Tenth *Duineser Elegie* (Rilke, *Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe. Bd.II*, edited by Manfred Engel & Ulrich Fülleborn, Frankfurt/M & Leipzig: 1996 [hereafter referred to as >KA II<], p.232, lines 72-79).

<sup>30</sup> Cf Kruse's inexplicable reference to »einer kosmischen, säkularisierten >unio mystica<« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.26, emphasis added).

<sup>31</sup> Cf Bollnow's use of Jaspers' phrase (*Rilke*, p.105).

trying to orient himself in a world standing under the shadow of a deceased God, god or gods necessarily the relevant topos under which to read Rilke's *Malte*?<sup>32</sup> Does Malte's spirituality inscribe itself comfortably into »la logique des dépotentialisations successives du modèle religieux opérées depuis le milieu du XIXe siècle par Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, puis Freud«?<sup>33</sup> Or might we not at least keep open the possibility that Rilke's text carries a theocentric >offence< of sorts to the world-picture of the ontological demystifier, the hermeneut of >suspicion<,<sup>34</sup> be (s)he historical determinist, vitalistic nihilist or post-spiritual modernist pledging full allegiance to the *nec plus ultra* of *Diesseitigkeit* and its networked relativities? Must we not perhaps brace ourselves, at least on the evidence of Rilke's rather *unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*,<sup>35</sup> for the embarrassment of a certain spiritual extravagance? Do

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<sup>32</sup> Giloy would have Malte launch into an aesthetic salvage operation on his existence as a result of coming to the nihilistic, and very Nietzschean, conclusion that both God and the Subject are dead: »In der frühe[n] Phase seiner Reflexion [Paper XIV] glaubt er noch, er könne auf ein Zugrundeliegendes - Gott oder Subjekt - als Grund des Lebens rechnen. Bald weiß er, daß er sich täuscht. Er wird notgedrungen aus der Erfahrung mit der eigenen Nichtigkeit metaphysischer Nihilist. Nun aber spekuliert Malte wie die Nihilisten des 19. Jahrhunderts auf einen >Schein von Möglichkeit< [MLB, Paper XIV, p.470], die pure Kontingenz der Wirklichkeit wieder als Totalität zu denken. Noch einmal soll der häßliche Widersinn des Lebens wenigstens artistisch überwunden werden. Aber das Dilemma besteht darin, wie für das singebende Subjekt, dem seit Fichte die Weltkonstitution überantwortet war, Ersatz zu schaffen ist« (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.9; cf p.12). Yet the textual grounds adduced for ascribing such a nihilistic insight to Malte are questionable indeed - namely, the point in the second *große Frage* where Malte wonders aloud as to whether »man trotz Erfindungen und Fortschritten, trotz Kultur, Religion und Weltweisheit an der Oberfläche des Lebens geblieben ist?« (MLB, Paper XIV, p.468). Does not talk of life's >surface< imply belief in life's >depth<? Does a critique of traditional modes of perception and behaviour compel a leap into Nietzsche's aesthetic justification of existence (cf *ibid.*, p.12)? Does a repudiation of traditional *Kultur, Religion und Weltweisheit* necessarily spell atheistic nihilism? (If so, then both Kierkegaard and Krishnamurti were atheistic nihilists.)

<sup>33</sup> Christine Maillard, »Le >mystique< et la Psyché«, p.87.

<sup>34</sup> Cf for example Paul Ricoeur, "Religion, Atheism, and Faith", in: Alasdair Macintyre & P. R., *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (New York & London: 1969), pp.57-98, esp. p.68.

<sup>35</sup> *Unzeitgemäß*, that is, only on a certain model of modernity - qua phenomenon of *Entzauberung*. Of course, as Fick and others have shown, there are other models available to us.



not Rilke's words suggest that there may be more things in the heaven and earth he is evoking than are dreamt of in the philosophy of the modern *saeculum*, that he leaves open the possibility that »magical and religious notions« may amount to more than »mistakes«?<sup>36</sup> Might not the jottings of his Malte Laurids Brigge stand, like the cathedral which Kafka's K. enters in *Der Proceß*, »as a ghostlike provocation in the heart of the city«?<sup>37</sup> How are we to respond to a Malte who exhibits not merely a modern social *anomie* but also what Auguste Viatte calls »la croyance au surnaturel« accompanied by »les émotions les plus inaccoutumées«, »une parcelle d'illuminisme«, a »besoin d'infini«?<sup>38</sup> How might we deal with the cosmicising *Absolutheitsanspruch* that goes with some such >neo-Romantic< investment in notions of transcendence? And - a corollary of this last - how might Rilke's Malte deal with the paradox of expressing in finite language themes that involve a transmundane breach with immanence itself?<sup>39</sup>

Five. Rilke explicitly refers to *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* three times: as *Malte Laurids Brigge, dieses Buch* and *diese[s] unter der tiefsten inneren Verpflichtung geleistete[] Buch*. A key word is missing, to wit:

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<sup>36</sup> Wittgenstein, complaining of Sir James Frazer's progressivist, debunking posture in *The Golden Bough* (quoted in Nieli, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language*, p.174).

<sup>37</sup> Gerald Gillespie, "The Haunted Mirror Before the Gate", in: G. G. & Prier (ed.), *Narrative Ironies*, pp.33-49, here: p.35.

<sup>38</sup> Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du romantisme: Illuminisme, Théosophie 1770-1820. Tome Second: La Génération de l'empire* (1927, reprint Paris: 1979), p.276.

<sup>39</sup> A problematic already touched upon in the brief discussion above of Wagner-Egelhaaf's study. Cf Bridgham: »The problem which we inevitably encounter in using these terms [>immanence< and >transcendence<] is one which has plagued Rilke criticism, generally resulting in more confusion than clarity, but it is a problem which we cannot ignore« (*Urbild und Verzicht*, p.17). Bridgham (ibid., footnote 1) usefully refers his reader to Anthony R. Stephens' cataloguing of »five types of transcendence« to be found in Rilke (Stephens, *Rilke's >Gedichte an die Nacht<. An Essay in Interpretation*, Cambridge: 1972, pp.189-212).

*Roman* - a circumstance all the more noteworthy when one reflects that at no point in his career does Rilke seem to have referred to the *Malte* as a novel. August Stahl writes: »Rilke hat niemals den Begriff des Romans verwendet für sein Werk, sondern sprach allenfalls von seinem >Prosa-Buch<, von den >Aufzeichnungen< oder einfach von >Malte Laurids<«. <sup>40</sup> Gutjahr, in her opening paragraph, follows the critical consensus in making a large and defining generic assumption. By ascribing novelistic status to Rilke's text, she has enlisted it in the cause of what she calls *eine[] zu gewinnende[] literarische[] Moderne*, whose lineaments she accordingly indicates: response to changed or changing times (*[die] Erkenntnis, daß die Welt sich so radikal verändert hat*); sense of fragmentation leading to crisis in self-reflection and self-theorisation (*[die] anbrechende[] Epoche, die sich selbst nicht mehr als >epochale Einheit< zu erfassen vermag*); *Sprachkrise (mit herkömmlichen Mitteln unsagbar)* necessitating a momentous narratological paradigm shift (*beginnt aus dem Bruch mit der Erzähltradition ein neues Erzählen*). Yet the generic *petitio principii* may occlude from critical view other traditions to which the *Malte*-Prosabuch might be brought into relation. For if one insists that this text is to be understood above all else in terms of its formal intertextuality with other texts in the novelistic genre, this will by definition lead one to mobilize the hermeneutic repertoire which has been built up around precisely that genre. This trap is eloquently stressed by Stahl, whose observation above on Rilke's nomenclature of the *Malte* forms part of a pointed rebuttal of those readers who, he argues, have brought an inappropriately novelistic *Erwartungshorizont* to the text:

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<sup>40</sup> Editorial discussion of *Deutungsaspekte*, *MLB*, p.893.

[...] viele Leser [haben] seit dem Erscheinen des Buches und bis heute, vieles und womöglich gerade das von Rilkes Prosa-Buch erwartet, was eben schon von der Konzeption her ausgeschlossen werden sollte. Rilke hat niemals den Begriff des Romans verwendet für sein Werk [...] Wenn daher festgestellt wurde und wird, daß das Werk eine fragmentarische Form aufweise, daß ihm eine chronologisch fortschreitende Handlung abgehe und daß die äußere Realität zurücktrete zugunsten eines Bewußtseins, das sich auseinandersetze mit der eigenen Erfahrung, der gegenwärtigen und vergangenen, mit dem selbst Erlebten wie mit der überlieferten Geschichte, so charakterisieren solche Diagnosen mehr die (enttäuschten) Erwartungen der Leser an ein Prosawerk dieses Umfangs als die Besonderheit des *Malte*.<sup>41</sup>

To put the case another way: by glossing this text as *eine selbstreflektorische Zäsur [für Rilkes Werk] und darüber hinaus für die Geschichte des Romans in Deutschland*, Gutjahr may indeed be failing to account adequately for the *und darüber hinaus* which, unostentatiously yet tendentiously, bridges her incontestable first item and her possibly reductive second item. Gutjahr, even as she threatens to downplay any existential or spiritual radicalism claimed for the *Malte* by Rilke, may be engaged in a correlative motion of overstating the work's aesthetic or formal radicalism - its modernistic >novelty<, if a double sense of that word be allowed.

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<sup>41</sup> bid.

### I.iii: Two Mythologemes

I have lingered at some length with Gutjahr's citation of the letter to Lotte Hepner simply because I believe it to be a pregnant expression of a still influential trend in *Malte*-criticism from which I am most anxious to distance the present study. The problem, as I am presenting it, is that Rilke's discourse of a *recherche de l'absolu* in relation to the *Malte* suffers a persistent critical deflection which one does not find to a remotely comparable degree in *Elegie* or *Sonette* studies. Theological, mystical and paranormalist categories remain something of a minority sport in *Malte* studies, as though Malte's God were never more than motif, metaphor or metonym. One might, without too great a fear of overstating the case, reduce this common critical reflex down to two >mythologemes<:

Mythologeme A: *Malte Laurids Brigge is in crisis because he undergoes the pressure of living in the modern metropolis.*

Mythologeme B: *This crisis explains the formal modernity of the text, whose radical subversion of the novel genre must be understood as a response to a radically changed historical moment.*

Malte, on this approach, is seen as undergoing a Simmelian *Erkenntniskrise* due to the phenomenological overtaxation of the metropolitan subject; a *Sprachkrise* due to the >unsayability< of this bewildering new world; and a *künstlerische Schaffenskrise* brought on by pathologies of the lifeworld

attendant upon this cognitive and linguistic dislocation. Thus, the topoi - *Großstadt* - *Erkenntniskrise* - *Sprachkrise* - *Schaffenskrise* - *Formale Moderne* - quickly solidify into a more or less explicit hermeneutic bedrock.

The difficulty here, it seems to me, is that our mythologemes and their auxiliary topoi - with the possible exception of the last: *Formale Moderne* - do indeed adumbrate at least partial truths about the *Malte*. After all, the crisis documented in the text is experienced by a man who has just arrived alone, *déclassé*<sup>42</sup> and artistically unsuccessful<sup>43</sup> in Paris; the texts which he produces are radical responses to a crisis; he himself foregrounds problems of perception and cognition; he himself bemoans certain features of industrial modernity; he himself expresses a longing for a poetic idyll... None of this is even minimally controversial. The challenge lies not in setting these insights to nought, rather in relativising and refining them against a new, less reductive interpretive horizon. I propose in the following preliminary scrutiny of these mythologemes simply to clear a space for the substantive chapters of this study, in which other potentials in the text's thematic and aesthetic programme might be drawn out.

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<sup>42</sup> See Kruse's useful collation of details pertaining to Malte's aristocratic background in "Zur ästhetischen Religiosität", p.54.

<sup>43</sup> For Thomas Anz, *Literatur der Existenz: Literarische Psychopathographie und ihre soziale Bedeutung im Frühexpressionismus* (Stuttgart: 1977), this constellation, which shatters »die heile Welt von gestern« (ibid., p.84), represents Malte's true crisis: that of the artist outsider unable to cope with metropolitan modernity.

## Mythologeme A: Modern metropolitan crisis?

Neil H. Donahue characterises *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* as a »response to early twentieth-century modernity, as concentrated in the metropolis«. <sup>44</sup> According to Donahue, »Malte's reactions reflect Simmel's categories«, <sup>45</sup> as expounded in the latter's influential essay "Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben" (1903), where the talk is of a »*Steigerung des Nervenlebens*, die aus dem raschen und ununterbrochenen Wechsel äußerer und innerer Eindrücke hervorgeht«. <sup>46</sup> Malte's crisis is therefore down to a (Benjaminian) *Chockerlebnis*, <sup>47</sup> whereby the sensitive young Dane from the country cannot find his feet in the big smoke: »In the city, Malte cannot maintain the secure identity he had in the country, in his ancestral home.« <sup>48</sup> The governing assumption in this approach, as Donahue articulates it with reference to Simmel, is that: »the social conditions of a place broadly determine the psychological disposition of individuals«. <sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Neil H. Donahue, "Fear and Fascination in the Big City: Rainer Maria Rilke's Use of Georg Simmel in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910)", in: N. H. D., *Forms of Disruption. Abstraction in Modern German Prose* (Michigan: 1993), pp.75-100, here: p.77.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Georg Simmel, "Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben", in: G. S., *Brücke und Tür: Essays des Philosophen zur Geschichte, Religion, Kunst und Gesellschaft*, edited by Michael Landmann (Stuttgart: 1957), pp.227-242, here: p.228.

<sup>47</sup> Cf Sabina Becker, *Urbanität und Moderne. Studien zur Großstadtswahrnehmung in der deutschen Literatur 1900-1930* (St. Ingbert: 1993), p.95.

<sup>48</sup> Donahue, "Fear and Fascination in the Big City", p.81.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79. Simmel, however, is less deterministic than this comment would suggest, conceding that the strong individual will not necessarily conform to the reigning >Typus< (see "Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben", p.231). Cf Kruse: »Die Negativität der Gesellschaft als grundlegendes Movens der Bewegung des *Malte->Romans*< ist als *durch den historischen Epochenwandel begründeter Prozeß völligen Identitätsverlustes* lesbar. Hat Malte zu Beginn der Aufzeichnungen bereits Haus, Hof und Erbe sowie alle familiären Bindungen und damit seine Identität als dänischer Adliger verloren, so ist an diesem individuellen Schicksal der Epochenwandel des Übergangs von der Feudalgesellschaft zur modernen, anonymen, in der Großstadt angesiedelten Massengesellschaft angezeigt« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der*

It does indeed seem uncomplicated to state that Malte's move to Paris not just coincides with but triggers a crisis. From the opening fragment, Malte depicts Paris as a place of danger, a necropolis,<sup>50</sup> a site of unspeakable and impersonal turbulence. A passage frequently cited to strengthen this reading is the following from Paper XXII (»Ein Briefentwurf«), where Malte writes:

Ich bin in Paris, die es hören freuen sich, die meisten beneiden mich. Sie haben recht. Es ist eine große Stadt, groß, voll merkwürdiger Versuchungen. Was mich betrifft, ich muß zugeben, daß ich ihnen in gewisser Beziehung erlegen bin. Ich glaube, es läßt sich nicht anders sagen. Ich bin diesen Versuchungen erlegen, und das hat gewisse Veränderungen zur Folge gehabt, wenn nicht in meinem Charakter, so doch in meiner Weltanschauung, jedenfalls in meinem Leben. Eine vollkommen andere Auffassung aller Dinge hat sich unter diesen Einflüssen in mir herausgebildet, es sind gewisse Unterschiede da, die mich von den Menschen mehr als alles Bisherige abtrennen. Eine veränderte Welt. Ein neues Leben voll neuer Bedeutungen. Ich habe es augenblicklich etwas schwer, weil alles zu neu ist. Ich bin ein Anfänger in meinen eigenen Verhältnissen.<sup>51</sup>

Yet even as it makes clear the enormous impact of the move to Paris, this passage strangely relativises this very impact.

Firstly, the *Veränderungen* which Malte ascribes to the effect of the metropolis are carefully assigned: *wenn nicht in meinem Charakter, so doch in meiner Weltanschauung, jedenfalls in meinem Leben*. The qualifier indicates an

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*Subjektivität*, pp.27f., emphasis added). Perhaps the most single-mindedly socio-political treatment of the *Malte* can be found in Andreas Freisfeld's damning critique in *Das Leiden an der Stadt. Spuren der Verstädterung in deutschen Romanen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Köln & Wien: 1982), pp.75-131, where every feature of this »ersten modernen Großstadtroman in der deutschen Literatur« (ibid., p.67) is related directly to the pathological alienation of metropolitan life in high capitalist society. Malte's Papers are thus shown to bear witness to the kind of modernistic loss of >totality< explored (and deplored) by Lukács in *Die Theorie des Romans*.

<sup>50</sup> Cf Gutjahr, "Erschriebene Moderne", p.371.

<sup>51</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXII, pp.504f.

important point, to which Andreas Huyssen perhaps more than anyone in the critical literature has alerted us: this is not the first time that Malte has found himself in crisis.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, his *Charakter* discloses itself across the book as one almost congenitally prone to crisis, panic, fear and disorientation. The Paris crisis, far from being without precedent, actually throws Malte *back* in a terrifying repetition to the terrors and perspectives of childhood,<sup>53</sup> a childhood lived not in Paris but in Denmark.

Next, Malte does not uncomplicatedly ascribe the *Veränderungen* directly to the metropolitan *délire* but to the fact that he has capitulated *in gewisser Beziehung* to the *merkwürdige[n] Versuchungen* of which the *große Stadt*

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<sup>52</sup> Expressing his discontent with »a narra-teleological account« attributing Malte's crisis simply to the chronologically later city experiences ("Paris / Childhood", p.117), Huyssen treats Malte's city as »functioning [...] as the Proustian madeleine for all the childhood anxieties related to the phantasm of the fragmented body« (ibid., p.121). Although seeing Paris as the deliverer of overwhelming shocks to Malte's system, Huyssen's analysis is properly oriented by the realisation that »the fear of going to pieces is nothing experientially new in [Malte's] life« (ibid., p.125). It is with this interplay of past and present in mind that Huyssen attempts to »map *Malte* onto a discourse that, from Baudelaire via Georg Simmel to Walter Benjamin, has attempted to define the parameters of the experience of modernity as rendered by the literary text via a theory of perceptions of city life, perceptions as much determined by outside stimuli as they are dependent on psychic processes« (ibid., p.117). Huyssen will conclude that Malte differs from the classic accounts of metropolitan subjectivity in his inability to develop the necessary *blasé* carapace (ibid., p.134; cf Simmel, "Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben", p.232).

<sup>53</sup> Dieter Schiller rightly notes that Malte's remembrance of his childhood days offers him »kein Refugium« ("Der Einsame und seine Welt", p.146). Yet when, at a later point in his essay, he describes Malte's passage from childhood to vagrant adulthood as the »Auflösung einer scheinbar bruchlosen Identität von Gemeinschaft und Individuum in der vorkapitalistischen Welt [...] und ihr Ersetzen durch den unaufhebbaren Widerspruch von Individualität und kapitalistisch entfremdeten gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen« (ibid., p.153), a Marxian reductionism has already occluded the insight that the young Malte has never enjoyed the stable experience of an *even apparently* integral identity, nor has he ever been anything but *always already terrified* (e.g. the infant's nocturnal terrors held at bay by the mother, *MLB*, Paper XXIII, p.507), *always already alienated from the world and its humans*. Childhood for Malte is a site of terror, longing, perplexity, alienation and mourning. The resurgence of childhood memories heralds the return of what Baudelaire's splenetic prose-poet calls Time's »démoniaque cortège de Souvenirs, de Regrets, de Spasmes, de Peurs, d'Angoisses, de Cauchemars, de Colères et de Névroses« ("La Chambre Double", *Le Spleen de Paris*, in: Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes I*, edited by Claude Pichois, Paris: 1975, pp.275-364, here p.281).



is so *voll*.<sup>54</sup> What might these *Versuchungen* be? What exactly is the *gewisse Beziehung* in which Malte yields to them? The mysterious quality of these phrases is acknowledged by Malte himself: *Ich glaube, es läßt sich nicht anders sagen*. He is speaking as if in code, making no mention of phenomena customarily associated with Simmelian metropolitan life. Further, the *Veränderungen* are in turn glossed as *Einflüsse*[] under which *eine vollkommen andere Auffassung aller Dinge* has formed inside Malte. Crucially, he writes that this has led to a process of increasing differentiation and alienation from *den Menschen*. It is this, and not the general city way of life *per se*, that he terms a *veränderte Welt*. He does not merely feel *socially* alienated from his >fellow< human beings, he feels transcendently *different to them*, apart, exceptional, no longer *one of their number*. It is this experience that carries the central idea: *Ein neues Leben voll neuer Bedeutungen*. Hence, it seems to me most precipitous to equate *veränderte Welt* in this subjective sense with *veränderte Welt* in an epochal, socio-historical sense - as Sabina Becker does when she sets Malte's phrase to work in phrases like »[d]ie veränderte Situation in der Stadt«, »d[ie] >veränderte[] Welt< von Paris«, »[d]ie veränderte Realität innerhalb des

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<sup>54</sup> Cf Rilke's letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé of June 30<sup>th</sup> 1903: »Kannst Du verstehen, wie das ist; alles verändert sich, fällt mir von den Sinnen ab und ich fühle mich hinausgedrängt aus der Welt, darin alles vertraut und nahe und sinnvoll ist, in eine andere ungewisse, namenlos bange *Umgebung*. Wohin? Dann war mir, als würde ich keinen erkennen, der bei mir einträte, und als wäre auch ich allen fremd wie ein in fremden Landen Gestorbener, allein, überzählig, ein Bruchstück anderer Zusammenhänge« (*Rainer Maria Rilke - Lou Andreas-Salomé Briefwechsel*, edited by Ernst Pfeiffer, Frankfurt/M: 1975, p.59, emphasis added). Rilke's words here give the sense that the self feels spectral because it has entered a strange zone (*Umgebung*) where none are recognisable to him. This is the kind of transcendental defamiliarisation which Malte will associate with the dying.

urbanen Raumes«, relating this *Veränderung*, as Donahue does, directly to the »erfahrene[] Reizüberflutung in der Großstadt«. <sup>55</sup>

No less telling is the shadow cast on the entire *Briefentwurf* fragment by an earlier passage, in which Malte meditates dismally on the internal contradiction of writing letters that describe to their recipient how the writer of the letter is changing:

Ich lerne sehen. Ich weiß nicht, woran es liegt, es geht alles tiefer in mich ein und bleibt nicht an der Stelle stehen, wo es sonst immer zu Ende war. Ich habe ein Inneres, von dem ich nicht wußte. Alles geht jetzt dorthin. Ich weiß nicht, was dort geschieht./ Ich habe heute einen Brief geschrieben, dabei ist es mir aufgefallen, daß ich erst drei Wochen hier bin. Drei Wochen anderswo, auf dem Lande zum Beispiel, das konnte sein wie ein Tag, hier sind es Jahre. Ich will auch keinen Brief mehr schreiben. Wozu soll ich jemandem sagen, daß ich mich verändere? Wenn ich mich verändere, bleibe ich ja doch nicht der, der ich war, und bin ich etwas anderes als bisher, so ist klar, daß ich keine Bekannten habe. Und an fremde Leute, an Leute, die mich nicht kennen, kann ich unmöglich schreiben. <sup>56</sup>

The very word *Bekannte*, with a past tense embedded in its participle form, encodes intersubjective crisis in its grammatical suppression of the fact that selfhood is processual rather than fixed. This is the solipsistic nightmare

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<sup>55</sup> Becker, *Urbanität und Moderne*, pp.82-4. Compare Dieter Schiller: »Im Malte werden nicht nur Grundprobleme des Künstlers und der Kunst im Zeitalter des Übergangs zum Imperialismus in ihrem subjektiven Reflex erfaßt, sondern es wird gefragt, wie man sich zu der veränderten Welt stellen soll« (”Der Einsame und seine Welt”, p.147, emphasis added). Further down, Schiller writes: »[d]ie neue Sicht der Welt [wird] zur bewußten Haltung, zum Brennspeigel, in dem das Bild der Epoche schärfer erscheint« (ibid., p.148). Similarly Harald Neumeyer in *Der Flaneur. Konzeptionen der Moderne* (Würzburg: 1999): »Paris verwandelt das Ich und konfrontiert es mit einer >veränderten Welt< >voll neuer Bedeutungen« (ibid., p.225). For Neumeyer, this marks the epochal character of Rilke’s text: »[...] dies ist die neue Dimension in Rilkes Beitrag zu einer Geschichte der großstädtischen Erfahrungs- wie Wahrnehmungsmodi - [...] das Ich [wird] durch die Abwesenheit der gewohnten Reize, an die sich die vertrauten Wahrnehmungen und überlieferten Bedeutungen anschließen lassen, verunsichert und erfährt sich als in der Großstadt entwurzelt [...]« (ibid., pp.219f., emphases added).

<sup>56</sup> *MLB*, Paper IV, p.456.

within which the *Briefentwurf* seems to be framed. What is more, there are strong grounds for taking the *Briefentwurf* to be the very letter alluded to in Paper IV: it closes with a meditation on the incommunicability of subjective experience, an insight which rebounds metatextually upon the *Entwurf* itself, as if Malte, seeing the aporia into which his letter is leading itself, determines not to post it.<sup>57</sup> Where Malte's diaristically private account of *Sich Verändern* - surely the same *Veränderungen* mentioned in the *Briefentwurf* - talks of incommunicably subjective interiority, his account in the counterpart letter runs aground on its own self-consciousness as inauthentic discourse. Malte is finding things changed not because of an overwhelmingly new external reality on the streets of Paris but *because he himself is changing*, this change being related to some mysterious, incommunicably interior awakening. If Paris plays a rôle in this, then it is to draw this potential *out*. Malte feels alienated not just from those in the city but from *everybody everywhere*, even his own *Bekannte* living far away from Paris (from whom he has apparently sundered himself by taking a »notwendigen Abschied«).<sup>58</sup> This is transcendental *étrangeté*.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> The somewhat questionable idea has gained ground in the critical literature that the addressee of this letter is Abelone: see for example Stephens (*Strukturanalyse*, p.155), Harro Müller-Michaels ("Daß man erzählte, daß muß nach meiner Zeit gewesen sein - zu Funktionen des Erzählens in Rilkes *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*", in: *literatur für leser*, 1, 1985, pp.16-26, here: pp.18f.) and Giloy (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.80).

<sup>58</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXII, p.504.

<sup>59</sup> See Park's contextualisation of the *Briefentwurf* passage within the theme of (self-) alienation (*Rilkes Selbstwerdung*, pp.81f.). Cf the opening of Baudelaire's "L'Étranger", the first piece in the *Spleen de Paris* series: »>Qui aimes-tu le mieux, homme énigmatique, dis? ton père, ta mère, ta sœur ou ton frère? / - Je n'ai ni père, ni mère, ni sœur, ni frère. / - Tes amis? / - Vous vous servez là d'une parole dont le sens m'est resté jusqu'à ce jour inconnu« (*Oeuvres complètes I*, p.277). In Paper LIV Malte will write that the »Kraft aller jungen Leute, die fortgegangen sind«, issues from the condition of being »niemandes Sohn mehr« (*MLB*, p.587).

I submit that this »neue Sicht der Welt« (Dieter Schiller)<sup>60</sup> relates not so much to a new external situation as to an *altered state of consciousness*, along the lines set out by du Prel throughout *Das Rätsel des Menschen*:

Nehmen wir aber an, wir hätten ganz andere Sinne als die uns gegebenen, so würde unsere jetzige Welt verschwinden und eine ganz andere dastehen.<sup>61</sup>

Der Übergang vom diesseitigen Erkenntnismodus zum jenseitigen allein schon kommt faktisch einer Versetzung in eine andere Welt gleich, weil keine Ähnlichkeit besteht zwischen den Eindrücken, welche diesseitige und jenseitige Wesen aus der gleichen Welt beziehen.<sup>62</sup>

The *Veränderung* which Malte is intuiting within himself begins to take on the same mystical-esoteric sense as that given in du Prel's Kantian motto of the *anders angeschaute Diesseits*. Incidentally, this is the sense in which Malte will more explicitly use the word *Veränderung* in Paper LXX, where, referring to his aunt Abelone, he defines a mysterious »Veränderung« in her character as »jenes gespenstische Anderswerden«.<sup>63</sup>

Is the move to the *ville lumière* the reason for Malte's crisis - or simply its catalyst?<sup>64</sup> It is my contention that any move to absolutise or even place centre stage Malte's *Großstadt* experience in classic Simmelian terms will prove unsustainable in the face of close reading of texts cited.

To take another example, Kristiaan Versluys writes:

Among the first to realize that the city presented an unprecedented challenge to the poet, he [Rilke] was also among the first to understand the essential difference

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<sup>60</sup> Schiller, "Der Einsame und seine Welt", p.148.

<sup>61</sup> Du Prel, *Rätsel des Menschen*, p.91.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.119f.

<sup>63</sup> *MLB*, Paper LXX, p.629.

<sup>64</sup> Cf Kaja Antonowicz' use of this word in describing the rôle of Paris in Malte's crisis: "Cet infernal couvercle - Malte Laurids Brigge apprend à écouter", in: Klein (ed.), *R. M. Rilke et >Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge<*, pp.97-111, here: p.100.

between the rural and the urban mind.<sup>65</sup> When confronted with the horrors of Paris, his fictional persona, Malte Laurids Brigge, writes: »Ich würde so gerne unter den Bedeutungen bleiben, die mir lieb geworden sind.«<sup>66</sup> The use of the conditional mood indicates that such a stay is no longer possible. Once one has entered the city, one encounters a new universe where things have meanings different from the ones they had in the rural past. In country surroundings things have clear »significations«. In the city, on the contrary, all is uncertain and can be defined only for a moment, before it eludes again the writer's grasp.<sup>67</sup>

Does such Rousseauesque *Agrarromantik* hold for *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*? The quotation on which the passage pivots has been wrenched out of all context. Malte is writing in shock about a »Sterbende[r]« whom he has that day seen in a *crémèrie*.<sup>68</sup> The horror centres on the utter cognitive estrangement suffered by the dying man at the point of death:

Ich sage mir: es ist nichts geschehen, und doch habe ich jenen Mann nur begreifen können, weil auch in mir etwas vor sich geht, das anfängt, mich von allem zu entfernen und abzutrennen. Wie graute mir *immer*, wenn ich von einem Sterbenden sagen hörte: er konnte schon niemanden mehr erkennen. Dann stellte ich mir ein einsames Gesicht vor, das sich aufhob aus Kissen und suchte, nach etwas *Bekanntem* suchte, nach etwas schon einmal Gesehenem suchte, aber es war nichts da. Wenn meine Furcht nicht so groß wäre, so würde ich mich damit trösten, daß es nicht unmöglich ist, alles anders zu sehen und doch zu leben. Aber ich fürchte mich, ich fürchte mich namenlos vor dieser *Veränderung*. Ich bin ja noch gar nicht in dieser Welt *eingewöhnt* gewesen, die mir gut scheint. Was soll ich in einer anderen? Ich würde so gerne unter den Bedeutungen bleiben, die mir lieb geworden sind, und wenn schon etwas sich

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<sup>65</sup> Cf Simmel's identification of the city's »tiefe[r] Gegensatz gegen die Kleinstadt und das Landleben, mit dem langsameren, gewohnteren, gleichmäßiger fließenden Rhythmus ihres sinnlich-geistigen Lebensbildes« (»Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben«, p.228).

<sup>66</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.490. Cf the use of *Bedeutungen* in the *Briefentwurf* just cited: »[...] ein neues Leben voll neuer Bedeutungen [...]« (Paper XXII, p.505).

<sup>67</sup> Kristiaan Versluys, *The Poet in the City. Chapters in the Development of Urban Poetry in Europe and the United States (1800-1930)* (Tübingen: 1987), p.115. Compare Liu's classification of »Großstadt Paris« as sheerest anti-pastoral: »das Pendant zur Natur, die sich dem Menschen in Not stets heilend und helfend zuwendet« (*Suche nach Zusammenhang*, p.66).

<sup>68</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.487.

verändern muß, so möchte ich doch wenigstens unter den Hunden leben dürfen, die eine verwandte Welt haben und dieselben Dinge.<sup>69</sup>

That Malte has seen what he has seen in a city is, in this instance, not the fundamental theme of his meditation. The theme is Death, organic, cognitive and psychological. The *Bedeutungen* to which Malte refers have nothing to do with the binaries *Stadt-Land* or *Moderne-Vormoderne*. Instead, the switch in perspective experienced by the dying is a transcendental switch, independent of context: one can be lying on one's deathbed in a remote baronial manor or sitting in a Paris café, it does not matter. One will be alienated *in extremis* from whatever happens to surround one. There is no suggestion, for instance, that the man in the crémérie had been cognitively estranged from the city locale up to that point. The sovereign theme here is not »the essential difference between the rural and the urban mind«, as Versluys would have it, but that between the mind anchored in *Bekanntes* and the mind which is in some sense experience the *mors mystica* of >dying< to the familiar world. This process Malte refers to as a *Veränderung*. Interestingly, one sees in Malte's shock reaction other items of vocabulary encountered in citations made above: Malte's alienation from people (*abtrennen* as theme and verb) as a result of seismic shifts beginning to take place somewhere deep within him (*Inneres, in mich, in mir*) which involve a collapse in the stability of the given world (*Bekanntes*).

Versluys' frame exemplifies the danger of assuming that all the Paris episodes feed preeminently, directly or even at all into a *Großstadt* theme.

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<sup>69</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.490, emphases added.

Such sociological reductionism risks giving all of Malte's experience unto the Caesar of socio-historical determination.

Let us take one further example of a phrase in the *Aufzeichnungen* which, if taken out of context, will tempt the social historian to place Malte under the sign of a modernist metropolis trauma: »Ich wußte nicht, in welcher Stadt ich war und ob ich hier irgendwo eine Wohnung hatte und was ich tun mußte, um nicht mehr gehen zu müssen«. <sup>70</sup> Gutjahr, citing Walter Benjamin's *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert* by way of comparison, appends the commentary: »Die Stadt bleibt ein Labyrinth, in dem sich der Erzähler nicht zurechtfindet«. <sup>71</sup> This leads to the neatly sociological explanation: »Rilke setzt seinen Erzähler einem schockartigen Großstadterleben aus, *wie es für die Zeit um 1900 für die Herausbildung einer neuen Wahrnehmungsdisposition relevant wurde*«. <sup>72</sup> But what at first blush appears socio-historically >relevant< as a case of the labyrinthine city bewildering the unacclimatised subject looks decidedly less so when context is taken into account. Malte has just exited the Salpêtrière hospital after his terrifying experience there of *das Große*. He has stated that this is a return of *das Große* from the days of his childhood, when he had lain in bed terrified. Thus, one misreads the chronology of the episode if one places an inappropriate causal relation between Malte's terror and his disorientation in the labyrinth. *The former causes the latter*, as is made clear in the fact that Malte did not get lost on his way to the Salpêtrière when his

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<sup>70</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIX, p.498.

<sup>71</sup> Gutjahr, "Erschriebene Moderne", p.371.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

nerves were calmer.<sup>73</sup> The city does not >remain<<sup>74</sup> a labyrinth for Malte, it becomes one all of a sudden. Papers XXXII and LXII, *set in Malte's childhood in Denmark*, offer compelling parallels.<sup>75</sup> In the first case, Malte dresses up in front of a mirror, only to lose all sense of self as he confronts his own masked reflection: »Ich rannte davon, aber nun war er es, der rannte. Er stieß überall hin, er kannte das Haus nicht, er wußte nicht wohin [...]«. <sup>76</sup> This has happened to Malte in Ulsgaard, the supposedly tranquil country seat of the Brigge family. In Paper LXII, the young Malte runs out onto the Copenhagen street and into a stranger who »auffallen mußte durch seine Größe« and who raises his fist »wie ein zweiter Kopf«, terrifying the boy who »lief geradeaus eine leere, furchtbare Gasse hinunter, die Gasse einer fremden Stadt, einer Stadt, in der nichts vergeben war«. <sup>77</sup> The boy's terror of annihilation (hardly less intense than the dread which Nathaniel experiences around Coppelius in Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*) has triggered the topographical defamiliarisation - and not the other way around. Indeed Malte narrates his encounter with the *große Mann* in order to explain what he claims is his intuitive understanding of the disorientations and terrors and hatreds of *fourteenth century France*. Thus does the declaration in Paper XIX (*Ich wußte nicht in welcher Stadt ich war*), which at first glance seemed so obviously to offer a case of phenomenological

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<sup>73</sup> For all that the route was convoluted: *MLB*, Paper XIX, p.492.

<sup>74</sup> Gutjahr's »bleibt« (*"Erschriebene Moderne"*, p.371).

<sup>75</sup> Cf Huysen: »[...] Malte himself becomes increasingly aware that his country childhood was actually haunted by the same kinds of phantasms that make life miserable for him in the big city [...]« (*"Paris / Childhood"*, p.131).

<sup>76</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXXII, p.530, emphasis added.

<sup>77</sup> *MLB*, Paper LXII, p.612, emphases added.



disorientation caused by the modern city, read quite differently when placed into its textual environment.

We saw in Rilke's letter to Lotte Hepner how he places the crisis figured in the *Malte* under a time-frame of *Jahrtausende*.<sup>78</sup> It is surely significant that Malte himself does not theorise his (or mankind's) crisis in any straightforward way as specifically urban, or even modern. In the fourteenth fragment, he inaugurates the justly celebrated *>große Fragen<*:

Ist es möglich, [...] daß man noch nichts Wirkliches und Wichtiges gesehen, erkannt und gesagt hat? Ist es möglich, daß man *Jahrtausende Zeit* gehabt hat, zu schauen, nachzudenken und aufzuzeichnen, und daß man die *Jahrtausende* hat vergehen lassen wie eine Schulpause, in der man sein Butterbrot ißt und einen Apfel? [...]/ Ist es möglich, daß man trotz Erfindungen und Fortschritten, trotz Kultur, Religion und Weltweisheit an der Oberfläche des Lebens *geblieben ist*? [...]/ Ist es möglich, daß die *ganze Weltgeschichte* mißverstanden worden ist? Ist es möglich, daß die Vergangenheit falsch ist, weil man immer von ihren Massen gesprochen hat, gerade, als ob man von einem Zusammenlauf vieler Menschen erzählte, statt von dem Einen zu sagen, um den sie herumstanden, weil er fremd war und starb?<sup>79</sup>

As in the letter to Hepner, so here in Malte's grand programmatic flourish: if one is to speak of the current situation, then it is in terms of a *continued* failure to overcome the perennial crisis of man's estate. From this flows another crucial feature of Malte's response to his own crisis. He will depict a series of historical and mythical figures from various historical epochs stretching back to antiquity in order to convey a consistent *typus*: the single individual whose

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<sup>78</sup> *MLB-Materialien*, p.110.

<sup>79</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIV, pp.468f., emphases added.

heightened sensitivity both raises his awareness of the human condition and utterly alienates him from the crowd.

Now it may be that here, as elsewhere, Malte's philosophy can be seen as a defensive, inauthentic manoeuvre of escape into history and myth, symptomatic of a lost *Weltbezug*, no more than the desperate terminal kick, the »idéologie du refus et de la rupture de la norme sociale,«<sup>80</sup> of the decadent déclassé aristocrat caught adrift in the modern vulgarian capitalist world and vacuously self-styled into a splendid isolation.<sup>81</sup> And perhaps one might proceed to reintroduce the question of industrial modernity through the back door, so to speak. This is quite thinkable. Yet the relevant point for present purposes is more modest: that Malte himself, for all his occasional critique of certain features of modern life, does not at any point clearly ground his *own* crisis in the question of a new socio-historical dispensation.

In the *Briefentwurf* cited earlier Malte reflects: »Ich habe heute einen Brief geschrieben, dabei ist es mir aufgefallen, daß ich erst drei Wochen hier bin. Drei Wochen anderswo, auf dem Lande zum Beispiel, das konnte sein wie ein Tag, hier sind es Jahre.«<sup>82</sup> Do these words evoke the Simmelian whirlygig of the modern urban experience? Do they bear witness to an urban

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<sup>80</sup> Jean-Pierre Bertrand & Daniel Grojnowski, editors' introductory "Présentation" of Georges Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte* (Paris: 1998), pp.7-44, here p.40.

<sup>81</sup> Dieter Schiller registers Malte's poetic religiousness as an impotent cry of pain at the heartless world of urban capitalism: »Der Dichtung wird die metaphysische Aufgabe zugesprochen, die verkehrte Welt und ihren Reflex im Innern des Menschen in Ordnung zu bringen, menschliches Leben angesichts widermenschlicher Verhältnisse zu ermöglichen. Im Kunstwerk wird die Sehnsucht nach einer >heilen Welt< realisiert. Dichtung erhält also - um es kurz zu sagen - religiöse Funktion« ("Der Einsame und seine Welt", p.143).

<sup>82</sup> *MLB*, Paper IV, p.456.

freneticism, an expressionistically new temporal experience of *simultanéité* or suchlike?<sup>83</sup> One notes in Malte's words a surprising inversion. He is experiencing city time as retarded not accelerated (as one might have expected with a thematics of modernity). Why might subjective time in Paris be slower than *anderswo*? A preliminary reason is not at all far to seek: Malte arrives in Paris lonely, poor and insecure. Time is dragging for him in his tribulation. Another detail strikes one. Were Malte treating Paris as the *Inbegriff der modernen Metropole* then one would have to read the words *auf dem Lande zum Beispiel* as purest tautology. For it should go without saying that the *anderswo* of the big city is *auf dem Lande*. Yet we are hardly entitled to read the words *auf dem Lande* as emphatically binary, because the phrase *zum Beispiel* logically signals that *other candidates for the topos anderswo are thinkable*

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<sup>83</sup> Sabina Becker sees Malte as »vollkommen unfähig, in der Welt der kapitalistischen Moderne, also einer Welt der Ware, der Reizüberflutung, der Simultaneität und der Geschwindigkeit zu bestehen« (*Urbanität und Moderne*, pp.129f.). Likewise Liu's characterisation of the Parisian scenes: »[...] die dargestellten Szenen [...] sind ausnahmslos Einzelbeobachtungen und finden jeweils in einem ihnen eigenen Raum statt. Der *im rasanten Tempo* vollzogene Szenenwechsel wird begleitet durch den simultanen Wechsel der Räume, welche die Geschehnisse in sich aufnehmen. Für eine gewisse Kontinuität der Erscheinung bürgt nur noch der sehende Malte, der allerdings mit dem Vorbeirasen der Szenen auch kaum Schritt halten kann. Maltes >Sehen< wird ständig durch den Raumwechsel ausgeblendet und in eine andere Szene eingeholt« (*Suche nach Zusammenhang*, pp.62f., emphasis added). For Liu, this throws Malte into a crisis of cognitive mapping: »Maltes Eindrücke von der Großstadt Paris bleiben nur voneinander isolierte Teilerfahrungen, die sich nicht additiv zu einem Ganzen zusammenschließen« (ibid., p.77). Yet even if this accurately characterises the experiential mode of Malte's urban snapshots - and I do not accept that it necessarily does, as Malte's staccato impressionism may actually have little to do with a *rasantes Tempo* in the outside world - the problematisation of cognitive mapping is not confined to the metropolis. As Liu himself recognises (ibid., pp.61f.), for example, Malte's description in Paper XV (*MLB*, p.470f.) of Urnekloster, a gothic country seat, displays just such cognitive fragmentation. I suspect that Malte's Paris has for many readers become a *palimpsestic text written over the still visible text of Rilke's Paris letters*, which more forcefully portray Paris as a fragmented space. (One could of course make the more general point that Malte's very identity has from the start been trapped in a palimpsestic relationship to that of his author.)

- even other cities, even in principle other metropolises. There is something about this particular city, Paris, that lends it great power over Malte's consciousness.

The significance of this is self-evident.

Firstly, it reminds us that Malte, contrary to his typical critical profile,<sup>84</sup> is by no means a provincial ingénu arriving for the first time in a major city. He is, on the contrary, very well travelled.<sup>85</sup> References are given in his *Aufzeichnungen* to experiences not only of Copenhagen (where he partly lived as a child, his family having had a »Stadtwohnung« there)<sup>86</sup> but also of Naples (where he explicitly mentions having witnessed a young girl die on an electric tram),<sup>87</sup> St. Petersburg, and Venice. One detail in the very first fragment takes on telling relevance in this context: »Es roch, soviel sich unterscheiden ließ, nach Jodoform, nach dem Fett von pommes frites,<sup>88</sup> nach Angst. Alle Städte riechen im Sommer«. <sup>89</sup> We have no particular reason to suspect that Malte is drawing this last remark from anywhere other than personal experience.

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<sup>84</sup> For example: Guenther C. Rimbach describes Malte as: »Mittellos aus geruhsamer Landexistenz in die schnellebige Weltstadt versetzt [...]« (”Zum Begriff der Äquivalenz im Werke Rilkes und zur Entsprechung zwischen den Künsten in der Poetik der Moderne”, in: *Modern Austrian Literature*, Volume 15, Number 3/ 4, 1982, pp.127-143, here: p.133). Likewise Neumeyer's diagnosis: »Malte's Verunsicherung wie Vereinsamung in Paris gründet nicht zuletzt in dem Faktum, daß der ländlichen Gefilden Entstammende in der für ihn radikalen Fremde zu leben hat - in der Großstadt [...]« (*Der Flaneur*, p.219).

<sup>85</sup> In Paper LX, Malte even seems to indicate that he has travelled *since* his arrival in Paris. He writes of the *Fortgeworfenen*: ”Der Nebel kommt und macht sie undeutlich und ungewiß: sie sind gleichwohl. Ich war verreist, ich war krank, vieles ist mir vergangen: sie aber sind nicht gestorben” (*MLB*, Paper LX, p.603, emphasis added).

<sup>86</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.518.

<sup>87</sup> *MLB*, Paper XLVII, p.569.

<sup>88</sup> Cf Baudelaire's prose poem ”Le vieux saltimbanque”: »Et partout circulait, dominant tous les parfums, une odeur de friture qui était comme l'encens de cette fête” (*Oeuvres complètes I*, p.296).

<sup>89</sup> *MLB*, Paper I, p.455, emphasis added.

Secondly, it invites us to focus our attention on Paris as the specific topographical space of the *Aufzeichnungen* and not simply as the representative modern *Großstadt*. The *hier* in Malte's phrase, *hier sind es Jahre*, refers, strictly speaking, not to the generic concept >City< but to *Paris*. Malte's letter may have little or nothing to do with what Kruse calls »[t]echnische Modernität, als deren Inbegriff das die Weltausstellungen organisierende Paris der Jahrhundertwende gelten darf [...]«.<sup>90</sup>

The action of Paris on the imagination of this young Dane may be quite specific, not least because he arrives in Paris heavily pre-programmed by the work of Charles Baudelaire.<sup>91</sup> At what angle might Baudelaire's Paris collide with Malte's imagination? The opening of Paper XXIII gives a clue:

Die Existenz des Entsetzlichen in jedem Bestandteil der Luft. Du atmest es ein mit Durchsichtigem; in dir aber schlägt es sich nieder, wird hart, nimmt spitze, geometrische Formen an zwischen den Organen; denn alles, was sich an Qual und Grauen begeben hat auf den Richtplätzen, in den Folterstuben, den Tollhäusern, den Operationssälen, unter den Brückenbögen im Nachherbst: alles das ist von einer zähen Unvergänglichkeit, alles das besteht auf sich und hängt, eifersüchtig auf alles Seiende, an seiner schrecklichen Wirklichkeit.<sup>92</sup>

The terror of the Parisian cityscape here is not the Simmelian bustle of impersonal modernity, not the massification and industrialisation of high capitalism's »konkrete[s] gesellschaftliche[s] System« (D. Schiller),<sup>93</sup> not the Apollinairean *folie de machines* that so inebriated Marinetti's futurists (while

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<sup>90</sup> Kruse, *Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.28.

<sup>91</sup> To whom Malte pays explicit tribute in Papers XVIII (MLB, p.491) and XXII (MLB, p.505).

<sup>92</sup> MLB, Paper XXIII, pp.505f.

<sup>93</sup> Schiller, "Der Einsame und seine Welt", p.150. Malte's unambiguously *Zeit*-critical discussion in Paper VII of *fabrikmäßiges Sterben* will be examined in context in Chapter Two.

bewildering just about everyone else).<sup>94</sup> Malte's terror relates to something quite different: *alles, was sich an Qual und Grauen begeben hat*. The Paris under description here is a haunted space, in which the presence of the past,<sup>95</sup> both recent *and distant*, is felt (or felt to be felt) by the sensitive or unwilling (or would-be) intuitive. Elsewhere, Malte will write of the »Kraft« with which we come into contact within ourselves when we experience a »wirkliche[] Furcht«. <sup>96</sup> Such *Kraft*, as Bollnow points out, appears to involve »die Macht des Unheimlichen«, leading Malte's reader to the thought, »daß es Bestimmungen des Göttlichen sind, die sich hier häufen: das tremendum, das den Menschen erzittern läßt, die majestas, das Übermächtige, vor dem er

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<sup>94</sup> Malte's words in Paper II are often cited as evidence of his inability to cope with the urban experience: »Daß ich es nicht lassen kann, bei offenem Fenster zu schlafen. Elektrische Bahnen rasen läutend durch meine Stube. Automobile gehen über mich hin« (*MLB*, p.455). Yet the street traffic is but *one element* in a more complex psychoacoustic mosaic. Comparison with two superficially similar texts should demonstrate the peculiarity of Rilke's text. In Ernst Wilhelm Lotz' *Da sind die Straßen*, the expressionist subject's disorientation is *exclusively and programmatically* ascribed to the kinetic energy of the modern city: »Lärm stößt an Lärm. Schmerzliche Klingeln schellen,/ zersagend das Gehör. Wagen mit Eisen/ erschüttern. Die Elektrische mit grellen/ Schleiftönen nimmt die Kurve in den Gleisen.« (cited in Neumeyer, *Der Flaneur*, p.242). The following passage from Obstfelder's priest likewise takes us into a realm of explicit socio-historical thematisation that is not present in Malte's passage: »That railway station! / It makes me sick at heart. It plunges me into a turmoil of thoughts. And I know not what to do. / The darkness under the curving roof, the lights in the darkness, the locomotives screeching back and forth - to me it is like some mystery. / The mystery of modern life. / Man has become a new creation. His heart has a different beat. It beats to a new rhythm [...] Finally I see all mankind in one single swirling vortex - and I become sick at heart« (Sigbjørn Obstfelder, *A Priest's Diary*, translated from the Norwegian with an introduction by James McFarlane, Norwich: 1987, p.20). In Chapter Three, I shall centre Malte's Paper II in a very different problematic: the occult.

<sup>95</sup> One thinks here of the topographical poems "Der Platz. Furnes" and (significantly) "Quai du Rosaire. Brügge" from Rilke's *Neue Gedichte (Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe. Bd.I*, edited by Manfred Engel & Ulrich Fülleborn, Frankfurt/M & Leipzig: 1996 [hereafter referred to as >KA I<], pp.493f.).

<sup>96</sup> *MLB*, Paper XLVII, p.571.

vernichtet ist«. <sup>97</sup> In both of these passages, Malte is bringing his discourse into the realm of a supernatural and religious sublime. <sup>98</sup>

In Paris, the supernatural casts its shadow over Malte, with spectral and paranormal motifs recurring insistently. I shall in Chapter Three consult George Rodenbach's 1892 novel *Bruges-la-Morte* (translated as *Das tote Brügge* by Friedrich von Oppeln-Bronikowski and published by Reclam in 1903) as a possible neglected inspiration for Rilke's *Aufzeichnungen*. There, the city of Bruges provides an occult backdrop for the morbid *état d'âme* of the protagonist, Hugo Viane. I will suggest that Paris, the city of Honoré de Balzac's *Le Centenaire ou les deux Béringheld* of 1822, of Théophile Gautier's *Spirite* of 1865, of Baudelaire's "Les sept vieillards" and "Le revenant" of 1857, of Maupassant's *Qui sait?* of 1890, likewise attracts Malte for its phantasmagorical and necropolitan ambience. Thus, *Paris as a morbid, haunted, gothic space* will compel our attention in ways blocked by a dominantly cultural-sociological approach to the city theme, which if exaggerated produces something of a critical red herring. <sup>99</sup> The cityscape as the specific

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<sup>97</sup> Bollnow, *Rilke*, p.42. As we have seen, however, Bollnow will tend to withdraw from Rilke any genuinely supramundane horizon which might arise from such themes.

<sup>98</sup> Cf Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, translated from the German by John W. Harvey (London, Oxford & New York: 1950), pp.12ff.

<sup>99</sup> Of course, this is not to deny that spectral and gothic themes might meaningfully be deciphered by the critic as codifications of social malaise (*Ein Gespenst geht um in Paris, das Gespenst des Hochkapitalismus...*). In taking such an approach, one might for instance follow Adorno, whose biting "Thesen gegen den Okkultismus" ascribe what he memorably terms »die Metaphysik der dummen Kerle« to a pathetic failure to face up to the alienation which Marx had predicted would increasingly immiserate a populace enslaved to commodity production: »Die verschleierte Unheilstendenz der Gesellschaft narret ihre Opfer in falscher Offenbarung, im halluzinierten Phänomen [...] Wenn die objektive Realität den Lebendigen taub erscheint wie nie zuvor, so suchen sie ihr mit Abrakadabra Sinn zu entlocken« (Theodor W. Adorno, "Thesen gegen den Okkultismus", in: T. W. A., *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt/M: 1980, pp.271-278, here: pp.271 & 272). But how, it might be asked in the present context, is one to get at such latent

setting for Malte's *Aufzeichnen* will thus be anything but irrelevant to the analysis, for it will be decoded in the first place as a laboratory, at once promising and refractory, for his paranormal experimentalism. The suggestion will be put forward that Rilke has done what S. S. Prawer says of E. T. A. Hoffmann: he has »depicted the city as the home of uncanny presences that haunted, in earlier times, the castles of the Gothic novel«. <sup>100</sup> Yet the case of Malte presents us with a fascinating complication: he has himself inhabited such >earlier times<, which now exist inside him as a ghostly amalgam of memory traces.

One final point in the case against centralising Malte's crisis in the topos of bewildered subject in modern urban metropolis. It seems to me sensible to respond to Malte's Paris experience under the heading of sheer *affliction*. In a much-cited letter to Lou Andreas-Salome of 18<sup>th</sup> July 1903, Malte's creator-to-be writes:

Ich möchte Dir sagen, liebe Lou, daß Paris *eine ähnliche Erfahrung für mich war wie die Militärschule*; wie damals ein großes banges Erstaunen mich ergriff, so griff mich *jetzt wieder* das Entsetzen an vor alledem was, wie in einer unsäglichen Verwirrung, Leben heißt. Damals als ich ein Knabe unter Knaben war, *war ich allein unter ihnen*; und wie allein war ich jetzt unter diesen Menschen, wie fortwährend verleugnet von allem was mir begegnete; die Wagen fuhren durch mich durch, und die welche eilten, machten keinen Umweg um mich und rannten voll Verachtung über mich hin wie über eine schlechte Stelle in der altes Wasser sich gesammelt hat. <sup>101</sup>

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meanings in the *Malte* if the manifest layer of gothicism has not been taken seriously or at least recognised in the first place?

<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Horst Conrad, *Die literarische Angst. Das Schreckliche in Schauerromantik und Detektivgeschichte* (Düsseldorf: 1974), p.93.

<sup>101</sup> In *MLB-Materialien*, p.23, emphases added.



The trauma of Paris is conveyed here as a repetition, a revisiting of the terrors experienced by the young Rilke at the Militärunterrealschule St. Pölten and the Militäroberrealschule Mährisch-Weißkirchen from 1886-91. This is of course the period that inflicted upon him »die schmerzlichste Seelenwunde« of all (Park).<sup>102</sup> The common denominator between both experiences is the experience of abusive power in an environment of utter loneliness.<sup>103</sup> Thus, to focus on the urban setting as the decisive factor behind Rilke's trauma in Paris would in an important respect be to miss the point of Rilke's exposition. Paris has forced him *again* to know what it is to be one of the wretched of the earth. His horror has taken on different forms at different times in his life, but the experiences are themselves cognate.<sup>104</sup> Through the Törleß-like shock of the

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<sup>102</sup> Park, *Rilkes Selbstwerdung*, p.194, note 38. Kassner confirms: »Die einzige ganz schreckliche Erinnerung seines Lebens waren die Jahre, die er in der Kadettenschule von St. Pölten zubrachte. Militär war für ihn ein Klischee des Teufels, war die zum Klischee gewordene Welt« (Rilke. *Gesammelte Erinnerungen 1926-1956*, p.11). Rilke's military school experience is pregnantly codified in Papers XXXVII (»Aber wenn ich dort zu Sorö, abseits von den andern, im Fenster stand, und sie ließen mich ein wenig in Ruh, so sah ich hinaus in die Bäume [...]«, *MLB*, p.543) and LVI (»[...] rasche, unerwartete Erfahrungen [...] lebensgroße Erfahrungen, die sich so schwer machten, wie sie waren«, *MLB*, p.594). Else Buddeberg rightly corrects Otto Bollnow's contention (Rilke, pp.37ff.) that a truly existential *Angst* came into Rilke's life only with the writing of the *Malte*: »Sie wird nicht erst im *Malte* erfahren, - vielmehr werden die jahrelang schwer erfahrenen Ängste erst im *Malte* ausgestaltet. Wann hat wohl Rilke nach den Erfahrungen der Militärschulzeit überhaupt noch in einem >im ganzen gesicherten Lebensgefühl< [Bollnow, *Rilke*, p.39, D.D.] gelebt?« (Rainer Maria Rilke. *Eine innere Biographie*, Stuttgart: 1954, p.538).

<sup>103</sup> As we shall see, however, *Malte*, unlike Rilke in the letter just quoted, is tormented in Paris not by being treated as invisible, but by being *looked at* by others (the *Fortgeworfenen* in particular). One of *Malte's* few peaceful moments comes in the temporary invisibility which he enjoys in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paper XVI).

<sup>104</sup> Interesting in this context is Andrea Pagni's central contention, in *Rilke um 1900*, that Rilke's first experience of Paris does not represent a sudden breakdown in his monistic worldview. Rather, argues Pagni, the Paris crisis needs to be relativised as a *reprisal* of a crisis dating back to the second half of 1900. This crisis Pagni reads into the evolution of the *Stundenbuch*: »Dennoch gibt es im STUNDEN-BUCH eine Zäsur: sie liegt nicht etwa nach dem zweiten Teil und wird nicht erst durch die Pariser Erfahrungen verursacht; sie liegt bereits nach dem ersten Teil, dem *Buch vom mönchischen Leben*, da in ihm der Glaube an die organische Lebenstotalität noch ungebrochen ist, während sowohl *Das Buch von der Pilgerschaft* als auch *Das Buch von der Armut und vom Tode* glückliche Versuche darstellen, diesen Glauben zu

academy and now through the anonymous cruelty of Paris, Rilke has tapped a base of nightmare that he believes has afflicted men and women throughout history. As if to underline this idea, he immediately mentions the resonance of the 30<sup>th</sup> chapter of Job as well as the Baudelaire prose poem "A une heure du matin". As we have seen, these allusions will eventually find inscription in the *Malte* book. And Rilke will describe to his French translator Maurice Betz how Malte's childhood undergoes an uncanny *repetition* in his Paris experiences: »Aber all das war vielleicht schon in ihm enthalten: seine Kindheit, jene Begegnung mit dem Unbekannten eines Abends auf der Straße, seine Ängste, seine Schrecken ...«. <sup>105</sup> An *uncanny* repetition in a second sense: Malte's remembrance of his childhood repeatedly shows just how *unheimlich* the *heimlich* scenery of that Denmark childhood was in (literally) *the first place*. <sup>106</sup>

Malte has not simply moved to Paris. He has moved to Paris in utter indigence. »Und man hat niemand und nichts und fährt in der Welt herum mit einem Koffer und mit einer Bücherkiste und eigentlich ohne Neugierde. Was für ein Leben ist das eigentlich: ohne Haus, ohne ererbte Dinge, ohne Hunde.« <sup>107</sup> The role played in Malte's crisis by his poverty, social exclusion and general affliction can hardly be overstated. It is a central part of Rilke's

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retten, ihn wiederherzustellen. Die Dialektik des STUNDEN-BUCHES entsteht daraus, daß diese verbindlichen ästhetischen Modelle einer Lebensbewältigung sich in der Praxis nicht verwirklichen lassen und nur für >eine Weile< - wie Rilke viel später erkennen wird - glaubhaft sind, dann aber ersetzt werden müssen« (*Rilke um 1900*, p.88).

<sup>105</sup> In Maurice Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich: Erinnerungen - Briefe - Dokumente*, translated from the French by Willi Reich, Wien, Leipzig & Zürich: 1938, p.106.

<sup>106</sup> A Freudian structure highlighted by Doumet, "Malte devant les parois", pp.75f.

<sup>107</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVI, p.464.

programme with his Malte-figure that he subject him to just this existential sharpening. The pressure exerted by Paris under these circumstances is not the vertiginous *nouveauté* of modernity, rather the specific atmospheric pressure of hardship. That the scene of hardship is a modern metropolis does not mean that either >modernity< or >metropolitan life< form the kernel of the problem.

I will suggest that Malte's multi-layered experience of hardship draws him into a thematics of spiritual voiding, of dying to worldly allegiances, of *malheur* in the most shattering Weilian sense.<sup>108</sup> From this I hope to show how and why it is that Malte identifies himself so intensely with other afflicted characters from scattered points in history. Thus, for instance, his articulation of his own agony through a verbatim transcription of Job's cry from the heart.<sup>109</sup> Let it be stressed: the specific ways in which Malte suffers in the modern city need in no way be neglected for us to respond to him, at least in part, as he sees himself - a type of suffering individual found in all historical eras, all cultures, all places. At the core of Malte's self-thematisation is the sense that he is not so much a modern subject (or >abject<)<sup>110</sup> as the very epitome of the outsider afflicted to breaking point - transcendently outside, transcendently afflicted. Nor need this dehistoricise our reading or force us to bracket out the facticities of urban life as registered in the text. It is a

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<sup>108</sup> See for instance Simone Weil, "On Human Personality" (1943). Printed in: David McLellan, *Simone Weil. Utopian Pessimist*. Hampshire & London: 1989, pp.273-288, esp. pp.281ff.

<sup>109</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, pp.491f.

<sup>110</sup> Cf Michel Vanoosthuyse, "L'abject et le sublime: voyage dans *Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge*", in: Klein (ed.), *R. M. Rilke et >Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge<*, pp.129-146, esp. p.131.

question rather of phenomenological method, of what we identify as the dominant, centripetal force in a crisis seen through the prism of Malte's consciousness.

We are now in a position to revise our >Mythologeme A<, which read: *Malte Laurids Brigge is in crisis because he undergoes the pressure of living in the modern metropolis.* In the foregoing, I have conceded that the vicissitudes of metropolitan existence do indeed play a rôle in Malte's fear and trembling, but contended that this rôle is neither causally privileged nor necessarily related to a specifically *Simmelian* notion of *Großstadtleben*. Rather, I have proposed a) *that Malte enters Paris in an already debilitated state and as such is prey to hardship in this particular urban setting;* and b) *that he imaginatively responds to Paris as an almost magnetically gothic, Hoffmannesque arena.* To establish a nexus between these two propositions will be an important part of the work of Chapters Two to Five.

## Mythologeme B: Formale Moderne

The case that *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* is a pioneering novel in the very vanguard of post-*Jahrhundertwende* modernism is founded above all else on its purported formal innovation, its audacious *Zertrümmerung* of the traditional novel.<sup>111</sup> Harald Neumeyer efficiently compacts the critical consensus on this *roman-sans-romanesque* character:

Die ästhetische Modernität der *Aufzeichnungen* wurde zurecht in der Aufspaltung des traditionellen realistischen Romans gesehen: An die Stelle der Illusion eines geschlossenen Handlungs-, Raum- und Zeitkontinuums tritt eine fragmentarische Form, die die Einlinigkeit einer Handlungsführung, Handlung überhaupt auflöst und differente Räume wie Zeiten aneinanderfügt, deren Zusammenhang allein in der Perspektive eines Ich und dessen Erinnerungsarbeit besteht. Diese >offene< Form resultiert demnach auch aus dem Verzicht auf einen auktorialen oder personalen Erzähler zugunsten eines Ich-Erzählers, der von einem Thema, Bild oder Eindruck zum nächsten springt, die Chronologie aufkündigt und seinen in Paris erfahrenen Verlust eines einheitlichen und mit sich identischen Ich in den disparaten Teilen seiner Aufzeichnungen artikuliert.<sup>112</sup>

Neumeyer's anatomy sends us back to Ulrich Fülleborn's now canonic attempt to clarify »das Verhältnis des *Malte* zum modernen Roman« in his 1961 essay "Form und Sinn der Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge".<sup>113</sup> There Fülleborn locates the modernity<sup>114</sup> of Rilke's text in its bold repudiation

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<sup>111</sup> Cf Gutjahr, "Erschriebene Moderne", p.391, note 3.

<sup>112</sup> Neumeyer, *Der Flaneur*, p.234.

<sup>113</sup> Ulrich Fülleborn, "Form und Sinn der Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge. Rilkes Prosabuch und der moderne Roman," printed in *MLB-Materialien*, pp.175-198. Here: p.177.

<sup>114</sup> Fülleborn isolates the two essential »Kriterien moderner Dichtung«: »1. daß es hier um eine Revolutionierung der künstlerischen Formensprache geht; und 2. daß diese mit einer Wirklichkeitserfahrung zusammenhängt, die die traditionsgebundene Dichtung nicht kennt oder kaschiert« (ibid., p.176).

of traditional novelistic narratology as inadequate to the new socio-historical moment:

Rilke geht einfach davon aus, daß es das Erzählen, wie es für den alten Roman konstituierend war, nicht mehr gibt und setzt in das Vakuum seine Prosaaufzeichnungen [...] Die unbestimmten Zwischenräume, die die taktischen Einheiten des Buches, die Prosagedichte und längeren Aufzeichnungen, isolieren, zeigen die Unmöglichkeit des zusammenhängenden, herkömmlichen Erzählens; der fehlende Aufbau im Sinne der Architektur des klassischen Romans verweist auf den Ausfall des Erzählers, der noch aus selbstbewußter Subjektivität Ordnung zu stiften vermochte. Jetzt erzählt nicht mehr ein Ich, sondern die Wirklichkeit diktiert. Sie hat es auf die Destruktion des >Helden< angelegt, die Entthronung des Menschen als Subjekt, seine völlige Degradierung, sofern er sich als autonome Persönlichkeit behaupten will.<sup>115</sup>

For Fülleborn, such features combine to form a stunning »Antwort auf die vorgefundene geistig-geschichtliche Situation« through »die größtmögliche Ausweitung des Bewußtseins eines fingierten Ich-Erzählers, die Anstrengung eines radikalen Umdenkens, das als geschichtlich notwendig eingesehen wird«. <sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp.188f.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp.196f. As part of his thesis that Rilke's book participates in a contemporary renewal of the novel form, Fülleborn draws it into explicitly genre-based conversation with Joyce, Broch, Musil, Kafka, Proust, Frisch, Sartre and Camus. Stephens shares this framework: »[...] vor allem die Befreiung von den Konventionen des realistischen Romans machte[] das Werk zu einem entscheidenden Durchbruch, nicht nur für Rilke, sondern für den deutschen Roman überhaupt« (*Strukturanalyse*, p.13). For Stephens, as for Fülleborn, Rilke's prose-aesthetic radicalism is to be related preeminently to his native lyricism, which he has in this case harnessed for a boldly original purpose: »das Bild einer Persönlichkeit und ihrer Welt >mosaikhaft< aufzubauen, wobei die herkömmliche Funktion einer Romanhandlung von einem nie zu Ruhe kommenden Spiel der Möglichkeiten ersetzt wird« (ibid.). Fülleborn's recognition of a »musikalisches Kompositionsprinzip« in the »Auftauchen, Anwachsen und Verschwinden, [...] Wiederkehr, Abwandlung und Verschlingung« of the book's themes and motifs ("Form und Sinn", pp.187 & 186 respectively) has been deservedly well-received. But this musicality may have less to do with Rilke's alleged lack, *qua* »Buchlyriker«, of »ursprüngliches Erzähl-talent« (ibid., p.181) and more with the influence of Hoffmann's and Kierkegaard's respective prose aesthetics.

Examples from the critical literature could be multiplied. It is standard praxis in *Malte*-studies to itemise the book's formal >difficulties< as indices of an >ex-centric< relationship to a generic centre of gravity - >Roman<. Thus: the chronologically cohesive narrative logic of the traditional novel is absent; there is no basic apparatus of neat chapter divisions, nor do we find any clear momentum of plot development; there is a fragmentation at work in the text as a whole, which is premised on a fictive editor whose shadowy presence and minimal overt intrusion serve only to heighten the sense of contingency behind the text's final form, disrupting, to a degree beyond what the habituated novel reader might expect, the traditional security of the first-person novel's *Ich-Instanz*; there is in the midst of all this generic destabilisation an unusually intense meta-narrative self-consciousness in the »Selbstreflexion der Erzählerfigur und damit in einem Erzählen über das Erzählen«;<sup>117</sup> from a narratological point of view, this text is the text to end all texts, travelling as it does the entire spectrum of »erzählstruktureller Möglichkeiten«<sup>118</sup> and boasting a formal breadth unheard of in a single novel.

This >novel<, then, would seem to offer such an ensemble of innovatory features at the level of form - Neumeyer speaks of a »Zugewinn formal-ästhetischer Innovation«<sup>119</sup> - that one could meaningfully begin to discuss Rilke's programme in the *Malte* as *ein neues Erzählen*, a radical reinvention of the novel form itself undertaken in response to a radically changed cultural-historical moment. And such linkage between a) a

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<sup>117</sup> Gutjahr, "Erschriebene Moderne", p.370.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Neumeyer, *Der Flaneur*, p.235.

purported radicalisation at the level of form and b) a diagnosis of dislocated lifeworlds in the socio-culturo-historical matrix from which the text is emerging (both factually, relating to Rilke's lifeworld, and fictively, relating to Malte's) can only have powerful normative implications for the hermeneutic disposition one brings to the text.

Yet we have already noted above that Rilke makes no reference anywhere to *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* as a >novel<.<sup>120</sup> This surely threatens to render methodologically superfluous scholarly efforts to pinpoint the text's myriad deviations from a norm by which it may not be necessary to define the text in the first place.<sup>121</sup>

Alert to the dangers of a category mistake, let us turn afresh to the text before us. The *Aufzeichnungen* are presented as a series of papers left by the young Brigge, whose ultimate fate is left uncertain. This naturally deepens the contingency associated with the text as a fictive existential document. Perhaps the single most vexed question relating to this aspect of the text's formal apparatus concerns the legitimacy of treating the presented sequence in which

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<sup>120</sup> A minority of critics have indicated their unease with the classification of the *Malte* as a *Roman*. Helmut Naumann, for instance, speaks of a »>Roman< (der keiner ist)« (*Gesammelte Malte-Studien. Zu Rilkes >Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge<. Erster und Zweiter Teil*, Rheinfelden & Berlin: 1993, here: *Erster Teil*, p.58), while Kruse indicates that he refers to the *Malte* as a >Roman< »mit vielen Vorbehalten« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.18). In justice to Fülleborn it must be added that, for all his novel-centred approach in "Form und Sinn", he scrupulously avoids facile reference to the *Malte* as a novel - preferring terms like *Prosa-Buch* and *Aufzeichnungen*.

<sup>121</sup> One might elect to transcend this choice altogether by attending to the ghosts of Lawrence Sterne, Friedrich Schlegel, Jean Paul, as well of course as Hoffmann himself, as they chorus a righteous *List, list, o list!* at the straitjacket which progressivist discussions of a purported genre-breakthrough around 1900 so often place around the pre-1900 novel. My current concern, however, is neither to debate the genealogy of the novel genre nor even to attempt a working definition of the word >novel< itself. Rather it is simply to steer clear of the exaggerated historical claims which accompany hermeneutic response to certain allegedly >un-novelistic< features of the *Malte*.



the 71 *Aufzeichnungen* appear as corresponding meaningfully to the order in which these texts would have been notionally written. Precisely because the fictive editor of Malte's papers offers the reader so few pointers on this score, and no explicit account of his own redaction, one would seem to face a principled indeterminacy with regard to the text's >paratactic< construction.<sup>122</sup> Rilke, enshrouding the Malte figure's ultimate fate and his relationship to the editor in total mystery, leaves a *Leerstelle* which is surely integral to the eerie fascination of this *Daseinsentwurf*. Rilke himself uses this telling last term in a letter to Gräfin Manon zu Solms-Laubach dated April 11<sup>th</sup> 1910:

Ich weiß nicht, wie weit man aus den Papieren auf ein ganzes Dasein wird schließen können. Was dieser erfundene junge Mensch innen durchmachte (an Paris und an seinen über Paris wieder auflebenden Erinnerungen), ging überall so ins Weite; es hätten immer noch Aufzeichnungen hinzukommen können; was nun das Buch ausmacht, ist durchaus nichts Vollzähliges. Es ist nur so, als fände man in einem Schubfach ungeordnete Papiere und fände eben vorderhand nicht mehr und müßte sich begnügen. *Das ist, künstlerisch betrachtet, eine schlechte Einheit, aber menschlich ist es möglich*, und was dahinter aufsteht, ist immerhin ein Daseinsentwurf und ein Schattenzusammenhang sich rührender Kräfte.<sup>123</sup>

In the words italicised here, Rilke invokes a standard of existential over against aesthetic integrity, as though precisely the non-integral form of the *Aufzeichnungen* were somehow an important element in their existential impact.<sup>124</sup> It is nonetheless important that we avoid overstating the difficulty

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<sup>122</sup> Cf Becker, *Urbanität und Moderne*, p.98.

<sup>123</sup> *MLB-Materialien*, p.82, emphasis added.

<sup>124</sup> Compare Rilke's words to Maurice Betz: »Die notwendige Einheit [der *Aufzeichnungen*, D.D.] war nicht mehr die eines Gedichtes, es war die der Persönlichkeit, welche von Anfang bis zu Ende in ihrer unendlichen Mannigfaltigkeit lebendig werden mußte« (Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, p.113). See Engelhardt's discussion of Rilke's revealing contamination of aesthetic

adumbrated in his words.<sup>125</sup> For within the overall scheme of the *Malte* one can discern certain local continuities, clusters of *Aufzeichnungen* that allow themselves to be grouped together by theme, motif, tone and pathetic direction. Indeed, Rilke's sequencing of the fragments reveals itself as a careful act of verisimilitude in this respect: these *in einem Schubfach [gefundene] ungeordnete Papiere* do not, within the fictive logic of the text's *als ob*, appear to be *ungeordnet* in an absolute sense of >randomly sequenced<, as with a deck of cards thoroughly shuffled *in order to* introduce sequential-chronological disorder. *Ungeordnet* rather in the sense of unnumbered, untotalised by a knowing editorialising hand, >unfinished< (whatever >finished< might mean either existentially or poetologically...), possibly abandoned (as, for instance, with a posthumous *Nachlaß* due to sudden death), revealing a number of surprising and possibly anomalous placings or juxtapositions, yet not enough of these quite to undermine one's sense of a certain governing logic in the progression. Many of the *Aufzeichnungen* do, after all, dovetail quite explicitly, and the text bears a dense network of proleptic and analeptic details. It is in my view decidedly not the case that the Papers would permit themselves to

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and existential categories in the Solms-Laubach letter ("Der Versuch, wirklich zu werden", pp.124f., footnote).

<sup>125</sup> As Kruse surely does when he writes pessimistically of the attempt to reconstruct the >äußere Geschichte< of the protagonist from the text: »Das läßt sich für die ersten zweiundzwanzig Aufzeichnungen, die einen gewissen entwicklungslogischen Zusammenhang in Zeit und Raum aufweisen, mit einigen Abstrichen durchführen, während den dann folgenden Aufzeichnungen ein solcher Zusammenhang abgeht« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, pp.15f.). For Kruse, the order in which *Malte's Aufzeichnungen* are presented to the reader, at least after Paper XXII (which, ironically, I take to be the clearest anachronism in the entire text, on the basis that the inscription of this *Briefentwurf* is the same abortive letter mentioned earlier in Paper IV), involves a »Zerschlagung des chronologischen, in den Konventionen von Zeit und Raum festgelegten Lebenszusammenhanges zu autonomen Schriftfragmenten« (*ibid.*, p.22). Further on this point see Kruse's "Zur ästhetischen Religiosität", p.65, note 32.

be randomly rearranged without a radical loss of internal sense (logical and psychological) ensuing.

As well as tracing internal continuities, one can follow Rilke's praxis, in the letter to Hulewicz of 10<sup>th</sup> November 1925, of breaking the overall text down into three main thematic areas: Malte's »Pariser Umgebung, his »Kindheits-Erinnerungen« and the »Reminiszenzen seiner Belesenheit«.<sup>126</sup> Although the order is casually disrupted in Rilke's schematisation,<sup>127</sup> one can without too much difficulty discern a *rough* progression in the finished textual sequence from the first area to the second to the third. There is moreover a *rough quantitative* trend in the text's progression, involving greater average length of fragment as the text proceeds, as though Malte were finding his fluency as he progresses with his *Aufzeichnungen*. Admittedly, it does still remain quite plausible to read these patterns as the achievement of an editorialising hand (fictive of course), leaving *ultimately undecidable* the question of the (notionally) >original< order of genesis from the pen of Malte. For all that, however, *it will be a working assumption of this thesis that internal evidence coupled with thematic criteria relating to the existential logic of Malte's progression allow a broad correlation of textual sequence and fictive chronology to be granted*. My interpretation of the *Malte* thus rests on a committed directional reading of an emergent and sequential crisis. Thus, when Rilke writes to the Gräfin Manon zu Solms-Laubach in the letter of April 11<sup>th</sup> 1910: »[...] es

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<sup>126</sup> *MLB-Materialien*, p.131.

<sup>127</sup> A fuller citation of his formulation: »es [verlangt] auch den jungen M. L. Brigge, das fortwährend ins Unsichtbare zurückziehende Leben über Erscheinungen und Bildern sich faßlich zu machen; er findet diese bald in den eigenen Kindheits-Erinnerungen, bald in seiner Pariser Umgebung, bald in den Reminiszenzen seiner Belesenheit« (*MLB-Materialien*, p.131).

hätten immer noch Aufzeichnungen hinzukommen können; was nun das Buch ausmacht, ist durchaus nichts Vollzähliges«,<sup>128</sup> I take this to suggest not that the text is an anarchically >open< ensemble of autonomous fragments, but that its theoretical >openness< to new Papers relates in a progressive (>entwicklungslogisch<) direction only. That is, Malte could have continued to produce text after text *in the manner of the later Papers*, but not necessarily in the manner of the earlier ones.<sup>129</sup> For, as I hope to show in Chapter Five, there is an intimate (psycho)logic behind Malte's turn in the latter phase of the book toward a more unashamedly free-flowing mythopoeic text-type.<sup>130</sup>

The *Malte* gathers between its covers »das ganze Spektrum erzählstruktureller Möglichkeiten«, the text visiting the entire range of subject positions grammatically available to a narrator »vom Ich und Wir zum Er und Sie oder Du und Ihr« (Gutjahr).<sup>131</sup> Yet it needs to be pointed out that the position of *Ich* remains inviolate throughout. At no point does the signifier *Ich* shift its semantic allegiance away from the person of Malte without first coming under the direct and obvious governance of this prior, privileged *Ich* - for instance as direct speech marked out typographically as such or as clearly

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<sup>128</sup> *MLB-Materialien*, p.82.

<sup>129</sup> Cf Kruse: »einen Anfang haben ja die Aufzeichnungen, aber kein Ende [...]« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.25).

<sup>130</sup> The directional reading I am proposing here is not to be confused with the >evolutionary< interpretation described - and trenchantly criticised - by Stephens: »daß Malte die Pariser Wirklichkeit bewältigen lerne, daß diese Bewältigung durch das Aufzeichnen selbst erzielt werde und daß ihm am Ende des Buches eine geradezu glänzende künstlerische Laufbahn bevorstehe [...]« (*Strukturanalyse*, p.18: Stephens here tracing such an approach back to Armand Nivelle's 1959 "Sens et structure des Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge"). Although I do see a psychological progression of sorts in Malte's Papers, in no sense do I see it founded upon a >Bewältigung<, artistic or existential, of his crisis. For Malte, as I shall argue in a Kierkegaardian vein, existence can never be anything but critical, impossible, paradoxical, fraught. >Progress< for an Unhappy Consciousness such as his will lie not in escape from this fact but in the courage of one's response to it *sub specie aeternitatis*.

<sup>131</sup> Gutjahr, "Erschriebene Moderne", p.371.

signalled citation. Rilke, for all his use of diverse narrative focalisations in the *Malte*, holds back in the final analysis from a genuine pluralisation or volatilisation of the *Ich-Instanz*.<sup>132</sup> However intense his imaginative empathy, *Malte-Aufzeichner* nowhere loses his own sense of self to the degree that he believes that he has *become* that someone else.<sup>133</sup> He is not producing >heteronyms< in the Pessoaan sense, or betraying symptoms of multiple personality disorder.

I do wish, however, to make early tangential mention of one point at which a radical destabilisation of *Malte-Aufzeichner* as final *Instanz* of his own *Ich* is described in the text - *but subjunctively, as threat, anticipated phenomenon, prophecy, prediction*: »Aber diesmal werde ich geschrieben werden. Ich bin der Eindruck, der sich verwandeln wird.«<sup>134</sup> Evoked here, as Lorenz formulates it, is a »Zurücknahme der Autor-Funktion aus dem Geltungsbereich subjektiver Autonomie.«<sup>135</sup> That this personal eschaton, this »Apokalypse des Schreibens« (Kruse),<sup>136</sup> is expressed by Malte in the mode of *Noch Nicht* futurity,<sup>137</sup> deferred to some absolutely transformative or ecstatic future moment, will

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<sup>132</sup> Thus Alberto Desto is surely overstating the case when he argues that the traditional narratorial *Ich* is *wholly* dissolved and instead »zum Ort experimenteller Weltkonstitution im Erzählen wird, demgegenüber daher die überkommenen Instrumente der Analyse nicht standhalten [...]« (Rainer Maria Rilke e >*I quaderni di Malte Laurids Brigge*<, 1973, as cited and paraphrased by Kruse, *Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.17, footnote 3).

<sup>133</sup> Which is not to say that *self-alienation* of the *Ich* will be an absent theme in his Papers. At present, however, I am querying the suggestion that the act of imaginative empathy which *Malte-Aufzeichner* undertakes bears the hallmarks of an identity crisis. Although Malte does indeed at points suffer a threat to the integrity of his *Ich* (in, for example, the Sophie phenomenon of Paper XXXI or the mirror-game of Paper XXXII or in the hysteroid symptoms of Paper XX), the *act of writing* does not itself host or constitute such a threat. (Malte, for instance, never slips into the voice of Sophie in the present tense.)

<sup>134</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, pp.490f.

<sup>135</sup> Lorenz, *Schweigen in der Dichtung*, p.141.

<sup>136</sup> Kruse, *Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, pp.111ff

<sup>137</sup> The last words of the *Malte* and, as we shall see, an important clue to Malte's character and situation.

have large implications for my mystically oriented understanding of the theme of *Ent-Ichung* as it appears in the book.<sup>138</sup> For mystical experience, along with its next of kin, paranormal powers, will be identified as the Godot for which Malte is waiting. Thus, *Ent-Ichung* will indeed be seen to feature in Malte's texts as theme, but only in a prospective light.

This moves the discussion from the question of the *Malte*-book's poetology to that of Malte's own poetology. What is his distinctive orientation towards the aesthetic? One might begin with his disposition as *Ich*-narrator in the text. Fülleborn, arguing that the *Malte* fully takes part in a general modernist dissolution of narratorial *auctoritas*, focusses on Paper XLIV's opening line:

»Daß man erzählte, wirklich erzählte, das muß vor meiner Zeit gewesen sein.« [MLB, p.557] Dieses Wort, das man leicht überliest, weil es zunächst einmal eine bestimmte örtliche Funktion erfüllt, ist ganz erstaunlich. Es erfaßt hellsichtig [! D.D.] eine geschichtliche Situation: die Situation des modernen Romans; es begründet und rechtfertigt damit zugleich die Form der Aufzeichnungen Maltes und ordnet sie indirekt diesem modernen Roman zu, obgleich es ihn zu jenem Zeitpunkt realiter noch gar nicht gab. Aber Rilke muß ihn als Möglichkeit, ja Notwendigkeit eingesehen haben: den paradoxen Roman, in dem sich das Erzählen an sich selbst, an seiner inneren Unmöglichkeit bricht [...] es gibt keinen Erzähler mehr, der die Handlung aus der Überlegenheit seiner *auctoritas* zu einem bestimmten Ende zu führen vermochte.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Ent-Ichung* is the guiding concept of Walter Sokel's pioneering essay, "The Devolution of the Self in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*", in: Rilke. *The Alchemy of Alienation*, edited by Frank Baron, Ernst Siegfried Dick & Warren R. Maurer (Kansas: 1980), pp.171-190 (originally published in German as "Zwischen Existenz und Weltinnenraum: Zum Prozeß der Ent-Ichung in Malte Laurids Brigge", in: *Probleme des Erzählens. Festschrift für Käte Hamburger zum 75. Geburtstag*, edited by Fritz Martini, Stuttgart: 1971, pp.212-233).

<sup>139</sup> Fülleborn, "Form und Sinn", p.179, emphasis added.

Yet the *bestimmte örtliche Funktion*, which Fülleborn mentions but pointedly omits to clarify, is anything but incidental to the meaning of Malte's words. For these words introduce an account of narrative *Wortmagie*, as propounded by Graf Brahe - the books's exponent *par excellence* of occultism, who is celebrated in this Paper as the ultimate »raunende[r] Beschwörer des Imperfektes« (as the narrator of Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* is called).<sup>140</sup> As the Paper makes abundantly clear, Malte's notion of *wirkliches Erzählen* comes with a massive stress on the ontologically charged first word: Graf Brahe claims a transcendental, »holographisches Vermögen« that allows him to narrate within »ein phantasmatisches Präsenzkontinuum« (Uwe Steiner).<sup>141</sup> *Wirkliches Erzählen* has nothing to do with an unsayably fragmented modern world and any attendant loss of narratorial articulacy, nor with a distinctively modern sense of *sentimentalisch* self-consciousness ensnaring all attempts at predicative or narrative cohesion. Rather, it relates quite specifically to a theurgical gift of locution, the *loquere ut videam* that creates a combination of spiritistic conjuration and >magnetic< transference of mental memory-pictures to the listener.<sup>142</sup> Kant makes mention in the *Träume eines Geistersehers* of Swedenborg's claims of an angelic transference of consciousness: »Ein Geist

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<sup>140</sup> Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (*Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden, Bd.III*) (Frankfurt/M: 1960), p.9.

<sup>141</sup> Uwe Steiner, *Die Zeit der Schrift: Die Krise der Schrift und die Vergänglichkeit der Gleichnisse bei Hofmannsthal und Rilke* (München: 1996), p.380. See also Müller-Michaels, "Daß man erzählte, das muß nach meiner Zeit gewesen sein", pp.21f.

<sup>142</sup> Thus for instance Graf Brahe's words on St. Germain's eyes - »Ich sage dir, die hätten Venedig hier hereingesehen in dieses Zimmer, daß es da gewesen wäre wie der Tisch« (*MLB*, Paper XLIV, pp.561) - can be situated in the same discursive field as the visionary *réverie* triggered in the consciousness of George Eliot's Latimer, in the supernatural short story *The Lifted Veil*, when his father's uses the word >Prague<.

liest in eines andern Geistes Gedächtnis die Vorstellungen, die dieser darin mit Klarheit enthält«. <sup>143</sup> Baßler, recognising that such »mediumistische[s] Vergegenwärtigen von Abwesendem« forms the spiritistic (as opposed to simply >narratological<) core of *Erzählen* in this Paper, writes illuminatingly:

[...] Diktieren und Zitieren [werden] als gleichermaßen poetische wie spiritistische Verrichtungen enggeführt: >Der Graf diktierte< [MLB, p.559], heißt es dort, wobei sein Kammerdiener Sten anwesend sein mußte, der Swedenborg las und von dem >es hieß, daß er zitiere<,- die Geister nämlich, von denen wiederum Graf Brahe meint: >Es ist gut, wenn sie kommen< [MLB, p.560]. <sup>144</sup>

Malte's lament in this Paper is that he has neither had the privilege of hearing truly magical acts of narration nor proven able himself to recapture his grandfather's (purported) charism. He is thus experiencing the pressure exerted by »die medial (und erzählerisch) begabte Verwandtschaft [...] auf der mütterlichen Seite [...]« (Baßler). <sup>145</sup>

Although paying scant attention to the occultist connotations of Brahesque *Erzählen*, Stephens rightly relativises the importance of *Erzählen* - as an aesthetic task - in Malte's crisis: »man [hat] allzu rasch das Problem des Erzählens zum Hauptanliegen des Werkes erhoben und ihm eine etwas

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<sup>143</sup> Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers*, p.174.

<sup>144</sup> Baßler, "Maltes Gespenster", p.251, footnote 24 & p.244 respectively. One finds such a spiritistic usage of the word *zitieren* in, for instance, Schiller's *Der Geisterseher*: »Es ward beschlossen, den Geist des Verstorbenen zu zitieren [...]« (*Der Geisterseher. Aus den Memoires des Grafen von O\*\**, in: F. S. Werke. Nationalausgabe Bd. XVI, edited by Hans Heinrich Borchardt, Weimar: 1954, pp.45-159, here: p.83). Cf Cornelia D. Wyler-Zimmerli's discussion of the Graf's *wirkliches Erzählen* as a mysterious »raumschaffende Kraft«: *Zeit und Raum: Zu Rilkes >Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge<* (Zürich: 1977), p.129. See also Kruse's highly convincing alchemistic reading of Graf Brahe's »physiologisches Erzählen« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, pp.223ff.).

<sup>145</sup> Baßler, "Maltes Gespenster", p.243.



bedenkliche Priorität über andere Elemente der Gesamthematik eingeräumt [...]«.<sup>146</sup> Stephens is challenging the common assumptions:

- a) that Malte's crisis is due fundamentally to what Brigitte L. Bradley terms his »berufsbedingtes Außenseitertum«.<sup>147</sup>
- b) that his deepest fear is of failure *as a writer*;
- c) that his crisis would somehow be *solved* if only he could muster up a supreme work of literature.

This, argues Stephens, is to mistranslate Malte's existential and spiritual crisis into a *Künstlerkrise*:

Die >Krise des Erzählens< ist in *Malte Laurids Brigge* eindeutig die Krise des Erzählers selbst, und innerhalb der Romanfiktion sind Maltes Schwierigkeiten beim Aufzeichnen oder beim Konzipieren eines möglichen Kunstwerks eigentlich nur Symptome seiner existentiellen Nöte und [...] Metaphern seines problematischen Verhältnisses zum eigenen Ich.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Stephens, *Strukturanalyse*, p.15.

<sup>147</sup> Brigitte L. Bradley, *Zu Rilkes Malte Laurids Brigge* (Bern & München: 1980), p.37.

<sup>148</sup> Stephens, *Strukturanalyse*, p.15. To take a brief survey of the approach which Stephens is querying, Saalman (*Würfelfwurf nach dem Absoluten*, p.72) joins the book's form with Malte's »Geständnis[ ], die Erlebnisse in keinen erzählerischen Zusammenhang bringen zu können« and insists that Malte's programme is to establish »das Primat des ästhetischen Bewußtseins« such that the »ästhetische[ ] Ich« can rescue the »psychologische[ ] Ich« from the threat of »existentielle Disintegration« (ibid., p.75). What Malte dreads, according to Saalman, is »die Gefahr vollständiger künstlerischer Sterilität« (ibid., p.62, emphasis added). Essentially the same poetological reduction is carried out by Giloy (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.10), only with the accent specifically on verse poetry: »Die >Aufzeichnungen< erzählen von einem, dem ein poetologisches Ziel vorschwebt, der sich aber auf dem Weg dorthin wieder und wieder in Aporien verstrickt. >Malte< ist die strikt durchgeführte Pathologie oder Pathogenese eines Dichters, der nie anlangt, wohin er will. Nicht ein einziger Vers findet sich bezeichnenderweise im Buch Maltes, der denkt, lebt, liebt und leidet, Verse zu schreiben«. Quite why Malte does not seem at all to preoccupy himself with the writing of verse poetry after his programmatic declarations in Paper XIV (*MLB*, pp.466f.) seems not to give Giloy pause. The rôle of poetology is placed at the centre of Malte's mysticism by Wagner-Egelhaaf and Kruse also. Thus the latter: »Unbedingt zuzustimmen ist W[agner]-E[gelhaaf] hingegen, wenn sie *allen* Gebrauch mystischer Elemente im Malte auf ein poetologisches Programm hin *finalisiert* sieht« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.132, footnote 60, emphases added). Elsewhere Kruse will write of Malte's goal of a »vita contemplativa litteraria« (ibid., p.81).

The issue of how aesthetic and existential (as well as religious) themes in the *Malte* might be approached in a differentiated but, at another level, integral way, represents, to be sure, one of the most theoretically challenging, if not indeed intractable, problems of the book. Liu accuses Stephens, along with Ernst Feodor Hoffmann,<sup>149</sup> of driving »eine Trennungslinie zwischen dem Künstler und der Kunst, zwischen Maltes existentieller Not einerseits und seinem schriftstellerischen Versuch andererseits«. <sup>150</sup> For Liu, Hoffmann isolates the aesthetic from the existential, while Stephens commits the converse error:

Ohne Maltes Existenzproblematik im Licht seines Ringens mit der dichterischen Verwirklichung zu sehen, oder umgekehrt seine Berufung als Künstler nicht vor dem Hintergrund seiner existentiellen Bedrängnisse zu beleuchten, läuft die Untersuchung leicht Gefahr, den erforderlichen Bezugsrahmen zu verlieren und entweder das Künstlertum - wie z.B. bei Hoffmann - oder die Existenz Maltes - wie bei Stephens etwa - voreilig zum Hauptthema zu machen.<sup>151</sup>

While the charge against Hoffmann is not unfair, I simply cannot agree that Stephens has lapsed into an equal but opposite one-sidedness. Malte's artistic interests - defined with Liu as his *schriftstellerischer Versuch* - are a *subset* of his existence, not its sum total. Can it seriously be argued that Malte's existence *equals* his writerly interests? Or even (to complete the aestheticist topsy-turvy) that *Malte's existence is a subset of his writerly interests*? Now, it goes without saying: Malte, being a textual construct, has no existence outside of the written text in which he lives and moves and has his being. But once we

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<sup>149</sup> In the latter's "Zum dichterischen Verfahren" essay.

<sup>150</sup> Liu, *Suche nach Zusammenhang*, p.29.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.29f.

suspend disbelief and move into the *Fiktionslogik* zone of Malte's *Lebensrealität*,<sup>152</sup> different categories must come into play. We are not after all - and despite the best efforts of Peter Henninger<sup>153</sup> - reading *Malte le fataliste*...

Huysen writes of Malte's

intense modernist longing for another kind of language that would, in psychoanalytic and ontogenetic terms, correspond to a phase preceding the development of language, which is after all constituted quintessentially as differentiation.<sup>154</sup>

The grounds for ascribing this very Kristevan aspiration to Malte Huysen finds in the final *Aufzeichnung*, where Malte is said to evoke »transcendence in that other >glorious language<«. <sup>155</sup> Yet context has been neglected here.<sup>156</sup> The Prodigal Son, writes Malte in the final Paper, »war *wie* einer, der eine herrliche Sprache hört und fiebernd sich vornimmt, in ihr zu dichten«. <sup>157</sup> The >glorious language< is a simile, followed by further similes and one metaphor (significantly, an alchemical one) free of a *wie*-marker: »[...] wie ein Läufer in die Wette [...] Er hatte den Stein der Weisen gefunden [...] wie ein Wurm [...]«. <sup>158</sup> It is not clear to me that the Prodigal Son is guided here by what Huysen calls »the dream of another language«, <sup>159</sup> any more than he dreams of athletic prowess (*wie ein Läufer*).<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Cf Kruse, *Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.240.

<sup>153</sup> Henninger, "Quelques aspects du non-dit dans *Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge*", pp.163f.

<sup>154</sup> Huysen, "Paris / Childhood", p.126.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> As in Bradley's discussion of Malte's phrase (*Zu Rilkes Malte Laurids Brigge*, p.55).

<sup>157</sup> MLB, Paper LXXI, p.633, emphasis added.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. Cf by way of contrast the *lack* of simile in Obstfelder: »If there indeed existed a spirit akin to - though much greater than - mine which wanted to communicate with me from out of the cloud, could he expect me to interpret *a language I had never learnt?*« (*A Priest's Diary*, p.65, emphasis added).

<sup>159</sup> Huysen, "Paris / Childhood", p.137.

<sup>160</sup> Baßler, while taking due heed of context, defends a programmatically poetological reading of the *herrliche Sprache* passage: »[die] poetologische Lesart [...] ersetzt ja nicht den Sensus

What Malte does anticipate in his own situation, however, is »Die Zeit der anderen Auslegung«,<sup>161</sup> which, as I shall argue in detail in Chapter Five, relates to an event of transcendental channelling from a state of altered consciousness: >spirit< brought down into recognisable human language. It by no means necessarily involves the language of a *poesia ermetica*, although this kabbalistic scenario cannot be ruled out.

To go into this issue any more deeply at this stage would be premature.

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litteralis, sondern tritt als neues Isotopiennetz hinzu. Ein lockeres Gefüge wie das des *Malte*, in dem der Literalsinn ohnehin wenig Konsequenzen hat, ermutigt eine solche Praxis zusätzlich« (*Maltes Gespenster*, p.252, note 32). Yet it is one thing for Baßler to detect poetological overtones in a phrase such as this, another for Huyssen to ignore the simulaic frame altogether in order to cast the phrase as the utopian motto of the entire text.

<sup>161</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.490.

## I.iv: A Generic Model

Let us return to the main issue of this book's genre. If, having established a non-chaotic trajectory for the text, one sets aside the assumption that the *Malte* is to be approached as a novel, one can take a fresh inventory of the rich variety of text-types to be found within it: diary, autobiography,<sup>162</sup> short prose fiction, *poème en prose*, legend, parable, pericope, lyric, aesthetic discourse, philosophy, aphorism, letter, *meditatio* and prayer.<sup>163</sup> Instead of seeking to engraft the dimensions of the novel onto this heterogeneity, it may be profitable to look elsewhere for comparably synthetic texts. Not that this

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<sup>162</sup> Rugg, in her study of the work as an experiment in autobiography, claims that: »Rilke's letters« - those written *post hoc*, one presumes - »reveal that the experiment backfired« (»A Self at Large«, p.44). This both oversimplifies Rilke's ambivalent and fluctuating response to his creation and leaves unexamined the question of the criteria by which >success< with such a text might be judged. Thus, for instance, the fact that completion of the work threw its creator into a personal crisis does not necessarily bespeak that work's artistic failure. Conceivably, the opposite consequence might just as easily be drawn. Huyssen occupies a judicious middle ground on the question of autobiographical content: »[...] a rigorous separation of Malte from his author, as if we could have Malte without Rilke's childhood anxieties, is as ludicrous as a total identification of Malte with Rilke would be« (»Paris / Childhood«, p.121). For Huyssen, »it is Rilke's unconscious that speaks with a vengeance in this novel« (ibid., p.127). With this conclusion Huyssen can avoid pat references to a wholly self-conscious and intentional autobiographical act on Rilke's part. In conversation with Betz, Rilke himself amends Flaubert to sum up the nature of the relationship: »>er war mein Ich und war ein anderer<« (In Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, p.114). Cf his gnomic words to Lou: »Die gute Ellen Key hat mich natürlich umgehend mit dem Malte verwechselt und aufgegeben; aber niemand als Du, liebe Lou, kann unterscheiden und nachweisen, ob und wie weit er mir ähnlich sieht: Ob er, der ja zum Teil aus meinen Gefahren gemacht ist, darin untergeht, gewissermaßen um mir den Untergang zu ersparen, oder ob ich erst recht mit diesen Aufzeichnungen in die Strömung geraten bin, die mich wegreißt und hinübertreibt« (letter of December 28<sup>th</sup> 1911, in *MLB-Materialien*, p.88 - note how the last phrase here anticipates the close of the first Duino elegy).

<sup>163</sup> Kruse writes of: »eine flutende Folge von Wahrnehmungen, Eindrücken, Empfindungen und Reflexionen, von Erlebnissen und Erinnerungen, Bildern, Berichten, Zustandsbeschreibungen [...], die die Räume der Wirklichkeit wie die der Einbildung, Gegenwart und Vergangenheit, persönliche wie Weltgeschichte durchqueren [...]« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.15). Rugg, writing of »the novel's inherent confusion of genres« (»A Self at Large«, p.44), adds a particularly important observation: »Rilke's first drafts of the novel were more emphatically novellistic [*sic*], with Malte appearing as a third person« (ibid., p.46). The significance of this shift from third to first person perspective should become obvious from Chapter Three onwards.

need in the least entail neglect of intertextual filiations with texts traditionally canonised as novels,<sup>164</sup> rather it is to avoid according the novel sole or even prime normative status.

At least one comparably synthetic corpus springs to mind.

There exists a text consisting of scattered, unheaded, unsystematised Papers brought under the collective title of *Diapsalmata* (aphoristic, lyrical reflections in a range of substantive refrains). These Papers purport to be written (after Marcus Aurelius Antoninus) *ad se ipsum* by a man identified simply as >A<. This fictive author is a young Dane. His >Papers< were published in 1843, nearly three quarters of a century before the >Papers< of Rilke's Danish persona Malte Laurids Brigge. Their true author is Søren Kierkegaard. The ninety-two Papers of >A< comprise a free mix of diary, prose poem, autobiography, meditation, aphorism, philosophy. To give a taste of their register, let us inspect a sample.

In the opening Paper of the *Diapsalmata*, A meditates bitterly on the alienation of the poet from his public:

What is a poet? An unhappy person who conceals profound anguish in his heart but whose lips are so formed that as sighs and cries pass over them they sound like beautiful music. It is with him as with the poor wretches in Phalaris's bronze bull, who were slowly tortured over a slow fire; their screams could not reach the tyrant's ears to terrify him; to him they sounded like sweet music. And people crowd around

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<sup>164</sup> The francophone symbolist novel - from Huysmans' *À rebours* (1884) through Édouard Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1887, an inspiration for Malte's middle name perhaps?) and Maurice Barrès' *Un homme libre* (1889), and on up to André Gide's *Paludes* (1895) - seems to offer a particular resonance in this respect. As Bertrand & Grojnowski point out, such novels involve »l'histoire ténue de quelque chose qui n'arrive pas à un personnage le plus souvent seul, oisif, volontiers souffrant, en retrait du monde [...] l'échec d'un héros célibataire, idéaliste et névrosé, à travers une forme qui refuse et détourne obstinément le prêt-à-porter romanesque, jouant délibérément de l'autoréflexivité et de l'hybridation des genres« ("Présentation" to Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte*, pp.31 & 33 respectively).

the poet and say to him, »Sing again soon« - in other words, may new sufferings torture your soul, and may your lips continue to be formed as before, because your screams would only alarm us, but the music is charming. And the reviewers step up and say, »That is right; so it must be according to the rules of esthetics.« Now of course a reviewer resembles a poet to a hair, except that he does not have the anguish in his heart, or the music on his lips. Therefore, I would rather be a swineherd out on Amager and be understood by swine than be a poet and be misunderstood by people.<sup>165</sup>

The deeply affecting pathos of an unfortunate figure on the streets of Copenhagen is captured in Paper XX:

What a strange, sad mood came over me on seeing a poor wretch shuffling through the streets in a somewhat worn pale green coat flecked with yellow. I felt sorry for him, but nevertheless what affected me most was that the color of this coat so vividly reminded me of my childhood's first productions in the noble art of painting. This particular color was one of my favorite colors. Is it not sad that these color combinations, which I still think of with so much joy, are nowhere to be found in life; the whole world finds them crude, garish, suitable only for Nürnberg prints. If they are encountered occasionally, the meeting is always unfortunate, as this one is. It is always a feeble-minded person or a derelict - in short, always someone who feels alienated in life and whom the world will not acknowledge. And I, who always painted my heroes with this eternally unforgettable yellow-green tinge to their coats! Does this not happen with all the color combinations of childhood? The gleam that life had at that time gradually becomes too intense, too crude, for our dull eyes.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or. A Fragment of Life. Edited by Victor Eremita. Part I*, translated from the Danish and edited with introduction and notes by Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: 1987), p.19. In Papers XXIV (on Beethoven, *MLB*, pp.507-9), XXVI (on Ibsen, *MLB*, pp.510-13) & LXV (on Eleonora Duse, *MLB*, pp.617f.), Malte Laurids Brigge discusses the mutual estrangement of *Künstler* and *Publikum*. A more general thematic of the misunderstood soul runs through the entire book, most strongly in Fragments IV (»Ich lerne sehen«, *MLB*, p.456), LXI (Charles le Fou, *MLB*, pp.604ff.) and LXXI (*der verlorene Sohn*, *MLB*, pp.629ff.).

<sup>166</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, p.23. Compare the insistent attention which Malte pays to the *Fortgeworfenen* in Paris (esp. in Papers XVI, *MLB*, pp.480ff. & LX, *MLB*, pp.602ff.), reaching its climax in the episode with the wretched newspaper vendor whose colours, particularly the play of yellow and green, so move Malte in Fragment LIX (*MLB*, pp.601f.). Compare also Malte's childhood drawings described in Fragment XXIX (*MLB*, pp.518f.).

Paper XXIV expresses the existential disorientation of a life being lived at psychological *point zéro*:

What is going to happen? What will the future bring? I do not know, I have no presentiment. When a spider flings itself from a fixed point down into its consequences, it continually sees before it an empty space in which it can find no foothold, however much it stretches. So it is with me; before me is continually an empty space, and I am propelled by a consequence that lies behind me. This life is turned around and dreadful, not to be endured.<sup>167</sup>

In Paper LV, A pays homage to two »unfortunate« *Straßenkünstler*:

[...] - One of them was probably seventeen years old, wearing a green Kalmuk coat with large bone buttons. The coat was much too large for him. He held the violin tightly under his chin; his cap was pulled down over his eyes. His hand was concealed in a fingerless glove; his fingers were red and blue with cold. The other one was older and wore a chenille coat. Both were blind. A little girl, who presumably guided them, stood in front of them, thrust her hands under her scarf. We gathered one by one, a few admirers of those melodies - a postman with his mailbag, a little boy, a maidservant, a couple of dock workers. The elegant carriages rolled noisily by; the carts and wagons drowned out the melodies, which emerged fragmentarily for a moment. You two unfortunate artists, do you know that those strains hide in themselves the glories of the whole world? - Was it not like a rendezvous? -<sup>168</sup>

A's existential >aestheticism< includes a propensity to wallow in world-weary melancholy. In Paper LXXXVI he gives vent to a native morbidity:

My misfortune is this: an angel of death always walks at my side, and it is not the doors of the chosen ones that I sprinkle with blood as a sign that he is to pass by - no, it is precisely their doors that he enters - for only recollection's love is happy.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, p.24. Cf Malte's frequent foreboding about the future (e.g. Paper X's splenetic and insecure reflections upon his aimless existence, *MLB*, pp.464f.).

<sup>168</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, p.30. Cf the *Straßenkünstler* in Malte's Paper XIII (*MLB*, p.466), a motif later monumentalised in Rilke's Fifth *Duineser Elegie* treatment of Picasso's family of *Saltimbanques*. Rilke's predilection in the *Malte* (as elsewhere) for the Maeterlinckian motif of blindness is evident in the episodes of the blind cauliflower vendor (Paper XVIII, *MLB*, pp.484f.) and the blind *Zeitungsverkäufer* cited above (Paper LIX, *MLB*, pp.601f.).

<sup>169</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, p.41. Malte's almost obsessively thanatotic imagination is on full show in, amongst others, Paper IX (*ein eigener Tod*, *MLB*, p.464), XVIII (the dying man in the *crémérie*, *MLB*, pp.487ff.), XLVI (»D[ø]den«, p.569) & XLVII (*Todesfurcht*, *MLB*, pp.569ff.). The



The *Diapsalmata* constitute just one element in a far larger textual scheme involving scattered papers brought under the name *Either/Or - A Fragment of Life*. This work is divided into two parts: >PART I CONTAINING A'S PAPERS<, and >PART TWO CONTAINING THE PAPERS OF B, LETTERS TO A<, and is presided over by a fictive editor named >Victor Eremita<. In order to convey the full radicalness with which Kierkegaard generates fictive indeterminacy through the figure of Eremita, I propose to cite at some length the substantial >Preface< in which Eremita narrates the story of how, seven years earlier, he »happened to come into possession of these papers«. <sup>170</sup> Intrigued by a writing desk he sees in the shop window of a »secondhand dealer«, he buys it. <sup>171</sup> One fortuitious morning,

[...] a secret door that I had never noticed before sprung open. This door closed off a compartment that I obviously had not discovered. Here, to my great amazement, I found a mass of papers, the papers that constitute the contents of the present publication. <sup>172</sup>

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theme of unhappy love is no less insistent (e.g. Bettine in Paper LVII, *MLB*, pp.597ff., *die Liebenden* in Paper LVIII, *MLB*, p.599, *intransitive Liebe* in Paper LXX, *MLB*, pp.628f. and, in Paper LXXI, the legend of the Prodigal Son, »der nicht geliebt werden wollte«, *MLB*, pp.629ff.).

<sup>170</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, p.4.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6. Cf Rilke's words (quoted above): »[...] als fände man in einem Schubfach ungeordnete Papiere und fände eben vorderhand nicht mehr und müßte sich begnügen« (*MLB-Materialien*, p. 82). There is also, however, an intriguingly similar evocation of a secret desk compartment in Paper XXVIII of the *Aufzeichnungen* themselves: »Sie [Maman] hatte dabei immer die Vorstellung, es könnte sich plötzlich noch etwas finden in einem geheimen Fach, an das niemand gedacht hatte und das nur dem Druck irgendeiner versteckten Feder nachgab. >Auf einmal springt es vor, du sollst sehen<, sagte sie ernst und ängstlich und zog eilig an allen Laden. Was aber wirklich an Papieren in den Fächern zurückgeblieben war, das hatte sie sorgfältig zusammengelegt und eingeschlossen, ohne es zu lesen« (*MLB*, pp.515f.; cf the ingenious meta-textual significance which Kruse draws out of this passage, *Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.18).

[...] A quick look at the discovered papers readily showed me that they formed two groups [...] the one contained a number of esthetic essays of varying lengths; the other consisted of two long studies and a shorter one, all with ethical content, it seemed, and in the form of letters.<sup>173</sup>

[...] I have preferred to call the first author A, the second B. / Besides the longer pieces, a number of scraps of paper were found on which were written aphorisms, lyrical utterances and reflections. The handwriting itself indicated that they belonged to A, and the contents confirmed this. / Then I tried to organize the papers in the best manner. With B's papers it was rather easy to do. One letter presupposes the other. In the second letter, we find a quotation from the first; the third letter presupposes the two preceding ones. / Organizing A's papers was not so easy. *Therefore I have let chance fix the order - that is, I have let them remain in the order in which I found them, without, of course, being able to decide whether this order has chronological value or ideal significance. The scraps of paper lay loose in the compartment, and I therefore had to assign them a place. I have placed them first, because it seemed to me that they could best be regarded as preliminary glimpses into what the longer pieces develop more coherently. I have called them [Diapsalmata] and added as a kind of motto: ad se ipsum.*<sup>174</sup>

Eremita rather exasperatedly conveys the *mise-en-abyme* of the final section of A's Papers:

[...] The last of A's papers is a narrative titled "The Seducer's Diary." Here we meet new difficulties, inasmuch as A does not declare himself the author but only the editor. This is an old literary device to which I would not have much to object if it did not further complicate my own position, since one author becomes enclosed within the other like the boxes in a Chinese puzzle. This is not the place to explain in greater detail what confirms me in my view; I shall only point out that the prevailing mood in A's preface somehow manifests the poet.<sup>175</sup>

Eremita laboriously explains his procedure in dating the papers:

[...] Here and there in the diary a date is given, but the year is lacking.<sup>176</sup> Thus, I seem unable to go further, but I believe that by scrutinizing the dates more closely I have found a lead. Admittedly, every year has an April 7, a July 3, an August 2, etc., but it

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<sup>173</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, pp.6f.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.7f., emphases added.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.8f.

<sup>176</sup> Malte's Papers do not specify as to year, the only calendar information coming at the very start: »11. September, rue Toullier.« (MLB, Paper I, p.455).

by no means follows that April 7 is a Monday every year. I have done some checking and have found out that this specification fits the year 1834.<sup>177</sup>

Having mentioned that the titles of B's epistolary papers are wholly editorial, Eremita details a further intervention he has allowed himself: »Occasionally there is in the margin a comment, which I have made into a footnote lest I encroach distractingly upon the text«. <sup>178</sup> Assuring his readers that he has »not left untried any means of tracing the authors«, Eremita confesses to complete perplexity as to their identity or ultimate fate,<sup>179</sup> before proceeding to the thorny issue of generic designation:

All that remained was only to give these papers a title. I could call them Papers, Posthumous Papers, Found Papers, Lost Papers, etc. There is, of course a multiplicity of variations, but none of these titles satisfied me. [...] In my continual preoccupation with these papers, it dawned on me that they might take on a new aspect if they were regarded as belonging to one person [...] The title I have chosen [*Either/Or*] expresses precisely this [...] Whether A wrote the esthetic pieces after receiving B's letters, whether his soul subsequently continued to flounder around in its wild unruliness or whether it calmed down - I do not find myself capable of offering the slightest enlightenment about this, inasmuch as the papers contain nothing.<sup>180</sup>

Behind the characters of A, B (Judge Wilhelm) and Victor Emerita stands once again the figure of Søren Kierkegaard, who constructed this elaborate fictive

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<sup>177</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, p.10.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11. Cf the *Malte*-editor's occasional interventions: »\*Ein Briefentwurf« (*MLB*, Paper XXII, p.504), »\*Der Tod, der Tod« (*MLB*, Paper XLVI, p.569), »\*Im Manuskript an den Rand geschrieben« (*MLB*, Paper LIV, p.587, Paper LV, p.592, Paper LX, p.603, Paper LXIV, p.617 & Paper LXX, p.629).

<sup>179</sup> *Either/Or I*, pp.11ff. As noted, *Malte*'s ultimate fate remains undisclosed.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.13f.

framework around the genesis and editorship of the papers contained in *Either/Or*, publishing the two-volume work >pseudonymously< in 1843.<sup>181</sup>

Rilke is known to have interested himself in *Either/Or* as early as January 1904, the very year in which the *Malte* was begun.<sup>182</sup>

Not to put too fine a point on the matter, the formal apparatus constructed in the editor's >Preface< to *Either/Or - A Fragment of Life* bears an uncanny resemblance to that outlined in our anatomy of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*.<sup>183</sup> But *Either/Or - A Fragment of Life* is itself only one fragment in a multi-volume pseudonymous project executed by Kierkegaard. In a text entitled *Fear and Trembling - Dialectical Lyric*, which Kierkegaard published in 1843, a new pseudonym >Johannes de Silentio< writes an extended *meditatio* on the Old Testament story of Abraham's aborted sacrifice of his son Isaac. This text shifts mood, register and subject position<sup>184</sup> with an astonishing formal looseness and fluency. Likewise a further text published by Kierkegaard in 1843 called *Repetition - A Venture in Experimenting Psychology*, in which one >Constantin Constantius< collates memoir, letters, spiritual mythology, aesthetic theory and metatextual reflection to form a singular textual ensemble that utterly resists genre classification.

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<sup>181</sup> Rilke, writing to Georg Brandes on November 28<sup>th</sup> 1909 of Gide's *Porte Étroite*, muses: »(Würde nicht Kierkegaard diese *Aufzeichnungen* erkannt und in Ehren gehalten haben?)« (in Bridgham, *Urbild und Verzicht*, p.8, emphasis added).

<sup>182</sup> Schnack, *Rilke-Chronik*, p.176.

<sup>183</sup> Cf Liu's interesting but fleeting comparison of Malte's »Betrachtungsweise« with that of >A< in the *Diapsalmata* (*Suche nach Zusammenhang*, p.67).

<sup>184</sup> What Gutjahr says of Malte holds *a fortiori* for Silentio: »Der Erzähler [...] durchquert souverän die Formen des Erzählens vom Ich und Wir zum er und Sie oder Du und Ihr; er wechselt in gleitenden Übergängen aus der Innen- zur Außenperspektive, von der personalen zur auktorialen und neutralen Erzählhaltung. [...] Er beherrscht] die Klaviatur des Erzählens mühelos [...]« (*"Erschriebene Moderne"*, p.371).

It need hardly be spelled out how this bears upon the significance accorded to Rilke's formal strategies by scholars treating the *Malte* as a novelistic breakthrough. Instead of theorising Rilke's achievement in terms of a pathos of response to a new epoch, we are surely given pause by the book's similarities to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous productions. (If anything, Kierkegaard's texts are in certain respects more >radical< than Rilke's, if by radicality one understands experimentalism, depth of *mise en abyme*, etc.)

It will be a central contention of this thesis that *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* may be located in the same strange generic border zone of philosophy, theology, autobiography, aesthetics, novel, *Novelle*, *poème en prose* and spiritual *confessio* as that occupied by the pseudonymous writings of Kierkegaard mentioned.<sup>185</sup> I shall read the *Malte* as »ein Experiment mit den

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<sup>185</sup> On the interest to Rilke of Kierkegaard's pseudonymity, cf J.-F. Angelloz, *Rainer Maria Rilke. Leben und Werk*, translated from the French by Alfred Kuoni, Zürich: 1955, p.224 (reinforcing a point made by Hermann von Jan in his 1938 *Rilkes Aufzeichnungen des M. L. Brigge*). Interestingly, Maurice Betz claims that Rilke told him how the Malte-figure had originally been born, already dead, in a now lost dialogue: »>Es geschah<«, as Betz recalls Rilke's recollection, »>daß der junge Mann dem Mädchen sehr lange von einem dänischen Dichter, einem gewissen Malte erzählte, den er gekannt hatte und der sehr jung in Paris gestorben war<« (Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, p.110). Finally, according to Betz, Rilke »>unterbrach den Dialog und begann Maltes eigenes Tagebuch<« (ibid., p.111). It seems likely that Obstfelder's *Tagebuch eines Priesters* inspired this first formal switch (cf ibid., pp.108f.). But Rilke did not remain within the limitations of the strict diary-form. Recalling the entry into a strange new genre-field, he tells Betz: »Die notwendige Einheit war nicht mehr die eines Gedichtes, es war die der Persönlichkeit, welche von Anfang bis zu Ende in ihrer unendlichen Mannigfaltigkeit lebendig werden mußte [...] Viele Seiten schrieb ich auf gut Glück. Manche waren Briefe, andere Notizen, Bruchstücke aus einem Tagebuch, Gedichte in Prosa. Trotz der Dichte des Gewebes dieser mir ganz neuen Prosa war es ein ständiges Herumtappen, ein Marsch ins Dunkle, der niemals ein Ende nehmen zu können schien« (ibid., p.113). Note that Malte does not write of *dieser ganz neuen Prosa*, but of *dieser mir ganz neuen Prosa*. He is *not* claiming formal originality. In his November 1904 review of Obstfelder's *Pilgerfahrten*, Rilke writes of the poet's *Nachlaß*: »Als Obstfelder starb, hinterließ er nur *ein* Manuskript, das er selbst als vollkommen abgeschlossen ansah: >Das Tagebuch eines Priesters<. Außerdem fand sich eine Unmenge undatierter und ungeordneter Papiere mit verschiedenen, immer wieder veränderten Aufzeichnungen, nicht Bücher, sondern Buchanfänge, nicht Feststehendes, sondern Werdendes, steigendes und fallendes Leben, eine Wirrnis, die im Grunde Bewegung war, und diese Welt von Stimmungen und Stimmen zitterte und kreiste um die eigentümliche Stille, die ein Toter zurückläßt. Da hatte der Herausgeber die schwere Aufgabe, in diese Kreise hineinzugreifen und sie zum Stehen zu

Wirkungen unterschiedlicher Schreibformen der Ich-Perspektive« (Müller-Michaels)<sup>186</sup> by energetic recourse to certain key elements of the Kierkegaardian pseudonym model.

In short, I do not believe Rilke's major achievement with the *Malte* to lie along the axis of formal experimentation as such. *Qua* post-Kierkegaardian fiction, the text is not nearly so >original< as generally assumed. And fixation on purported genre innovation in a deal of critical literature has diverted attention from other dimensions of the work, in the process distorting hermeneutic perspective. Out of the postulate that Rilke's text, far from representing a prodigious breakthrough for the novel form at the start of the twentieth century, in fact offers a *continuation of the hybrid genre initiated by Kierkegaard* in the 1840s in his pseudonymous writings,<sup>187</sup> I shall develop the

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bringen; denn es konnte ja nichts mehr geschehen« (KA IV, p.564). The premonition here of *Malte's Papers*, which initially seem to have had an explicit *Nachlaß* character, is hard to miss - although the differences are evident also (*immer wieder veränderte[] Aufzeichnungen ... Buchanfänge*). I stress this last point because I believe over-identification of *Malte* with *Obstfelder* (as opposed to his *Priest*) leads to the erroneous idea that *Malte's Papers* are the strange fruit of his attempt to *write books* rather than change his very mode of existence. Even if the two endeavours are not *necessarily* unrelated, they are necessarily *not* one and the same thing (a point which will be revisited at several points in the course of the present study).

<sup>186</sup> Müller-Michaels, "Daß man erzählte, das muß nach meiner Zeit gewesen sein", p.16. I cannot establish beyond doubt if this experiment is being ascribed to *Malte* or to *Rilke*.

<sup>187</sup> >Continuation< of the hybrid genre does not mean mere >replication<: to write a Kierkegaardian text after Kierkegaard is not to come up with identical features, but to retain the formal looseness and energetic playfulness of the master. (The suggestion in this last word of a possible >anxiety of influence< on *Rilke's* side is not unintended.) After all, no two of Kierkegaard's own pseudonymous texts are easily commensurable, so ingeniously unrelenting is the continuing innovation from work to work. It should, incidentally, be mentioned that serious critical consideration has been given to reading Kierkegaard as a novelist: see for example George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious. From the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image* (Basingstoke & London: 1992), pp.140f. If one were to adopt this approach, the substantive issue regarding *Rilke's* purported formal innovation would remain untouched: any reference to the *Malte* as a novel would still need to take stock of what Kierkegaard had already achieved with the form. An ancillary point: one must in turn avoid ascribing utter novelty to Kierkegaard's formal apparatus. As far as the editorial fiction behind *Either/Or* is concerned, for instance, the spectre of *Hoffmann* is particularly hard to ignore - a point all the more interesting given that I shall in certain respects be reading the *Malte* as a *Hoffmannesque tale tied to a Kierkegaardian teleology*.

argument that these arresting formal affinities offer us a clue to the existence of *affinities every bit as arresting at the level of theme*.<sup>188</sup> And thematic affinity will attract into the discussion both a further pseudonymous text by Kierkegaard, the already mentioned *The Sickness Unto Death - A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening* by one >Anti-Climacus< (published in 1849), and a number of non-pseudonymous, homiletic Kierkegaardian texts (most importantly, the *Christian Discourses* which were demonstrably known to Rilke in the relevant period). All shall reinforce the double proposal that the *Malte* book is deeply Kierkegaardian in both letter and spirit.<sup>189</sup>

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This thesis is perhaps best summed up as a systematic exploration of the play of >spirit< in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* - in the double sense carried by the words >Spiritism< and >Spirituality< (>Geist< offering a corresponding double sense in German). Taking a clear focus on the

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<sup>188</sup> That theme will be ultimately religious in character. Cf Stephens: »Die letzte und offenste aller Fragen, die Malte an sich selbst und seine Erlebniswelt richtet, ist die nach dem Wesen Gottes und seinem Verhältnis zur empirischen Wirklichkeit. [...] man [könnte] das Zentralproblem des Werkes mit der Formel erfassen, in *Malte Laurids Brigge* handle es sich um einen Roman *statt* einer religiösen Erkenntnistheorie« (*Strukturanalyse*, p.15). This is precisely the terrain of Kierkegaard's >indirect communication<, whereby spiritual questions are probed by means of fictive, pseudonymous texts. It is to be regretted that Stephens does not himself detect a Kierkegaardian dimension. When he identifies much of Malte's experience as »Existentialismus avant la lettre« (ibid., p.16), he is casually neglecting the figure whom Bollnow, without exaggeration, refers to as »der gemeinsame Ahnherr der gesamten Existenzphilosophie« (*Rilke*, p.22). Likewise Stephens' description of the strangely philosophic orientation of the *Malte*-book's *Persönlichkeitsmodell*, which positively cries out for Kierkegaardian recognition: »Aber wie schon die Form des ganzen Werkes mit einer konventionellen Romanstruktur wenig gemeinsam hat, so unterscheidet sich ebenfalls die Persönlichkeit Maltes von der einer konventionellen Romangestalt. Es besteht demnach die Möglichkeit, diese Figur vorwiegend als Schema metaphorischer und abstrakter Relationen zu erfassen, denn der Gesamteffekt von Maltes Selbstanalysen weist einen erheblichen Grad an Abstraktheit und gedanklicher Komplexität auf« (*Strukturanalyse*, p.28).

<sup>189</sup> See Excursus at end of this Chapter.

theme of transcendence, it resists the still strong dual tendency within modern *Malte* studies diagnosed in this Chapter - a) the pressing of deterministic claims for the central importance of industrial-urban modernity in Rilke's text and b) the alignment of these claims with a certain model of literary modernism. Nor does this thesis follow the idea that the *Aufzeichnungen* are fuelled by what Judith Ryan, in a deliberately reductive formulation, refers to as »die Ängste eines jungen Dichters [...], der in einer fremden Stadt dichten lernen will«. <sup>190</sup> I do not propose to read the *Malte* as »die strikt durchgeführte Pathologie oder Pathogenese eines Dichters« (Giloy), <sup>191</sup> to place a facile equals-sign between Malte's existential-spiritual crisis and an artistic crisis (whereby »Maltes existentielle Not« becomes »schließlich eine künstlerische«), <sup>192</sup> unless - perhaps - the latter category is understood in the very deepest neo-Romantic, *Kunstreligion* terms. <sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Ryan, ">Hypothetisches Erzählen<", p.251. It is to be stressed that Ryan is herself using this phrase purely in order to query it.

<sup>191</sup> *Aporie des Dichters*, p.10. Cf Müller-Michaels' insistence that the *Aufzeichnungen* centre on the »Prozeß der Suche nach neuen literarischen Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten und deren Funktionen« ("Daß man erzählte, daß muß nach meiner Zeit gewesen sein", p.16 - although once again it is not *entirely* clear that the reference here is to Malte's rather than Rilke's quest). Similarly, Uwe Steiner's deconstructive reading of Malte's crisis as a graphematic excruciation - with Malte the »Messias der Schriftapokalypse« (*Zeit der Schrift*, pp.325-418 *passim*, here: p.357) - rather numbs the existential nerve of Rilke's book by absolutising the importance of textuality over all other considerations.

<sup>192</sup> Liu, *Suche nach Zusammenhang*, p.56, emphasis added.

<sup>193</sup> Engelhardt sees at work in the *Malte* a programmatic *Analogisierung* of artist and saint: »Die Erfahrung des Wirklichen kann, da sie als extreme Erfahrung konzipiert ist, als absolute Verzweiflung und, nach dem theologischen Topos, als in Seligkeit umschlagende gedacht werden. Rilke hat, indem er den Künstler, so wie er ihn existentiell sich denkt, dem Heiligen analogisiert, diesen Umschlag versucht. Mit religiösen Terminologien werden schon, nicht ganz zu Unrecht, Rodins Werke bedacht, und anlässlich Flauberts >Saint-Julien-l'hospitalier< [MLB, Paper XXII, p.505] wird die Kunstarbeit als religiöse deutbar [...] das Kunstprogramm ist ein religiöses [...] « ("Der Versuch, wirklich zu werden", pp.116f.). I am nevertheless doubtful about the soundness of fixing a simple relationship of equivalence between artist and saint in the *Malte*. To assign art with a religious function is not to see art and religion as co-equal. Malte, I contend, sees the evolved artist as *one* figure who - along with, for example, the female lover and the esoteric adept - has placed himself in motion towards the transcendental space occupied most consummately by the living saint. For Malte, artistic



Büchner's Lenz offers a useful point of comparison in this respect. Neither Malte nor Lenz can be said to be viscerally afflicted with a case of writer's block - *unless perhaps the >blockage< be considered more broadly as spiritual rather than aesthetico-linguistic or cognitive in nature*. Malte, as I propose to show, undergoes a crisis not of aesthetic *techné* but of existential and psychological turmoil<sup>194</sup> due to shortfalls on, as it were, the >supply side< of spiritual experience. Lorenz has written of the perennial problem in mystical discourse of the »Mangel an geeigneter Sprache, der daran hindere, religiöse Empfindungen angemessen zu artikulieren«.<sup>195</sup> I will argue that Malte is preoccupied not with mystical *articulation* - the problem of finding words that will function (in Hofmannsthal's phrase) as »versiegelte Gefängnisse des göttlichen Pneuma«<sup>196</sup> - but with the more primordial problem of spiritual *experience* at a non- or supra-verbal level. His Papers bear the marks not of »das kontinuierliche Bemühen, ein >Unsägliches< sprachlich zu konturieren« (Lorenz),<sup>197</sup> rather of *das kontinuierliche Bemühen, ein Unsägliches zu erfahren*. The crisis is experiential rather than expressive. Malte is not Lord Chandos.

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development is but *one* route by which the higher affects may be cultivated. Whether he considers it the *via regia* is far from clear - whatever the ideology of his creator. This issue will be accorded the detailed attention it deserves in the appropriate contexts of the present study (most particularly in Chapter Five and the >Conclusion?< section).

<sup>194</sup> Although Malte's crisis cannot of course be placed in the same category as the psychosis of Lenz.

<sup>195</sup> Lorenz, *Schweigen in der Dichtung*, p.9.

<sup>196</sup> Quoted in Steven P. Sondrup, *Hofmannsthal and the French Symbolist Tradition*, Bern & Frankfurt/M: 1976, p.45.

<sup>197</sup> Lorenz, *Schweigen in der Dichtung*, p.31. It should be pointed out at once that Lorenz is *not* referring here to the *Malte*, but to Rilke's later poetry. I am merely using his terms to convey mysticism's general language-conundrum, about which, I believe, Malte is *not yet* in a position to worry: How to preserve in language the religious dignity of unspeakably rich experiences? (Lorenz's study is an attempt to show that only indirect discourse, with its deictically or elliptically structured >silences<, can be deployed without profanement.)

Wie ist es möglich zu leben, wenn doch die Elemente dieses Lebens uns völlig unfaßlich sind? To my mind, Rilke's question, in which he summarises for Lotte Hepner the matter of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, is getting at nothing less than what Du Prel calls >Das Rätsel des Menschen<: »Woher kommen wir? Wozu leben wir? Wohin gehen wir? [...] der Mensch, der doch die Spitze der irdischen Schöpfung bildet, [ist] nicht einmal über sich selbst im klaren [...]«.<sup>198</sup> The present study makes the case that Malte is an Unhappy Consciousness searching for signs and experiences of >transcendental subjectivity< (du Prel, after Kant), and that this quest takes on unmistakably monistic, parapsychological, occult, esoteric and theological dimensions (the latter category here of course providing the link with Kierkegaard's thought.)<sup>199</sup> A guiding conviction of this interpretation, as

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<sup>198</sup> Du Prel, *Rätsel des Menschen*, p.43. Cf du Prel's location *within Man* of the penultimate metaphysical explanandum: »Wir müssen also die Versuche, das Welträtsel zu lösen, vertagen, bis wir vorerst das Menschenrätsel gelöst haben, und zwar ganz besonders die psychologische Seite desselben, d.h. das Rätsel der menschlichen Seele« (ibid., pp.52f.).

<sup>199</sup> Bettina Gruber distinguishes, rather too categorically in my view, between occultist, esoteric and mystical discourses. Occultism, she writes, tries to develop »eine tangible und voll wissenschaftskompatible Metaphysik« in which, as science broadens its understanding of the »Geltungsbereich« of natural laws, *das Okkulte* will by and by disappear as that-which-is-hidden (»Mystik, Esoterik, Okkultismus: Überlegungen zu einer Begriffsdiskussion«, in: Baßler & Châtellier, ed., *Mystique, mysticisme et modernité*, pp.27-39, here: p.31). Esotericism by contrast is accompanied by »die Berufung auf eine möglichst archaische Tradition« in which a corpus of ideas is placed at the centre of the apprentice's initiation (ibid., p.33). Mysticism, finally, is a matter of an a-historical intrusion of eternity into subjective space-time (ibid., p.35), involving »direkte Erfahrung des Individuums, das darin einer Erkenntnis, klassischerweise einer Erkenntnis Gottes, der *cognitio dei experimentalis*, teilhaftig zu werden meint« (ibid., p.34). Although the boundaries between these options are more fluid than Gruber seems to allow, they are not without use as a basic orientation. The topics of empirical proof of spirit, the handing down of esoteric tradition, and the experience of direct mystical affectivity will all be highly relevant to Malte Laurids Brigge's very Lavaterian difficulties. As a rule, I shall employ the terms >monistic< and >transcendental(ist)< to convey Malte's broad quest for superordinary experience, the terms >mystical<, >occultist</>parapsychological< (including the fields of spiritism and neo-mesmerism), >esoteric< and >gnostic< to emphasise a respective aspect of that quest. For reasons which should become clear, the terms >spiritual< and >religious< will not by and large come into their own until the Kierkegaardian analysis in Chapter Five. Once again, however, I must stress the fluidity of these categories.

indicated earlier, will be that the *Ich* of the *Aufzeichnungen* needs to be more inquisitively linked to the open visionary of the Elegies and Sonnets. In his *dunkle Himmelfahrt*, Malte may in fact vault just as passionately to high heaven.

## EXCURSUS A:

### Rilke's Exposure to Kierkegaard

I do not propose in this thesis to speculate point for point as to whether Rilke's text might be displaying a Kierkegaardian >influence< or merely an >affinity<. What, though, would be the broad positivistic grounds for positing the former?

Bridgham writes of the archival situation as of 1975:

Under Frau Ruth Fritzsche-Rilke the Archive was inaccessible for research purposes. W. Kohlschmidt, in his article "Rilke und Kierkegaard", [...] lists the volumes he found in the Archive in 1950: *Entweder/Oder*, with Rilke's name on the flyleaf and the date July, 1904; *Ausgewählte Christliche Reden*, dated >Frühling 1904<; *Das Tagebuch eines Verführers* (from *Entweder/Oder*), published by Insel Verlag in 1903 and thus possibly sent to Rilke by Kippenberg in the same year; *Papirer* (in Danish), published in 1904, but still uncut; *Furcht und Zittern / Wiederholung*, vol.3 of the *Gesammelte Werke*, published by Diederichs Verlag in 1909; *Abschliessende Unwissenschaftliche Nachschrift*, vol.7 of the *G. W.*, published in 1910; *Stadien auf dem Lebenswege*, vol.4 of the *G. W.*, published in 1914. Before her death in 1972 Frau Fritzsche-Rilke informed the present writer that these volumes were not in her possession.<sup>200</sup>

Several relativising factors need to be placed alongside this list:

- a) Rilke learned Danish in the summer of 1904 expressly in order to read Kierkegaard (and Jens Peter Jacobsen) in the original.
- b) Kohlschmidt himself writes that his list may offer only a partial picture: the »Handexemplare der Kierkegaard-Bücher aus Rilkes Besitz«, he writes,

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<sup>200</sup> Bridgham, *Urbild und Verzicht*, p.2, footnote 2.

»haben sich (*wenigstens zum Teil*) in der Bibliothek Clara Rilkes in Fischerhude erhalten«. <sup>201</sup>

c) Rilke had a significant number of books confiscated by the owners of his abandoned apartment on the rue Campagne-Première in Paris after his departure from there in July 1914. Despite a concerted campaign by André Gide, »only a few cartons of papers« were ever retrieved. <sup>202</sup> Rilke, writing of these losses to Marie von Thurn und Taxis in September 1915, links them unambiguously to the *Entstehungsperiode* of the *Malte* in particular:

[...] längst war ich geneigt, alles, was sich seit den zwölf Jahren in Paris um mich angesetzt hatte, als Nachlaß des M. L. Brigge anzusehen, und vielleicht ist mit allen diesen mitwissenden Dingen und Büchern und den paar Erbstücken die Obsession der Gestalt von mir genommen, von der endgültig abzusehen, ich doch reinlich entschlossen war. <sup>203</sup>

d) In principle, neither letters nor *ex libris* evidence (whether complete or fragmentary) can be taken to convey anything like a total picture of textual exposure. Indeed, were a reader, having hitherto relied on Rilke's letters for a sense of his exposure to Kierkegaard, to come across Kohlschmidt's library inventory, they would assuredly be surprised at its extent. We can thus at the very least keep open the possibility that the library inventory in turn significantly understates Rilke's familiarity with the Kierkegaardian oeuvre.

e) Finally, the extent to which Kierkegaard's thought »lag damals schon in der Luft«, to quote Musil in a famous diary entry, <sup>204</sup> should not be

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<sup>201</sup> Kohlschmidt, "Rilke und Kierkegaard", p.92, emphasis added.

<sup>202</sup> Siegfried Mandel, "Rilke's Readings and Impressions from Buber to Alfred Schuler", p.255.

<sup>203</sup> Quoted *ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> Quoted in Fick, *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele*, p.287, footnote 129.

underestimated as it comes closer to the truth than Bollnow's own assertion that: »damals, in den ersten Jahren des Jahrhunderts, der große dänische Denker noch weitgehend unbekannt war«. <sup>205</sup> Of immeasurable importance here, from a Rilkean perspective, is Rudolf Kassner's searching essay of 1906, "Sören Kierkegaard. Aphoristisch".

Given these points, Kohlschmidt's 1950 inventory cannot be cited as the final word on Rilke's exposure to Kierkegaard during the period in which he was working on the *Malte*. Most emphatically: neither the rather late date, in *Malte*-terms, of the *Fear and Trembling / Repetition* text (Diederich's second edition, 1909: not an impossibly late date, given that the text was presumably available for the Christmas 1908 trade, and that intensive work on the *Malte* was done in December of 1908 and of 1909 - most likely work involving those later parts of the book, which, as I shall argue in Chapter Five, bear the strongest hallmarks of *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*) nor the absence from the list of *The Sickness unto Death* can disqualify one from nominating these texts as influential intertexts for the *Malte*. Consider also Kohlschmidt's information on the *Fear and Trembling / Repetition* volume:

die Ausgaben *Furcht und Zittern, Wiederholung* (2. Aufl. Diederichs 1909), von Rilke im Herbst 1910 an Clara Rilke übereignet [...] [Darin] hat Rilke für Clara Rilke doppelt angekreuzt die berühmte "Lobrede auf Abraham", einfach "Problemata", "Problema II", "Problema III", "Epilog", "Wiederholung". <sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Bollnow, *Rilke*, p.23.

<sup>206</sup> Kohlschmidt, "Rilke und Kierkegaard", p.94.

It is possible to infer from this that Rilke has worked through the 1909 edition of a text with which he may already be familiar (in an earlier German edition or even in the original Danish) in order to >prepare< it for his wife.

Rilke's reference to Kierkegaard in his letter of August 18<sup>th</sup> 1915 to Ilse Erdmann: »Ich hab ihn nie viel gelesen [...]«<sup>207</sup> is misleading, if not downright disingenuous, unless *nicht viel* is meant extensively (only a handful of texts out of a huge *œuvre*) rather than intensively (passionate subjective appropriation on the reader's part). Bollnow may not in fact be going too far when he writes: »Bei der sparsamen Art, mit der [Rilke] überhaupt von seiner Lektüre spricht, läßt sich abschätzen, daß kein Denker auf ihn jemals einen auch nur annähernd gleich gewichtigen Einfluß ausgeübt hat«<sup>208</sup> - although one might nominate Maeterlinck as a comparable *philosophical* influence. (Elena Balzamo has noted Rilke's general reticence in this department: »pour lui, le camouflage de ses lectures faisait partie d'une stratégie parfaitement consciente«.)<sup>209</sup>

Else Buddeberg challenges Bollnow's claims for a Kierkegaardian influence not just on the third book of the *Stundenbuch* of April 1903 but even on the *Malte*-book itself.<sup>210</sup> grounding her scepticism in one particular linguistic detail:

Hätte [Rilke] Kierkegaard gekannt, so wäre ihm gewiß dessen scharfe Unterscheidung von Angst und Furcht zur Durchdringung seiner eigenen

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<sup>207</sup> In Schnack, *Rilke-Chronik*, p.508.

<sup>208</sup> Bollnow, *Rilke*, p.24.

<sup>209</sup> Elena Balzamo "Jens Peter Jacobsen et Rainer Maria Rilke en miroir", in: Klein (ed.), *R. M. Rilke et >Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge<*, pp.23-39, here: p.23,

<sup>210</sup> Buddeberg, *Eine innere Biographie*, pp.537ff., note 43.

Angstproblematik hilfreich gewesen. Sein eigener, sonst immer so gewissenhafter Sprachgebrauch schwankt auch noch im *Malte*.<sup>211</sup>

To deduce from the synonymous use of *Angst* and *Furcht* in the *Malte* that Rilke most likely had not read Kierkegaard's *Der Begriff Angst* by 1910 is one perfectly reasonable option (not that there are not others). But Buddeberg makes an unwarranted induction from this deduction. The *Angst/Furcht* distinction is not to the forefront in Kierkegaard's other pseudonymous works, and certainly not in the work whose very title conveys the importance for Kierkegaard of religious and existential dread: *Furcht und Zittern*. Furthermore, Rilke may indeed have picked up from Kassner or others<sup>212</sup> the strong association of Kierkegaard's name with the words *Angst* and/or *Furcht*, without being notified of Kierkegaard's differentiation, the linguistic niceties of which have no bearing on the overall question of influence.<sup>213</sup>

It is surely revealing that Betz spontaneously associates Rilke's prodigious readerly retention with his specific knowledge of Kierkegaard:

Ich kannte aber damals den Kopenhagner Magister nur wenig und versäumte so die Gelegenheit, Rilke über den sonderbarsten aller dänischen Schriftsteller zu befragen. Ich bedauere dies um so mehr, denn Rilke verstand es wundervoll, einem Zugang zu einem unbekanntem Werk oder Schriftsteller zu verschaffen oder den Wunsch zu erwecken, diesen näher kennenzulernen, indem er *ganze Seiten nacherzählte und vorspielte. Er war dafür mit einem erstaunlich treuen Gedächtnis begabt. Von dem, was er gelesen hatte, bewahrte er eine zugleich tiefe und flächenhafte Erinnerung und wußte ebensogut die innere Atmosphäre eines Werkes wiederzugeben wie irgendeine stilistische Einzelheit oder sogar ein Wort oder eine Wendung.*<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p.539.

<sup>212</sup> Cf also Giloy on Jacobsen's mediatory rôle here (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.13).

<sup>213</sup> As Bollnow himself points out in the second edition of his book: see *Rilke*, p.349, footnote 16.

<sup>214</sup> Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, pp.189f., emphases added.



The Kierkegaardian orientation of this thesis is based on the conviction that, by the time the *Aufzeichnungen* are being conceived and developed, Kierkegaard has become (as Malte might put it) *Blut, Blick und Gebärde* in Rilke. But this hypothesis cannot ultimately be demonstrated, positivistically or otherwise. At best, it can be elaborated on the basis of a close intertextual reading of the primary texts themselves.

# CHAPTER TWO

*Eine große Stadt, groß, voll  
merkwürdiger Versuchungen:*

**Malte in Paris**

**»Dahinter?«**

*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte  
Laurids Brigge, Paper I.*

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**»My inward representation  
even of comparatively  
indifferent faces is so vivid  
as to make portraits of  
them unsatisfactory to me.«**

George Eliot.

## II.i

### »Nichtgesicht«

The book opens:

*11. September, rue Toullier.*

So, also hierher kommen die Leute, um zu leben, ich würde eher meinen, es stürbe sich hier. Ich bin ausgewesen. Ich habe gesehen: Hospitäler.<sup>1</sup>

*Ich bin ausgewesen. Ich habe gesehen...* One notes at once the proximity of *aus* and *sehen*, with perception being cast, as one would expect, as a function of outward-directed attention. In Paper IV, however, Malte will explicitly launch his project of *Sehenlernen* under curiously different categories:

Ich lerne sehen. Ich weiß nicht, woran es liegt, es geht alles tiefer in mich ein und bleibt nicht an der Stelle stehen, wo es sonst immer zu Ende war. Ich habe ein Inneres, von dem ich nicht wußte. Alles geht jetzt dorthin. Ich weiß nicht, was dort geschieht.<sup>2</sup>

*Sehen* is here presented as a function of subjective inwardness, not outward observation, Malte making an evocative gesture to the dark continent of the Unconscious (*Ich weiß nicht, was dort geschieht*).

This curious double orientation of the verb *sehen* raises a first question: What manner of binary negotiation, *via* an act of what is being called

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<sup>1</sup> *MLB*, Paper I, p.455.

<sup>2</sup> *MLB*, Paper IV, p.456.

>seeing<, will we witness between the *Äußeres* indicated in »Ich bin ausgewesen« in Paper I and the *Inneres* identified here in Paper IV?

*Ich bin ausgewesen. Ich habe gesehen...* Malte, a déclassé Danish aristocrat, leaves his cheaply rented room »fünf Treppen hoch«<sup>3</sup> to walk the streets of Paris for all the world in the style of the *flâneur*, that classic Baudelairean type who so intrigued Walter Benjamin. But before Malte has introduced himself to the reader as *flâneur*, a pre-emptive first sentence sends out its funerary signals: *So, also, hierher kommen die Leute, um zu leben, ich würde eher meinen, es stürbe sich hier.*<sup>4</sup> Thus, before writing up an inventory of the day's sights *out there*, Malte has already established a distinctive cognitive mood for his text. And far from offering a simple, as it were phenomenologically stringent registration of an outer reality, he goes on to engage in several highly complex linguistic procedures. The foremost is metonymy:

*Ich bin ausgewesen. Ich habe gesehen: Hospitäl. Ich habe einen Menschen gesehen, welcher schwankte und umsank. Die Leute versammelten sich um ihn, das ersparte mir den Rest. Ich habe eine schwangere Frau gesehen [...] Dahinter? Ich suchte auf meinem Plan: Maison d'Accouchement. Gut. Man wird sie entbinden - man kann das. Weiter, rue Saint-Jacques, ein großes Gebäude mit einer Kuppel. Der Plan gab an Val-de-grâce, Hôpital militaire.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIV, p.468. Rilke himself lived just three floors up in the rue Toullier. Might not Malte's five flights be a citation of Anselmus' »verdammte[] fünf Treppen« in Hoffmann's *Der goldene Topf?* (*Fantasiestücke in Callot's Manier. Werke 1814*, edited by Hartmut Steinecke with Gerhard Allroggen & Wolf Segebrecht, Frankfurt/M: 1993, p.317)

<sup>4</sup> Eerily, Malte's opening entry, with its launch of an *es stürbe sich* morbidity, is dated, of all days, September 11<sup>th</sup>... September, incidentally, is a privileged month in Hoffmann, hosting as it does the autumnal equinox (September 23<sup>rd</sup>).

<sup>5</sup> *MLB*, Paper I, p.455.

Even in this short Paper, a robustly synthetic principle of selection and association is clearly at work. The innocence or neutrality of *Ich habe gesehen* is put in question by a) the intentionality flagged in the word *meinen*; b) the absence of any mention of other, less thematically or atmospherically or psychologically compelling sights. The very syntax enacts this absolutisation of the hospital-as-theme programme. Consider one alternative formulation: *\*Ich habe Hospitäler gesehen*. The loss of the original's climactic end-focus, achieved through an inversion and a colon, would yield a markedly less emphatic statement: *Ich habe gesehen: Hospitäler*. This phrasing marks out the hospitals not merely as something seen, but as the definitive sight, the sight that sensitises Malte to certain sights at the expense of others, the matrix of Malte's cognitive response to all other sights, whether already seen or about to be seen.<sup>6</sup> Malte is, in Harald Neumeyer's words, as if »magisch [...] angezogen« by Paris' hospitals.<sup>7</sup> And it is under the double rubric of *es stürbe*

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<sup>6</sup> The place of *Hospitäler* at the head of the Paper is anachronistic to the apparent syntax of Malte's *flânerie*.

<sup>7</sup> *Der Flaneur*, p.211. Neumeyer makes a fascinating point here: if one takes out a map of Paris and follows Malte's peregrinations, a strange circumstance becomes clear: »[...] kein Weg ist ihm zu lang, um zu einem Krankenhaus zu gelangen« (ibid., p.212). Malte does not traverse Paris aimlessly - he makes sure, as Neumeyer puts it, that »Gehen und Sehen korrelieren« (ibid.). (Is this the reason why, as we shall see presently, he carries a map himself - so that he can make a beeline to the hospitals?) It is thus quite one-sided to claim that Malte finds himself defenselessly confronted with unpleasant scenes which he flees in terror. For all that the thought of such scenes fills him with terror, he, resembles the visitor to the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's in *actively seeking them out*. Cf Rilke's narration in Betz (*Rilke in Frankreich*, pp.120ff) of a lost Malte-episode, in which Malte follows a young couple into »die alte Morgue an der Ostspitze der Cité« (ibid., p.121). A young drowned girl whom Malte sees there (ibid., p.123) does in fact appear as a motif in the finished book (*MLB*, Paper XXIV, pp.507f: Malte sees death-masks hanging in a *mouleur's* shop, one of which is »[d]as Gesicht der jungen Ertränkten, das man in der Morgue abnahm [...]«). As Wagner-Egelhaaf shows in detail, Malte's Parisian topography is also replete with »>mystische Indikatoren« (see *Mystik der Moderne*, p.80).

*sich*<sup>8</sup> and *Hospitüler* that the images of collapsing person, pregnant woman, and, further on, disfigured child draw Malte mag(net)ically in, as if gratifying the cognitive mood which has been set by the morbid collocation. The metonymic principle of connotation through contiguity or association is in force.

Alongside this metonymy, and indeed strictly speaking another form of it, we find dominating the reported sightings a curious logic of invisibility. The crowd gathers around the collapsed figure in the street, blocking Malte's view: *Das ersparte mir den Rest*. It is precisely this *Rest*, this *unseen remainder*, which lends the scene its forbidding power (just as, incidentally, the swelled belly of the woman indicates even as it hides the unborn). We are indeed far here from the possibility of accounting for Malte's mode of perception in terms of a bracketing out of pre-formed cognitive judgements. The foreboding in Malte's response to the collapsed figure is not dimmed by the blocking of his view - *the very invisibility grants it an >ob-scene< reality*. One thinks of the collapsing figures witnessed by Gustav von Aschenbach in Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*, where the context of an actual pestilence in the city places both the reason for the collapse and the resulting death beyond doubt. With Malte, by contrast, the *es stürbe sich* intentionality seems to be pressing factual events into the service of an inner mood, converting in symbolist style raw perceptual data into >objective correlatives< - »a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that

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<sup>8</sup> Henninger spots an idiomatic upset in this phrase: »*Es stürbe sich hier*, ne se dit pas. La langue connaît la locution impersonnelle: *Es lebt sich hier gut* [...]« (”Quelques aspects du non-dit dans *Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge*”, p.152).

when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked« (T. S. Eliot).<sup>9</sup>

A third factor which contributes to the cognitive complexity in evidence in the passage is Malte's recourse to information which is, technically, extraneous to the objects qua phenomena as they come into and leave his field of vision. Three times he consults his map of Paris, twice it gives him his bearings:

Ich suchte auf meinem Plan: Maison d'Accouchement. Gut. Man wird sie entbinden - man kann das. Weiter, rue Saint-Jacques, ein großes Gebäude mit einer Kuppel. Der Plan gab an Val-de-grâce, Hôpital militaire. Das brauchte ich eigentlich nicht zu wissen, aber es schadet nicht [...] Dann habe ich ein eigentümlich starblindes Haus gesehen, es war im Plan nicht zu finden, aber über der Tür stand noch ziemlich leserlich: Asyle de nuit. Neben dem Eingang waren die Preise. Ich habe sie gelesen. Es war nicht teuer.<sup>10</sup>

The sites marked on the map text are unmarked to the present beholder (*Maison d'Accouchement*, *Val-de-grâce*), while the one building left unmarked on the map signals itself textually in non-symbolic space (*Asyle de nuit*). External reality is being perceived not phenomenologically but by recourse to cartographical supplement, a relativisation of eye-witness authority that

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<sup>9</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems", p.25. Cf Rilke's letter to Clara of August 31<sup>st</sup> 1902: »Mich ängstigen die vielen Hospitäler, die hier überall sind [...] Man sieht Kranke, die hingehen oder hinfahren, in allen Straßen. Man sieht sie an den Fenstern des Hôtel-Dieu in ihren seltsamen Trachten, den traurigen blassen Ordenstrachten der Krankheit. Man fühlt auf einmal, daß es in dieser weiten Stadt Heere von Kranken gibt, Armeen von Sterbenden, Völker von Toten« (*Briefe in Zwei Bänden I*, p.126). Rugg cites this letter as clear evidence of a basic autobiographical act on Rilke's part ("A Self at Large", pp.43f). Yet the changes from letter to fictive text are at least as striking as the retentions. Put simply, Malte sees a good deal less than Rilke by way of morbid scenery. I am suggesting that such blocking of Malte's view is far from incidental to Rilke's strategy, as it seduces him into the habit of metonymic addition. Malte's Paris Papers do not, as Park contends, describe »in protokollhaft sachlicher Genauigkeit die Pariser Erlebnisse Rilkes« (*Rilkes Selbstwerdung*, p.65).

<sup>10</sup> *MLB*, Paper I, p.455.



socialises or >publishes< the sites before they have become sights. This >publicity< of buildings in the Parisian cityscape is hardly thematised without the gentle insinuation of a critique. The unmapped building happens to be a shelter for the destitute: *es war im Plan nicht zu finden*. The text in Malte's hands does map out the city, but this mapping out is itself a selective, tendentious, ideological manoeuvre. Civic-touristic discourse, with its Baedekeresque selectivity, has no place for the obscene, un-scenic shadow-world of destitution, which it accordingly consigns to invisibility.

Behind the paratactic simplicity, faux naïveté and diaristic conscientiousness of the opening paper's first *flânerie*, then, we have already found a text congested by some far from simple cognitive manoeuvres. In the course of perceiving and later registering on paper the various - or rather, not so various - sights, Malte has shown a rigorous proclivity for formalising, selecting, associating, sequencing and deducting. The governing trope of metonymy has facilitated this proclivity.

Where the first Paper presents a sequence of sights,<sup>11</sup> the second focuses on »l'expérience auditive«:<sup>12</sup> »Daß ich es nicht lassen kann, bei offenem Fenster zu schlafen. Elektrische Bahnen rasen läutend durch meine

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<sup>11</sup> With the exception of one olfactory remark: »Es roch, soviel sich unterscheiden läßt, nach Jodoform, nach dem Fett von pommes frites, nach Angst. Alle Städte riechen im Sommer« (MLB, Paper I, p.455). Malte seems to have inherited his paternal grandmother's sensitivity to the smell of iodoform (see MLB, Paper XXXVI, p.541) - a connection noted by Carré, "Des >revenants< dans *Les Carnets de Malte Laurids Brigge*", pp.41-61, here: p.54.

<sup>12</sup> Antonowicz, "Cet infernal couvercle", p.103.

Stube [...]«.<sup>13</sup> Proceeding from acoustic stimulus to deduction of the source, Malte reconstitutes the sounds into identifiable objects. He does this in a present tense. Yet the terms under which this present tense sets itself up are riddled with difficulty, in a manner rather reminiscent of the old aorist tense in classical Greek, which does not specify as to momentary or continuous character of an action.<sup>14</sup> *Daß ich es nicht lassen kann, bei offenem Fenster zu schlafen*: the phrasing points to an *habitual, nightly* need on Malte's part to keep his room ventilated, rather than to one particularly sultry night. There is no talk of any one night here. Nor is it feasible that Malte is in bed awake, writing about *tonight*, for he will close his description of the night sounds by narrating his own slumber: »Dann schlafe ich plötzlich ein«.<sup>15</sup> Thus *Erzählzeit* and *erzählte Zeit* cannot be co-terminous.<sup>16</sup> We seem, on this account, to be reading a description of a *type* of noisy night.

The opening items on Malte's list seem to be described in a corresponding habitual present, as non-punctual and continuous events: »Elektrische Bahnen rasen läutend durch meine Stube. Automobile gehen über mich hin«.<sup>17</sup> The flow of nocturnal traffic can hardly be untypical for the

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<sup>13</sup> *MLB*, Paper II, p.455. Cf the opening of Baudelaire's "À une heure du matin" (*Le Spleen de Paris*, X, p.287), from the later part of which Malte will quote in Paper XVIII.

<sup>14</sup> I do not share Vanoosthuysse's view that this Paper, unlike its predecessor, »efface [...] toute postériorité de la transcription et se livre comme la restitution immédiate des perceptions d'un sujet [...]« ("L'objet et le sublime", p.134).

<sup>15</sup> *MLB*, Paper II, p.456.

<sup>16</sup> Unless perhaps the words *Dann schlafe ich plötzlich ein* have been appended to the fragment the next day. Yet even this possibility is rendered most awkward by the *maintenance* (in a French as well as an English sense) of the present tense.

<sup>17</sup> *MLB*, Paper II, p.455. Compare Obstfelder's priest: »Here into my little room is carried from dawn till night a rushing sound as of a new Atlantic. It is of the electric trains which go speeding past [...]« (*A Priest's Diary*, p.43).

rue Toullier. Yet this sense of sustained and regular recurrence is immediately weakened by mention of new sounds:

Eine Tür fällt zu. Irgendwo klirrt eine Scheibe herunter, ich höre ihre großen Scherben lachen, die kleinen Splitter kichern. Dann plötzlich dumpfer, eingeschlossener Lärm von der anderen Seite, innen im Hause. Jemand steigt die Treppe.<sup>18</sup>

What contaminates the continuous present tense suggested in the opening lines is the fact that this is a chain of events, both causally (the slammed door seems to cause the window to fall) and chronologically (*Dann plötzlich*). That this *precise* chain is heard by Malte each night is surely out of the question (unless, that is, something else altogether is going on with these bumps in the night). Thus we find creeping into the general, habitual present tense a particularity of incident, of sequenced one-off events, which demands a different, more immediate, punctual present tense. The adverb *plötzlich* (which will recur, with rather problematical implications, in the final sentence of the passage) is placed here beside *Dann*, implying surprise in the listener and so reinforcing this sense of singular, unexpected incident.

Malte now mentions a number of other sounds in the ambience:

Jemand steigt die Treppe. Kommt, kommt *unaufhörlich*.<sup>19</sup> Ist da, ist lange da, geht vorbei. Und wieder die Straße. Ein Mädchen kreischt: Ah tais-toi, je ne veux plus. Die Elektrische rennt ganz erregt heran, darüber fort, fort über alles. Jemand ruft. Leute laufen, überholen sich.<sup>20</sup>

Is there any connection between the fall of the window pane, the entrance of the figure into the building and the girl's shrieking out in the street? Possibly,

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<sup>18</sup> *MLB*, Paper II, p.455.

<sup>19</sup> Emphasis added to indicate a possible wordplay.

<sup>20</sup> *MLB*, Paper II, pp.455f.

though neither Malte nor we can say. And this undecidability sponsors his acoustic tantalisation, for it forces him to attend again to the unseen, the obscene, that which is not scenic. Malte's brain brings noise into metonymic relation with events taking place off-stage.

The entry closes on an almost pastoral note: »Ein Hund bellt. Was für eine Erleichterung: ein Hund. Gegen Morgen kräht sogar ein Hahn, und das ist Wohltun ohne Grenzen. Dann schlafe ich plötzlich ein.«<sup>21</sup> The reassuring if incongruous presence of *die Kreatur* in the cityscape relieves Malte of his tension. Yet this is deeply alienated pastoral, the »son villageois«<sup>22</sup> of the *Hahn* easing Malte *into* sleep rather than waking him up out of it.

It proves instructive to compare the motif here of *Nachtgeräusche* heard through an open window with a slightly later motif (Paper XIII) of *Tagesgeräusche* heard from an open window:

Unten ist folgende Zusammenstellung: ein kleiner Handwagen, von einer Frau geschoben; vorn darauf ein Leierkasten, der Länge nach. Dahinter quer ein Kinderkorb, in dem ein ganz Kleines auf festen Beinen steht, vergnügt in seiner Haube, und sich nicht mag setzen lassen. Von Zeit zu Zeit dreht die Frau am Orgelkasten. Das ganz Kleine stellt sich dann sofort stampfend in seinem Korbe wieder auf, und ein kleines Mädchen in einem grünen Sonntagskleid tanzt und schlägt Tamburin zu den Fenstern hinauf.<sup>23</sup>

The text is framed by the binary of *Unten* and *hinauf*, drawing attention to the relative positions of observer and observed. Malte, one can infer, is in his room five stories up, looking out the window at the figures below: *Unten* indicates his *downward* look, which in turn becomes the scope of the

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<sup>21</sup> *MLB*, Paper II, p.456.

<sup>22</sup> Antonowicz, "Cet infernal couvercel", p.103.

<sup>23</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIII, p.466.

tambourine girl's *upward* look (*zu den Fenstern hinauf*) at the close of the passage. The change from the psychoacoustic drama of Paper II is that there the open window admitted phenomena which were heard but not seen, whilst here it admits phenomena which are both heard and seen. *And the drop in uncanny atmosphere from Paper II to Paper XIII is directly proportional to the increase in perceptual data by a whole sense faculty.* Malte is, as Antonowicz notes, a subject for whom the faculty of hearing has become »un sens qui est [...] presque trop développé«. <sup>24</sup> A later episode, involving the medical student next door (Papers L to LI), will have Malte suffer another psychoacoustic tantalisation, only this time one of far greater intensity for the auditor.

Paper III enacts a shift from noise (thesis) to ambient silence (antithesis):

Ich glaube, bei großen Bränden tritt manchmal so ein Augenblick äußerster Spannung ein, die Wasserstrahlen fallen ab, die Feuerwehrleute klettern nicht mehr, niemand rührt sich. Lautlos schiebt sich ein schwarzes Gesimse vor oben, und eine hohe Mauer, hinter welcher das Feuer auffährt, neigt sich, lautlos. Alles steht und wartet mit hochgeschobenen Schultern, die Gesichter über die Augen zusammengezogen, auf den schrecklichen Schlag. So ist hier die Stille.<sup>25</sup>

Where noises could in principle be approximately sourced and localised, noiselessness cannot.<sup>26</sup> The portentous extended simile of a conflagration offers Malte an indirect means of evoking an absence. Let us formulate

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<sup>24</sup> Antonowicz, "Cet infernal couvercle", p.102. Cf Malte's lifelong distrust of music (MLB, Paper XXXVII, p.544)

<sup>25</sup> MLB, Paper III, p.456.

<sup>26</sup> Although the footsteps on the *Treppenhaus* which come to a standstill in Paper II offer an exception - and, as we shall see in the *Medizinstudent* episode, a telling exception - to this rule.

carefully his procedure here. He converts an absence of sound, indeed the very concept of soundlessness in all its abstraction, into an expectancy of sound. This he does by simulaic recourse to an image evoking an imminence of event - the burning building about to collapse.

Mobilised here is the dialectic of sound and silence. The former (as Novalis liked to point out with respect to rhythm)<sup>27</sup> is not just imminent but also immanent with respect to the latter - and vice versa: the sounds having greatest impact on the listener are often those emerging from a womb of silence. Sound happens in the interstices of silence; silence, in this *Aufzeichnung*, is defined by sonic imminence. In conversation with Betz, Rilke indicates the importance of absence in the opening fragments:

Er [Malte] lernt sehen, er lernt auch hören: das, was da ist, und vor allem das, was nicht da ist: die Abwesenheit von Geräuschen, Bildern, Menschen ... Manchmal ist es gerade diese Abwesenheit, die ihm den Schlüssel der Dinge gibt.<sup>28</sup>

This is tremendously important, as it scotches once again the notion that Malte's *Sehenlernen* involves a scrupulously phenomenological attention to visual stimuli. The action of an absence-presence dialectic behind acts of indirect perception has made itself keenly felt just three Papers into the book. In Paper I the invisible triggered Malte's defining responses to the visible; in Paper II the invisible strengthened its clutch on Malte's imagination, provoking him to reconstitute objects by total reliance on sound;<sup>29</sup> and now,

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<sup>27</sup> See Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester & New York: 1990), pp.79f.

<sup>28</sup> In Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, p.107.

<sup>29</sup> Or more accurately, interplay of sound and visual memory (he knows what the street and the *Treppenhaus* look like). This dynamic will be revisited, with a crucial cognitive complication, in the *Zeitungsverkäufer* episode of Paper LIX.

in this third Paper, Malte allegorises an absence of sound by recourse to *visual-pictorial imagination* - the >mind's eye<.

But even here, the modality of Malte's exposition is revealing. *Ich glaube, bei großen Bränden tritt manchmal so ein Augenblick äußerster Spannung ein.* The image of such a conflagration does not seem ever to have been witnessed personally by Malte (*ich glaube*), it is rather *an image he has apparently only ever heard (of)*. Not for the first time, nor by any means for the last, we see Malte engage in synaesthetic reconstruction. The sonic is translated into the optical. In the present case, Malte is evoking what he does *not* hear by fetching up an allegory based on what he has *not* seen.<sup>30</sup> This homology of silence and invisibility, the respective modes of absence for sound and image which Rilke identifies in the conversation with Betz, alerts us quite systematically to the dominant theme in Malte's *Sehenlernen*: absence as a heightened form of presence.

In the first Paper, Death constituted the abstract conceptual matrix of the entire report: *es stürbe sich hier*. In this third Paper, Malte offers an allegory (in the Goethean sense) of another concept, *Stille*. We are dealing here not with the deep congeniality of image and idea found in the mysterious, organic *Numinosum* of the symbol, rather with a consciousness turned in on itself casting around for a self-explanatory, intelligible equation of thought and being. Malte's work with *Stille* is *abstractly illustrative* of concepts, rather than symbolically, ecstatically expressive of revealed *correspondances*.

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<sup>30</sup> His use of the conflagration image may be related to a childhood memory of hearing about the burning down of the Schulin manor (*MLB*, Paper XLII, p.552).

This growing impression of a subject turned in on itself for all its purportedly outward orientation, this sense of a creeping splenetic *ennui* caused by a lack of authentic *Weltbezug*, chimes with Paper IV's conversion of outward attention into introvert energy. In a strikingly non-communicative, vague and abstract reflection, Malte laconically reports that his cognitive responses are changing:

Ich lerne sehen. Ich weiß nicht, woran es liegt, es geht alles tiefer in mich ein und bleibt nicht an der Stelle stehen, wo es sonst immer zu Ende war. Ich habe ein Inneres, von dem ich nicht wußte. Alles geht jetzt dorthin. Ich weiß nicht, was dort geschieht.<sup>31</sup>

A vocabulary of epistemological uncertainty and negative constation (*Ich weiß nicht [...] bleibt nicht [...] von dem ich nicht wußte [...] Ich weiß nicht [...]*) enhances semantic indeterminacy by combining with an exclusively abstract series of nouns (*Stelle / Ende / Inneres*). If the third *Aufzeichnung* conveyed an abstract quality (*Stille*) via concrete simile (*Brand*), then here the subjective introversion accompanying *Sehenlernen* is given no such imagistic instance. Precisely at the point of attempting to convey his *Sehenlernen*, his evolving mode of perception, Malte produces a text of disconcerting a-pictoriality that leaves the reader blind.<sup>32</sup>

This self-reflexive meditation is followed by a declaration of solipsism:<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *MLB*, Paper IV, p.456.

<sup>32</sup> The vertical geometry mapped by the word *tiefer* can scarcely be said to broadcast a concrete image.

<sup>33</sup> Already briefly discussed in the Introduction above.



Ich habe heute einen Brief geschrieben, dabei ist mir aufgefallen, daß ich erst drei Wochen hier bin. Drei Wochen anderswo, auf dem Lande zum Beispiel, das konnte sein wie ein Tag, hier sind es Jahre. Ich will auch keinen Brief mehr schreiben. Wozu soll ich jemandem sagen, daß ich mich verändere? Wenn ich mich verändere, bleibe ich ja doch nicht der, der ich war, und bin ich etwas anderes als bisher, so ist klar, daß ich keine Bekannten habe. Und an fremde Leute, an Leute, die mich nicht kennen, kann ich unmöglich schreiben.<sup>34</sup>

The syllogistic progression is stark, a clinically psychodynamic version of Stephen Dedalus's flippantly sophisticated: »I am other I now«<sup>35</sup> in Joyce's *Ulysses*. I am changing, reasons Malte.<sup>36</sup> My *Bekannte* base their image of me on *having* known me. Ergo: their image of me is irremediably caught in the past tense. Ergo: the person who is *bekannt* to them is no longer co-incident with the actual >me<, who is in continual flux. Ergo: letters, with their aggravating time delay, are riddled by definition with anachrony, misunderstanding, occlusion, cross-purpose. Ergo: it is pointless to continue writing letters. Q.E.D.

The first and second parts of this fourth *Aufzeichnung* are covertly congruent. The reader's position in relation to the first passage is analogous to the position of the *fremde Leute* evoked in the second. In the first, Malte states *that* he is changing, without in any real way illuminating the change itself; in the second he ponders the absurdity of offering someone a written statement to the effect *that* one is changing. In both cases, to thematise one's inner dynamics on paper is repudiated as an exercise in aporia. Indeed it is as

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<sup>34</sup> *MLB*, Paper IV, p.456.

<sup>35</sup> Dedalus' justification for failing to repay a one pound debt to AE (George Russell) in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode (James Joyce, *Ulysses*, with introduction by Declan Kiberd, London: 1992, p.242).

<sup>36</sup> »In witziger Anlehnung an Heraklits Flußmetapher [...]« - Giloy (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.80).

though Malte's awkward attempt in the first paragraph to set his self-examination down on paper has *generated* the dismal meditation of the second paragraph.

The theme of potent invisibility has been carried over, then, into this fourth Paper. In the first paragraph, Malte writes of a *mysterious, invisible interior realm*, a *Dunkelzone* - the *terra incognita* of the Unconscious (*Ich weiß nicht, was dort geschieht*);<sup>37</sup> while in the second he discusses misrecognition under the theme of *intersubjective opacity*.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Malte's words show the cogito becoming aware of its subservience to forces >within< itself yet >outside< its field of awareness. For du Prel, this fact »das Selbstbewußtsein erschöpft nicht seinen Gegenstand« (*Rätsel des Menschen*, p.138) necessitates a transcendental psychology that would go from »Bewußtseinsanalyse«, which ignores the self-alienation of the subject, to »Seelenlehre« (ibid., p.54). It is important to clarify that talk of *das Unbewußte* for du Prel and other monists is rarely a matter of hidden memories, subterranean drives, or even phylogenetic factors. Rather, a *transcendental* consciousness is being indicated that cannot be accounted for in terms of immanent factors. This version of the Unconscious resides in a supramundane dimension of spirit, which by definition does not have its ground in this world. It is termed un-conscious not because it itself lacks intelligent order but because it is not directly intelligible to *our* ordinary consciousness. As Fick points out (following Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, pp.207ff): »Das >Unbewußte< wurde vor Freud entdeckt; es ist eine der wichtigsten Konzeptionen spätrömischer Philosophie und Medizin (Carl Gustav Carus). Doch dies >Unbewußte< ist definiert als die Antithese des Bewußten; insofern es außerbewußt ist, ist es das Absolute; beschreibbar ist es nur in Negationen. Bei Freud hingegen ist das Unbewußte ein verdrängtes Bewußtsein [...]« (*Sinnenwelt und Weltseele*, pp.18f; cf pp.74ff). Hartmann, in his *Philosophie des Unbewußten* of 1869, turns the Absolute into »une instance intrapsychique« (Christine Maillard, "Le >mystique< et la psyché", p.79), existing at a transpersonal rather than merely intra-subjective level. Malte's remark in Paper IV on the *Inneres* does not specify whether this is a Freudian or transcendental Unconscious. As we shall see, each shall play a rôle in the further *Aufzeichnungen*.

<sup>38</sup> *Und an fremde Leute, an Leute, die mich nicht kennen, kann ich unmöglich schreiben*. These words are hardly free of meta-textual point, with Malte's characterisation of intersubjective relationship as sheer tragi-comic misrecognition suddenly turning back on the reader, who is reminded of the private, solipsistic textual space of these diaristic notebooks. *What, reader, is the nature of your cognitive sovereignty? How are you learning to see? Do you think you can see me? How have my words been stimulating your phantasia? How do you picture me sitting writing these words? Individuum est ineffabile*, went the scholastic maxim. A broader question has been raised in this fourth *Aufzeichnungen*, and one perhaps best covered under the topic of *divination or telepathy*. Most generally, how can one human truly relate to another? How can one human subject discern the >ghost in the machine< of another human face? How can a reader see the >ghost in the machine< of the text, itself something out there in a graphic, material sense, yet requiring the decoding activity of a semiosis before it is >seen< in something >more< than an immediate sense? In what way might telepathy, this strange *passio in distans*, relate to the multiform project of *Sehenlernen* in Malte's Papers? What relevance might it hold for Malte's

But if *individuum ineffabile est*, then how is the self to account for itself *to itself*? The *reductio ad absurdum* to which epistolary friendship is subjected refuses to exhaust its effects in a breakdown of intersubjective communication. The signifier *Ich* in these lines itself becomes shot through with alterity. *Wenn ich mich verändere, bleibe ich ja doch nicht der, der ich war, und bin ich etwas anderes als bisher...* Are we to take *bisher* at its word? If so, then the identity relation between the several inscriptions of the *Ich* (including its accusative *mich*) undergoes radical interrogation. Quite simply, the first person pronoun goes into subtle semantic slide. The syllogism proposes that identity does not sustain itself in purity over *time*, the key factor here. As the paragraph proceeds, one *Ich* is rendered *fremd* over against not merely the *fremde Leute* but also the previous and the succeeding versions of *Ich*. What, one might query, is the *precise* relation between the Malte-*Ich* writing at point *t* and the Malte-*Ich* written at *t*? And what is the relation between both of the above and the Malte-*Ich* who, writing several words later, at *t+1*, finds himself developing that which was written at *t* by *>himself<-at-t*? The consequence of such stretching of the *Ich* along the syntagmatic axis is that the very opposition *Ich - fremde Leute* which governs the passage is relentlessly harassed. This *Selbstverfremdung* in Malte's almost algebraic second paragraph in turn relates intimately to the discourse of the Unconscious entered in the first paragraph. Rugg perceptively notes that the switch from the third-person Malte of the earliest drafts of the book to the final first-person form »places

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apprenticeship in the art of *Sehen*, and for the reader's apprenticeship in the related art of *Lesen*?

the mystery within the self. >Das unbekannte Leben< of the draft becomes >das unbewußte Leben< of the final version«. <sup>39</sup> Yet Rilke has not so much deleted the issue of >unbekanntes Leben< as *expanded the epistemological problem to two dimensions rather than one* - intersubjective and intrasubjective opacity.

In Paper V, Malte elaborates his *Sehenlernen* programme by giving an example of its operation: »Daß es mir zum Beispiel niemals zum Bewußtsein gekommen ist, wieviel Gesichter es giebt. Es giebt eine Menge Menschen, aber noch viel mehr Gesichter, denn jeder hat mehrere.«<sup>40</sup> How does Malte's physiognomic observation proceed here? Note that he introduces it with a note of cognitive anxiety: »Habe ich es schon gesagt? Ich lerne sehen. Ja, ich fange an. Es geht noch schlecht.«<sup>41</sup> Curiously enough, his insight into the high number of faces, this coming-into-consciousness of a phenomenon, cannot be a product simply of his Paris-bound observations. For extensive time is inscribed into this *Sehen*. Each given face undergoes comparison not

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<sup>39</sup> Rugg, "A Self at Large", p.46.

<sup>40</sup> *MLB*, Paper V, p.457. Compare the progression in the following remarks by Heine from a pathognomic to a genuinely physiognomic change in the individual's face: »In dieser Beziehung hat die Seele vollständig ihre leibliche Abzeichnung oder Symbol im äusseren Antlitz. Dasselbe Gesicht sieht bald freundlicher, bald finsterer aus, und doch hat jede Physiognomie zugleich einen ständigen Charakter, ist im ganzen schön, ernst, edel, oder das Gegentheil. Man könnte das Ständige in der Seelenstimmung ihre Physiognomie nennen; vielleicht liesse sich auffinden, dass in dem Maasse, als die Physiognomie des Gesichts oft und stark sich verändert, bei demselben Individuum auch die Physiognomie der Seele sehr veränderlich ist« (quoted in Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel*, p.111).

<sup>41</sup> *MLB*, Paper V, p.457.

synchronously with other people's faces, but diachronically with the other, prior, faces of the one person. Present perception reacts to the trace of memory. The theme of subjective diachrony in Paper IV is thus being elaborated on a physical rather than psychodynamic axis. Yet, if we are correct in keying the *Aufzeichnungen* to a sequential chronology, then Malte's time in Paris can amount to little more than three weeks (the *drei Wochen* mentioned in the previous Paper). This is nothing like the time required to gather the raw data for such an observation.<sup>42</sup> The time scale of the potted, mildly tragi-comical<sup>43</sup> biographical sketches which Malte draws in support of his thesis is not weeks but years: »Da sind Leute, die tragen ein Gesicht jahrelang [...] Andere Leute setzen unheimlich schnell ihre Gesichter auf, eins nach dem andern, und tragen sie ab. Es scheint ihnen zuerst, sie hätten für immer, aber sie sind kaum vierzig; da ist schon das letzte«. <sup>44</sup> The anomaly can

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<sup>42</sup> Nor, in my view, is one justified in reading Malte's remarks as a critique of the »>Maskenhaftigkeit< des großstädtischen >man<« (Park, *Rilkes Selbstwerdung*, p.65). Malte does not specify this phenomenon as distinctively urban, nor does he relate it to the huge number of faces he is seeing there. Rather, he is recognising that he has never before realised how many faces each human being actually has, has had or will have. Hence perhaps the oddity of *wieviel* instead of *wieviele Gesichter*?

<sup>43</sup> When Malte writes »Aber es kommt auch vor, daß ihre Hunde damit ausgehen. -Weshalb auch nicht? Gesicht ist Gesicht« (ibid.), he is citing an old physiognomic tradition. Graeme Tytler writes of the Italian Giambattista della Porta's *De humana physiognomoniam* of 1586, in which Porta »continues the Aristotelian tradition of comparing human and animal physiognomies, the animals being somewhat endowed with those curiously human expressions to be found in similar engravings in [Lavater's] *Fragmente*« (*Physiognomy in the European Novel*, p.41; cf illustration of dog-master resemblance, p.42, fig.2). Tytler reproduces a drawing from Lavater demonstrating dog-and-master resemblance. (Cf Malte's words in Paper XXXII [p.528]: »Ich hatte nie Masken gesehen vorher, aber ich sah sofort ein, daß es Masken geben müsse. Ich mußte lachen, als mir einfiel, daß wir einen Hund hatten, der sich ausnahm, als trüge er eine. Ich stellte mir seine herzlichen Augen vor, die immer wie von hinten hinsahen in das behaarte Gesicht.«) On Rilke's interest in the existential significance of the mask, see Rüdiger Görner, "Im Innern des Nirgendwo. Über Rilkes erlittene Utopie", in: Görner (ed.), *R. M. R. Wege der Forschung*, pp.384-403, here: pp.386ff.

<sup>44</sup> *MLB*, Paper V, p.457.

be carried only by the supporting fiction that Malte can somehow see present face haunted by past faces.

Malte attempts, however, to close the fragment by offering a punctual, specific, present-tensed Parisian case of what he means:

Die Frau erschrak und hob sich aus sich ab, zu schnell, zu heftig, so daß das Gesicht in den zwei Händen blieb. Ich konnte es darin liegen sehen, seine hohle Form. Es kostete mich unbeschreibliche Anstrengung, bei diesen Händen zu bleiben und nicht zu schauen, was sich aus ihnen abgerissen hatte. Mir graute, ein Gesicht von innen zu sehen, aber ich fürchtete mich doch noch viel mehr vor dem bloßen wunden Kopf ohne Gesicht.<sup>45</sup>

Having closed his third paragraph with an eery evocation of the *Nichtgesicht* left in the space where a series of faces had successively appeared, Malte cites the woman at the corner. But the effect of his example is uncanny. To state, as for instance Fick does, that »Malte sieht nicht das Gesicht, sondern das >Nichtgesicht<«<sup>46</sup> is, strictly speaking, not accurate. The obscene *Nichtgesicht* is neither observed nor described: *nicht zu schauen, was sich aus ihnen abgerissen hatte*. The focus of Malte's *Schauen* is precisely that which he does *not* see. The *Nichtgesicht* seems to perform a curious double semantic function. If *Gesicht* signifies both Face - that which presents itself to sight as the supreme symbol of a person - and the faculty of sight itself, then the *Nichtgesicht* is precisely the negation of both together: *the non-Face which does not present itself to Sight*.

And here a cold, uncongenial, uncooperative, all too probabilistic, if truth be told rather *banal* question might just insinuate itself: *If he had looked from the hands to the facial area, what if anything would Malte have seen?* »Der

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele*, p.312.

prosaische Dämon«, of whom a character in Hoffmann speaks, has begun to whisper in our ears.<sup>47</sup>

Paper V, then, grants another glimpse at the complexity of Malte's style of >seeing<. That which he claims to observe - *wieviel Gesichter es giebt* - he cannot concretise with a specific example from his daily perambulations. Moreover, that which exerts the most horrified fascination over his imagination - *de[r] bloße[] wunde[] Kopf ohne Gesicht* - he leaves in the realm of the unseen, the obscene. *Ich lerne (nicht) sehen*: is the grammar of Malte's strange phenomenology slowly disclosing itself?

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<sup>47</sup> Theodor in *Das öde Haus*. In: E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Sämtliche Werke III*, edited by Hartmut Steinecke & Gerhard Allroggen (Frankfurt/M: 1985), p.169. Tellingly, the lack of presentable *Nichtgesicht* in this Paris Paper will be redeemed in Paper LV in the passage where the frozen body of Herzog Karl der Kühne is discovered: »Aber das Gesicht war eingefroren, und da man es aus dem Eis herauszerterte, schälte sich die eine Wange dünn und spröde ab, und es zeigte sich, daß die andere von Hunden oder Wölfen herausgerissen war; und das Ganze war von einer großen Wunde gespalten, die am Ohr begann, so daß von einem Gesicht keine Rede sein konnte« (MLB, pp.591f, emphasis added: in the converse scenario of Paper V, there could be no talk of a *Nichtgesicht*.) But the material for this narrative redemption is, within the text's fictive logic, precedent, as though the child's exposure to the Karl der Kühne narrative had pre-programmed the man walking around Paris.

## II.i

### »Voilà votre mort, monsieur«

The sixth fragment inaugurates a cluster of meditations upon death extending to the tenth *Aufzeichnung*. Here the thanatotic focus is on the Hôtel-Dieu which Malte associates not with the healing of the sick but with the dying of those conveyed by ambulance to the hospital:

Es ist zu bemerken, daß diese verteufelten kleinen Wagen<sup>48</sup> ungemein anregende Milchglasfenster haben, hinter denen man sich die herrlichsten Agonien vorstellen kann; dafür genügt die Phantasie einer Concierge. Hat man noch mehr Einbildungskraft und schlägt sie nach anderen Richtungen hin, so sind die Vermutungen geradezu unbegrenzt. Aber ich habe auch offene Droschken ankommen sehen, Zeitdroschken mit aufgeklapptem Verdeck, die nach der üblichen Taxe fahren: Zwei Francs für die Sterbestunde.<sup>49</sup>

The potency of the unseen makes itself felt here as much as in previous Papers. Indeed, if one plays off the vocabulary of surmise (*ungemein anregende Milchglasfenster... sich die herrlichsten Agonien vorstellen ... Phantasie ... Einbildungskraft ... Vermutungen*) against the bare eye-witness report (*Aber ich habe auch offene Droschken ankommen sehen...*), then the suspicion is hard to

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<sup>48</sup> Compare with Malte's complaint several lines earlier about Paris' unholy traffic - »Man kann kaum die Fassade der Kathedrale von Paris betrachten ohne Gefahr, von einem der vielen Wagen, die so schnell wie möglich über den freien Plan dort hinein müssen, überfahren zu werden« (MLB, Paper VI, p.458) - the *perte d'auréole* recounted in Baudelaire's prose-poem of the same name: »>Tout à l'heure, comme je traversais le boulevard, en grande hâte, et que je sautillais dans la boue, à travers ce chaos mouvant où la mort arrive au galop de tous les côtés à la fois, mon auréole, dans un mouvement brusque, a glissé de ma tête dans la fange du macadam« ("Perte d'auréole", *Oeuvres complètes I*, p.352, emphasis added). Interesting, in the light of an earlier discussion, that Malte's most graphic evocation of Parisian freneticism goes no further in this direction than a text dating from the 1860s. We are sent more back to Baudelaire than forward to Döblin.

<sup>49</sup> MLB, Paper VI, p.458.



resist that an anti-climax has been engineered by Rilke. In the case of the stricken person in the open carriage, the focal point is not hidden, leaving the accompanying description strikingly - undescriptive. So little has Malte to depict directly, he reports on a tangential detail of transport fare. It is as though Malte's imagination is >pornographically< excitable. The essential X is kept hidden and, as Derrida says of the Law in Kafka's parable, »the inaccessible incites from its place of hiding«. <sup>50</sup> The pornography of dying is in operation only where the dying figure is hidden by the closed *Droschke*; where the figure is seen in the *offene Droschken*, the effect is wholly deflationary, anti-climactic.

The source text for this scene is Rilke's letter to Lou of July 18<sup>th</sup> 1903. There, however, a direct description of stricken figures in the open *Droschke* is actually given:

Als ich zum ersten Mal am *Hôtel-Dieu* vorüberkam fuhr gerade eine offene Droschke ein, in der ein Mensch hing, schwankend bei jeder Bewegung, wie eine zerbrochene Marionette schief, mit einem schweren Geschwür auf dem langen, grauen, hängenden Halse.<sup>51</sup>

Is it insignificant that Rilke elects not to transfer this direct description onto Malte's page? If he had done so, would not Malte have been deprived of the pleasure of his shadowy *Vermutungen*? The very atmosphere of Malte's description emanates from the hiddenness of the centre of agony. For all the dread that Rilke's description expresses, it cannot compete with Malte's

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<sup>50</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Before the Law", translated from the French by Avital Ronell & Derek Attridge, in: J. D., *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge (New York & London: 1992), pp.181-220, here: p.191.

<sup>51</sup> Rilke - *Andreas-Salomé Briefwechsel*, p.55.

*herrlichste Agonien*. (This is the >fridge door dilemma<: once the door is opened, the light goes on, with the consequence that I cannot take a look into the dark interior without first banishing the very darkness I wish to see.)

Our recent question returns in new form: *When will Malte actually see something commensurate to his capacity for horror?* Occlusion - the occult in its occluded condition - is becoming the very element of these early *Sehenlernen* Papers. And this mutual exclusivity of *Faszinosum* and direct sighting threatens Malte's accounts with anti-climax, bathos, irony, as though the outer world were refusing to calibrate itself according to the temperature of Malte's intense inward foreboding. It is as though, by the law of *Nichtgesicht*, surmise (*Vorstellung ... Vermutung*) and *Sehen* are being placed in inverse proportion. Now this is more than Ryan's *hypothetisches Erzählen* alone: Malte's hypothetical imagination is not supplementing the facticity he perceives, it is relating to that facticity antagonistically through one *Kontrafaktur* after another, each threatened by the potentially demystifying empirical world.

Death continues to preoccupy Malte in Paper VII, as he begins to make good on the *es stürbe sich* thematics promised at the head of Paper I:

Dieses ausgezeichnete Hôtel [l'Hôtel-Dieu, DD] ist sehr alt, schon zu König Chlodwigs Zeiten starb man darin in einigen Betten. Jetzt wird in 559 Betten gestorben. Natürlich fabrikmäßig. Bei so enormer Produktion ist der einzelne Tod nicht so gut ausgeführt, aber darauf kommt es auch nicht an. Die Masse macht es. Wer giebt heute noch etwas für einen gut ausgearbeiteten Tod? Niemand.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *MLB*, Paper VII, pp.458f.

The voice of Baedeker 1894 (an extraneous epistemological crutch akin to the map in Paper I) segues into the pointedly punning oxymoron of *Natürlich fabrikmäßig*, which in turn gives the cue for Malte's cultural critique of the inauthentic, massified death of the present time. In terms so obviously predictive of Heidegger's diagnosis in *Sein und Zeit* of the narcotic operations of *das Man*,<sup>53</sup> the alleged modern failure to live out the extravagant scenario of one's death is related to a general loss of existential authenticity:

[...] der Wunsch, einen eigenen Tod zu haben, wird immer seltener. Eine Weile noch, und er wird ebenso selten sein wie ein eigenes Leben. Gott, das ist alles da. Man kommt, man findet ein Leben, fertig, man hat es nur anzuziehen. Man will gehen oder man ist dazu gezwungen: nun, keine Anstrengung: Voilà votre mort, monsieur. Man stirbt, wie es gerade kommt; man stirbt den Tod, der zu der Krankheit gehört, die man hat [...]<sup>54</sup>

The almost apophthegmic seesaw of *Man kommt / man will gehen*, an echo of the book's opening rhythm (*um zu leben / es stürbe sich hier*), introduces a metaphor of death as clothing (*anzuziehen*), a metaphor which underscores the alienation of the dying from their death, the pathetic exteriority of their death to themselves. The increasingly sophisticated medicalisation of death is charged with this alienation effect: »(denn seit man alle Krankheiten *kennt*, *weiß* man auch, daß die verschiedenen letalen Abschlüsse zu den Krankheiten gehören und nicht zu den Menschen; und der Kranke hat sozusagen nichts zu tun)«. <sup>55</sup> The *man* of *man stirbt den Tod* (the *Kranke*) is not the *man* of these parenthetical lines (the medical cognoscenti), yet they share a calamitous loss

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<sup>53</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: 1960), pp.126ff.

<sup>54</sup> *MLB*, Paper VII, p.459.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, emphases added.

of existential individualism. The dying cannot in any meaningful sense be agents in the protracted unfolding of their deaths, because the cognitive arrogance of the doctors (*kennt, weiß*) has flattened out their deaths into dependably self-scheduling clinical events. The patient is thus reduced to just that - a *passio*, dispossessed of all claim to subjective, individual, singular response. Each medic in the Hôtel Dieu, like the doctor at the dying man's bedside in Ortega y Gasset's *The Dehumanization of Art*, observes the dying only »with the professional portion of his self«. <sup>56</sup> As we know, the Salpêtrière medics will soon subject Malte himself to this reductive and deterministic clinical gaze.

The second, closing paragraph treats of three types of modern death:

In den Sanatorien, wo ja so gern und mit so viel Dankbarkeit gegen Ärzte und Schwestern gestorben wird, stirbt man einen von den an der Anstalt angestellten Toden; *das wird gerne gesehen*. Wenn man aber zu Hause stirbt, ist es natürlich, jenen höflichen Tod der guten Kreise zu wählen, mit dem gleichsam das Begräbnis erster Klasse schon anfängt und die ganze Folge seiner wunderschönen Gebräuche. *Da stehen dann die Armen vor so einem Haus und sehen sich satt*. Ihr Tod ist natürlich banal, ohne alle Umstände. Sie sind froh, wenn sie einen finden, der ungefähr paßt. Zu weit darf er sein: man wächst immer noch ein bißchen. Nur wenn er nicht zugeht über der Brust oder würgt, dann hat es seine Not. <sup>57</sup>

The dismally institutionalised death of the poor in the clinic; the ritualistically genteel home death of the well-heeled - in each case, a massive cultural failure to honour the singularity of the dying is enacted. <sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art / Notes on the Novel*, translated by Helen Weyl (New York: 1951), p.16.

<sup>57</sup> *MLB*, Paper VII, p.459, emphasis added.

<sup>58</sup> The description of the *wunderschönen Gebräuche* surrounding the *Begräbnis erster Klasse* can hardly be anything but sarcastic. The deaths of the prosperous are included in Malte's critique of the contemporary - a point confirmed by the next Paper's words: »[...] dann glaube ich, das muß früher anders gewesen sein« (*MLB*, Paper VIII, p.459). The rich may not die a good

But does this take us to the heart of Malte's complaint about the modern way of dying? I am interested in the status of the verb *sehen* in the above passage. In the words highlighted above, it is ironically enlisted to convey two examples of not seeing, of *Nichtgesicht*. The doctors and nurses in the clinics are self-satisfied spectators not of a dying human being who *faces* them, but of the *faceless* process of a death which they have witnessed so often that they now see it in systematic, typological, anonymously diognostical terms. The *Armen*, meanwhile, stand *in front of* the house of the dying and *sehen sich satt*. But the point is precisely that they cannot see the actual event, it is hidden pornographically behind the front wall of the house. What is observed with fascination is the ritualistic funeral and its ironically labelled *wunderschönen Gebräuche*, for which the deceased's last breath was the unseen cue. The people congregate to observe a death, yet the blocking of their view<sup>59</sup> means they must make do with death at one remove: the choreographed spectacle of a funeral.

Is this, then, the core of Malte's complaint - *that Death is no longer public, visible, on show*, having been hidden away behind the walls of either the

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death, but they at least provide the pretext for a good funeral. Interesting in this context is Catherine Pickstock's survey of twentieth-century research into the modern way of death, pointing to a deep necrophobia in the modern world: »It is a common thread in the work of the twentieth-century historians of death [...] that a shift in attitude has occurred [dated anywhere from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, D.D.], where a former cultural familiarity with death and its integration into life is replaced by a *retreat from death in a double gesture of denial and mystification* [...] In general, the main reasons offered by these writers for this retreat focus, to differing degrees of intensity, on, first, the drift towards immanentism, culminating in the triumph of reason in the Enlightenment, according to which, *death is the last remaining scandal which refuses to be mastered*; and, secondly, advances in medical science, which mean that, in the West, so-called >untimely< death or deadly epidemics occur less frequently, encouraging the *synecdochal dream that mastery over disease presages an eventual triumph over death itself*« (After Writing. *On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* [Oxford: 1998], pp.101f, emphases added).

<sup>59</sup> Cf the blocking of Malte's view of the collapsed figure in the street in Paper I.

medical >factories< (the *modus moriendi* of the poor) or the large houses (the *modus moriendi* of the well-off)? In the discussion of Paper I, Malte's closing words - *Die Hauptsache war, daß man lebte. Das war die Hauptsache* - were shown to express not a sarcastic antiphrasis but a splenetically perverse frustration, coming as they do in direct annulment of his opening declaration: *ich würde eher meinen, es stürbe sich hier*.<sup>60</sup> In that Paper's *flânerie*, Malte goes out and sees only the living (as well as a sign of the unborn). *Ich habe gesehen: Hospitäler*: the hospitals show themselves only from the outside, granting Malte no more than blind proximity to a scene of actual death. And any sign of life which Malte does see around a hospital is just that - a sign of *life*. The pregnant woman and the infant whose skin is healing present themselves as beneficiaries not victims of medical intervention. Malte here resembles the conspiracy theorist reluctantly registering data inconvenient to the paranoid narrative.<sup>61</sup> When Malte does finally penetrate a hospital, the Salpêtrière, he is aware of his fellow patients' *Agonien* only from behind a partition.<sup>62</sup> The walls of a hospital; the partitions inside a hospital; the walls of the houses of the rich; the crowd which surrounds the collapsed man and spares (or denies) Malte *den Rest*<sup>63</sup>... we witness here a consistent blocking of direct eye-witness perspective. Malte bemoans both the invisibility of the modern death, which

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<sup>60</sup> In this I disagree with Bradley's placing of Malte's *Das war die Hauptsache* into seamless continuity with the Paper's opening declaration (*Zu Rilkes Malte Laurids Brigge*, p.41).

<sup>61</sup> Which is not to say that the conspiracy theory is necessarily wrong, or that Malte's critique of the modern clinical death is to be dismissed. The point being made here relates purely to epistemological criteria.

<sup>62</sup> »Jetzt erinnerte ich mich jener halben Wand, und es war mir klar, daß das alles von jenseits der Türen kam und daß man dort an der Arbeit war« (*MLB*, Paper XIX, p.496).

<sup>63</sup> *MLB*, Paper I, p.455: »Die Leute versammelten sich um ihn, das ersparte mir den Rest.«

has been displaced from the purview of the *civis*, and his own lack of access to a domestic interior where death might from time to time be on show. In Paper IX, significantly, Malte will make sure to >redeem< the pregnancy of Paper I for his *es-stürbe-sich* mood: »Und was gab das den Frauen für eine wehmütige Schönheit, wenn sie schwanger waren und standen, und in ihrem großen Leib, auf welchem die schmalen Hände unwillkürlich liegen blieben, waren *zwei* Früchte: ein Kind und ein Tod«. Nor will he fail to offer a compensatory evocation of the grandiose deaths of women spending their terminal hours on enormous beds »wie auf einer Schaubühne«.)<sup>64</sup> Though he lives in mortal fear of his own mortality (»Ich fürchte mich«),<sup>65</sup> he is at the same time drawn to the spectacle of death, with its *herrlichsten Agonien*,<sup>66</sup> as an event of incommensurable reality. A cognitive vampire, he casts around for a good death into which he can sink his eyes. But the streets fail to offer him the spectacle of a thanatotic *Rest*, for he is neither rich<sup>67</sup> nor a member of the medical profession. It would seem that only his *own* death would allow him an entrance ticket to the show - although even then he would require a sizeable mirror.

It therefore makes a certain sense that his next turn, in Paper VIII, will be inwardly directed, as he scans his memory for the scene of a visible, literally *spectacular* death. The *Rest* screened from him in Paper I will in Papers

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<sup>64</sup> *MLB*, Paper IX, p.464.

<sup>65</sup> *MLB*, Paper VI, p.458.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Cf Paper XVIII: »Man weiß, daß ich arm bin« (*MLB*, p.485). There, the interior of a building is rendered nude by the demolition of the walls, affording Malte a privileged glimpse of the *intérieur*.

VIII and IX be awkwardly redeemed, through recollection, mythopoesis and tableau, in the aesthetic.

In reading Paper V, I suggested that Malte proposes a theory (there: the theory of the mutable human face) only to offer an illustration that singularly falls short of its function (there: the exemplum of the woman with the [*nichtgesehene*] *Nichtgesicht*). Something analogous seems to take place in Paper VIII. Malte, seeking a counter-example to the inauthentic, alienated and hidden mode of modern dying identified in Papers VI and VII, casts back to the death of his paternal grandfather, Kammerherr Christoph Detlev Brigge, at the family manor in Ulsgaard:

Wenn ich nach Hause denke, wo nun niemand mehr ist, dann glaube ich, das muß früher anders gewesen sein. Früher wußte man (oder vielleicht man ahnte es), daß man den Tod *in* sich hatte wie die Frucht den Kern [...] Meinem Großvater noch, dem alten Kammerherrn Brigge, sah man es an, daß er einen Tod in sich trug. Und was war das für einer: zwei Monate lang und so laut, daß man ihn hörte bis aufs Vorwerk hinaus.<sup>68</sup>

That Malte's remarks are hedged with characteristic epistemological uncertainty (*glaube ich ... muß [...] gewesen sein ...vielleicht*) is explained by the evident fact that the scenes under description were not witnessed personally by Malte as a child. The all-important verb in *Sah man es an* is governed impersonally.<sup>69</sup> Interesting then how the entire account of the Kammerherr's last days enjoys a lavishness of description, a *Detailfreude*, ironically at odds

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<sup>68</sup> *MLB*, Paper VIII, pp.459f.

<sup>69</sup> Cf Huyssen: »[...] despite its ostensible gesture as statement of fact, this phrasing rather expresses desire (>must have been<) and hesitation (>it seems to me>)« (*"Paris / Childhood"*, p.120).



with this lack of eye-witness testimony.<sup>70</sup> Malte writes of the servants in the bedroom: »[sie] sahen manchmal heimlich nach dem großen, dunkelnden Haufen in der Mitte, und sie wünschten, daß das nichts mehr wäre als ein großer Anzug über einem verdorbenen Ding«,<sup>71</sup> and of the village congregation: »so beteten sie, es möge keinen Herrn mehr auf Ulsgaard geben: denn dieser war ein schrecklicher Herr«. <sup>72</sup> The privileged access to interior consciousness signalled in words like *heimlich*, *wünschten* and *beteten* raises obvious questions as to the source of such narratorial knowledge. Malte's status here as quasi-omniscient narrator is most tellingly established in the following anecdote:

es gab einen unter den jungen Leuten, der geträumt hatte, er wäre ins Schloß gegangen und hätte den gnädigen Herrn erschlagen mit seiner Mistforke, und so aufgebracht war man, so zu Ende, so überreizt, daß alle zuhörten, als er seinen Traum erzählte, und ihn, ganz ohne es zu wissen, daraufhin ansahen, ob er solcher Tat wohl gewachsen sei.<sup>73</sup>

The emphasised clause implies a degree of narratorial insight over and above even the immediate self-understanding of the figures within the narrative itself - a telepathic option more usually associated with the fictive mode.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Malte describes the Kammerherr's death as a horrifying experience for the »geistesabwesenden, verschlafenen Dinge« of the room which had remained undisturbed since Detlev's mother had died there twenty-three years previously (*MLB*, Paper VIII, p.461). His animistic account is particularly interesting from an occultist point of view: cf Gruber, *Die Seherin von Prevorst*, pp.212ff.

<sup>71</sup> *MLB*, Paper VIII, p.462.

<sup>72</sup> *MLB*, Paper, VIII, p.463.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

<sup>74</sup> Cf Nicholas Royle, in his riveting essay "The remains of psychoanalysis (i): telepathy": »[...] it is difficult to imagine a theory of fiction [...] without a theory of telepathy. The interdependence of the novelistic and telepathic is nowhere more clearly staged than in the fact that - at least in third-person narratives - characterisation has traditionally presupposed a telepathic narrator. Novels are telepathic structures« (*After Derrida*, Manchester & New York: 1995, p.79).

Disparate focalisations - servants, dogs, villagers in their homes and at church, village women in childbirth - seem to drive Malte's virtual remembrance of events, the only event strictly remembered by Malte being of course the event or events of having these scenes partly or fully narrated to him. The narrative he now constructs seems to issue from a reaction of his mythopoeic imagination to what he picked up as a child from the oral traditions of the family or the villagers.

No less curious about the account is the fact that these multiple perspectives group themselves around a *hidden* core event: the actual demise of the Kammerherr. This confronts the reader with a double *Leerstelle*:

(a) we are not given an Ivan Illyich-like phenomenology or psychology of dying from the perspective of the dying man himself, for, like his grandson, »er sah nicht, was geschah«. <sup>75</sup> The subject of the *experience* is by definition not present after the event to give account; indeed he cannot even be said to have been consciously alive to the experience itself even as it was unfolding. <sup>76</sup>

(b) What is described is not the death but the period of dying leading up to the moment of death itself. In the previous *Aufzeichnung*, the *Armen* of the village watched the funereal rituals *following* a noble death; here, the view is equally imbalanced, with all but the events *prior to* the death occluded from view. The obscene non-event remains obscene.

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<sup>75</sup> *MLB*, Paper VIII, p.461.

<sup>76</sup> Cf the psychological condition of the man in the *cr merie* (Paper XVIII, pp.489f.).

If Kammerherr Christoph Detlev Brigge and the period of his dying provide Malte with much-needed mythopoeic material for his *es-stürbe-sich / eigener Tod* topos, then Paper IX shows Malte extending his range of exempla: »Und wenn ich an die andern denke, die ich gesehen oder von denen ich gehört habe: es ist immer dasselbe. Sie alle haben einen eigenen Tod gehabt«.77 The cogency of *sehen*, with its suggestion of eye-witness authority, is immediately undercut by the examples given: military men, »die ihn [den Tod] in der Rüstung trugen, innen, wie einen Gefangenen«, so evidently a reference to heroically stylised figures in paintings or romances; the theatrical deaths of »diese Frauen«, lying in front of the entire family, retinue and dogs »wie auf einer Schaubühne«, suggests a visual tableau or twice-told scenario that likewise downgrades Malte's status as eye-witness; and the »Kinder« whose manner of dying somehow managed to express not only the lives they have lived but also their future lives held forever *in potentia*: »sie nahmen sich zusammen und starben das, was sie schon waren, und das, was sie geworden wären«.78 We find in this Paper an elision of individuality inherent in the very mode of description: *Diese Männer ... diese Frauen ... die Kinder*. Given that Malte's affirmatory turn to examples of the *eigener Tod* theme came on foot of his complaint at the impersonality and anonymity of modern death (»Die Masse macht es«, runs the charge in Paper VII), the use of the plural, with its heavily typological strain,79 suggests a surprising and ironic complicity with the demonised modern disposition. Again, the point is that Malte can only

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77 *MLB*, Paper IX, p.464, emphasis added.

78 *Ibid.*

79 Cf Malte's own *Sprachkritik* in his sixth *große Frage* (*MLB*, Paper XIV, p.469).

write in such impersonal and anonymous terms because of the dearth of individual, personally witnessed case histories at his disposal. In searching out worthy narratees to illustrate his thesis on the contrast between the authentic and the inauthentic death, Malte can only cite figures whose *representation* he has seen or of whom he has heard tell. His cognitive-experiential repertoire is vexingly limited.

If we consider Death's hiddenness in the context of Malte's general dialectic of *Inneres* and *Äußeres*, it becomes a little clearer what he means by *ein eigener Tod*. The modern death is *uneigen(tlich)* on two counts of occultation: a) it takes place behind closed doors; b) by forcing the dying into prescribed social and institutional rôles, it does not let the inner self come out of the shadows. A death is authentic if it is »gut *ausgearbeitet*« or »*ausführlich* [gestorben]«, for such a death offers a glimpse of the potential life that was never brought *out* into existence, the invisible life that was never *expressed* or *exteriorised*. The authentic death is thus an eleventh-hour telegraphy from a hidden self other than the mere manifest persona adapted to the world of facticity and society. Or to use more Jungian language: *The authentic death allows the Shadow to come out from its hiding place in the Unconscious and briefly flare up manifest in the world before the human being quits the world*. The Kammerherr's death, for example, is authentic not in the sense that the man, consciously >owning< his death, departs from the world with Socratic equanimity, but because it is an almost demonically fierce eruption of an un-lived life:

Das war nicht der Tod irgendeines Wassersüchtigen, das war der böse, fürstliche Tod, den der Kammerherr sein ganzes Leben lang in sich getragen und aus sich genährt hatte. *Alles Übermaß an Stolz, Willen und Herrenkraft, das er selbst in seinen ruhigen Tagen nicht hatte verbrauchen können*, war in seinen Tod eingegangen, in den Tod, der nun auf Ulsgaard saß und vergeudete.<sup>80</sup>

The Kammerherr's death does not consummate the life he has lived, as Walter Sokel seems to suggest.<sup>81</sup> On the contrary: it represents the revenge upon him of a life he failed to live. The truth of a life, of an inner life, exceeds anything the adjusted, inhibited, socialised subject *qua* persona can show to the world. The virtual trajectory of the imagined life, the unconsciously willed life, the *alter ego* existence, is not usually evidenced in all its passionate intensity until the crisis of death provokes an apparition of the spectre.<sup>82</sup> In a very real sense, Malte seems to be suggesting, the facts of a person's life are less >true< than the richly counter-factual, unconscious, subjunctive shadow-worlds within that person. And herein lies the value of the *eigene Tod*: it allows the eye to

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<sup>80</sup> *MLB*, Paper VIII, p.463, emphasis added. The inhibited ego of the Kammerherr is described in Paper XXXVI (pp.539f). In a journal entry from 1854 (undated), Kierkegaard praises the authentically explosive death: »[...] to make a crashing departure from this world is as heterogeneous as possible to a smooth placid life and a quiet death« (*Journals & Papers Vol.1*, translated from the Danish and edited by Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, Bloomington & London: 1967, p.480).

<sup>81</sup> Sokel: »The powerful individuality and authenticity of his whole existence seemed to be manifested in his long-drawn-out dying« (”The Devolution of the Self in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*”, in *Rilke, the alchemy of alienation*, edited by Frank Baron, Ernst Siegfried Dick, Warren R. Maurer. Kansas: 1980, pp.171-190, here: p.171).

<sup>82</sup> Cf Philippe Forget: »[...] qui peut dire si le spectre revient du passé ou de l'avenir, qui peut localiser la mort, surtout la mort propre dont parle Malte?« (”Du sens comme un à la coerrance ou: comment lire la >légende du fils perdu<”, in: Klein, ed., *R. M. Rilke et >Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge<*”, pp.165-186, here: p.183). Frau Margarete Brigge, the Kammerherr's wife, is herself described as having been haunted by an un-lived, virtual life - »ein anderes, glänzendes: ihr natürliches« (*MLB*, Paper XXXVI, p.539). That she is in fact one of Malte's unhappy lovers relativises somewhat his unsympathetic portrayal of her. Ironically, the only thing which she and her husband seem to have in common is the fact that their marriage makes them victims of the dull self-alienation attendant upon a neurotic repression of the shadow self.

catch a glimpse, in full nudity, of a normally hidden (>clothed<) inner reality.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> In Chapter Five, I will relate the Kammerherr's eruptive death to Kierkegaardian notions of despair, authenticity and possibility.

## II.iii

### »Erinnerung«

The dying of Kammerherr Brigge at the family manor of Ulsgaard formed the set piece of Malte's meditation on death. In Paper X, he describes the therapeutic value of committing the story to paper:

Ich habe etwas getan gegen die Furcht. Ich habe die ganze Nacht gesessen und geschrieben,<sup>84</sup> und jetzt bin ich so gut müde wie nach einem weiten Weg über die Felder von Ulsgaard. Es ist doch schwer zu denken, daß alles das nicht mehr ist, daß fremde Leute wohnen in dem alten langen Herrenhaus. Es kann sein, daß in dem weißen Zimmer oben im Giebel jetzt die Mägde schlafen, ihren schweren, feuchten Schlaf schlafen von Abend bis Morgen.<sup>85</sup>

Malte inserts himself gently into the fields of Ulsgaard, his absence from the manor in the earlier fragment having presented constitutive problems for his account there of the Kammerherr's last weeks. He compares the relief he feels upon writing his meditations to the therapeutic exhaustion of a long walk across the Ulsgaard fields. What motivates the parallel? Why *Ulsgaard's* fields? Why Ulsgaard's *fields*? Might not there be a suggestion that a certain young boy spent long hours outside the house in which the great crisis of his grandfather's death was unfolding? Certainly, the time frame supports the hypothesis, Paper XXXVI making it clear that Malte knew the Kammerherr personally.<sup>86</sup> This paper also establishes that Detlev met his demise shortly

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<sup>84</sup> Compare Obstfelder's priest: »I have thought. I have written. That has given me peace« (*A Priest's Diary*, p.17).

<sup>85</sup> *MLB*, Paper X, p.464.

<sup>86</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXXVI, pp.539ff.

after that of his wife, the domineering Margarete, which was in turn preceded by the death of Malte's mother. Malte hovers in the background of all three deaths, as though protectively kept away from the rooms hosting this taboo adult reality. (As we have seen in the insistency of the *es-stürbe-sich* thematics, what was taboo has since become totem for Malte.) Malte's relief here and now - the product of a *writing away from* the horrific X of death, the moment of death, the phenomenology of a death rattle observed - is set in parallel with his evoked relief there and then - the product of a *walking away from* the horrific X of his grandfather's death. Malte was there, but not *there*. Having been written out of that narrative as it was unfolding, he now writes the narrative himself, though keeping clear once again of the unfronted centre. Recall that much of his death narrative focuses on how the Kammerherr's death *sounded to those outside the manor*. Thus, it is anything but coincidental that Malte at this very point locates himself in our mind in the *Felder von Ullsgaard* of all places. Hence an alleviation of the paradox of Malte's attempting to allay his *Furcht* by meditating upon the fearful theme of Death: his meditation has evaded the dark, obscene event, tiring him as he writes / walks away from it.

This opening passage of the tenth *Aufzeichnung* registers Malte's shock at the utter irretrievability of the past (*schwer zu denken, daß alles das nicht mehr ist*). The Kammerherr Paper opened with the words: *Wenn ich nach Hause denke, wo nun niemand mehr ist*. This is a self-correcting formulation: the intentional thought (*denke*) is going not to a place but to a place-in-time, a unique chronotope now forever lost. The word *nun*, with its intrusion of



temporality into a spatial category (*Hause*), registers the violence of the shock. >Direct< observation of Ulsgaard-manor-as-it-is-now would not bring the observer face to face with the site marked out in Malte's *nach Hause*. Instead, it would evacuate that spatially-bound site of time, of history, of ghosts. A >direct< observer, looking at the manor *now*, would see what Malte's painfully minimalist epithet evokes: *[ein] alte[s] lange[s] Herrenhaus*<sup>87</sup> - an old *Zuhause* denuded of its old *Lebenswelt*. Malte can venture no further confident description of the manor in its present state, as all else would be mere surmise (*Es kann sein, daß...*). He is almost acknowledging a second *Tod* - the loss of Ulsgaard as a place-in-time. Ulsgaard, the site of Malte's memories, is as >dead< as the Kammerherr. Malte's nostalgia, like that of Proust's Marcel, is chronotopically double, relating as it does to *temps perdu* and to the impossible *nostos* or >return home<. Yet Ulsgaard / *Zuhause* continues to exist in some twilight realm outside the space-time continuum, in a realm visited by the haunting act of memory or by the transcendental operation of clairvoyance. This merits a mention because, as we shall see later, Ulsgaard is not the only absent building to exert fascination on Malte's imagination. An all-but demolished house in Paris will draw him into an intense *Vergegenwärtigung* of the lives lived there over the years (»es ist *zu hause* in mir«),<sup>88</sup> while a burnt down manor belonging to friends of Malte's parents will be remembered for its uncanny phantom presence (»[...] wir blieben so,

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<sup>87</sup> In fact this double epithet is carried over from Paper VIII: »Das lange, alte Herrenhaus« (*MLB*, p.460). It provides the minimal descriptive constant available to Malte.

<sup>88</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, pp.485ff; here: p.487.

Maman und ich, bis das Haus wieder ganz vergangen war«).<sup>89</sup> Yet again, we find ourselves touching upon the spectral topic of how what is absent or invisible enjoys a heightened presence.

The nostalgic turn brings Malte to a reflection on his present rootless existence:

Und man hat niemand und nichts und fährt in der Welt herum mit einem Koffer und mit einer Bücherkiste und eigentlich ohne Neugierde. Was für ein Leben ist das eigentlich: ohne Haus, ohne ererbte Dinge, ohne Hunde. Hätte man doch wenigstens seine Erinnerungen. Aber wer hat die? Wäre die Kindheit da, sie ist wie vergraben. Vielleicht muß man alt sein, um an das alles heranreichen zu können. Ich denke es mir gut, alt zu sein.<sup>90</sup>

The loneliness of Malte's transcendental homelessness, involving a chilling disconnection from the sites of his past, is developed through the *man*-figure. Malte depicts himself in permanent itinerant exile, like Oedipus or Ahasverus, perhaps even like one of the living dead who walks the world banished forever from the sphere of human sociality. Living without the usual supportive coordinates of worldly existence, he finds himself perilously close to existential *point zéro*.

All he has is an interior realm, which, in a sense, he does not even *have*. *Hätte man doch wenigstens seine Er-inner-ungen? Aber wer hat die?* At first glance the thought seems simple: Malte cannot remember things from his past, they are *vergraben* in the (Freudian) unconscious, inaccessible to the conscious mind. Yet the wording is strangely general, supra-individual: *wer hat die?* Can Malte really be claiming that no-one presides over *any* memories? In fact the

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<sup>89</sup> *MLB*, Paper XLII, pp.552ff; here: p.556.

<sup>90</sup> *MLB*, Paper X, pp.464f.

phrase is richly ambiguous: *Wer hat seine eigenen Erinnerungen?* jostles with *Wer hat meine Erinnerungen?* for the semantic allegiance of the demonstrative pronoun (*die*). The latter possibility - *Wer hat meine Erinnerungen?* - points in the direction of shared memory: What human *Instanz* can Malte Laurids Brigge turn to in his quest for epistemological support? The co-protagonists of his childhood are absent or (in more cases) dead. His memories cannot be countersigned or confirmed by anyone also present at the time. His all-too-partial perspective as observer in the past now sets aporetic limits on his ability to relate meaningfully and securely to that past. His memories are not sufficient guarantee for him to claim he *has* access to their historical source. Malte Laurids Brigge, in short, must endure the trauma of being the sole surviving witness of his own childhood. It is partially in this sense that he can grieve for a childhood which is *wie vergraben*. And to compound the trauma, only sheaves of paper can receive transmission of those memories which he does retain, destined (so he thinks) to remain unread.

Yet the fact that his past is buried in the unconscious means that his past is not >his<, for it is beyond his conscious governance. Where, then, have the memories gone? Have they simply disappeared? Or do they continue to exist, like the ghostly chronotope *Ullsgaard*, in some virtual dimension outside present time and space? And might not this >elsewhere< be the *Inneres* into which *Er-Innerungen* pass, the selfsame *Inneres* of which Malte has written in Paper IV: »Ich weiß nicht, was dort geschieht«?<sup>91</sup> (*Geschehen*: an all-important

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<sup>91</sup> *MLB*, Paper IV, p.456.

word in this book.) *Where, then, if not in conscious mind, is this elsewhere? And who, if not the conscious subject, presides over this occult repository of memories?* The question *Wer hat die?* may in fact be pointing to a transcendental subject within, a >second< or >higher< self, whose existence and spiritual stewardship was purported to have been demonstrated beyond doubt by Mesmer, Puységur and Braid. *Hätte man doch wenigstens seine Erinnerungen. Aber wer hat die? Wäre die Kindheit da, sie ist wie vergraben.* Malte seems to be stretching the very concept of *having a memory*, or of *childhood being there*. To have a memory is not to remember in the weak, cognitive sense of narrative or snapshot recollection, but to repeat the experience, to relive the memory so that it is once again present, *da*. Likewise, to experience childhood being there is to be haunted by its revenance, to be reminded of its undimmed ontological reality in another fold of time and space. In Paper XX, Malte will combine these senses of a full-blown return of the repressed and an uncanny haunting by an undead past when he writes: »Ich habe um meine Kindheit gebeten, und sie ist wiedergekommen [...]«. <sup>92</sup> How Malte copes with this experience of repetition will warrant close scrutiny.

*Vielleicht muß man alt sein, um an das alles heranreichen zu können.* The paradoxical idea that the more one lives forward in time, the closer one gets to some accommodation with, understanding of or mastery over <sup>93</sup> the past, <sup>94</sup> puts one in mind of a dictum of Kierkegaard's that was made famous by

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<sup>92</sup> *MLB*, Paper XX, p.499.

<sup>93</sup> The difficulty in meaning is caused by the verb *heranreichen an*.

<sup>94</sup> Malte's words here will find an echo several pages forward when he characterises poetic inspiration as a repetition or revenance out of the blue of (forgotten) experiences, with chronological distancing a *sine qua non* if the verses are to be gifted (Paper XIV, p.467).

William James: »Philosophy is perfectly right in saying that life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets the other clause - that it must be lived forwards.«<sup>95</sup> We can perhaps relate this to the *Kuriosum* of Malte's professed *incuriositas*:<sup>96</sup> he is casting his quest for (in-)sight systematically in a retrospective direction. In-sight is crucially a matter of retro-spect. (Later he will insist, though in a more sober sense, that »alle unsere Einsichten nachträglich sind.«)<sup>97</sup> It now becomes a matter of discrimination as to just how radically Malte means *an das alles heran[zu]reichen* to be understood. For if, as argued in the preceding paragraph, the cardinal theme of this passage is the virtual world of unconscious interiority, then it becomes feasible that Malte, in evoking the ideal elder (*Vielleicht muß man alt sein ... Ich denke es mir gut, alt zu sein*), has cited the esoteric commonplace that sapiential development reaches its apogee in old age. The elder is not merely a man who has accumulated great *Lebensweisheit*, but a spiritual adept so evolved as to be able to commune with worlds past and future. After all, as we have seen, Malte's maternal grandfather, Graf Brahe, is a powerful rôle-model in this department:

Die Zeitfolgen spielten durchaus keine Rolle für ihn, der Tod war ein kleiner Zwischenfall, den er vollkommen ignorierte, Personen, die er einmal in seine Erinnerung aufgenommen hatte, existierten, und daran konnte ihr Absterben nicht das geringste ändern. Mehrere Jahre später, nach dem Tode des alten Herrn, erzählte man sich, wie er auch das Zukünftige mit demselben Eigensinn als gegenwärtig empfand.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Undated journal entry 1843, *Journals & Papers Vol.1*, p.450. Cf Balzamo, "Jens Peter Jacobsen et Rainer Maria Rilke en miroir", p.34, on the »éloge[] de la vieillesse« as a recurrent theme in early Rilke.

<sup>96</sup> »und eigentlich ohne Neugierde« (*MLB*, Paper X, p.464).

<sup>97</sup> *MLB*, Paper L, p.578.

<sup>98</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, p.475. Cf du Prel, *Rätsel des Menschen*, p.84.

At first blush, Paper XI marks a resumption of outwardly-directed observation in marked contrast to the cognitive navel-gazing of the preceding sequence of Papers:

Heute war ein schöner, herbstlicher Morgen. Ich ging durch die Tuilerien. Alles, was gegen Osten lag, vor der Sonne, blendete. Das Angeschienene war vom Nebel verhangen wie von einem lichtgrauen Vorhang. Grau im Grauen sonnten sich die Statuen in den noch nicht enthüllten Gärten. Einzelne Blumen in den langen Beeten standen auf und sagten: Rot, mit einer erschrockenen Stimme. Dann kam ein sehr großer, schlanker Mann um die Ecke, von den Champs-Élysées her; er trug eine Krücke, aber nicht mehr unter die Schulter geschoben, - er hielt sie vor sich her, leicht, und von Zeit zu Zeit stellte er sie fest und laut auf wie einen Heroldstab. Er konnte ein Lächeln der Freude nicht unterdrücken und lächelte, an allem vorbei, der Sonne, den Bäumen zu. Sein Schritt war schüchtern wie der eines Kindes, aber ungewöhnlich leicht, voll von Erinnerung an früheres Gehen.<sup>99</sup>

If read apart from the *côterie* of morbid, angst-ridden, solipsistic *Aufzeichnungen* that precedes it, this passage comes across as a rather innocuous *poème en prose* offering lyrical treatment of a cheerful if slight Parisian scene (and written perhaps in matinal tribute to the opening of Baudelaire's *Le Fou et le Vénus*).<sup>100</sup> Its local meanings can scarcely be said to be anything other than straightforward. Given its global context, however, its

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<sup>99</sup> *MLB*, Paper XI, p.465.

<sup>100</sup> »Quelle admirable journée! Le vaste parc se pâme sous l'œil brûlant du soleil, comme la jeunesse sous la domination de l'Amour [...] On dirait qu'une lumière toujours croissante fait de plus en plus étinceler les objets; que les fleurs excitées brûlent du désir de rivaliser avec l'azur du ciel par l'énergie de leurs couleurs, et que la chaleur, rendant visibles les parfums, les fait monter vers l'astre comme des fumées« (*Oeuvres complètes I*, p.283).

levity inspires hermeneutic suspicion: why such an oddly inconsequential Paper?

One line of contour between it and previous Papers is provided by the common matter of *Sehenlernen*. For we see in the passage a carefully orchestrated binary of visibility-invisibility, brightness-darkness (*blendete ... Angeschienene ... lichtgrauen Vorhang ... noch nicht enthüllt*). In the discursive foreground lies not so much *what* is seen as *how* the percept presents - or refuses to present - itself. Malte, the attentive (and, one assumes, mobile) scrutineer of the *phainomenon's* self-disclosure, tests out the limits of visibility.

Malte's attention focuses in the second half of the passage on the appearance of the tall, slender man (>appearance< in at least two senses: his coming-into-view from around the corner and his physical attributes). This foregrounding seems to sustain the passage's guiding interest in the phenomenal object-world. But the sudden final sentence places a shutter over the lens: *voll von Erinnerung an früheres Gehen*. The man's interior state, already encoded for Malte in the semiotics of his smile<sup>101</sup> and in his childlike gait, now reveals itself as that which can or will reveal itself no further. *Erinnerung*, that key word from the previous Paper, is continuing its cognitive sabotage here. The man enjoys a *private* memory of *früheres Gehen*, triggering a double intrusion onto the scene of *past tense* and *interior world*, neither of which are accessible to Malte save through guesswork - or telepathy. The words *Erinnerung an früheres Gehen* mark the limits of an empirical phenomenology.

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<sup>101</sup> Cf Paper IX (p.464): »Kam das dichte, beinah nahrhafte Lächeln in ihrem ganz ausgeräumten Gesicht nicht davon her, daß sie manchmal meinten, es wüchsen beide?«. One thinks also of the >*Subrisio Saltat*.< figure in the Fifth *Duineser Elegie* (KA II, p.216).

The man's inner life is occult to the naked eye, his physical gait shadowed by a mental progression.<sup>102</sup> His body is a haunted space, visited and acted upon by what is non-present, invisible.<sup>103</sup> Like the Man in the Crowd in Poe's 1840 story, Malte's Man in the Tuileries Gardens »lässt sich nicht lesen«.<sup>104</sup> For all the surface levity of this Paper, then, Malte ends it in epistemological distress at an indecipherable smile. There will be more such smiles in the *Aufzeichnungen*.

The Paper, relying constitutionally on what can be seen in the empirical *hic et nunc*, can proceed no further in the face (literally) of such interiorisation. It aborts mission at once.

The twelfth fragment offers a renewed stab at *poème en prose*:

Was so ein kleiner Mond alles vermag. Da sind Tage, wo alles um einen Licht ist, leicht, kaum angegeben in der hellen Luft und doch deutlich. Das Nächste schon hat Töne der Ferne, ist weggenommen und nur gezeigt, nicht hergereicht; und was Beziehung zur Weite hat: der Fluß, die Brücken, die langen Straßen und die Plätze, die sich verschwinden, das hat diese Weite eingenommen hinter sich, ist auf ihr gemalt wie auf Seide. Es ist nicht zu sagen, was dann ein Lichtgrüner Wagen sein

<sup>102</sup> Compare a passage from Karl Philipp Moritz on the interiorised gait, which Forget quotes in a different context: »Das gewöhnliche Gehen hat seinen Zweck außer sich, es ist bloß Mittel zu irgendeinem Ziele zu gelangen [...] Die Leidenschaft aber, der hüpfenden Freude z.B. drängt auch den Gang in sich selbst zurück [...]« (”Du sens comme un à la coërrance ou: comment lire la >légende du fils perdu<”, p.183, footnote 21).

<sup>103</sup> Compare an actual scene in the Jardin du Luxembourg which Rilke describes to Betz. »Eine kleine alte Frau« sits on a bench oblivious to her surroundings: »Sie aber hatte nur Augen für ihr Köfferchen, aus dem sie, eins nach dem anderen, Bilder von ihrer ersten Kommunion, bunte Ansichtskarten, Schlüssel, Schmuckstücke, alte Photographien, Bandreste zog, die sie betrachtete und zärtlich streichelte. / >Sie war da,< sagte Rilke, >wie ganz allein auf der Welt, mit ihren Gedanken und Erinnerungen.<« (Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, p.126). In the Man of the Tuileries Paper, by contrast, such objective exteriorisation of the stranger's *Erinnerungen* is withheld from the percipient.

<sup>104</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, edited by Graham Clarke, London & Vermont: 1993, p.116. This unreadability both reprises the adumbration motif found in the description of the garden's figures and flowers (*Das Angeschienene war vom Nebel verhangen wie von einem lichtgrauen Vorhang*) and anticipates the thematisation of unreadable interiority in the library scene of Paper XVI (*MLB*, p.479).



kann auf dem Pont-neuf oder irgendein Rot, das nicht zu halten ist, oder auch nur ein Plakat an der Feuermauer einer perlgrauen Häusergruppe. Alles ist vereinfacht, auf einige richtige, helle plans gebracht wie das Gesicht in einem Manetschen Bildnis. Und nichts ist gering und überflüssig. Die Bouquinisten am Quai tun ihre Kästen auf, und das frische oder vernutzte Gelb der Bücher, das violette Braun der Bände, das größere Grün einer Mappe: alles stimmt, gilt, nimmt teil und bildet eine Vollzähligkeit, in der nichts fehlt.<sup>105</sup>

If the last Paper registered the visual impact of the rising sun, then here the self-conscious observer<sup>106</sup> gives an impressionist(ic) account of the waxing crescent moon's transformative effect on subjective perception. He thus evinces at the terrestrial level Tycho Brahe's astronomical fascination with atmospheric refraction. On the one hand, Malte extracts prose-poetic mileage out of the indistinctness of the cityscape under a crescent moon; on the other, he touches on the indescribability of same. *Es ist nicht zu sagen, was dann ein lichtgrüner Wagen sein kann...*, he writes, naming the very object whose lush unrecognisability he is stressing.

Interestingly, Malte follows a crisis in observation of the human face (Paper XI) with a lyrical evocation of the aesthetic perfection of the cityscape based upon a simulaic citation of the stylised face in a Manet portrait. The latter is characterised precisely for its simplicity, its pleasing rightness, its revealing one-dimensionality - in contrast to the actual faces Malte is encountering in Paris. This citation of *peinture* highlights perhaps the most telling manoeuvre of the passage: the quasi-painterly stylisation of the scene

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<sup>105</sup> *MLB*, Paper XII, pp.465f.

<sup>106</sup> Malte is hardly, as Rimbach claims, seeing these objects »[b]ei einem Blick aus dem Fenster« (*"Zum Begriff der Äquivalenz"*, p.136). That would require a supernaturally roving eye...

into an aesthetic totality. »La description est éduquée par la peinture,« as Vanoosthuysse comments, »le tableau remplace le réel.«<sup>107</sup> The totalised perfection of: *alles stimmt, nimmt teil und bildet eine Vollzähligkeit, in der nichts fehlt* seems forced, unearned, and poetologically facile. Malte, in fixing on the ambient *sujet*, seems to be striking a self-conscious symbolist pose.<sup>108</sup>

Malte's uncomfortable relations with direct observation, and the often demystifying data served up by perceptual clarity, are surely motivating the symbolist *Verflüchtigung* of sense data in this Paper. The subtle changes in the cityscape brought on by the moon's influence reflects (or even generates) subjective mood more securely than is the case with a less noticeable climatic ambience. Having sensed Malte's rising discomfort with both exteriority and interiority, due to the respective modes of epistemological estrangement accompanying each, we now see him enjoying a rare moment<sup>109</sup> of cognitive

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<sup>107</sup> Vanoosthuysse, "L'abject et le sublime", p.139. Arndal reads this Paper as a very specific, if disguised, tribute to Cézanne rather than Manet (">Ohne alle Kenntnis von Perspektive<?", pp.123ff). Yet Malte, as Rilke before him in his letter to Clara of October 12<sup>th</sup> 1907 (*MLB-Materialien*, p.38), is plagiarising the writer Jeannot, whose account of observing Manet as he worked on a portrait was printed in *La Grande Revue* in August 1907: »Manet, although painting his pictures from the model, by no means copied nature; I realize how splendid his simplifications were [...] Everything was abbreviated: The tones were clearer, the colors more lively, the values closer. This formed a tender and blond harmonious whole« (quoted in: *Impressionism*, by the editors of *Réalités*, London: 1977, p.217).

<sup>108</sup> In so doing, he comes up against a perennial problem in symbolist prose. We might term it the *Laokoon* complex: why write about this extravagant shock of colours instead of capturing it in the more congenial medium of visual art? Note, in this *ut pictura poesis* context, how texts fare in the Paper. The covers of the books in the *bouquinistes'* stalls are fetishised, thereby reducing the books to colour-points, external appearance, an aesthetic criterion other than their principal one. Thus is the pleasure of the text associated with the erasure of its very textuality. Likewise, further up, the wording of a *Plakat* is rendered indistinct. Thus, the impressionistic pen-picture both affords Malte the opportunity to write and, in its detextualising impulse at the level of motif, deprives the function of the pen itself.

<sup>109</sup> To use the word >moment< is, admittedly, rather misleading: *Da sind Tage* indicates a *type* of day rather than one particular day. Cf the discussion above of the distended time-frame in Paper II. As Uwe Steiner points out, this text elides textuality in order to freeze out time: »Schrift würde die räumliche Harmonie des Tableaus verzeitlichen« (*Die Zeit der Schrift*, p.349).

gratification predicated upon an external scene rendered ethereally indistinct.<sup>110</sup> Only here does he find pan-signification<sup>111</sup> and *correspondance* between mood and imagery. Malte's response is explained by his intuition that, to paraphrase Mallarmé, *Le sens trop précis rature / Sa vague littérature*.

The consecutive triad of short *Prosagedichte* is completed in Paper XIII's description of a family of street entertainers.

Unten ist folgende Zusammenstellung: ein kleiner Handwagen, von einer Frau geschoben; vorn darauf ein Leierkasten, der Länge nach. Dahinter quer ein Kinderkorb, in dem ein ganz Kleines auf festen Beinen steht, vergnügt in seiner Haube, und sich nicht mag setzen lassen. Von Zeit zu Zeit dreht die Frau am Orgelkasten. Das ganz Kleine stellt sich dann sofort stampfend in seinem Korbe wieder auf, und ein kleines Mädchen in einem grünen Sonntagskleid tanzt und schlägt Tamburin zu den Fenstern hinauf.<sup>112</sup>

When we first considered this passage, it was by way of comparison with the eery *Nachtgeräusche* of Paper II. Malte's cognitive unease was related negatively to the degree of visual clarity enjoyed by him as observer (the word *Unten* in the Paper's incipit having been decoded as a vital piece of information relating to his position relative to the street musicians).

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<sup>110</sup> Cf Martin Jay on Baudelaire's recognition in his 1846 Salon of Delacroix's achievement in liberating colour from its subservience to line (*Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: 1993, p.153). Jay characterises the impact of this on Impressionism: »Rather than painting theatricalized scenes in an idealized, geometrical space on the other side of the canvas / window as seen from afar, the Impressionists sought to reproduce the experience of light and color on the retinas of their eyes [...] In fact, *what* was painted often seemed less important than *how* it was painted, as the experience of sight rather than persons, narratives, or natural objects became the subject of their art« (ibid., p.154).

<sup>111</sup> Cf Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: 1970), pp.118f.

<sup>112</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIII, p.466.

*Unten ist folgende Zusammenstellung*:... Might not *Unten* offer a double sense here, marking out not only the space down below in the street (cancelled out, as already noted, by the final word in the passage, *hinauf*) but also *the textual space below itself*? This inflects the word *Zusammenstellung* into a meta-textual gloss on the synthetic act of scribal stylisation which Malte has performed (or more [chrono]logically: is about to perform) on the scene below. Thus *Zusammenstellung* performs a notably similar function to that of *Vollzähligkeit* in the previous Paper, drawing attention to the the fact that what is being perceived is being aestheticised into a totality. And the fact that Malte's audition of these *Tagesgeräusche* seems so much calmer than his audition of the *Nachtgeräusche* can be explained by *the visual supplement which enables the totalisation*: the sounds make sense as emanations of the ensemble seen below.

Yet if Malte's spectation / audition seems uncomplicated, this is true only for as long as the *Aufzeichnung* lasts. For Malte's audience ends abruptly upon mention of the tambourine girl's upward look: *und ein kleines Mädchen in einem grünen Sonntagskleid tanzt und schlägt Tamburin zu den Fenstern hinauf*. Why the termination at this seemingly arbitrary point? If, as inferred, Malte's pen portrait depends upon his looking out the window at the scene below, then the girl's gesture, surely a supplication for money,<sup>113</sup> induces a sudden access of self-consciousness in Malte, switching the rôles of observer and observed. Malte, shrinking back, hides himself from the girl's view. Yet this in

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<sup>113</sup> Cf the similar gesture of the cauliflower vendors in Paper XVIII: »[...] weil man vor einem Haus war, welches kaufte« (*MLB*, p.485).

turn screens his own view of the *Zusammenstellung* below, disabling further contemplation of the scene. As with the *Erinnerung* of the Man in the Tuileries Gardens, which set a limit on Malte's perspective, so too here: a loss of visibility shuts down the text.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> I must confess that, reading this thirteenth Paper, I am at times tempted by an alternative reading which, while not quite so strongly supported by the material, does conform to the tendency of Malte's *Sehenlernen*. There is something strangely clipped, even telegraphic, about Malte's language as he itemises the elements of the scene outside. This linguistic minimalism, which makes the *raison d'être* of the piece, as an exercise in direct description, a little unclear, bears curious similarities to the style of the *Nachtgeräusche* Paper. Is it possible that Malte here too is only *listening* to the sounds outside? That, like a blindfolded subject in an E.S.P. research experiment, he is conveying his mental picture of what he cannot see? That, in other words, this Paper both echoes Paper II and prefigures the *Zeitungsverkäufer* experiment of Paper LIX? That, finally, it differs crucially from the latter in Malte's refusal or failure to *test the accuracy of his >Einbildung<?*

## II.iv

### Flânerie

Malte's vantage point at the window in the thirteenth *Aufzeichnung* puts one strongly in mind of the perspectival situation in Hoffmann's 1822 story *Des Vettters Eckfenster*. There, the first person narrator visits his physically incapacitated cousin who is a writer spending his days by the *Eckfenster* of his apartment<sup>115</sup> constructing imaginative hypotheses about divers figures busying themselves in the throng of the Gendarmenmarkt below. Boasting »ein Auge, welches wirklich schaut«,<sup>116</sup> the cousin offers the narrator his opera glasses and invites him to train his eye in like manner: »Auf Vetter! ich will sehen, ob ich dir nicht wenigstens die Primizien der Kunst zu schauen beibringen kann. Sieh einmal gerade vor dich herab in die Straße, hier hast du mein Glas, bemerkst du wohl die etwas fremdartig gekleidete Person [...]«.<sup>117</sup> Each figure coming into the cousins' purview generates an elaborate narrative based on attributional clues. Unlike Malte, the two observers have a safely Olympian perspective on things: at no point do they experience the discomfort of being looked at by their cognitive targets. Their inspections remain untrammelled by self-consciousness.

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<sup>115</sup> An inspiration perhaps for the figure of Ewald, the young paralytic sitting by the window, who figures in Rilke's *Geschichten vom lieben Gott*?

<sup>116</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Des Vettters Eckfenster*, in: *Späte Werke*, edited by Walter Müller-Seidel & Wulf Segebrecht (Darmstadt: 1971), pp.595-622, here: p.600.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. Cf Becker, *Urbanität und Moderne*, p.115.

We started our study of Malte's Papers with the very first Paper's *flânerie* linkage of *Sehen* and *Gehen*. The comparison of Paper XIII with Hoffmann's text becomes all the more interesting when one reflects upon the latter's status as a seminal moment in the development of the *flâneur* tradition in literature. Walter Benjamin, in a note in *Das Passagen-Werk*, glosses the work: »E.Th.A. Hoffmann als Typ des Flaneurs; >Des Vettters Eckfenster< ist dessen Testament«. <sup>118</sup> The importance of Hoffmann's text lies in its early literarisation of an urban semiology. The city, with its unprecedented population density and accompanying anonymity, becomes a space whose >readability< will become a strong topos in nineteenth century literature. Harald Neumeyer articulates well the inaugural moment sounded in *Des Vettters Eckfenster*:

Was Hoffmann vorführt, ist die Entstehung von Literatur aus Hermeneutik: Die großstädtischen Erscheinungen fungieren als Signifikanten, die beim Beobachter einen hermeneutischen Impuls auslösen, das zu lesen, was in den Signifikanten selbst nicht zu lesen ist; und das Resultat dieser Lektüre heißt >Erfindung< und gereicht dem Schriftsteller zu Ehren. <sup>119</sup>

Because of the greater concentration of strangers in the city than in the town or village, the urban dweller need only leave his door, or even simply look out the window, to be exposed to new faces and unexpected situations. »Quelles bizarreries ne trouve-t-on pas dans une grande ville, quand on sait se promener et regarder?« asks Baudelaire's *flâneur* rhetorically. <sup>120</sup> Where the

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<sup>118</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk, Gesammelte Schriften V.1*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt/M: 1982, p.536.

<sup>119</sup> Neumeyer, *Der Flâneur*, p.30.

<sup>120</sup> Baudelaire, "Mademoiselle Bistouri" (*Oeuvres complètes I*, p.355).

*picaro* would have to wander from locale to locale in search of experience, the city subject could now be stimulated into weaving narratives around those randomly encountered in the street, square or alleyway. Not that these narratives are merely a matter of wholly arbitrary *Erfindung*. Rather, the subject's physiognomic skills are mobilised in acts of semiotic deduction from physical attribute back to existential background and mental life.<sup>121</sup> (Hoffmann's writer cites this older physiognomic tradition when he speaks of »meiner geübten Physiognomik«.)<sup>122</sup> In this ambiguous limbo between factual observation and subjunctive mood, between mimesis and phantasia, one might even say between realism and romanticism, hovers the repertoire of nineteenth century responses, literary and otherwise, to the city as a field of signifiers.

The narrator's cousin in *Des Vettters Eckfenster* is consigned to a chair, this immobility proving the perfect school for his *Sehenlernen*. But urban semiology does not, by definition, become *flânerie* until it becomes peripatetic. Such mobilisation of the urban phenomenologist-physiognomist's perspective finds its *locus classicus* in Edgar Allan Poe's 1840 story *The Man of the Crowd*, a text of sufficient interest to Benjamin to have merited two separate treatments

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<sup>121</sup> Cf Wilhelm Dilthey's footnote on "The Connection of Outer and Inner Perception in the Recognition and Understanding of Other Persons": »The concept of psychological interpretation: the direct completion of an external state of affairs by an inner one [is a process] equivalent to an inference. The enormous scope and importance of this permeates our whole social existence« (*Selected Works Vol.1*, edited by Rudolf A. Makkreel & Frithjof Rodi, translated from the German by Jeffrey Barnouw & Franz Schreiner, New Jersey: 1989, p.391, footnote 150).

<sup>122</sup> Hoffmann, *Des Vettters Eckfenster*, p.602.



in his œuvre.<sup>123</sup> The tale's first person narrator recounts how one autumn evening, sitting at the bow-window of a London Coffee-House, his attention is drawn to an enigmatic figure in the »most thronged mart of the populous town« outside: »[...] suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age) - a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression«.<sup>124</sup> Thirsting for release from his »curiosity«, he resolves to exit the Coffee-House and »follow the stranger whithersoever he should go«.<sup>125</sup> The stranger spends literally the next twenty-four hours »forc[ing] his way to and fro, without aim«<sup>126</sup> up and down the city thoroughfares. Finally, the hermeneutic trail is dropped by the despairing narrator:

And, as the shades of the second evening came on, I grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation. »This old man,« I said at length, »is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd.* It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is a grosser book than the 'Hortulus Animæ', and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that *es lässt sich nicht lesen.*«<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> In "Der Flaneur", a chapter of *Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire* (1937-8), and in the essay *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire* (1939) (in: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* I.2, edited by Rolf Tiedemann & Hermann Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt/M: 1974, pp.537-569 & pp.605-653 respectively).

<sup>124</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, p.112.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. Neumeyer declares this moment »die Geburtssekunde des Flaneurs«, adding: »keine absolute [Geburtssekunde], aber immerhin stellt der Text dar, wie und vor allem warum aus einem sitzenden [d.h. bei Hoffmann, D.D] ein gehender Beobachter wird: Die Dynamik der großstädtischen Menge fordert die Dynamisierung ihres Beobachters - das Auge hat sich in Bewegung zu setzen.« *Der Flaneur*, p.33.

<sup>126</sup> Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, p.114.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p.116.

The cardinal difference between Poe's narrator and Hoffmann's *Vetter*, and that which gives rise to the mobilised eye of the later text, is that Poe's narrator is not content to indulge in educated guesses as to the identity and character of a stranger, however physiognomically ingenious or convincing. Instead, his burning desire to establish *facts* inspires him to give chase. The amateur physiognomist has been combined with the *flâneur*, the *flâneur* with the amateur detective. As Benjamin puts it, Poe's tale has become: »etwas wie das Röntgenbild einer Detektivgeschichte. Der umkleidende Stoff, den das Verbrechen darstellt, ist an ihr weggefallen. Die bloße Armatur ist geblieben: der Verfolger, die Menge, ein Unbekannter [...]«. <sup>128</sup>

For all that Poe's *Man of the Crowd* is to influence Baudelaire's treatment of the *flâneur* figure in the *Tableaux parisiens*<sup>129</sup> and beyond into the *prose poétique* of *Le Spleen de Paris*, the question of factual accuracy as a challenge to the hermeneutic-physiognomic and detectivistic skills of the *flâneur* is sacrificed in Baudelaire in favour of the sovereign subject's right to read allegories of himself into and out of strangers. This self-liberation from veridical or referential anxieties entails a »sainte prostitution de l'âme« whereby the poetic *flâneur* engages in imaginative metempsychosis: »Comme ces âmes errantes qui cherchent un corps, il entre, quand il veut, dans le personnage de chacun« ("Les Foules").<sup>130</sup> In the prose poem "Les Fenêtres", for instance, Baudelaire's *flâneur* observes a woman at a window: »Avec son visage, avec son vêtement, avec son geste, avec presque rien, j'ai refait

<sup>128</sup> Benjamin, "Der Flâneur", p.550.

<sup>129</sup> The *Tableaux Parisiens* first appeared in 1861 as a section of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

<sup>130</sup> Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes I*, p.291.

l'histoire de cette femme, ou plutôt sa légende, et quelquefois je me la raconte à moi-même en pleurant». <sup>131</sup> The rhetorical prolepsis which follows the *légende* <sup>132</sup> makes explicit the subjugation of the woman's alterity to an egoic reference: »Peut-être me direz-vous: >Es-tu sûr que cette légende soit la vraie?< Qu'importe ce que peut être la réalité placée hors de moi, si elle m'a aidé à vivre, à sentir que je suis et ce que je suis?«. <sup>133</sup> Thus, while the reveries of the *flâneur* permit him to expand his sense of self and imaginatively enter into foreign subjects, the autological circle is never broken - nor claimed to be broken. This subjectivist move has been carefully prepared in the piece's opening fetishisation of occlusion as an imaginative good:

Celui qui regarde du dehors à travers une fenêtre ouverte, ne voit jamais autant de choses que celui qui regarde une fenêtre fermée. Il n'est pas d'objet plus profond, plus mystérieux, plus fécond, plus ténébreux, plus éblouissant qu'une fenêtre éclairée d'une chandelle. Ce qu'on peut voir au soleil est toujours moins intéressant que ce qui se passe derrière une vitre. <sup>134</sup>

Neumeyer reflects on this apotheosis of subjective *Willkür*:

Im Vergleich zu Hoffmann und Poe suspendiert Baudelaires Flaneur die Wahrheitsfrage. Hoffmanns Schriftsteller hat immerhin noch auf die Ähnlichkeit seiner Hypothesen zum betrachteten Gegenstand zu achten; Poes Detektiv sucht eine definitive Schlüssigkeit und muß sich am Ende die Unlesbarkeit des >man of the crowd< eingestehen. Der Flaneur in "Les Fenêtres" kümmert sich weder um Wahrscheinlichkeit noch um faktische oder logische Richtigkeit - egal, ob das von ihm entzifferte Signifikat tatsächlich dem Signifikanten korrespondiert oder zugehört, wichtig ist nur, daß dieses Ich (für) sich liest. Der Wirklichkeit kommt demnach nur noch ein funktionaler Wert zu. Auch wenn der Flaneur die Distanz zum Beobachteten

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p.339.

<sup>132</sup> An identical switch from *histoire* to *légende* can be found in the opening sentence of Malte's final *Aufzeichnung*: »Man wird mich schwer davon überzeugen, daß die *Geschichte* des verlorenen Sohnes nicht die *Legende* dessen ist, der nicht geliebt werden wollte« (Paper LXXI, p.629, emphases added).

<sup>133</sup> Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes I*, p.339.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

aufkündigt, so geschieht dies allein deshalb, weil es um die Konstitution eines Ich, nicht um eine Entschlüsselung der großstädtischen Erscheinungen zu tun ist.<sup>135</sup>

The subjectivistic-narcissistic *flâneur* in the Baudelairean vein, subordinating the mimetic to the creative imperative, responds psychosocially to the bourgeois separation of *publici juris* and *privatissimum*, as well as to the deeper separation of *physis* and *psyche*. Early literary specimens give us a sense of this where this model can lead.

The opening of Charles Dickens' second novel gives us a further taste of this mentality. In his *Sketches by Boz* series, Dickens had served his apprenticeship to the device of the *flâneur* perspective, his own legendary extended constitutionals through the streets of London becoming central to his entire aesthetic.<sup>136</sup> *The Old Curiosity Shop* opens on the (initial) narrator's nocturnal *flâneries*:

Although I am an old man, night is generally my time for walking [...] I have fallen insensibly into the habit, both because it favours my infirmity, and because it affords me greater opportunity of speculating on the characters and occupations of those who fill the streets. The glare and hurry of broad noon are not adapted to idle pursuits like mine; a glimpse of passing faces caught by the light of a street lamp, or a shop window, is often better for my purpose than their full revelation in the daylight; and, if I must add the truth, night is kinder in this respect than day, which too often destroys an air-built castle at the moment of its completion, without the least ceremony or remorse.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Neumeyer, *Der Flaneur*, p.60.

<sup>136</sup> See Michael Hollington, "Dickens the Flâneur", in: *The Dickensian*, vol.77, 1981, pp.71-87.

<sup>137</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, edited by Elizabeth M. Brennan (Oxford & New York: 1997), pp.5f.

I draw attention, for obvious reasons, to the words *speculating - full revelation - air-built castle*. The old man goes out into the city in order to find suggestive stimuli for his mind's eye, not in order to establish conscientious phenomenological rapport with what he observes. Clarity of view - fit only for what Duc Jean des Esseintes, the decadent aristocrat of Joris-Karl Huysmans' 1884 novel *À Rebours*, memorably calls »ces yeux bourgeois«, »les grossières rétines«<sup>138</sup> - does not facilitate such mental activity, it threatens it. The old man's >super-mimetic< mode of imaginative response takes him outdoors but only so that the external world can be reduced to an impressionistic pretext for a text. (Des Esseintes, under the motto of »rêve d'idéal«, goes the whole way into *Weltvergessenheit*, repudiates the vulgarity of actual experience and »réclame des illusions« by secluding himself in chambers and creating a wholly artificial world.)<sup>139</sup> Importantly, Dickens' *flâneur* openly acknowledges his subjective impressionism and its vulnerability to empirical disconfirmation: *if I must add the truth*.

The narrator at the beginning of Balzac's *Facino Cane* stylises his *flânerie* into an exercise in full-blown metempsychosis:

Une seule passion m'entraînait en dehors de mes habitudes studieuses; mais n'était-ce pas encore de l'étude: j'allais observer les mœurs du faubourg, ses habitants et leurs caractères [...] Chez moi l'observation était déjà devenue intuitive, elle pénétrait l'âme sans négliger le corps; ou plutôt elle saisissait si bien les détails extérieurs, qu'elle allait sur-le-champ au delà; elle me donnait la faculté de vivre de la vie de l'individu sur laquelle elle s'exerçait, en me permettant de me substituer à lui comme de derviche des Mille et une Nuits prenait le corps et l'âme des personnes sur lesquelles il prononçait certaines paroles [...] Quitter ses habitudes, devenir un autre

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<sup>138</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris: 1955), p.42.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

que soi par l'ivresse des facultés morales, et jouer ce jeu à volonté, telle était ma distraction. A quoi dois-je ce don? Est-ce une seconde vue? est-ce une de ces qualités dont l'abus mènerait à la folie? Je n'ai jamais recherché les causes de cette puissance; je la possède et m'en sers, voilà tout.<sup>140</sup>

This penetration of other souls occurs in the same vein as Baudelaire's *sainte prostitution de l'âme*, but with the all-important difference that *it takes its own ontological truth-claims seriously*, resting neither on a notion of mere phenomenological rapport with its object nor on an *aesthetic* of fictive, imaginative response to that object. Instead it seeks surnatural, supersensuous rapport through telepathy or divination, »the apprehension of that which lies out of the sphere of immediate knowledge; the seeing of that which to the natural sense of the seer is invisible« (Thomas Huxley, 1881).<sup>141</sup>

The bold fusion in the Balzac passage of *voyeurisme* and *clairvoyance* simply makes explicit the supernatural conceit latent in so much *flâneur* discourse, with its roots in Lavaterian physiognomy.<sup>142</sup> On several occasions in *Das Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin notes this nexus of phenomenology and parapsychology in the *flâneur's* hermeneutics: »Die Menge ist der Schleier,

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<sup>140</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *La Comédie Humaine*. VI. *Études de Mœurs: Scènes de la Vie Parisienne*. II (Bruges: 1950), pp.66f. I am indebted to John Rignall's essay, "Benjamin's *flâneur* and The Problem of Realism" (in: *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, edited by Andrew Benjamin, London & New York: 1989, pp.112-121, here pp.114ff.), for bringing this passage to my attention.

<sup>141</sup> Quoted in Carlo Ginzburg, "Spurensicherung. Der Jäger entziffert die Fährte, Sherlock Holmes nimmt die Lupe, Freud liest Morelli - die Wissenschaft auf der Suche nach sich selbst", in: *Freibeuter Heft 3 & 4* (1980), pp.7-17 & 11-36 respectively, here: *Heft 4*, p.36, footnote 52.

<sup>142</sup> Rignall argues that the epistemological premise of *flâneur* discourse - >To See is to Know< - is intimately linked to »the metonymical practice of realist description« itself: »The descriptive energy expended on appearances, clothes, buildings, interiors is predicated on the assumption that to see, to observe closely the visible exterior is to gain access to the life of truth within« ("Benjamin's *flâneur* and The Problem of Realism", p.116). For Rignall, the fact that Poe's *Man of the Crowd* *sich nicht lesen lässt* permits one to read the story »as both a diagram of realism and an anticipation of its end« (ibid., p.120).

durch den hindurch dem Flaneur die gewohnte Stadt als Phantasmagorie winkt«; »La foule est le voile à travers lequel la ville familière se meut pour le flâneur en fantasmagorie«; »Die Phantasmagorie des Flaneurs: das Ablesen des Berufs, der Herkunft, des Charakters von den Gesichtern«.<sup>143</sup> Balzac's narrator represents a parapsychological/ mystical synthesis of a) the imaginative *flâneur's* hunger for narrative (the inventive hermeneutics in Hoffmann, Dickens, Baudelaire) and b) the detectivistic *flâneur's* epistemological hunger (the »Versuche der Enträtselung«<sup>144</sup> in Poe). This breed of *flâneur*, through the exercise of metanormal capacities, undertakes what Baudelaire's *flâneur-poète* practises through imaginative projection.<sup>145</sup> The ability to transcend normal subjective boundaries constitutes the *flâneur's* charism.

My interest in this brief excursus has been to treat the *flâneur* not as a distinctive social type (e.g. the Dandy) but, in Neumeyer's phrase, »als textstrukturierende Perspektive«.<sup>146</sup> A palette of *Stadtphysiognomik* perspectives, immobile and mobile, has presented itself:

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<sup>143</sup> Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, pp.54, 69f & 540 respectively. It is an irony of literary history that *Des Vettres Eckfenster*, a Hoffmann story so long seen as untypically devoid of overt supernatural motif or theme, in fact inaugurates a *flâneur* literature positively saturated in post-Lavaterian ideas congenial to researchers of the parasensory dimension.

<sup>144</sup> Neumeyer, *Der Flaneur*, p.52.

<sup>145</sup> It must once again be stressed that Baudelaire's *prostitution de l'âme* openly treats the stranger as an empty *Projektionsfläche*, claiming no genuine desire to commune with his or her actual soul. This marks the difference both with Hoffmann's empirical-detectivistic percipient and Balzac's parapsychological-telepathic narrator. In the programme set out in Baudelaire's "Les foules", we find no claim either to analytic method or to factual discernment of souls.

<sup>146</sup> Neumeyer, *Der Flaneur*, p.54.

- I) close observation informing deductively reasoned hypotheses, though ultimately unperturbed by veridical anxieties (the not yet mobile eye's mimetic exactitude in Hoffmann's *Des Vetters Eckfenster*);<sup>147</sup>
- II) close observation giving rise to detectivistic concern for factual investigation (the mobilised eye giving chase in Poe's *The Man of the Crowd*);
- III) deliberately impressionistic and wilful observation in the service of imaginative hypotheses, unapologetically discarding veridical criteria (Baudelaire's sovereign subject moving through the *foules*, Dickens' old man deliberately avoiding »full revelation« of cityscape scenes);
- IV) wholesale renunciation of outwardly directed attention altogether (des Esseintes' world-weary decision to reclaim the ideal by outlawing himself from society and leading a sovereign *intérieur* existence of dreamy contemplation);
- V) extrasensory perception proceeding from close observation but tapping powers of vision, intuitive insight, *passio a distante* (Balzac's narrator, whose faculty of observation *saisissait si bien les détails extérieurs, qu'elle allait sur-le-champ au delà*).

Now where might Malte Laurids Brigge's *Sehenlernen* fit into all this? What *textstrukturierende Perspektiven* does he adopt when out walking, when room-bound, when drawing on memories?

The following tendencies were diagnosed in the readings of Papers I-XIII: a fetishisation of invisibility over visibility, such that *Ich lerne sehen* often

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<sup>147</sup> Strictly speaking, of course, not a *flâneur* narrative at all, yet included here for its early enactment of the *flâneur's* scopic drama.



seemed a matter more of *Ich lerne nicht sehen*, the *Gesicht* a matter of the *Nichtgesicht*, Malte's »apprentissage de la vue« a »désapprentissage« (Antonowicz);<sup>148</sup> a general cultivation of absence as heightened or uncanny presence; a preponderance of surmise over direct observation, of subjunctive over indicative; an epistemological crisis due to the invisible world of human interiority, whether as conscious mental life (e.g. reverie, reflection, recollection) or the Unconscious (e.g. >buried< memory, the Shadow self or the transcendental self); a crisis of intersubjective opacity due to this invisible dimension within the subject; reliance on unusual visual atmosphere for a match of mood and imagery; problematisation of the self-conscious observer; and, not least, a morbid disposition foundering in its attempt to find >objective correlatives<, visible correspondences, for its mood.

I suggest that we read Malte's *Sehenlernen* as a species of *parapsychological detectivism* fusing the strategies of imaginative hypothesis (à la Hoffmann, Dickens and Baudelaire), detectivistic *Spurensuche* (à la Poe) and telepathic insight (à la Balzac). Yet just as important is what separates Malte from each of these literary precursors. While drawn to *hypothetisches Erzählen*, Malte remains deeply concerned about the question of ontological accuracy. While eager to establish the truth on the basis of *Indizien*, he is at the same

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<sup>148</sup> Antonowicz, "Cet infernal couvercle", p.98. For Antonowicz, however, although the entire text contains »un champ sémantique de la non-vision« (ibid., p.99; cf Ingrid Haag, "Apprendre à voir la femme", in: Klein, ed., *R. M. Rilke et >Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge<*, pp.113-127, here: p.114: »apprendre à voir< [...] implique >désapprendre< à voir [...]«), Malte's *désapprentissage de la vue* becomes programmatic only gradually rather than from the first: »La deuxième partie du roman n'est plus centrée sur les impressions visuelles [...] Ce changement de registre sensoriel qui s'effectue dans le roman très lentement, implique aussi la prise de distance de la hiérarchie du sens fondée sur le regard« (ibid., p.101, emphases added).

time prone to turn away defensively from the scene out of fear of disconfirming his intuition. While dedicated to developing *ein Auge, welches wirklich schaut* with the power of supersensuous vision, he is haunted by the (sometimes literally) dispiriting spectre of error. Unlike Hoffmann's *Vetter*, he will feel threatened by the accusation: *Von allem, was du da herauskombinierst, mag kein Wörtchen wahr sein.*<sup>149</sup>

Indeed the veridical anxieties at the heart of Malte's *Sehenlernen* project, signalled not least by his tendency to uneasy circumlocution, lead me to the conclusion that we are dealing with a rich *epistemological tragi-comedy* which crystallises out the problem of error latent in the characterological hermeneutics of *all* physiognomic, *flâneuresque*, detectivistic and parapsychological discourse. The physiognomist's deepest fear is that, in Hegel's words, a *Gesichtsausdruck* is »nur ein Zeichen [...], das gleichgültig gegen das Bezeichnete ist und darum in Wirklichkeit nichts bezeichnet«,<sup>150</sup> thus annihilating the entire notion of body as reliable semiotic system - and with it Lavater's mystical (and proto-monistic) postulate of Man's *Gottesebenbildlichkeit*,<sup>151</sup> of what Novalis calls the »[h]eilige, unerschöpfliche Hieroglyphe jeder Menschengestalt« which permits one to speak of the

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<sup>149</sup> Cf Hoffmann, *Des Veters Eckfenster*, p.602.

<sup>150</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes. Werke Bd.III*, edited by Eva Moldenhauer & Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt/M: 1970), pp.239f.

<sup>151</sup> Rilke seems to revive the *Gottesebenbildlichkeit* theorem in his account of an experience at the foot of the Sphinx of Gizehin in 1911 (see Lorenz's theologically oriented account in *Schweigen in der Dichtung*, pp.166f). Cf the tenth *Duineser Elegie* (KA II, p.232, lines 72-27).

»Religiositaet der Physiognomik«. <sup>152</sup> The *flâneur* relies on external appearances in the street as the only available index of realities secreted away in the *intérieurs* of subjective life and private domesticity. The detective must make the positivistic leap of faith that past events can be indirectly reconstructed on the basis of material and circumstantial evidence, with the conclusions he draws often a matter of life and death. Finally, and most obviously, parapsychological discourse, whether from a Swedenborg, a Mesmer or a du Prel, has been ever forced to pass through the hostile defiles of sceptical materialist scrutiny of its often ambiguous empirical >demonstrations<.

I thus propose that *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* activates these epistemological anxieties in a quite systematic fashion, biasing the results in a tragi-comic direction. The »ville[] énorme[]«, with its limitless supply of new and strange faces, the »croisement« of its »innombrables rapports«, <sup>153</sup> becomes a rich space for Malte's psychism - which is not to say that the city is the *root cause* of this psychism. Wandering its streets, will Malte find them serviceable to his magical and/or imaginative needs - or will he,

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<sup>152</sup> Novalis, *Schriften. Bd. II: Das philosophische Werk II*, edited by Richard Samuel with Hans-Joachim Mähl & Gerhard Schulz (Stuttgart: 1960), p.566. Novalis continues his fragment: »Schwierigkeit Menschen wahrhaft zu *sehen*. Relativitaet und Falschheit der Begriffe von schönen und häßlichen Menschen. Recht häßliche Menschen können unendlich schön seyn. Öftere Beobachtung der Minen. Einzelne Offenbarungsmomente dieser Hieroglyphe« (ibid.). Compare one such *Offenbarungsmoment* in Malte's reflection upon Abelone's physiognomy as a transparency through which an inner beauty shines forth: »Ich interessierte mich dafür, weshalb Abelone nicht geheiratet hatte. Sie kam mir alt vor verhältnismäßig, und daß sie es noch könnte, daran dachte ich nicht. / >Es war niemand da<, antwortete sie einfach und wurde richtig schön dabei. Ist Abelone schön? fragte ich nicht überrascht [...] nachts wuchs in mir die Sicherheit, daß Abelone schön sei [...] Es war schon voller Sommer. Ich lief in einen der Wege hinein und auf einen Goldregen zu. Und da war Abelone. Schöne, schöne Abelone« (MLB, Paper XXXVII, p.543).

<sup>153</sup> Baudelaire, *À Arsène Houssaye*, Preface to the *Spleen de Paris* collection, *Oeuvres complètes I*, p.276.

like a depressed Baudelaire in Brussels, complain that they are *inutile*? I am put in mind here of a 1900 Schnitzler short story, *Ein Erfolg*, in which a hapless officer of the law named Engelbert Friedmaier hears a commotion on his street *Revier*. Seeing a crowd gather round an assaulted girl, he hastens to the scene with detectivistic excitement: »Hier war hoffentlich ein Mord an einem wehrlosen Kinde geschehen, und er war in der Lage einzuschreiten«. The >girl< turns out to be a ventriloquist's puppet, the >assailant< an entertainer.<sup>154</sup> *Es ist so gut wie nichts geschehen*. We see exemplified in this short Viennese scene the kind of comic anti-climax which threatens Malte Laurids Brigge's Parisian forays: where Friedmeyer *would see* criminal activity, Brigge *would see* morbidity, spectral or otherwise;<sup>155</sup> where Friedmeyer *would prove himself* detectivistically by happening upon evidence of criminality, Brigge *would prove himself* magically by happening upon evidence of the paranormal; where Friedmeyer is humiliated by his comic misprision, so too, *mutatis mutandis*, does Brigge risk epistemological humiliation.

I shall revisit the first thirteen *Aufzeichnungen* under an explicitly supernatural rubric in Chapter Three. For the moment, I merely propose a triple motivation for the strange *Nichtgesicht* tendency which was identified as their signature. Sometimes Malte will shy away from direct perception out of fear of *seeing something commensurate to his capacity for horror*. At other

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<sup>154</sup> Arthur Schnitzler, *Die Erzählenden Schriften Bd.1*, Frankfurt/M: 1961, p.530.

<sup>155</sup> The spiritistic, parapsychological and spiritual dimensions of Malte's morbidity must be kept in mind. Otherwise, one will easily confuse it with a decadent cultivation of decay and death for their own aestheticist sake. Cf. Wolfdietrich Rasch on the radical difference between a religious and a decadent cultivation of the *momento mori* motif (*Die literarische Décadence um 1900*, München: 1986, p.45).

moments he will refuse to look out of fear of *not seeing something commensurate to his capacity for horror* - that is, *seeing only his error*. At still other times, however, he will *deliberately set up a >blind< experiment as a way of flexing his muscles of indirect perception*. This last possibility perhaps explains the *Nichtgesicht* paradox of Malte's *Sehenlernen*: in order to see more, he forces himself to see less, in order to develop second sight he suppresses first sight.<sup>156</sup> And not until the *Zeitungsverkäufer* episode in Paper LIX will he finally embolden himself to take the final, decisive step by going beyond his virtual theatre (Doumet)<sup>157</sup> and *looking at what he has hitherto not looked at*. The result we have already seen: »Ich wußte sofort, daß meine Vorstellung wertlos war«.<sup>158</sup> The result of this result? The discontinuation of Parisian

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<sup>156</sup> Wagner-Egelhaaf notes the etymological root of the word >mystic<: >to close one's eyes< (*Mystik der Moderne*, p.81). The suppression of one sense faculty as a way of sensitising the self to supersensible phenomena is an important idea in the Beethoven-Paper (XXIV, *MLB*, p. 508): »Das Antlitz dessen, dem ein Gott das Gehör verschlossen hat, damit es keine Klänge gäbe, außer seinen. Damit er nicht beirrt würde durch das Trübe und Hinfällige der Geräusche. Er, in dem ihre Klarheit und Dauer war; damit nur die tonlosen Sinne ihm Welt eintrügen, lautlos, eine gespannte, wartende Welt, unfertig, vor der Erschaffung des Klanges«. Amusing in this light is an anecdote which Kassner tells involving Rilke: »Ich erinnere mich noch, wie er einmal in München vor einem mäßigen Orchester und der noch viel mäßigeren Symphonie eines großen Klaviervirtuosen sich die Augen zuhielt, um auf diese Weise mehr Ohr zu sein, worauf ich, der hinter ihm saß, leise ins Ohr flüsterte, ob es nicht trotz allem angezeigter wäre, die Ohren zuzuhalten und die Augen aufzumachen. Was er auch gleich tat« (*Rilke. Gesammelte Erinnerungen 1926-1956*, p.18). Cf also Malte's words about his dying mother: »Ihre Sinne gingen ein, einer nach dem andern, zuerst das Gesicht« (*MLB*, Paper XXXIII, p.532). In relation to this last, Antonowicz' thought-provoking suggestion about Malte's »arbre généalogique« deserves mention: that the Brahe side has been subject to a progressive ophthalmic degeneration, rendering it (rather on the Buddenbrooks model) a »race décadente dont les nerfs commencent à lâcher« (*"Cet infernal couvercle"*, pp.100f). However, for all Malte's difficulties with the faculty of sight - not least due to his own wilful myopia - as well as his obsession with blindness, there is no evidence that his own condition signals the eruption of such a physiologically based »mal héréditaire« (*ibid.*, p.100).

<sup>157</sup> Doumet, "Malte devant les parois", p.79.

<sup>158</sup> *MLB*, Paper LIX, p.601.

scenes in the remaining *Aufzeichnungen*...<sup>159</sup> Malte's project of *Sehenlernen* can hardly - *pace* Naumann - be said to stand under the phenomenological motto:

»Zu den Sachen selbst!«.<sup>160</sup>

Our inspection of the early Papers has given us only a hint of the unfolding epistemological tragi-comedy, and but a foretaste of Malte's parasensory experimentalism. As I hope to demonstrate, Malte's *Sehenlernen* aims not merely at the tele-*pathic* faculties of the narrator of *Facino Cane* - what George Eliot in *The Lifted Veil* calls a »superadded consciousness of the actual«<sup>161</sup> - but at a broader paranormal repertory encompassing mesmeric powers of *actio in distans* and Swedenborgian powers of *Geistersehen* also.

It is to the latter that I shall first attend in Chapter Three.

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<sup>159</sup> For the Malte who walks around Paris is not, like Baudelaire's *flâneur*, sovereignly free of veridical concerns. As Neumeyer rightly notes, he is still concerned to keep some sort of referential good faith: »[Malte ist] darum bemüht, seine Wahrnehmung nicht als pure Projektion erscheinen zu lassen« (*Der Flaneur*, p.223). Stephens sees Malte turning away from direct description of Parisian scenes as a response to the impossibility of expressing or coping with the inexpressibly intense reality - *das Unerhörte* - which he sees there (*Strukturanalyse*, pp.139ff). Yet I am arguing that, on the contrary, he turns from the direct experiences of Paris because they fail to deliver him scenes of *das Unerhörte* in the first place. Thus, when, with partial reference to Malte's Paris, Stephens writes that Malte comes to the insight about a third of the way into the *Aufzeichnungen* »daß mit der direkten Schilderung einer gesteigerten Wirklichkeit sehr wenig getan ist«, one must query the appositeness of the words *direkt*, *gesteigert* - and, not least, *Schilderung* itself. Stephens, in applying his *Vorwand*-analysis predominantly to »Gestalten und Ereignissen aus der eigenen Kindheit« (p.142), seems not to register just how indirect Malte's habits of perception *already are* in the Paris scenes. Stephens' bald assertion: »Der junge Däne [...] kommt in Paris an und wird von den Eindrücken der Großstadt überwältigt« (p.13) requires modification, if not indeed reversal: inasmuch as Malte walks around Paris in search of *das Äußerste*, the city leaves him *underwhelmed*.

<sup>160</sup> Contrary to Naumann: *Gesammelte Malte-Studien I*, pp.55ff, here: p.58.

<sup>161</sup> George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil* (Bath: 1985), p.29.

# CHAPTER THREE

Malte and the Occult,

or: Late Braheism

»>Kommen sie, Sten?<  
sagte er wohlwollend. >Es  
ist gut, wenn sie  
kommen.<«

*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte  
Laurids Brigge, Paper XLIV.*

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»Eine Weile sah ich, ohne  
zu sehen.«

*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte  
Laurids Brigge, Paper XV.*

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»>Was Ihnen, mein Lieber,  
fehlt, ist das Wunder.  
Merken Sie jetzt, warum  
Sie von allen Dingen und  
Sachen abgleiten. Sie sind  
ein Phantast mit  
unzureichenden Mitteln  
[...] Mit der Unendlichkeit  
zu arbeiten, ist purer  
Dilettantismus.<«

Carl Einstein,  
*Herr Giorgio Bebuquin.*

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»Wollen Sie lieber ein  
Wunder glauben, als eine  
Unwahrscheinlichkeit  
zugeben?<«

Schiller, *Der Geisterseher*

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### III.i

## The Occultistic *große Fragen*

After a troubled sequence of thirteen fragments, Malte, as if acknowledging that his musings and *flâneries* have been riddled with anti-climax and inconsequentiality, sighs his way into a long, reflective caesura: »Ich glaube, ich müßte anfangen, etwas zu arbeiten, jetzt, da ich sehen lerne. Ich bin achtundzwanzig, und es ist so gut wie nichts geschehen«.<sup>1</sup> Offering a damning dismissal of his own aesthetic productions to date, each a total failure in its respective genre (art criticism, poetry and drama), he launches into, first, an alternative poetological programme for authentic literature and, second, a (justly famous) series of *große Fragen*. At the end of this Paper, he commissions himself with a grand task: »Dieser junge, belanglose Ausländer, Brigge, wird sich fünf Treppen hoch hinsetzen müssen und schreiben, Tag und Nacht: ja er wird schreiben müssen, das wird das Ende sein«.<sup>2</sup> The reader traverses the space between these closing words and the opening words of the next *Aufzeichnung* programmed with anticipation ...

»Zwölf Jahre oder höchstens dreizehn muß ich damals gewesen sein. Mein Vater hatte mich nach Urnekloster mitgenommen«.<sup>3</sup> Malte instigates not a metaphysical enquiry, as might have been expected from the foregoing

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<sup>1</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIV, p.466.

<sup>2</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIV, p.470.

<sup>3</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, p.470.

discourse, nor a poetological self-schooling, but an autobiographical narrative. He narrates a ghost story.

This tale owes its privileged status to two factors. In the first place, its positioning in the slipstream of the important *große Fragen* statement of intent (of which more anon). Secondly, the fact that a slightly modified version of it, embedded in a frame narrative, constituted Rilke's second original opening, conceived most likely in 1904. As such, it represents the earliest strand of the *Malte*-book to have retained its place in the finished version. In the original version, the ghost-story is embedded in a frame narrative, Malte paying a visit to one of his few acquaintances in Paris and relating the events to him. (I find it interesting that this original Malte is a speaker rather than a writer. Is there not a vestigial orality in the prose style of the final version - »Hab ich es schon gesagt?«<sup>4</sup> and suchlike?) Malte informs his listening host that the »frühe und scheinbar unwichtige Begebenheit meiner Kindheit« which he is about to relate is of quite monumental import for his existence:

Ja es geschah, daß sie sich sogar aus allen anderen Erinnerungen mit einer besonderen Überlegenheit heraushob; es war mir, als wäre in ihr der Schlüssel gewesen für alle ferneren Türen meines Lebens, das Zauberwort für meine verschlossenen Berge, das goldene Horn, auf dessen Ruf hin immer Hülfe kommt. Als wäre mir damals der wichtigste Wink meines Lebens gegeben worden, ein Rat, eine Lehre - und nun ist alles verfehlt nur weil ich diesen Rat nicht befolgt, weil ich diesen Wink nicht verstanden habe; weil ich nicht gelernt habe, nicht aufzustehen, wenn sie eintreten und vorübergehen, die, welche eigentlich nicht kommen dürften, die Unerklärlichen.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *MLB*, Paper V, p.457.

<sup>5</sup> *MLB*, >Aus dem Nachlaß: Zweite Fassung des Eingangs<, p.641.

That Malte here casts the uncanny incident at Urnekloster in terms of an esoteric initiation surely represents a powerful piece of evidence that the original core of the *Malte*-book may have been deeply *and quite explicitly* Hoffmannesque in character.<sup>6</sup>

Before reading this ghost story, let us inspect the grand epistemological inquiry of the *große Fragen* in the Paper preceding it. This may go some way towards relieving the sense of *non sequitur* produced by the textual sequencing: Why of all things *a ghost story* directly after Paper XIV?<sup>7</sup>

The first two *große Fragen* offer new insight into Malte's distinctive conception of the act of seeing:

Ist es möglich, denkt es, daß man noch nichts Wirkliches und Wichtiges gesehen, erkannt und gesagt hat? Ist es möglich, daß man Jahrtausende Zeit gehabt hat, zu schauen, nachzudenken und aufzuzeichnen, und daß man die Jahrtausende hat vergehen lassen wie eine Schulpause, in der man sein Butterbrot ißt und einen Apfel?  
/ Ja, es ist möglich. / Ist es möglich, daß man trotz Erfindungen und Fortschritten, trotz Kultur, Religion und Weltweisheit an der Oberfläche des Lebens geblieben ist?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Baßler writes of the significance of the original frame narrative, »wie sie genrespezifischer nicht sein könnte: Malte sitzt bei einem Pariser Bekannten am Kamin im Lehnstuhl und erzählt sein unheimliches Erlebnis (nur einmal wird die Erzählung unterbrochen, um Holz nachzulegen)« (*„Maltes Gespenster“*, pp.240f). Dieter Schiller too is alert to this aspect of the text's genesis (*„Der Einsame und seine Welt“*, pp.146f). Huysen, by contrast, cursorily marginalises the text's paranormal moment as a matter merely of Malte's »susceptibility to Scandinavian spiritism« (*„Paris / Childhood“*, p.125).

<sup>7</sup> Cf Hans-Jürgen Schlütter: »Malte Laurids Brigge muß anfangen, >Wirkliches und Wichtiges zu sagen< - und erzählt eine Gespenstergeschichte« (quoted in Baßler, *„Maltes Gespenster“*, p.241).

<sup>8</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIV, p.468. Malte's last sentence here echoes a passage in Simmel's *„Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben“*: »Übersehen wir etwa die ungeheure Kultur, die sich seit hundert Jahren in Dingen und Erkenntnissen, in Institutionen und Komforts verkörpert hat, und vergleichen wir damit den Kulturfortschritt der Individuen in derselben Zeit - wenigstens in den höheren Ständen -, so zeigt sich eine erschreckende Wachstumsdifferenz zwischen beiden, ja in manchen Punkten eher ein Rückgang der Kultur der Individuen in bezug auf Geistigkeit, Zartheit, Idealismus« (p.240). A Kierkegaardian polemic against objective culture lurks behind both passages.

I suggest that we read this last agonised question, which laments a failure to penetrate the *Oberfläche des Lebens*, in a boldly neo-Faustian sense,<sup>9</sup> with Malte announcing an occult project of *Sehenlernen* in which he, the apprentice Mage, is to hone his Brahesque ambition of developing paranormal powers. For Malte here, knowledge seems to be a matter more of *gnosis* than of mere *episteme*.<sup>10</sup>

One curious feature of the first *große Frage* may become more intelligible in this light. What does Malte mean when he writes: *daß man Jahrtausende Zeit gehabt hat [...], und daß man die Jahrtausende hat vergehen lassen* (my emphases)?<sup>11</sup> The (to my knowledge, universal) assumption of Malte-scholars has been that these words refer to the human race *en masse* and its failure to achieve spiritual evolution.<sup>12</sup> But this conflicts with the suggestion in the third *große Frage* that any historical retrospect that thinks in terms of the mass, the race, the collective, is fundamentally erroneous:

Ist es möglich, daß die ganze Weltgeschichte mißverstanden worden ist? Ist es möglich, daß die Vergangenheit falsch ist, weil man immer von ihren Massen gesprochen hat, gerade, als ob man von einem Zusammenlauf vieler Menschen erzählte, statt von dem Einen zu sagen, um den sie herumstanden, weil er fremd war und starb?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Shorn, that is, of the original diabolism of the Faust myth.

<sup>10</sup> To use a distinction of Antoine Faivre (cited in Bettina Gruber, "Mystik, Esoterik, Okkultismus", p.32). Cf Kassner in *Der indische Idealismus* (p.14): »Krishna lehrt Arjuna das Unbegreifliche [...] er lehrt ihn das Schauen und nimmt ihm die Reflexion«.

<sup>11</sup> Cf Wyler-Zimmerli on Malte's careful assignment of subject positions in this Paper (*Zeit und Raum*, p.15).

<sup>12</sup> Although it should be noted that spiritual evolution at a species level is a typical feature of esoteric systems, whereby a tiny number of realised souls or avatars is viewed as being capable of forming a critical mass that can bring the entire species to a quantum leap in consciousness.

<sup>13</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIV, p.469.

The assumption that the first *große Frage* is referring to species failure over millenia would lend Malte's closing declaration in this *Aufzeichnung* an almost psychotically messianic ring:

Wenn aber dieses alles möglich ist, auch nur einen Schein von Möglichkeit hat, - dann muß ja, um alles in der Welt, etwas geschehen. Der Nächstbeste, der, welcher diesen beunruhigenden Gedanken gehabt hat, muß anfangen, etwas von dem Versäumten zu tun; wenn es auch nur irgend einer ist, durchaus nicht der Geeigneteste: es ist eben kein anderer da. Dieser junge, belanglose Ausländer, Brigge, wird sich fünf Treppen hoch hinsetzen müssen und schreiben, Tag und Nacht: ja er wird schreiben müssen, das wird das Ende sein.<sup>14</sup>

Is Malte really assigning himself with a world-historical, soteriological function discharged by no other human being?

A passage from Rudolf Steiner's *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* (1904-5), enunciating a key esoteric doctrine around the turn of the century, one imported mainly from the East, points us in a completely different and more fruitful direction:

[Der Geheimschüler] lernt die Lehre von der Einkörperung (Inkarnation) des höheren Selbst in ein niederes aus eigener Anschauung verstehen. Es wird ihm jetzt klar, daß er in einem höheren geistigen Zusammenhange darinnen steht, daß seine Eigenschaften, seine Schicksale durch diesen Zusammenhang verursacht sind [...] Er sieht ein, daß sein niedriges Selbst, wie es gegenwärtig sein Dasein ausmacht, nur eine der Gestalten ist, die sein höheres Wesen annehmen kann.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> MLB, Paper XIV, p.470.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, Dornach: 1931, p.168 (first appeared in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis*, vols. 13-28, Berlin: 1904-5; published in book form 1909). For Lavater's Copenhagen Christian spiritists, reincarnation is *the* key doctrinal revision necessary for Christianity: »Die Rotation, oder Seelenwanderung der Geister durch Körper, ist die größte Wohlthat für die Welt, das möglichste Vervollkommnungsmittel für sie, u. Etwas, wonach sich die edelsten der abgeschiednen Geister sehnen« (Lavater, *Reisetagebücher II*, p.341, Hegner's *Abschrift*. Carl Prinz von Hessel-Cassel happily relays the information that in two previous incarnations he had been King David and St. Peter, no less: *ibid.*, p.335). French spiritism, after Allan Kardec's *Le Livre des esprits, contenant les principes de la doctrine spirite* (1857), also holds reincarnation as a central tenet, while Anglo-Saxon

Is it not possible that Malte, in describing the career of this shadowy cipher, *man*, down the millenia, is in fact referring to *the individual soul's career from one reincarnation to the next*?<sup>16</sup> The major doctrines of metempsychosis, East and West, concur that the soul will only break free of the cycle of birth and death when it has achieved full spiritual enlightenment or >realisation<.<sup>17</sup> The fact therefore that *one* is still here, in yet another incarnation, is precisely a proof of spiritual shortcoming, a proof that *one* has not yet seen the truth behind the illusions of gross consciousness.<sup>18</sup> The jarringly pleonastic

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spiritism / spiritualism leaves belief in reincarnation optional. (See Jess, "Kardec's Book of the Spirits", p.74, on Kardec's belated recognition of Charles Fourier's influence here.) Reincarnation features prominently too in Kassner's *Der indische Idealismus* - and, interestingly given Malte's querying of *Weltgeschichte in toto*, Kassner describes it as a doctrine that disrupts the idea of history itself: »Nun, es liegt in der Natur dieses Glaubens, daß er alle Geschichte widersinnig, ja unmöglich macht, sie gleichsam verschluckt« (*Der indische Idealismus*, p.15; cf also Kassner's citation in the same book from the seventh *prapathaka* of the *Chandogya-Upanishad*, whose incantatory, refrain-based series of meditations, centred on the figure of »man«, bears certain rhetorical affinities with Malte's *große Fragen* sequence: *ibid.*, pp.27ff.) One finds a possible reference to reincarnation in Obstfelder: »When it is a matter of searching for eternal laws, of the quest for God, what then is earthly life? [...] Surely we must seek not one but many lives. We must transform ourselves, seek with better light, perhaps approach - and ultimately find!« (*A Priest's Diary*, pp.12f).

<sup>16</sup> Giloy (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.56) imputes to Malte's maternal grandfather Graf Brahe, who displays a transcendently cavalier attitude to linear time, an implicit belief in the soul's pre-natal existence.

<sup>17</sup> Cézanne's artistic goal of *réalisation* may have an esoteric or Eastern flavour. Cf Park both on Schopenhauer as a mediator of Eastern ideas to Rilke (*Rilkes Selbstwerdung*, p.177, note 13), and on Cézanne's »geistige Verwandtschaft« with Schopenhauer and with buddhism more generally (*ibid.*, pp.105ff). *Réalisation* in Cézanne is seen by Rilke to represent the beginnings, rather than the consummation, of a Buddha-like freedom from attachment and judgment: »Hinter dieser Hingabe beginnt, mit Kleinem zunächst, die Heiligkeit: das einfache Leben einer Liebe, die bestanden hat, die ohne sich dessen je zu rühmen, zu allem tritt, unbegleitet, unauffällig, wortlos. Die eigentliche Arbeit, die Fülle der Aufgaben, alles fängt erst hinter diesem Bestehen an [...]« (letter to Clara of October 19<sup>th</sup> 1907, KA IV, pp.624f).

<sup>18</sup> We have good grounds for reading the *große Fragen* as, so to speak, Malte's birthday present to himself (»[...] ich, Brigge, der achtundzwanzig Jahre alt geworden ist [...]«, *MLB*, Paper XIV, p.468). At twenty-eight, he is approaching the age at which Guatama Siddhartha renounced the world and went in search of Buddha-enlightenment. Rilke received a copy of Karl Eugen Neumann's translation of *Die Reden Gotamo Buddhos aus der mittleren Sammlung Majjhimanikayo des Pali-Kanons* (1896-1902) from Clara on September 8<sup>th</sup> 1908, which, in a letter to her, he discusses in the context of the still unfinished *Malte* project: »[...] ich weiß, was ich empfang. Ich schlugs auf, und schon bei den ersten Worten, irgendwelchen gerade aufgeschlagenen Worten, schauerte michs um, als gings auf in einen goldenen Saal, in dem

*Jahrtausende Zeit* is thus redeemed: the soul has spent millenia entering into *temporality* itself - *millenia of temporality* - but has wasted what should have been a time of learning by getting distracted and letting the time slip by as though it were a mere sojourn. Hence the *Schulpause* analogy, with its evocation of the indolent, appetitive self utilising its time to consume rather than to work. Hence also the *Sommerferien* image.

If this is in fact the tenor of Malte's words, then the *fourth* of the *große Fragen* makes new sense:

Ist es möglich, daß man glaubte, nachholen zu müssen, was sich ereignet hat, ehe man geboren war? Ist es möglich, daß man jeden einzelnen erinnern müßte, er sei ja

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nichts ist als das Ebenmaß. Warum ich mich zurückhalte vor dieser stillen, nur angelehnten Tür; warum in mir diese neue zögernde Gebärde aufkommt, die Dich so stark befremdete? - es mag sein, daß es um des Malte Laurids willen geschieht, den ich zu lang aufgeschoben habe. Bis dorthin bin ich so weit mit ihm eines, als ichs sein muß, um die Notwendigkeit zu ihm zu haben und die Zustimmung zu seinem Untergang. Zu weit darf ich nicht über sein Leiden hinaus, sonst begreif ich ihn nicht mehr, sonst fällt er mir fort und ab, und ich kann ihm nicht mehr die ganze Fülle seines Todes geben. / Nicht *meine* Einsichten will ich einschränken, sondern die seinen« (*Briefe in zwei Bänden 1*, p.315). This letter is revealing because it places Malte within the same problematic of *Leiden* as that diagnosed by the Buddha at the same time as it shows that Rilke plans to limit Malte's ability to transcend this problematic. On the *Wiedergeburt* doctrine as found in Neumann's translation, see Park (*Rilkes Selbstwerdung*, pp.71). A letter to Margot Sizzo of June 1<sup>st</sup> 1923 makes an at first glance negative reference to the doctrine of reincarnation. Rilke is querying one point of his correspondent's interpretation of the sixteenth sonnet of the first *Orpheus-cycle* ("Du, mein Freund, bist einsam [...], addressed to a dog, KA II, p.248): »[...] Sie denken zu weit, über das Gedicht hinaus, wenn Sie meinen, den Gedanken der Seelen-Wanderung, der mir in diesem Sinne fremd ist, zu Hülfe nehmen zu müssen« (*Briefe in Zwei Bänden II*, p.307, emphasis added). The sense in which the doctrine is foreign to Rilke clearly relates to the belief, found in certain Buddhist currents, that an animal may return to earth in human form (and, particularly in cases of disastrously negative karma, vice versa). Rilke is not professing wholesale disbelief in the theory of transmigration of souls. In *Das Rätsel des Menschen*, du Prel brings the reincarnation idea under a terrestrial teleology somewhat analogous to the Christian doctrine of the New Body: »Das Endziel dieses Prozesses würde also sein, daß der Besitz der Seele immer mehr in deren irdische Erscheinungsform überfließen würde, und wäre es selbst auf dem Wege der Reinkarnation [...] Jenes hypothetische Zukunftswesen nun, das vielleicht auf der Erde erscheinen wird und im normalen bewußten Besitz unserer derzeit noch transzendentalen Fähigkeiten wäre, würde nicht mehr nötig haben, durch Geburt und Tod hindurchzugehen; es hätte den Tod überwunden, indem die Seele als organisierendes Prinzip mit der Leiblichkeit vereinigt wäre und ihr nicht mehr wie ihrem bloßen Produkt gegenüberstände« (*Rätsel des Menschen*, pp.128f; cf Herbert Fritsche on reincarnation in his editorial introduction to du Prel's text, *ibid.*, pp.15f.)

aus allen Früheren entstanden, wüßte es also und sollte sich nichts einreden lassen von den anderen, die anderes wüßten?<sup>19</sup>

Are we compelled to read this in *exclusively* phylogenetic terms - the experiences of earlier generations encoded, by means of Ernst Haeckel's »biogenetischer Grundgesetz«, into a Jungian Collective Unconscious?<sup>20</sup> For the notion of a *Nachholen* of what happened before one was born is presented here as categorical imperative, as something which absolutely *must* be done. In a word, as something very close to the doctrine of *karma*.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the first part of this *große Frage* can be taken to relate to karmic law, with the second broadening the debate out to the very truth of the theory of reincarnation itself - *aus allen Früheren entstanden* referring in the first place not to one's familial ancestors but to one's own previous incarnations.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, perhaps, can Malte's closing words be acquitted of messianic delusion. Let us look at these words again in the light of *metempsychosis*:

Der Nächstbeste, der, welcher diesen beunruhigenden Gedanken gehabt hat, muß anfangen, etwas von dem Versäumten zu tun; wenn es auch nur irgend einer ist, durchaus nicht der Geeignetste: es ist eben kein anderer da. Dieser junge, belanglose Ausländer, Brigge, wird sich fünf Treppen hoch hinsetzen müssen und schreiben, Tag und Nacht: ja er wird schreiben müssen, das wird das Ende sein.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> MLB, Paper XIV, p.469.

<sup>20</sup> Cf Wolfgang Riedel, "Archäologie des Geistes. Theorien des wilden Denkens um 1900", in: *Das schwierige neunzehnte Jahrhundert. Germanistische Tagung zum 65. Geburtstag von Eda Sagarra im August 1998*, edited by Jürgen Barkhoff, Gilbert Carr & Roger Paulin, with preface by Wolfgang Frühwald (Tübingen: 2000), pp.467-485, here: pp.473f.

<sup>21</sup> Cf Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, p.168 & pp.208f.

<sup>22</sup> Cf Hess: »[...] the medium of reincarnation allows Kardec to maintain the crucial mediating term of purgatory [...] by transforming it into this-worldly existence. Instead of going to an otherworldly purgatory, human beings simply return for another life on earth. One's status in this world depends on the karma accumulated from violations of the divine laws in past lives: as a result, punishment balances redemption in the Kardecian cosmology« ("Kardec's *Book of the Spirits*", p.68).

<sup>23</sup> MLB, Paper XIV, p.470.



The passage is marked out by a linguistic distancing of the voice from the self, Malte writing entirely in the third person singular about this person he calls *Brigge*. This strategy of self-distantiation goes back to the incipit of the entire meditation:

Es ist lächerlich. *Ich* sitze hier in meiner kleinen Stube, *ich, Brigge, der* achtundzwanzig Jahre alt geworden *ist* und *von dem* niemand weiß. *Ich* sitze hier und *bin nichts*.<sup>24</sup> Und dennoch, *dieses Nichts fängt an zu denken und denkt*, fünf Treppen hoch, an einem grauen Pariser Nachmittag diesen Gedanken: / Ist es möglich, *denkt es*, daß man [...]<sup>25</sup>

The *Nichts* - a perennial mystical figure for the non-egoic self - is presented both here and in the closing passage as reflecting transcendently upon the ego, the incarnate self identified as *Brigge*. Thus, when Malte is referred to as [*d*]er *Nächstbeste*, the comparison is not with someone else *living* who could do the job more adeptly, but with the soul's earlier incarnations, who could have made more progress had they not wasted their time (*vergehen lassen, Versäumten*). Likewise, the words *es ist eben kein anderer da* take on the meaning that there is no-one else there to bring this soul onward *except the soul's current body-ego-incarnation*: [*d*]ieser *junge, belanglose Ausländer, Brigge*. >I, in my current and temporary identity as *Malte Laurids Brigge*, must work with the capacities and circumstances of this young man to make spiritual progress.<sup><26</sup> Such growth, as the earlier *große Fragen* make clear, can in no sense be a function of objective culture. The words *das wird das Ende sein* refer

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<sup>24</sup> Cf Obstfelder's priest: »I am nothing« (*A Priest's Diary*, p.28).

<sup>25</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIV, p.468, all emphases added.

<sup>26</sup> Cf Malte's words in Paper V: »[...] ich will meine Zeit ausnutzen« (*MLB*, p.457). *Meine Zeit*: the time allotted to me as Malte Laurids Brigge.

therefore not to some global eschaton but to the ultimate spiritual *telos* of the individual soul, the end of its incarnatory journey on earth, its escape from the sin of being born, its final release from maya, the gross world of mental boundaries and material finitude.

Malte, on this reading, has just drawn up a powerful gnostic manifesto with his seven *große Fragen*.<sup>27</sup> Intriguingly, Carl du Prel's *Der Spiritismus* contains a monistic manifesto structured around an equivalent sevenfold *Möglichkeitsmodus*. Each of seven successive paragraphs opens with the words: »Es ist naturwissenschaftlich möglich, daß [...]« and goes on to postulate man's »übersinnliche Hälfte«, the »transscendentale Subjekt« which transcends »die Empfindungsschwelle des irdischen Erkenntnisorgans«, penetrating below the surface of the phenomenal world of ordinary perception.<sup>28</sup> Malte, the apprentice magus, is commissioning himself to build a bridge with the supersensuous world of transcendental mind by mining occult faculties, those »magische Fähigkeiten« (du Prel)<sup>29</sup> that betoken an evolved soul and form the focus of contemporary esotericism's generously

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<sup>27</sup> Neumeyer properly rebuts Ulrich Fülleborn for reading a radically modernistic horizon into Malte's *große Fragen*: »Wichtig scheint mir jedoch [writes Neumeyer], daß Malte das >Überlieferte< und den modernen Fortschrittsglauben aufkündigt - beide bieten für ihn, etwa durch Stiftung von Kontinuitäten oder durch Schaffung neuerlicher Innovationen, keine Modelle der Sinnfindung an. Zugleich wird damit die Radikalität von Maltes Fragen auch wieder zurückgenommen: Was er nämlich nicht in Frage stellt und wodurch er metaphysischem Denken verpflichtet bleibt, ist die Prämisse, daß es Sinn gibt« (*Der Flaneur*, p.228, footnote 2, emphasis added). This is important on two counts. Firstly, Malte's dismissal of the past millenia as a waste of time on a spiritual criterion undermines the argument that he is essentially preoccupied with the tide of modernity. Secondly, it bears out the argument made in Chapter One that modernist or postmodernist reports of the Death of God and/or Meaning in the Malte may be greatly exaggerated.

<sup>28</sup> Du Prel, *Der Spiritismus* [1893] (Leipzig: [no date, ca.1916]), pp.13ff. Cf Kruse ("Zur ästhetischen Religiosität", p68, note 59).

<sup>29</sup> Du Prel, *Rätsel des Menschen*, p.84.

syncretistic formulations of the *theosophia perennis*.<sup>30</sup> The neophyte, »[...] ein Anfänger in meinen eigenen Verhältnissen«,<sup>31</sup> declares his apprenticeship in magic in a mood of utmost spiritual seriousness, with the very liberation of the soul itself at stake. Having become aware of »ein Inneres, von dem ich nicht wußte«,<sup>32</sup> the Brahe scion<sup>33</sup> hopes soon to become a seer, to be able to declare, like Swedenborg himself, »daß sein Innerstes aufgetan ist«. <sup>34</sup> That the technique of illumination which Malte nominates here involves the act of writing - *schreiben, Tag und Nacht* - may actually have less to do with >poetic< production in most received senses of the word than with a miscellany of exercises performed according to more esoteric models (spiritistic, kabbalistic, alchemistic, mystographic).<sup>35</sup> Malte, I believe, will be best understood - or rather, *least inexplicable* - as a *Gottsucher* who spends a great deal of his time writing - and not as a writer who spends a great deal of his time seeking God.

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<sup>30</sup> Arndal is especially insightful on the intimate relation between Malte's psychophysical monism and his notions of *Sehen* (">Ohne alle Kenntnis von Perspektive<?", pp.128ff).

<sup>31</sup> *MLB*, Paper XX, p.505.

<sup>32</sup> *MLB*, Paper IV, p.456

<sup>33</sup> Cf Sokel's justly influential argument that the contrast represented by Malte's Brigge and Brahe lines of descent, with their dichotomy of analytic and fantastical, constitutes the book's governing dualism ("The Devolution of the Self", pp.171ff). We find a remarkably similar, though non-occultistic, parental schism in Jens Peter Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* (in J. P. J., *Frau Maria Grubbe, Niels Lyhne, Novellen*, translated by Richard Maurice Baring, München:1961, pp.241-449, here: pp.250ff).

<sup>34</sup> Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers*, p.173. Compare Rudolf Steiner: »Nicht abstumpfen soll sich der Geheimschüler für die Außenwelt; aber sein reiches Innenleben soll ihm die Richtung geben, in der er sich ihren Eindrücken hingibt« (*Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, p.27).

<sup>35</sup> Without doubt, Malte's theory of authentic verse-production as kind of mysterious >subliminal uprush< from the depths of the Unconscious self does have certain occult features. It is however at some level still a form of *Erlebnisdichtung*, originating essentially in personal experience, however much the latter becomes transmuted by the Unconscious and then re-expressed cryptomnesiacally (cf Sokel, "The Devolution of the Self", p.180). I believe that the type of writing - or scribing - of which Malte writes elsewhere is radically different to the creation of poetry outlined in Paper XIV. Thus I do not share the general critical view that the production of *quelques beaux vers* represents Malte's ultimate ambition. It is relevant that original verse poetry is wholly absent from the Papers: Malte's *toujours travailler* (*Tag und Nacht schreiben*) does not result in verse drafts of any description.

### III.ii

#### »>Tante, wer war die Dame?<<

#### Christine

In Paper XV, Malte recalls having personally seen at the age of twelve or thirteen the spectre of one Christine Brahe who, at that time already over a century dead, haunts the Brahe manorial home of Urnekloster. The circumstance that this happens within Malte's own eye-witness purview, what du Prel in *Der Spiritismus* calls »der selbsterlebte Augenschein«,<sup>36</sup> is critical. If the diagnosis in the early fragments of a crisis due to an impoverished eye-witness perspective is sound, and if the occultistic reading of the *große Fragen* as a reflex response to this crisis is correct, then the privileged placing of this fantastical tale immediately after Malte's *große Fragen* begins to explain itself. In search of paranormal »Erfahrungstatsachen«<sup>37</sup> indicative of dormant *Hellseherei* powers within, he mines a vein of autobiographical experience richer than that offered by Paris, where his struggle to establish a secure semiotic code has turned him into a

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<sup>36</sup> Du Prel, *Spiritismus*, p.32.

<sup>37</sup> Du Prel, *Rätsel des Menschen*, p.41.

»Flaneur wider Willen« who undertakes a gradual »Rückzug ins Zimmer« (Neumeyer).<sup>38</sup>

There are three apparitions in all, the first and the last of which are described by Malte directly. The group - Malte, his father, his maternal grandfather Graf Brahe, his uncle the Major, his distant cousin Erik and a distant cousin of his mother, Mathilde Brahe - congregates for supper each evening at seven o'clock in a dark - gothically dark - dining room. All but Mathilde<sup>39</sup> are present for the first apparition:

Die Mahlzeit schleppte sich weiter wie immer, und man war gerade beim Nachtschiff angekommen, als meine Blicke von einer Bewegung ergriffen und mitgenommen wurden, die im Hintergrund des Saales, im Halbdunkel, vor sich ging. Dort war nach und nach eine, wie ich meinte, stets verschlossene Türe, von welcher man mir gesagt hatte, daß sie in das Zwischengeschoß führe, aufgegangen, und jetzt, während ich mit einem mir ganz neuen Gefühl von Neugier und Bestürzung hinsah, trat in das Dunkel der Türöffnung eine schlanke, hellgekleidete Dame und kam langsam auf uns zu. Ich weiß nicht, ob ich eine Bewegung machte oder einen Laut von mir gab, der Lärm eines umstürzenden Stuhles zwang mich, meine Blicke von der merkwürdigen Gestalt abzureißen, und ich sah meinen Vater, der aufgesprungen war und nun, totenbleich im Gesicht, mit herabhängenden geballten Händen, auf die Dame zuing. Sie bewegte sich indessen, von dieser Szene ganz unberührt, auf uns zu, Schritt für

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<sup>38</sup> Neumeyer, *Der Flaneur*, pp.227 & 226 respectively. Allemann is thus correct in his explanation of Malte's retrospective turn: »Es hat nur mittelbar mit dem Heraufholen verdrängter und vergessener Inhalte zu tun, sein eigentliches Ziel ist die angemessene Interpretation der Kindheitserfahrungen, die ein großes Versprechen, zugleich aber auch eine unklare und quälende Aufgabe bilden [...] in solchem Ernst-Nehmen der Kindheit schlummert die Möglichkeit, durch sie das Wissen um die höhere Gleichzeitigkeit des Daseins zurückzugewinnen und nun wahrhaft anzueignen« (*Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke*, p.123). That is, the *Unbewußte* which Malte is seeking to contact is both Freudian (repressed) and Hartmannian (transcendental), with the latter forming the ultimate focus of his exertions.

<sup>39</sup> »Eines Abends fehlte nämlich Mathilde Brahe [...] Mein Vater [...] fragte mit seiner breiten gedämpften Stimme: »Ist Mathilde krank?« Der Großvater lächelte in seiner Art [...]« (*MLB*, Paper XV, p.475). Compare Hoffmann, *Das Majorat*: »Eines Tages fehlte die Baronin bei der Mittagstafel; es hieß, sie kränkle, und könne das Zimmer nicht verlassen. Teilnehmend frug man den Baron, ob das Übel von Bedeutung sei. Er lächelte auf fatale Art [...]« (*Nachtstücke, Kleines Zaches, Prinzessin Brambilla, Werke 1816-1820*, edited by Hartmut Steinecke & Gerhard Allroggen, Frankfurt/M: 1985, p.225).

Schritt, und sie war schon nicht mehr weit von dem Platze des Grafen, als dieser sich mit einem Ruck erhob, meinen Vater beim Arme faßte, ihn an den Tisch zurückzog und festhielt, während die fremde Dame, langsam und teilnahmslos, durch den nun freigewordenen Raum vorüberging, Schritt für Schritt, durch unbeschreibliche Stille, in der nur irgendwo ein Glas zitternd klirrte,<sup>40</sup> und in einer Tür der gegenüberliegenden Wand des Saales verschwand. In diesem Augenblick bemerkte ich, daß es der kleine Erik war, der mit einer tiefen Verbeugung diese Türe hinter der Fremden schloß.<sup>41</sup>

The figure passing through the room - referred to only as *eine schlanke, hellgekleidete Dame* [...] [*die*] *merkwürdige*] *Gestalt* [...] *die Dame* [...] *die fremde Dame* - is a rather curious class of ghost. Her physical presence in ordinary space and concomitant obedience to the laws of physics are accentuated rather than played down: she comes through and (with the assistance of Erik Brahe) goes out of open doors, rather than passing ethereally through solid partitions; she needs the intervention of Graf Brahe, who prevents Malte's father from touching her or blocking her route across the room, allowing her to traverse *den nun freigewordenen Raum* unmolested.<sup>42</sup> At this point, be it

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<sup>40</sup> Cf this motif in Hoffmann, *Das öde Haus* (*Nachtstücke*, p.192).

<sup>41</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, pp.476f.

<sup>42</sup> Bradley links Graf Brahe's gesture to Malte's own resistance to demystification - his »Unterlassen von Infragestellung [...]« (*Zu Rilkes Malte Laurids Brigge*, p.46). Cf Adorno's sardonic comment on the open door in séances: »Weil die Geister die Kontrolle nicht mögen, muß ihnen, mitten unter den Sicherheitsvorkehrungen, ein Türchen offengehalten werden, durch das sie ungestört ihren Auftritt machen können. Denn die Okkulten sind praktische Leute. Sie treibt nicht eitle Neugier, sie suchen Tips« (»Thesen gegen den Okkultismus«, p.276). Adorno is surely caricaturing here, however. For Myers, Gurney et al, the sealed chamber will typically be the first requirement of a serious sitting. Du Prel too, for all that he stresses the corporeality of many spirit manifestations, describing how they would be weighed and measured for heart-rate, etc., lays great stress throughout on the physical precautions taken against a human hoaxer entering the séantistic chamber by clandestine means, still less through an open door. Compared to the spectre's arrival and exit in Malte's story and in Adorno's sceptical sketch, the mobility of the purported spirits who show up in du Prel's experimental chamber seems a great deal more mysterious (see for example *Spiritismus*, p.41; cf also du Prel, *Rätsel des Menschen*, p.94). Giloy leaves open the possibility that Malte's father, alone of the group, did not actually see the Christine-figure »und nur aus der Perspektive der anderen Christine entgegenging« (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.56). However, it is

noted, the young Malte has no idea who this figure is supposed to be. He has himself not yet identified it as the ghost of the long dead Christine Brahe.

That night, Malte receives a terrible fright when he thinks he is being visited in his bedroom by the *schlanke, hellgekleidete Dame* (obviously a citation of the classic *weiße Frau* figure) who had earlier passed through the dining room:

Aber plötzlich gegen Morgen erwachte ich doch aus irgend etwas Schlafähnlichem und sah mit einem Entsetzen, das mich bis ins Herz hinein lähmte, etwas Weißes, das an meinem Bette saß. Meine Verzweiflung gab mir schließlich die Kraft, den Kopf unter die Decke zu stecken, und dort begann ich aus Angst und Hülfslosigkeit zu weinen.<sup>43</sup>

But this particular *weiße Frau* turns out not to be so supernatural after all:

Aber die Stimme, die nun von ganz nahe auf mich einsprach, kam lau und süßlich an mein Gesicht, und ich erkannte sie: es war Fräulein Mathildes Stimme. Ich beruhigte mich sofort und ließ mich trotzdem, auch als ich schon ganz ruhig war, immer noch weiter trösten; ich fühlte zwar, daß diese Güte zu weichlich sei, aber ich genoß sie dennoch und meinte sie irgendwie verdient zu haben. »Tante«, sagte ich schließlich und versuchte in ihrem zerflossenen Gesicht die Züge meiner Mutter zusammenzufassen: »Tante, wer war die Dame?« / »Ach«, antwortete das Fräulein Brahe mit einem Seufzer, der mir komisch vorkam, »eine Unglückliche, mein Kind, eine Unglückliche.«<sup>44</sup>

The detail of *Züge meiner Mutter* is significant.<sup>45</sup> Critics have picked up on the strong thread that connects Mathilde to Maman. Earlier in the fragment,

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doubtful that his body language and interrogation of the Graf are consistent with such a scenario.

<sup>43</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, p.477.

<sup>44</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, pp.477f.

<sup>45</sup> Cf the apostrophe to »Mutter« in Paper XXIII, where She is praised for her almost superhuman ability to assuage the child's fear of ghosts (»[...] erschrick nicht, ich bin es«, *MLB*, p.507). Mathilde's appearance is both a reversal of this scenario (the mother-figure terrifying the boy) and a repetition of it (the mother-figure, once identified, becoming a soothing presence).

Malte recalls the uncanny manner in which her features recalled those of his recently deceased mother:

Sie war zu jener Zeit außerordentlich stark, von einer weichen, trägen Fülle, die gleichsam achtlos in ihre losen, hellen Kleider hineingegossen war; ihre Bewegungen waren müde und unbestimmt, und ihre Augen flossen beständig über. Und trotzdem war etwas in ihr, das mich an meine zarte und *schlanke* Mutter erinnerte. / Ich fand, je länger ich sie betrachtete, alle die feinen und leisen Züge in ihrem Gesichte, an die ich mich seit meiner Mutter Tode nie mehr recht hatte erinnern können; nun erst, seit ich Mathilde Brahe täglich sah, wußte ich wieder, wie die Verstorbene ausgesehen hatte; ja, ich wußte es vielleicht zum erstenmal. Nun erst setzte sich aus hundert und hundert Einzelheiten ein Bild der Toten in mir zusammen, jenes Bild, das mich überall begleitet. Später ist es mir klar geworden, daß in dem Gesicht des Fräuleins Brahe wirklich alle Einzelheiten vorhanden waren, die die Züge meiner Mutter bestimmten, - sie waren nur, als ob ein fremdes Gesicht sich dazwischen geschoben hätte, auseinandergedrängt, verbogen und nicht mehr in Verbindung miteinander.<sup>46</sup>

Now earlier in the narrative Maman is linked, in a most peculiar prolepsis, to the soon-to-appear Christine-figure when Malte tells how Graf Brahe, before the first apparition has taken place, discussed his deceased daughter:

Graf Brahe hielt es für eine besondere Artigkeit meinem Vater gegenüber, von dessen verstorbener Gemahlin, meiner Mutter, zu sprechen. Er nannte sie Gräfin Sibylle, und alle seine Sätze schlossen, als fragte er nach ihr. *Ja es kam mir, ich weiß nicht weshalb, vor, als handle es sich um ein ganz junges Mädchen in Weiß, das jeden Augenblick bei uns eintreten könne.*<sup>47</sup>

An uncanny, and hardly unsystematic or accidental, *Doppelgängerin* motif operates in this entire episode between three women - Mathilde, Maman and

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<sup>46</sup> MLB, Paper XV, pp.472f, emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup> MLB, Paper XV, pp.474f, emphasis added. Cf Giloy: »Die Erzählung des Großvaters über seine Tochter rief in Malte die Erwartung hervor, sie könne jeden Moment eintreten« (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.54).



the Christine-figure. Mathilde reminds Malte of Maman; Maman, as she figures in the Graf's table talk, anticipates the entrance of Christine; and Mathilde is linked to Christine when Malte mistakes the living woman sitting on his bed (Mathilde) for the figure he has earlier seen at supper (Christine).<sup>48</sup>

Yet of these three linkages, the most troubling is surely the last. *What is the precise relationship between Mathilde Brahe and Christine Brahe?*

To lay some groundwork for an educated guess, let us take the briefest of excursions into what is without doubt the single most live issue in late nineteenth century debates on spiritism, and one of which Rilke, given his reading of du Prel's *Der Spiritismus*, will most certainly have been aware. A sizeable section of that book is devoted to a potentially compromising feature of so many spiritistic sittings, and one which spiritism's critics would incessantly cite: »eine körperliche Ähnlichkeit zwischen Phantom und Medium [...]«. <sup>49</sup> This uncomfortably common resemblance between a human sitter and a spectral visitor is rationalised by du Prel as a cross-interference of energies, a hybrid manifestation, half-mediumistic, half-spiritistic: »[...] weil eben das Medium körperlich in wechselndem Grade mitbeteiligt ist, aber selbst dann liegt in der Gesamtheit der Merkmale der Beweis, daß die Materialisation nicht bloß animistisch ist«. <sup>50</sup> The ontological distinction between animistic and spiritistic explanations of spectral manifestations at séances and mediumistic sittings is absolutely critical for du Prel. A

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<sup>48</sup> Wagner-Egelhaaf confuses the chronology here when she writes: »Die Erscheinung der Christine Brahe kommt und geht, im Bewußtsein Maltes setzt sie sich fort in Mathilde Brahe, diese erinnert ihn an seine Mutter« (*Mystik der Moderne*, p.96).

<sup>49</sup> Du Prel, *Spiritismus*, p.37.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

>materialisation< of a figure is understood to be *animistisch* or *mediumistisch* (the word *somnambulistisch* is even used sometimes to cover this sense) if it is formed purely by a projection of energy from within the medium themselves, rather than the *spiritistic* materialisation of a *separate* being from the spirit dimension.

The entire second chapter of *Der Spiritismus*, on “Die Phänomenologie des Spiritismus”, is a polemic against Eduard von Hartmann’s own *Der Spiritismus* of 1885, in which *all* purportedly spiritistic phenomena are reinterpreted as, at best, animistic/ mediumistic/ somnambulistic manifestations, and thus related entirely to the living medium’s energy and not to any spirit offering independent proof of an after-life. Even those figures seen by more than one sitter fall under von Hartmann’s schema of mediumistic phenomena, the hallucination of the medium somehow infecting others in the room. For Du Prel, von Hartmann’s argumentative escapology in the teeth of evidence presented by spiritists is a matter of intellectual bad faith:

Auch Transfigurationen und Materialisationen erklärt Hartmann mit größter Leichtigkeit. Was die Spiritisten die kontrollierenden Geister der Medien nennen, sind für ihn nur feststehende Typen, in die sich die Phantasie des Mediums hineingelegt hat, und in die es die eigene Persönlichkeit hineinversenkt, so daß diese ihre Rolle mit größter *schauspielerischer Virtuosität* spielen. Stehen der Befriedigung dieses Dranges Hindernisse entgegen, ist z.B. das Medium zur *Sicherung gegen Betrug* in Knoten und Fesseln geschlagen worden, so streift es dieselben ab und wandelt transfiguriert herum. Tritt aber eine *eigentliche Materialisation* ein, so wird Hartmann auch dadurch nicht in Verlegenheit gesetzt; denn nun handelt es sich um

eine Hallucination im somnambulen Bewußtsein des Mediums, die es vermöge seiner magnetischen Kraft auf das somnambule Bewußtsein der Zuschauer überträgt.<sup>51</sup>

The terms of engagement between spiritists and sceptics begins to come across here in this example - and von Hartmann, to put it mildly, is no hard-nosed materialist, rather a Schopenhauerian monist putting a distinctively neo-mesmeristic construction on apparently spiritistic phenomena.<sup>52</sup> Du Prel's words indicate the extent to which phenomena reported and documented at sittings had come to be themselves haunted by the spectre of *alternative explanations*. In this case, von Hartmann's postulate of mediumistic projection is sustained even where the evidence of collective eye-witness reports would seem to point in a different direction. Von Hartmann, taking recourse to a somnambulistic »Vorstellungsübertragung bei großer Nähe« resulting from the »Mitteilung von Ätherschwingungen«,<sup>53</sup> sustains his alternative explanation:

es braucht nur durch ein intensives Willensinteresse der >Rapport< oder Telefonanschluß zwischen zwei Individuen im Absoluten [d.h., dem absoluten Geist, D.D.] hergestellt zu werden, damit der unbewußte geistige Austausch zwischen denselben sich auch ohne sinnliche Vermittelung vollziehen kann.<sup>54</sup>

The sticking-point between du Prel and von Hartmann is that the latter will not concede the possibility that genuine manifestations can *ever* appear *independently of their medium*, thus denying any ontological status to manifest figures at spiritistic sittings:

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.30, emphases added.

<sup>52</sup> Cf Schopenhauer, "Versuch über Geistersehn und was damit zusammenhängt", pp.303ff.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted by du Prel in *Der Spiritismus*, p.30.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, p.29.

Wenn das Medium beispielsweise die Hallucination hat, nicht mehr es selbst, sondern etwa der Geist John King oder Katie King zu sein, und als solcher aufzutreten und zu agieren, so wird auch in den Empfänger die Hallucination übertragen werden, daß das aus dem Vorhang hervortretende Medium nicht mehr das Medium, sondern John King oder Katie King sei.<sup>55</sup>

Where du Prel sees at the very least a partially independent spectre, von Hartmann never sees anything more than a medium. For du Prel, von Hartmann's obstinacy is sometimes beyond belief:

Vergeblich werfen die Spiritisten ein, daß Geistergestalten photographiert wurden, daß photographische Platten unmöglich an Hallucinationen leiden können, daß [William] Crookes<sup>56</sup> und andere sogar Medium und Phantom auf der gleichen Platte darstellten, womit gleichzeitig sowohl die Betrugs- als die Hallucinationstheorie beseitigt seien. Für so schwache Argumente hat Hartmann nur ein überlegenes Lächeln: »Bei der von Crookes angefertigten Photographie, auf welcher das Medium gleichzeitig mit dem Phantom zu sehen ist, liegt der dringende Verdacht vor, daß anstatt des angeblichen Phantoms das Medium, und anstatt des vermeintlichen Mediums die durch ein Kissen ausgestopfte Kleidung des Mediums in halb verdeckter Stellung photographiert worden sei.«<sup>57</sup>

When pressed by photographic evidence, von Hartmann has resorted to accusations of outright imposture.

For sceptics of whatever hue, the resemblance between a terrestrial sitter and a purportedly phantom visitor quite simply gives the game away, inviting alternative explanations, ranging from the mediumistic (von Hartmann) through the psychopathological (delusion or hallucination at individual or collective level, multiple personality) and on to the most

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, p.30.

<sup>56</sup> Author of the pioneering *Research in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (1874).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.30f.

damaging and perennial of all: »die einfache Betrugshypothese«.<sup>58</sup> The question of sitter-phantom consubstantiality threatens to become *the* dominant explanandum for late nineteenth century spiritism.

For an undaunted Du Prel, however, the medium of photography becomes the single most important weapon in the spiritist armoury. If photographic evidence can be adduced to prove certain features of phantom apparitions, then the sceptics' diverse explanations can be set at naught. Thus his list of the five criterial »Bedingungen« according to which photographic records of »Materialisationen ganzer Gestalten« may be classed:

1. Das Medium ist sichtbar; die Gestalt ist unsichtbar und wird photographiert.
2. Das Medium ist unsichtbar; die Gestalt ist sichtbar und wird photographiert.
3. Medium und Gestalt sind sichtbar; die Gestalt allein wird photographiert.
4. Medium und Gestalt sind sichtbar und beide werden zu gleicher Zeit photographiert.
5. Medium und Gestalt sind unsichtbar, die letztere wird in der Dunkelheit photographiert.<sup>59</sup>

I have offered du Prel's riposte to von Hartmann in such detail because our knowledge that Rilke read *Der Spiritismus* tells us that, as he put pen to paper to create the Christine episode, he was, for a layman, unusually well acquainted with the prodigious significance for spiritists of just such minutiae. So how might the debate sketched here between spiritism and scepticism, along with du Prel's attempts to rescue phantom manifestations from the latter's alternative explanations, relate to the Christine-narrative in *Malte Laurids Brigge*? Quite simply thus: if one juxtaposes a) du Prel's classic

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Vorrede, p.3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.41.

account, familiar to Rilke, of the key criterial conditions under which spiritistic phenomena might be said to challenge even the most hardened sceptic and b) the conditions under which Malte's ghost story unfolds, then *the Christine narrative suddenly appears extraordinarily >weak< as a spiritistic occurrence*. Du Prel's *Spiritismus* claims to instill in us the habit of inspecting the spectral apparatus to hand according to the strictest of criteria.<sup>60</sup> If a rationalistic explanation is recuperable, no matter how improbable it might be, then the phenomenon will be judged to have failed to meet spiritistic criteria. Only those cases where no rationalistic escape route of any kind is left to the analyst can be treated seriously.

So does Malte's Christine episode *compel* a spiritistic reading in this way? Apart from the circumstance that several characters witness the appearance<sup>61</sup> (if not the apparition: the participants are not all necessarily interpreting >Christine< as a ghost), Rilke conspicuously refuses to lend Malte's narrative any other >hard case< features, instead vitiating its cogency with ambiguous, borderline details.

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<sup>60</sup> In a clinching third section of *Der Spiritismus*, entitled "Der Kampf um den Spiritismus in Mailand", the sceptical reader is challenged to explain away multiply attested phenomena at a series of investigative sittings organised by a Professor Lombroso and centred on the purported mediumistic powers of Eusapia Paladino (*ibid.*, pp.72-97).

<sup>61</sup> Giloy spots the significance of this detail: »Wenn mehrere Personen dasselbe im gleichen Moment für wirklich halten, erhöht dies zumindest die Wahrscheinlichkeit, daß es dann auch unabhängig von der Wahrnehmung der einzelnen Personen so ist, daß keine Täuschung vorliegt« (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.55). Nevertheless, and without accounting for this collective witness, she assumes the spectral sighting at Urnekloster to be Malte's illusion: »Malte aber halluzinierte, glaubte also an die Wirklichkeit des Erlebten« (*ibid.*, p.58).

Firstly, the rôle played by the low visibility of the Urnekloster dining room in heightening the diners' suggestibility is established at great length by Malte as he sets the scene in the early part of the narrative.<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, and crucially, the connection of the spirit to one of the living figures in the scene is inserted as subtext into Malte's narrative. I am referring to the odd mutual exclusivity in the apparition scene we have already read of Mathilde and Christine. The night that Mathilde is absent at table *happens to be* the night that Christine appears. This fact is explained by Graf Brahe as a presentiment on Mathilde's part: »Nein, sie wünscht nur, Christinen nicht zu begegnen«.<sup>63</sup> The next time we encounter Mathilde, sitting on Malte's bed, she functions as, first, Christine-substitute and, second, mother-substitute.

Why does Rilke elect to insert this panoply of *compromising* borderline phenomena? To press the issue: is it unthinkable that the mutually exclusive appearances of Mathilde and Christine in fact point to nothing less than an actual relation of *identity?*; that the mischievous subtext of the Christine story is that she is no ghost at all, rather Mathilde in trance or, more simply and in shocking bathos, *Mathilde in deliberate disguise?*; that she and Graf Brahe (and possibly Erik) are staging the whole thing?; that Malte has not just once but

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<sup>62</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, p. 471. Compare the séance scene in *Der Zauberberg*, which Dr. Krokowski opens by insisting that low lighting should not be misinterpreted as »Stimmungsmache und Mystifikation« (Th. Mann, *Der Zauberberg*, p.935 & f), and which Hans Castorp closes by switching on the light (*ibid.*, p.947). Cf R. C. Finucane: »The scientist [Michael] Faraday agreed to attend a seance if certain conditions - the room lighting, for instance - were met« (*Appearances of the Dead. A Cultural History of Ghosts*, New York: 1984, p.186). Faraday was turned down. Finucane, himself openly hostile to the claims of spiritism, points to »lack of illumination« as »a favourite point with sceptics« (*ibid.*, p.190).

<sup>63</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, p.476. It should be noted that Malte cannot vouch for his memory on this point (»mit einem Satze, auf den ich, mit mir selber beschäftigt, nicht achtgab und der etwa lautete: [...]«, *ibid.*).

*twice*, in his bedroom *and* in the dining room, seen Mathilde and taken her to be Christine?; that Rilke, in short, is presenting us with a ghost story displaying a battery of masterly ambiguitive effects worthy of Hoffmann himself?<sup>64</sup>

Let us examine the hypothesis further. The observation that Mathilde and Christine are mutually exclusive presences at the dinner table seems to be disconfirmed in the words which frame the third and final apparition: »Das war, als wir Christine Brahe zum letztenmal sahen. Dieses Mal war auch Fräulein Mathilde zu Tische erschienen.«<sup>65</sup> But Rilke is surely playing with us here. Anticipating that his reader will have suspicions as to the ontological independence of the Christine figure, he craftily seems to promise a narrative >photograph< in which both Mathilde and Christine will appear in the same room (the spiritistic holy grail which du Prel itemises in the criterial list above as *Bedingung* number four). Note first of all the wording: *Dieses Mal war auch Fräulein Mathilde zu Tische erschienen*. At one level, *auch* brings Mathilde into relation with the other diners who have also appeared. But a double code of signification is in play here: not just Christine *appeared* (*erschieden*) but *also* Mathilde, the other *weiße Frau* given to sudden manifestation. Thus, so the word-play insinuates, this final evening spent by Brigge père and fils in the Brahe manor witnessed a double >apparition<. Incidentally, the phrase negatively imparts an extra, critical piece of information: given that Christine

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<sup>64</sup> Or of Henry James. Perhaps *Malte* scholars might consider following the lead of their counterparts in *Turn of the Screw* studies by agreeing a cordial schism into >apparitionist< and >non-apparitionist< camps? (Cf David Kirby, *The Portrait of a Lady and The Turn of the Screw. Henry James and Melodrama*, Hampshire & London: 1991, pp.73ff.)

<sup>65</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, p.478.



is elsewhere credited with three further appearances,<sup>66</sup> Mathilde must have been absent on the second and third, unnarrated occasions also.

But what of the hypothesis Mathilde = >Christine<, given Mathilde's presence on the evening of the fourth and final appearance? The description of Mathilde's behaviour on this final evening is intriguing: »[...] aber sie war anders als sonst«. Not least, one might add, because she was actually present in the room.

Wie in den ersten Tagen nach unserer Ankunft sprach sie unaufhörlich ohne bestimmten Zusammenhang und fortwährend sich verwirrend, und dabei war eine körperliche Unruhe in ihr, die sie nötigte, sich beständig etwas am Haar oder am Kleide zu richten, - bis sie unvermutet mit einem hohen klagenden Schrei aufsprang und verschwand.<sup>67</sup>

*So, also*: she was *not* after all there when Christine appeared for the last time. The information *Dieses Mal war auch Fräulein Mathilde zu Tische erschienen*: the pluperfect suddenly changes its sphere of influence. What on first reading appeared to signify that Mathilde *had* appeared at the table with the others that evening and thus placed herself in the ghost-scene which was to take place in the course of the meal, now refers to the fact that she *had* appeared at the table *before* the others saw Christine (*als wir Christine zum letzten Male sahen*), vanishing before Christine's arrival (again, a delightfully spectral verb is assigned to Mathilde: *verschwand*). The other noteworthy feature of Mathilde's short participation in this meal is her agitation. On one level, this may be taken to suggest her disquiet at the imminent visitation of the ghost

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<sup>66</sup> »Wir hielten uns noch acht Wochen oder neun in diesem Hause auf, wir ertrugen den Druck seiner Seltsamkeiten, und wir sahen noch dreimal Christine Brahe« (ibid.).

<sup>67</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, pp.478f.

(although, curiously enough, she always seems to be equipped with perfect foreknowledge on this score). But, on level two of what I am suggesting is the text's double code, does not Mathilde's fidgeting with her hair and clothes put one in mind of the actor about to dash off the stage for a quick change of costume before reappearing on stage moments later?<sup>68</sup>

Yet, the following sentence suggests that this would need to be a rather impossibly quick costume change on Mathilde's part for my reading to hold water: »In demselben Augenblick wandten sich meine Blicke unwillkürlich nach der gewissen Türe, und wirklich: Christine Brahe trat ein.«<sup>69</sup> This surely establishes an impossibly brief time-frame: Malte sees Christine enter the room the very moment that a) Christine *verschwand* and b) Malte turns his glance towards the door. Once again, however, I suspect Rilke may be teasing us. Is it not highly significant that the original draft of this episode words this >moment< differently? »In demselben Augenblick öffnete sich (meine Blicke warteten schon auf ihr) die gewisse Türe und Christine Brahe trat ein.«<sup>70</sup> Absolutely no room for doubt here: Mathilde's exit and Christine's entrance are all but coincident, both falling within the time-frame of *demselben Augenblick*. What has happened in the apparently minor emendation Rilke

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<sup>68</sup> Incidentally, Christine is described as *eine schlanke, hellgekleidete Dame* (MLB, p.476); Malte says that Mathilde reminded him *an meine zarte und schlanke Mutter* (MLB, p.472); while he remembers Mathilde *von einer weichen, trägen Fülle, die gleichsam achtlos in ihre losen, hellen Kleider hineingegossen war* (ibid.). The corpulence is to some degree masked by the loose clothing, which lends Mathilde the appearance of a »corps informe« (Carré, "Des >revenants< das *Les Carnets de Malte Laurids Brigge*", p.45). Now what did the historical Christine Brahe look like? In Paper XXXIV, Malte tells of his efforts to inspect her portrait in the gallery at Urnekloster, clearly in order to compare it with the apparition figure. The portrait is inexplicably missing... (MLB, pp.533ff).

<sup>69</sup> MLB, Paper XV, p.479.

<sup>70</sup> MLB, >Aus dem Nachlaß: Zweite Fassung des Eingangs<, p.651.

makes to this sentence for the finished text: *In demselben Augenblick wandten sich meine Blicke unwillkürlich nach der gewissen Türe, und wirklich: Christine Brahe trat ein...*? Simply this: Rilke has, with microscopic subtlety, strategically disarticulated *demselden Augenblick* from *trat ein*, thereby installing a tiny but absolutely telling fissure of ambiguity in the precise timing of the latter. No longer under the necessary governance of *demselden Augenblick* - that position has been reassigned to Malte's expectant *Blicke* (now released from parentheses) - Christine's entrance takes place somewhere within the indeterminate window of time marked nebulously by the words *und wirklich*.<sup>71</sup>

Our suspicions revive. Why does Mathilde leave the dining room? Is the exit motivated by Christine's imminent entrance, Mathilde wishing to avoid Christine? Or is it the other way around - Christine's imminent entrance *necessitating* Mathilde's exit, Mathilde preparing to *be* Christine?

So what might be going on in this episode? Why is the marvellous being ever so subtly subjected to such *Plausibilisierung*? Why this renunciation of so many elementary *Beglaubigungsstrategien* which the good ghost-storyteller will find to hand? Might we not relate our findings in this episode to the strategic engineering of anti-climax identified in the earlier *Aufzeichnungen*, where Malte never quite seemed to see anything commensurate to his capacity for horror? A detail of Christine's first

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<sup>71</sup> It might further be noted that, in what is obviously a word-play, the *Augenblick* is temporally stretched by the fact that Malte casts not just one *Blick* but a plurality of *Blicke* over to the door.

appearance suddenly takes on new relevance in this context of epistemological tragi-comedy: the fact that it is embedded in a context of comedy, our response to it pre-programmed by uncontrollable laughter...

Aber es begann damit, daß ich lachte. Ja ich lachte laut und ich konnte mich nicht beruhigen. Eines Abends<sup>72</sup> fehlte nämlich Mathilde Brahe. Der alte, fast ganz erblindete Bediente hielt, als er zu ihrem Platze kam, dennoch die Schüssel anbietend hin. Eine Weile verharrte er so; dann ging er befriedigt und würdig und als ob alles in Ordnung wäre weiter. Ich hatte diese Szene beobachtet, und sie kam mir, im Augenblick da ich sie sah, durchaus nicht komisch vor. Aber eine Weile später, als ich eben einen Bissen in den Mund steckte, stieg mir das Gelächter mit solcher Schnelligkeit in den Kopf, daß ich mich verschluckte und großen Lärm verursachte. Und trotzdem diese Situation mir selber lästig war, trotzdem ich mich auf alle mögliche Weise anstrengte, ernst zu sein, kam das Lachen stoßweise immer wieder und behielt völlig die Herrschaft über mich.<sup>73</sup>

This fit of laughter is, *nota bene*, a case of delayed laughter at something which at first did not reveal its high comedy (*durchaus nicht komisch*). Is the reader not perhaps being instructed in advance by the text, doubling for a moment as meta-text, as to the appropriate response to what will follow - namely, delayed laughter? The juxtaposition of comedic and gothic registers adds not just to Malte's nervous participation in the scene but also to the threat within the text of nervous, hysterical deflation.

The passage just cited has another trick up its sleeve. It can scarcely be coincidental that the action which triggers Malte's laughter involves the *fast*

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<sup>72</sup> The evening of the first apparition.

<sup>73</sup> *MLB*, Paper XV, p.475. As both Kruse (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.93) and Porombka ("Lachen mit Rilke", pp.64ff) note, laughter often presages horror in the *Malte*. Cf Paper XXXVI: Maman's laughter at table in Ulsgaard as Kammerherr Brigge makes his wife's wine-glass overflow (*MLB*, p.540); Paper XLII (pp.556, emphasis added): Malte, writing of his first sense of »etwas wie Gespensterfurcht«, at the Schulins', recalls the strange fact, »daß alle die deutlichen großen Menschen, die eben noch gesprochen und *gelacht* hatten, gebückt herumgingen und sich mit etwas Unsichtbarem beschäftigten [...]« (*MLB*, p.556).

*ganz erblindete* butler treating the absent Mathilde as though she were still present. In his blindness, he turns her place at the table into a Banquo-like ghostly space of invisible presence.<sup>74</sup> This detail, another >figure in the carpet< of the tale, so to speak, achieves three things germane to the low-gothic anti-climax of the episode. It draws renewed attention to the fact that Mathilde is absent; it accords her a ghostly presence in anticipation of her ghostly appearance on Malte's bed the next morning; and, Rilke's *coup de grâce*, it introduces the image of one blind man's failure to see that Mathilde is *not* there in order to tip the reader off that what is about to happen will involve a little boy's blindness<sup>75</sup> in failing to see that Mathilde *is* there in the room minutes later.

Blindness and insight, laughter and terror... the richly ambiguous epistemological tragi-comedy of the early Papers seems to have been ratcheted up in the Christine Paper, with Malte's own breathless testimony once again subjecting him to an aggressive cross-examination.

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<sup>74</sup> Anticipating the dog's behaviour around Ingeborg's invisible presence in Paper XXVIII (*MLB*, p.517).

<sup>75</sup> I ascribe ironic blindness quite advisedly only to the boy. The reaction of Malte's father to this >apparition< suggests that he puts a very different construction on events, seeing them not as terrifyingly paranormal but as outrageously provocative. At first, »totenbleich im Gesicht, mit herabhängenden geballten Händen«, he tries to accost the figure (*MLB*, Paper XV, p.476) - hardly a sign of terror. Malte recalls his father's mien after the figure has departed the room: »Das Gesicht meines Vaters war jetzt zornig, voller Blut [...]« (ibid., p.477). Ryan (»Hypothetisches Erzählen«, p.264) mistakes the father's *Zorn* for a sign that he is »erschreckt«, just as Giloy (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.56) misreads it as »tiefes Entsetzen«.

### III.iii

## »Ich war auf allerhand vorbereitet«

### The Hand

The Urnekloster episode is one of three >canonically< established spectral episodes in the *Aufzeichnungen*, the other two involving Ingeborg's ghost and the mysterious hand which Malte sees as a very young child. Let us examine the latter next, as it is the only other first-hand eye-witness account at Malte's disposal.

Malte writes: »So ist es, wunderlich genug, das erstemal, daß ich (und schließlich auch nur mir selber) eine Begebenheit erzähle, die nun weit zurückliegt in meiner Kindheit.«<sup>76</sup> Not having as a child dared to impart the experience to another living soul, although he was tempted to tell Maman or Erik, Malte now, for the very first time, finally lends it verbal expression and narrative coherence by putting it in writing. Indeed, as he tells us, this is the first time he has even told the story even to himself.

So what is the nature of his written deposition?

The incident is briefly related.<sup>77</sup> The very young Malte is sitting up at a table with his governess, Mademoiselle, he drawing, she reading. One of his colouring pencils falls to the ground. He climbs down and searches for it

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<sup>76</sup> MLB, Paper XXIX, p.518.

<sup>77</sup> MLB, Paper XXIX, pp.518ff.

under the table. While down there, he sees a mysterious hand shoot out of the wall. Terrified, he scrambles back up.<sup>78</sup>

Let us inspect the description of the hand's apparition. Malte is at first keenly observing the movements of his own, curiously alienated hand:

Ich verfolgte sie, wie sie vordrang, es interessierte mich, ich war auf allerhand [!] vorbereitet. Aber wie hätte ich darauf gefaßt sein sollen, daß ihr mit einem Male aus der Wand eine andere Hand entgegenkam, eine größere, ungewöhnlich magere Hand, wie ich noch nie eine gesehen hatte. Sie suchte in ähnlicher Weise von der anderen Seite her, und die beiden gespreizten Hände bewegten sich blind aufeinander zu. Meine Neugierde war noch nicht aufgebraucht, aber plötzlich war sie zu Ende, und es war nur Grauen da.<sup>79</sup>

One all but expects the foreign hand to scribble a new *mene mene tekel u-pharsin* on the back wall - which would, of course, gratify the critical temptation to rush a preeminently poetological meaning into the episode.<sup>80</sup> That nothing scribal (and/or >poetological<) does take place is just one of a series of >shortcomings<, from a good spiritist's point of view, in this strange hand's manifestation. Du Prel, in *Der Spiritismus*, deals exhaustively with the hugely prevalent spiritist motif of hand-materialisations and with the procedures for methodically verifying their objective reality. He cites the

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<sup>78</sup> Compare William Blake's earliest spiritistic experiences, as related by Kassner in *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben* (1900): »Mit vier Jahren hatte [das Kind] die erste Vision [...] William sah, wie Gott den Kopf zum Fenster hereinsteckte, und fing an zu schreien. Ein andermal sah er durch die grünen Blätter eines Lindenbaumes weisse Engelsflügel schimmern« (*Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben*, in: R. K., *Sämtliche Werke II*, edited by Ernst Zinn & Klaus E. Bohnenkamp, Stuttgart: 1974, pp.5-313, here: p.26).

<sup>79</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.520.

<sup>80</sup> Thus, for example, Wagner-Egelhaaf, who tentatively identifies the hand as »Maltes erwachsene Schreibhand« and proceeds to a diagnosis: »Maltes Dichterezukunft scheint in ihrer ganzen Fatalität am Bewußtseinshorizont auf« (*Mystik der Moderne*, p.92). Similarly Uwe Steiner, *Zeit der Schrift*, pp.389f.

signs of authenticity as laid down by the Russian paranormalist Alexander N.

Aksakow:

1. Durch das gleichzeitige Sehen mehrerer in ihrem Zeugnisse übereinstimmender Personen.
2. Durch das gleichzeitige Sehen und Fühlen mehrerer in ihrem Zeugnisse übereinstimmender Personen, wobei der sinnenfällige Eindruck dieser beiden Sinne im Einklang war.
3. Durch physikalische, von solchen Händen erzeugte Wirkungen, als z.B. Bewegung von Gegenständen vor den Augen der Zeugen.
4. Durch Erzeugung dauerhafter, physikalischer Wirkungen, und zwar:
  - a) durch in Gegenwart mehrerer Personen hervorgebrachte Schrift;
  - b) durch von derselben Hand auf weiche oder geschwärzte Substanzen hervorgebrachte Abdrücke;
  - c) durch gewisse *auf dieselbe* Hand von den Anwesenden erzeugte Wirkungen;
  - d) durch von derselben Hand aus einem gegebenen Stoff hervorgebrachte Gießformen;
  - e) durch die Photographie solcher Hände.
5. Durch das Wägen materialisierter Formen, wenn sie die volle menschliche Gestalt erreichten.<sup>81</sup>

By these standards, Malte is not alone no precocious modern Belshazzar. The hand's failure to write anything (condition 4a) is generalised into a failure to satisfy a single one of the criteria laid down by Aksakow. Not that specialist knowledge of spiritist discourse would be required for a reader's suspicions to be aroused by the >weakness< of the spectral hand. The general reader's *Kombinatorik* will easily lead her to wonder why it is that Rilke, who could effortlessly have provided Malte with an infinitely more convincing *Spukhand*, gives us this unspectacular specimen. As with the Christine Brahe episode, so

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<sup>81</sup> In du Prel, *Spiritismus*, pp.38f.



too here: Rilke is installing a classic spiritistic motif, but only, it would seem, in order to withdraw from it any convincing paranormal efficiency. But this strategy of omission is only half the matter - for Malte's account of the hand offers positive grounds for an alternative, demystifying explanation - to wit, that the hand is a shadow *tout court*.<sup>82</sup>

The proposal that the mysterious hand is in some sense the image of Malte's own hand is by no means new. Walter Seifert relates the appearance to the fact that Malte has been drawing just before his red pencil falls down over the edge of the table:

Die Erscheinung der >Hand< ist spiegelbildlich, *auch wenn sie >größer< und >ungewöhnlich mager< ist. In der Form des Spiegelbildes begegnet Malte in einer Steigerung, was er bereits an seiner eigenen verselbständigten Hand erfahren hat, die Fremdheit und Bedrohung des >Wirklichen<.*<sup>83</sup>

As the italicised words indicate, Seifert seems a little hesitant about calling the hand *spiegelbildlich*. His interpretation accordingly hovers between a weakly literal notion of the hand as reflection and a more vigorously argued notion that the hand metaphorically reflects Malte's own hand, which Seifert in turn symbolises. Seifert comes to the conclusion that the foreign hand symbolises an incursion of alterity which throws Malte into an early identity crisis:

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<sup>82</sup> Saalman compares this episode with Mallarmé's prose poem "Le Démon de l'analogie", in which the poet's hand is reflected in a shop window (*Würfelwurf nach dem Absoluten*, p.91, footnote 149).

<sup>83</sup> Walter Seifert, *Das epische Werk Rainer Maria Rilkes* (Bonn: 1969), p.253, emphasis added. Seifert here is developing his reading of the episode as a drama of social *Rollenerwartung* (see *ibid.*, p.251).

Die Erscheinung der >Hand< bedroht zwar die spontane Identität Maltes und hebt den vertrauten Bewußtseinsbereich auf, aber zugleich konstituiert sich ein neues >Bewußtsein<, insofern das Ich sich in seinen Gegensatz zerlegt und sich selbst in seinem Anderssein begegnet, denn die imaginäre >Hand< erscheint als Spiegelbild seiner eigenen. Deshalb geht das >Grauen< über den Identitätszerfall und die Begegnung mit dem Irrationalen über in >Stolz<, denn die Integration des Andersseins und der Fremdheit in das Bewußtsein vermittelt ein Ich, >voll von Innerem und schweigsam<.<sup>84</sup>

Helmut Naumann, in an essay devoted entirely to the *Hand*-episode,<sup>85</sup> dismisses Seifert's dual proposal of a) a shadow-hand b) a breach in the young Malte's *spontane Identität*. Firstly, argues Naumann (picking up no doubt on Seifert's defensive *auch wenn*), the shadow hypothesis fails to explain the outsize dimensions of the foreign hand: »Diese aus der Wand herauswachsende Hand, die der eigenen Kinderhand blind entgegengreift, ist freilich so deutlich in ihrer Verschiedenheit gekennzeichnet, daß es sich verbietet, darin ein Spiegelbild zu sehen«.<sup>86</sup> I shall deal with this point presently. Naumann's auxiliary argument is that Seifert's reading wildly pathologises the young Malte: »Diese Sicht der Dinge unterstellt Rilke, daß er seiner Romangestalt Malte eine frühkindliche Schizophrenie attestieren

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.253. Obviously, the specular motif of such a reading will seem all the more attractive in the light of the *Spiegelbild* episode recounted in Paper XXXII (*MLB*, pp.525ff). Dieter Schiller rather arbitrarily describes this »erschreckende Halluzination« as »eine Chiffre des Grauens, erwachsen aus dem Gefühl der Diskrepanz zwischen der scheinbar intakten Welt der Familiengemeinschaft und der Ahnung des Kindes, daß es mit dem gemeinsamen Leben der Familie nicht übereinstimmen kann« (»Der Einsame und seine Welt«, p.152).

<sup>85</sup> Helmut Naumann, *Gesammelte Malte-Studien. Zweiter Teil. Neue Malte Studien* (Rheinfelden & Berlin: 1993), pp.91-112.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.100. Similarly Saalman: »Die spezifische Eigenart des Erlebnisses liegt darin, daß es keineswegs eine genaue Spiegelung darstellt, sondern eher ein verzerrtes Bild liefert [...] Die entstellte Hand ist ein Ergebnis des >dérèglement de tous les sens< (Rimbaud), eine Verzerrung der sinnlichen Aufnahmeorgane des jugendlichen Maltes, welche in der ursprünglichen Szene zwar die Umwelt aus ihrer gewohnten Ordnung zu bringen vermögen, aber noch unfähig sind, aus der >déformation< eine neue ästhetische Struktur zu schaffen« (*Würfelwurf nach dem Absoluten*, pp.60).

wollte«.87 Naumann himself will go on to read the hand's intrusion into the young Malte's experience as a prophetic initiation into the overwhelming and alien reality of adulthood: »Es geht um nichts anderes als eben die *Kindheit*, für die Maltes Kinderhand stellvertretend steht und der, in der Gestalt der größeren und mageren Hand, das Erwachsensein als ein anderes, als Bedrohung entgegendrängt«.88

By rejecting the notion that the second hand might be no more than a shadow, Naumann can immediately convert it into a purely symbolic *Träger*. As it happens, Seifert, who does consider the hand to be a shadow, performs a similar symbolisation, with the difference lying only in the value of X, the symbol's ulterior >meaning<. I would like presently to propose a way out of this symbological second-guessing of the hand by moving attention away from what it itself (be it spectral or shadowy) might *symbolise* to what the episode and the narration of the episode might import in the context of Malte's present, adult crisis.

But first, let us examine the way in which Rilke marshals the details of the episode in order to insinuate the anti-climactic idea that the hand is in fact a shadow and nothing more sinister or paranormal.

In the Urnekloster episode, the play of light and dark enjoyed a central role, executing a contrary motion of a) heightening the gothic ambience in the dining room and b) deflatingly establishing Malte's suggestibility and

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<sup>87</sup> Naumann, *Malte-Studien II*, p.99.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p.105.

impressionability to indistinct forms in the room. So too here, Rilke painstakingly lays the optical groundwork for the optical illusion.

Malte informs us (and, in a way, himself too) that it was »am Abend, im Winter, wenn ich nicht irre«, before setting out the scene: »Der Tisch stand in meinem Zimmer, zwischen den Fenstern, und es war keine Lampe im Zimmer, als die, die auf meine Blätter schien und auf Mademoiselles Buch [...]«. <sup>89</sup> Rilke will deploy this *Lampe*, the only strong light source in a room otherwise lit only by fading natural light from outside, in order to throw light, in a double sense, on what is about to happen under the table. For it receives a tactically negative mention just before the second hand appears: Malte, combing the »kühlen, langhaarigen Teppich« <sup>90</sup> in vain for the pencil, comes up with a strategem: »Ich bildete mir ein, eine Menge Zeit zu verlieren, und wollte eben schon Mademoiselle anrufen und sie bitten, mir die Lampe zu halten, als ich merkte, daß für meine unwillkürlich angestregten Augen das Dunkel nach und nach durchsichtig wurde«. <sup>91</sup> The image of Mademoiselle illuminating the space under the table is given, only to be withdrawn. This detail of a non-event, somewhat surplus to narrative requirements, puts one in mind of the classic cognitive experiment: a subject is directed not, on any account, to imagine a green sheep... with the unvarying result that - a green sheep is spontaneously reported in the mind's eye. In the present case, the ~~image of the lamp~~ suddenly illuminating the space in front of Malte gains its relevance in the sudden switch several lines

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<sup>89</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.518.

<sup>90</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.519.

<sup>91</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, pp.519f.

down from his *nach und nach* acclimatisation to the darkness to the sudden (*mit einem Male*) projection of the elongated hand. I propose that the text is signalling over Malte's head either of the following elementary trains of events to us: After Malte has dropped the notion of asking Mademoiselle for assistance, he spends a short interval making the best of the darkness, upon which Mademoiselle, unbidden but alert in her solicitude, does what Malte had earlier almost asked her to do - namely, she gives him light. Or: Mademoiselle draws back her chair and checks up on Malte, and in so doing allows some light into the darkness underneath. If the lamp has been brought into play under a strategic erasure, then even the most elementary amateur reconstruction of the scenario will confirm that Rilke has carefully established the optical coordinates for this moment. The sudden illumination, whether major or minor, of the space under the table corresponds to the sudden apparition of the shadow hand. The position of the light source at some distance behind, and slightly higher than, Malte corresponds to the double circumstance that a) the shadow-hand comes from the wall in the opposite direction (*entgegenkam*), and not, for instance, adjacent to Malte's hand in a non-contrary direction, and b) the shadow form simultaneously displays elongation and emaciation.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps most ingeniously, the fact that Malte's hand is searching in a carpet which is *langhaarig* creates a surface unevenness on the plane of the floor such that Malte's hand and the shadow will not

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<sup>92</sup> This clears up Seifert's discomfort with the shadow hypothesis, evident in his insertion of a qualifying clause: »[...] spiegelbildlich, *auch wenn sie >größer< und >ungewöhnlich mager< ist*« (Seifert, *Das epische Werk*, p.253). The misleading term *spiegelbildlich* sets up a criterion of perfect, specular symmetry, making the imperfect symmetry of Malte's mystery hand more problematical than it need be.

*obviously* meet (which would happen if a hand were to clearly touch the ground on a smooth, level plane).

The distinctive morphology of the object-shadow relation, involving an imperfect symmetry, is now ready for description: *Sie [die fremde Hand] suchte ähnlicher Weise von der anderen Seite her, und die beiden gespreizten Hände bewegten sich blind aufeinander zu.* The movement of the two forms towards one another relates to the earlier directional detail that Malte's hand *vordrang* - that is, moved deeper into the space before the wall.

The deceptive details in the Urnekloster episode relating to Mathilde's movements on the night of Christine's final apparition have their equivalent here in Malte's wording of his escape from the hand: »Mit allem Recht, das ich auf sie [die eigene, rechte (!) Hand, D.D.] hatte, hielt ich sie an und zog sie flach und langsam zurück, indem ich die andere nicht aus den Augen ließ, die weitersuchte. Ich begriff, daß sie es nicht aufgeben würde, ich kann nicht sagen, wie ich wieder hinaufkam.«<sup>93</sup> This seems to perplex my reading by ascribing motor autonomy to the *andere Hand*, which is said to continue its activity even *after* Malte's hand has been withdrawn. But, as ever, the details play ironically with Malte's occult interpretation. Firstly, his hand is withdrawn not in a sudden upwards motion, but *flach und langsam*, which will keep the shadow hand essentially in position, though keeping it mobile without radically changing its dimensions beyond a slight elongation - thus sustaining the illusion of its busyness (*weitersuchte*). Secondly, can it be

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<sup>93</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.520.

accidental that the moment when Malte's hand does finally move up and away is shrouded in absolute indeterminacy? For even as the adult Malte recalls the child's conviction that the *fremde Hand* would continue searching indefinitely, he can produce only a mnemonic *Leerstelle* to describe his final withdrawal: *Ich kann nicht sagen....* Narratologically speaking, a perfectly timed hysterical blackout, given that the observing consciousness has up to this point born lengthy, intricate witness to events under the table.

The manipulatively constructed episode with the *Hand* has a further detail of interest. In the earlier discussion of the Christine Brahe episode, I suggested that the incident of the butler serving the absent Mathilde gave the reader an advance clue as to what was to come: delayed laughter anticipating the degeneration of high gothic into farce. Something comparable may be at work in Malte's curious description of Mademoiselle's manner of reading: »sie konnte lesen, stundenlang, sie blätterte selten um, und ich hatte den Eindruck, als würden die Seiten immer voller unter ihr, als schaute sie Worte hinzu, bestimmte Worte, die sie nötig hatte und die nicht da waren.«<sup>94</sup> Might not this both anticipate Malte's own act of reading something *nicht da* under the table, and signal meta-textually to the reader how he or she is to behave in reading what is to follow? If this episode follows the same mischievous double code as the Urnekloster one, then here too the reader is left in the impossible bind of trying to commit themselves to an unequivocal reading of

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<sup>94</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.518.

a text that, like Mademoiselle's book, refuses to offer *certain words* that would settle the issue either way.

But what *bestimmtes Wort* might be missing from the account of the mysterious hand's appearance? Du Prel, in his discussion of hand materialisations, cites one contemporary eye-witness report (Crookes' 1874 *Psychische Studien*) that catches the *Malte* reader's eye at once:

Da kam eine leuchtende Hand von dem oberen Teile des Zimmers hernieder, und nachdem sie einige Sekunden in meiner Nähe geschwebt hatte, nahm sie den Bleistift aus meiner Hand und schrieb schnell auf ein Blatt Papier, warf den Bleistift nieder und erhob sich dann empor über unsere Häupter, allmählich in Finsternis verschwindend.<sup>95</sup>

In *Malte's* tale, the hand in front of the child looks for the pencil which *Malte* has dropped onto the floor, and *its failure to find the pencil is itself a symbol of its failure to convince as a paranormal phenomenon by passing the classic écriture test established in spiritistic procedures*. So the critical detection of a scribal significance in the hand may in a certain sense be right after all: Rilke has inscribed the pencil into the narrative - and, in terms of basic narrative requirements, he could have just as easily conscripted a book, bell or candle - in order that it *not* be used, *not* be found by the mysterious hand. Yet again, we find ourselves asking a question of the most banal realism: *if the mystery*

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<sup>95</sup> In du Prel, *Spiritismus*, p.39.



>hand< had actually found the pencil, what, if anything, would it have done with it?

Is it not fortunate that the pencil stayed out of reach?<sup>96</sup>

A second point illumined by du Prel's citation of Crookes' report relates to the *leuchtende Hand* which he describes.<sup>97</sup> Helmut Naumann adduces »das Zeugnis einer Gesprächspartnerin Rilkes, der er 1926 erzählt habe, >daß die im *Malte* dargestellte Handszene auf ein persönliches Geschehen zurückgehe«<sup>98</sup>. This testimony, from Nimet Eloui Bey, gives us a startling autobiographical detail: »As a child, playing under the diningroom table, and hidden by the carpet, he had seen, in the shadow, an unknown hand, a *hand quite white*, reach out toward his and try to clasp it«. If Bey's emphatic testimony is reliable, then something remarkable has happened: Rilke has turned the *Stoff* of an autobiographical experience which he himself deems uncanny into a patterned narrative in his *Malte* book drained of its supernatural potency. For the simple but absolutely decisive word *weiß* has been withdrawn: where Bey's statement speaks of a *hand quite white* that appears *in the shadow*, *Malte* is given a hand drained of colour, for all the world a mere shadow of his creator's experience.

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<sup>96</sup> So where did the pencil go? (It is hard to imagine how a pencil which rolls off the edge of a table could possibly end up *under* that table.) The uncanny economy of *Malte's* text has already seen to it that the loss of a pencil in childhood is redeemed by the offer of »einen *alten, langen Bleistift*« on a Parisian street (*MLB*, Paper XVI, p.481, emphasis added) (- as though *Malte's* French *mademoiselle*, now elderly and recognising her boy, were finally making it up to him after all this time...).

<sup>97</sup> A spiritistic commonplace. Cf the »orakelndes Licht« which Lavater's Kopenhagener Kreis claimed to see. Lavater, *Reisetagebücher II*, p.329 (Hegner's *Abschrift*).

<sup>98</sup> In Naumann, *Malte-Studien II*, p.102.

In the two overtly paranormal episodes we have so far examined, Rilke seems to have inserted ambiguitive effects which, acting like a step-down transformer, undermine the ontological status of the supernatural figures and thus threaten each incident with anti-climactic banality. In the second narrative, this has even yielded a strange surplus, in occult terms, of autobiographical experience to ironised fiction. Rilke could only too easily have equipped Malte's experiences with >hard case< features, for instance along the lines already drawn in the citations from du Prel's *Der Spiritismus*. But Malte's two tales, in all their fictionality, do not force a final recourse to paranormal explanations. Why this contamination of paranormal incident with a potent strain of *Entzauberung*, *Plausibilisierung*? In situating this question in the broader context of Malte's situation, I hope to justify somewhat what must appear an at times pedantically >micrological< approach to these episodes.

Amid all the heterogeneity of the first sequence of Papers in the *Malte*, one issue showed up again and again as critical: the problem of eye-witness perspective. This is a promising angle from which to approach both the Christine and the *Hand* episode - their relation to Malte's own eye-witness authority. If, as Chapter Two tried to establish, epistemological tragi-comedy at Malte's expense constitutes an important strand in these early *Aufzeichnungen*, then the impact of the two purported ghost-stories we have just inspected becomes clearer. Malte is giving us the two aces up his sleeve, the two incidents when *he himself* saw *das Unerhörte*. Yet when he converts these experiences into text, to be read in the cold light of day, the aces up his

sleeve turn out to be, as it were, jokers in the pack. His text, like those ambiguous plaster casts which emerged from nineteenth century séances, proves nothing by way of a fleeting paranormal *presence*. And precisely this anti-climax, this ironic deflation of the two supernaturally privileged moments from his childhood, only strengthens the momentum of his epistemological humiliation.

On this reading, then, both Seifert and Naumann are wide of the mark in the respective significances they draw from the *Hand*-episode. What is telling is not so much the meaning of the hand for the young Malte - whether schizoid psychic bifurcation, traumatic premonition of induction into adulthood, poetological symbol or, as seems to me far more obvious, esoteric initiation - as the meaning of the hand for the older Malte who, for the first time, is setting down the facts as he remembers them. And this feature of the hand experience, that it had to wait some two decades before being subjected to a narrative demystification, in fact connects intimately with the question of the meaning of the experience for the young Malte. For, as we learn, this not-yet-narrated tale became for the child a key sanctuary for his Brahe identity. It is no accident that the two people to whom he nearly relates the incident are Maman and Erik, two spiritistically minded Brahes:<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Malte recalls how himself and his mother reached an important aesthetic agreement: »Denn wir waren einig darüber, daß wir Märchen nicht liebten. Wir hatten einen anderen Begriff vom Wunderbaren. Wir fanden, wenn alles mit natürlichen Dingen zugehe, so wäre das immer am wunderbarsten. Wir gaben nicht viel darauf, durch die Luft zu fliegen, die Feen enttäuschten uns, und von den Verwandlungen in etwas anderes erwarteten wir uns nur eine sehr oberflächliche Abwechslung« (MLB, Paper XXXI, p.523). This is little more than a paraphrase of the opening of Hoffmann's *Das öde Haus*, where a prototype of the *serapionistische Prinzip* is enunciated (Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, p.163).

Einmal, als es über dieser Erzählung<sup>100</sup> fast dunkel geworden war, war ich nahe daran, Maman von der >Hand< zu erzählen: in diesem Augenblick hätte ich es gekonnt. Ich atmete schon auf, um anzufangen, aber da fiel mir ein, wie gut ich den Diener begriffen hatte, daß er nicht hatte kommen können auf ihre Gesichter zu. *Und ich fürchtete mich trotz der Dunkelheit vor Mamans Gesicht, wenn es sehen würde, was ich gesehen habe.* Ich holte rasch noch einmal Atem, damit es den Anschein habe, als hätte ich nichts anderes gewollt. Ein paar Jahre hernach, nach der merkwürdigen Nacht in der Galerie auf Urnekloster, ging ich tagelang damit um, mich dem kleinen Erik anzuvertrauen. Aber er hatte sich nach unserem nächtlichen Gespräch wieder ganz vor mir zugeschlossen, er vermied mich; *ich glaube, daß er mich verachtete. Und gerade deshalb wollte ich ihm von der >Hand< erzählen. Ich bildete mir ein, ich würde in seiner Meinung gewinnen* (und das wünschte ich dringend aus irgendeinem Grunde), wenn ich ihm begreiflich machen könnte, daß ich das wirklich erlebt hatte. Erik aber war so geschickt im Ausweichen, daß es nicht dazu kam. Und dann reisten wir ja auch gleich. So ist es, wunderbarlich genug, das erstmal, daß ich (und schließlich auch mir selber) eine Begebenheit erzähle, die nun weit zurückliegt in meiner Kindheit.<sup>101</sup>

But Erik may not be the only one adept at evasion. Malte's fear of telling another person his story because of the face they might make, *wenn es [das Gesicht] sehen würde, was ich gesehen habe*, can be understood rather differently when *sehen* here doubles as *einsehen*. Might we not detect an anxiety on Malte's part of inspiring in the *vis-à-vis* not terror but laughter? If the listener, hearing Malte's occult narrative, >sees< what he says he saw, then they might well >see< his error.<sup>102</sup> Malte has quietly nurtured his Brahe prestige of communion with the other world, it having given him »ein[en] traurige[n]

<sup>100</sup> The reference is to the Ingeborg apparition scene of the previous Paper, which will be examined presently.

<sup>101</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.518, emphases added.

<sup>102</sup> Cf Malte's fury when Wjera Schulin refuses to let him outside to confirm that the burnt-down manor really is phantomly present, and his subsequent sensitivity to Graf Schulin's words: »>Nein, Kind, das bildest du dir ein<[...]<« (*MLB*, Paper XLII, p.554f). But Wjera may in fact have done Malte an unwitting favour by allowing the phantom scenario to retain its subjunctive potency.

und schwere[n] Stolz«<sup>103</sup> to preside over such untold tales of the extraordinary. Now, to his horror, the inscription of the two paradigmatic events evokes in him not a redoubled horror at the memory of what happened but a >dispiriting< banality. The young Malte's intuition about such »besondere[] Dinge, die nur für *Einen* gemeint sind und die *sich nicht sagen lassen*«<sup>104</sup> is confirmed when he finally breaks the spell of silence, if only to himself, in the committal to paper of the experience. *His report bears no mark of renewed trauma due to his reliving of the memory itself.* The trauma secretly documented in his text involves, on the contrary, the fact that his act of inscription has ended up threatening to downgrade to the level of bathetic inconsequentiality what he had experienced as having been negatively sublime. Now the point is not that this objective volatilisation or *Verunsicherung* necessarily annuls the meaning of these experiences *qua* subjective experiences. For, as we shall see in our consideration of Kierkegaard in Chapter Five, that which is objectively doubtful can nevertheless<sup>105</sup> lead to the most intensely subjective impact, bearing the authenticity of an inwardly directed *approfondissement*. Experiences, as Adorno knew, are not >as if<.<sup>106</sup> But Malte's two cardinal episodes, *on their own terms* as purportedly objective occult phenomena, do not pass muster for the esoteric repertoire he is hoping to build up.

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<sup>103</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.521. Cf Giloy, *Aporie des Dichters*, p.101.

<sup>104</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.521, second emphasis added.

<sup>105</sup> Though, in Kierkegaardian terms, this >nevertheless< rather misses the point (as we shall see in Chapter Five).

<sup>106</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie (Gesammelte Schriften Bd.VII)*, edited by Gretel Adorno & Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/M: 1970), p.364.

### III.iv

»>Ich hab es gesehen, Malte, ich hab es

gesehen<<:

Ingeborg

Malte's temptation as a young boy to tell his mother the story of the hand came upon him, he tells us, on one occasion when she told him story of Ingeborg's ghost. This Ingeborg story differs from the other two in that it is a twice-told tale, Malte setting it down on the basis purely of his mother's eye-witness account. Its fascination for the young Malte is underlined in the fact that he asked her to tell it over and over: »Und nun will ich die Geschichte aufschreiben, so wie Maman sie erzählte, wenn ich darum bat«<sup>107</sup> - *wenn* as opposed to *als*. This distancing of Malte as narrator from the narrative event is, in the light of what is so far emerging about his epistemological crisis, of obvious importance. One is reminded of the comparable narrative parameters around the account of Kammerherr Brigge's death in Paper VIII. Significant also is the narratorial rôle of his mother. Along with Erik, Mathilde and Graf Brahe, and to a lesser extent the Major, she completes the group of Brahe figures whose spiritistic leanings have such a profound effect on the young Malte. Thus, her *mediation* of this ghost story to him, at least in the mediate form of his recollection in which it reaches us, must guide our response to it.

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<sup>107</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXVIII, p.516.

Martine Carré stresses this *mise en abyme* of the Ingeborg narrative, rightly joining it to the key question of narrative reliability:

[...] le récit se fait [...] récit dans le récit. Malte prétend alors rapporter fidèlement la parole maternelle et lui confère, dans cette démarche d'emboîtement narratif, valeur de vérité abyssale (La mère de Malte reprend en effet ce récit en charge chaque fois qu'il le lui demande [...] Immuable dans ses conditions d'émergence et d'organisation, son témoignage s'apparente au mythe.)<sup>108</sup>

If, in the Christine and *Hand* episodes, the chief ambiguity arose over the question of whether the young Malte saw and interpreted aright, here the integrity of the apparition narrative is undermined already by the very mode of its mediation. As such, it is vulnerable to irony and ambiguity at very source.

The second major difference between this *Spukgeschichte* and the other two involves the spectral figure itself, which is invisible, »une image vide« (Carré):<sup>109</sup>

Da schoß schon Cavalier [der Hund], wie er immer tat, unter dem Tisch hervor und lief ihr [der vor einigen Tagen verstorbenen Ingeborg, D.D.] entgegen. Ich hab es gesehen, Malte, ich hab es gesehen. Er lief ihr entgegen, obwohl sie nicht kam; für ihn kam sie. Wir begriffen, daß er ihr entgegenlief. Zweimal sah er sich nach uns um, als ob er fragte. Dann raste er auf sie zu, wie immer, Malte, genau wie immer, und erreichte sie; denn er begann rund herum zu springen, Malte, um etwas, was nicht da war, und dann hinauf an ihr, um sie zu lecken, gerade hinauf. Wir hörten ihn winseln vor Freude, und wie er so in die Höhe schnellte, mehrmals rasch hintereinander, hätte man wirklich meinen können, er verdecke sie uns mit seinen Sprüngen. Aber da heulte es auf einmal, und er drehte sich von seinem eigenen Schwunge in der Luft um

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<sup>108</sup> Carré, "Des >revenants< dans *Les Carnets de Malte Laurids Brigge*", p.43.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p.48. Cf Stephens on the significance here of »>Aussparen< als Erzähltechnik« (*Strukturanalyse*, pp.143f).

und stürzte zurück, merkwürdig ungeschickt, und lag ganz eigentümlich flach da und rührte sich nicht.<sup>110</sup>

*Ich hab es gesehen...ich hab es gesehen*: the importance of Maman's refrain, underscored by the fact that this is Malte's second citation of it in relation to the Ingeborg narrative,<sup>111</sup> is that it refers to *the sighting of something unseen, the phenomenon of the nonphenomenon*. Here, as in the earlier Papers set in Paris, *sehen* amounts to seeing X only indirectly, metonymically, by means of an indicative ellipsis cued by Y. Cavalier the dog is not alone the only thing seen, serving as a *Vorwand* for Ingeborg's spirit, but also the only seer (Rilke here reactivating a ghost-story commonplace going back to Kleist's *Das Bettelweib von Locarno*).<sup>112</sup> For the human participants, the focal point remains invisible, kept under the law of *Nichtgesicht*.

Yet Cavalier's behaviour in this episode finds a close echo in that of another dog in Paper XLVII:

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<sup>110</sup> MLB, Paper XXVIII, p.517.

<sup>111</sup> Cf Paper XXVII: »>Ich hab es gesehen, Malte<, beschwor sie: >Ich hab es gesehen.<« (MLB, p.513). Recall Malte's words in Paper I: »Ich habe gesehen: [...]« (MLB, p.455).

<sup>112</sup> Cf Rilke's breathless narration of the Bettelweib story in the Schmargendorf diary (*Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit*, edited by Ruth Sieber-Rilke & Carl Sieber, Frankfurt/M: 1942, p.222). The tradition of the animal's - and particularly the dog's - heightened sensitivity to the presence of an astral body will be continued in, for example, Wilhelm von Scholz's story *Der Kopf im Fenster* (1922) and Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (the incident involving Freia, the dog of Ellen Brand's father, p.915). (That interest in the topic has not disappeared is evidenced by the stir recently created by Rupert Sheldrake's fascinating scientific study, *Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home, and Other Unexplained Powers of Animals*, London: 1999). In Rilke's letter to Nora Purtscher-Wydernbruck of August 11<sup>th</sup> 1924, where, as we saw in the Introduction, the idea of the transpersonal *Bewußtseinspyramide* is outlined, the animals' clairvoyance is given generous mention: »Diese freilich, die Mitwisser des Ganzen, die Tiere, die in einem breiteren Durchschnitt des Bewußtseins ihre Selbstverständlichkeit haben, leiten am ehesten schon wieder - hinüber und sind dem medialen Zustand nahe« (MLB-Materialien, p.130). Karl-Heinz Fingerhut points to both the Nietzschean and anti-Darwinian aspects of this appreciation of the animal, which is at the same time a critique of the human »Verabsolutierung der Bewußtseins-Spitze im rationalen Verstand« (*Das Kreatürliche im Werke Rainer Maria Rilkes: Untersuchungen zur Figur des Tieres*, Bonn: 1970, pp.59f). One might add that it also devastates Descartes' distinction between *homme-esprit* and *animal-machine*.



Zum Beispiel, als mein Hund starb. Derselbe, der mich ein- für allemal beschuldigte. Er war sehr krank. Ich kniete bei ihm schon den ganzen Tag, da plötzlich bellte er auf, ruckweise und kurz, wie er zu tun pflegte, wenn ein Fremder ins Zimmer trat. Ein solches Bellen war für diesen Fall zwischen uns gleichsam verabredet worden, und ich sah unwillkürlich nach der Tür. Aber es war schon in ihm. Beunruhigt suchte ich seinen Blick, und auch er suchte den meinen; aber nicht um Abschied zu nehmen. Er sah mich hart und befremdet an. Er warf mir vor, daß ich es hereingelassen hatte. Er war überzeugt, ich hätte es hindern können. Nun zeigte es sich, daß er mich immer überschätzt hatte. Und es war keine Zeit mehr, ihn aufzuklären. Er sah mich befremdet und einsam an, bis es zu Ende war.<sup>113</sup>

The sudden agitation, the evoked entrance of *ein Fremder*, the dog's staring at the human: the ingredients of the situation are the same in both cases. [*I*] *sah unwillkürlich nach der Tür*: Malte makes the very same movement as in the Christine incidents, and once again his interpretation of events is thrown into doubt by his own account. The dog barks in a manner similar to his reaction to the entrance of a stranger into the room; from this, Malte posits the entrance of a morbid presence into the room; he turns to the dog in order to find confirmation of this interpretation; but the dog does not look over towards the door, looking instead at Malte's face; this Malte wilfully interprets as evidence that the spirit of death has *already* entered. Thus, in Paper XLVII, Malte sees a dog in distress and, a little sophisticatedly, deduces the intrusion of death in spiritistic terms; while, in Paper XXVIII, his mother sees a dog in distress and deduces the spiritistic entrance of a dead woman's living spirit. In terms of its uncanny quotient, however, Malte's eye-witness

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<sup>113</sup> *MLB*, Paper XLVII, pp.569f. (Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich*, pp.162f, sources this incident in Rilke's recollection of the death of Lou Andreas-Salomé's small dog.) Malte's account of his dog's death is followed by a rather Obstfelderian account of moribund flies (*MLB*, Paper XLVII, p.570).

narrative is a poor relation of his mother's, its forced addition of a spectral element almost parodically parasitic upon his mother's host text.

But let us note how Maman's interpretation of Cavalier's behaviour is itself suggestively redefined in Malte's (quotation of her) account:

Von der andern Seite trat der Diener aus dem Hause mit den Briefen. Er zögerte eine Weile; offenbar war es nicht ganz leicht, auf unsere Gesichter zuzugehen. Und dein Vater winkte ihm auch schon, zu bleiben. Dein Vater, Malte, liebte keine Tiere; aber nun ging er doch hin, langsam, wie mir schien, und bückte sich über den Hund. Er sagte etwas zu dem Diener, irgend etwas Kurzes, Einsilbiges. Ich sah, wie der Diener hinzusprang, um Cavalier aufzuheben. Aber da nahm dein Vater selbst das Tier und ging damit, als wüßte er genau wohin, ins Haus hinein.<sup>114</sup>

Maman assumes that her husband has - along with everyone else (*Wir begriffen, daß er ihr entgegenlief*) - interpreted this scene as a ghostly apparition, and seems to assume that his uncharacteristically tender treatment of the dog relates to his own fresh grief at the death of Ingeborg. But not a word of this escapes the lips of either Malte's father or anyone else in the garden.<sup>115</sup> This lack of consensual reaction relativises Maman's point of view. The words *da nahm dein Vater selbst das Tier und ging damit, als wüßte er genau wohin, ins Haus hinein*, if we pick up on the similarity of Cavalier's convulsion to the behaviour of Malte's dog, suddenly point to the possibility of a strange

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<sup>114</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXVIII, p.517.

<sup>115</sup> Add to this the fact that, within the text's fictive internal chronology, the Urnekloster Paper shows that this incident did not make the father more open to the notion of ghosts: Malte portrays him there as a rationalist through and through («auf Konsequenz und Klarheit angelegt», *MLB*, Paper XV, p.478).

ellipsis in Maman's account: Is the dog dead?<sup>116</sup> Or, what amounts to much the same thing: has the *Jägermeister*, diagnosing terminal dementia, decided to put the dog out of its misery? If either of these, why does Maman suppress the dénouement if not to protect her story's supernatural impact from alternative, naturalistic proposals relating to the dog's behaviour? As a narrator, Maman may be very much the mother of her son. A possibly revealing detail, equivalent to Mademoiselle's lamp in Malte's *Hand-Erfahrung* or the *weiße Frau* recurrence and laughter-motif in the Christine story, can be discerned in her words: »Vielleicht war es unsere Schuld; vielleicht haben wir sie gerufen«. <sup>117</sup> The expectant body language of the group sitting out taking tea is coupled with an evoked but immediately withdrawn exclamation from Maman's lips:

Ich blickte auf und sah alle andern dem Hause zugewendet, nicht etwa auf eine besondere, auffällige Weise, sondern so recht ruhig und alltäglich in ihrer Erwartung. Und da war ich daran - (mir wird ganz kalt, Malte, wenn ich es denke) aber, Gott behüt mich, ich war daran zu sagen: »Wo bleibt nur -« Da schoß schon Cavalier, wie er immer tat, unter dem Tisch hervor und lief ihr entgegen. <sup>118</sup>

>Wo bleibt nur -<. The about-to-be-exclaimed question is already abbreviated in Maman's self-quotation, as though he had been about to say >Wo bleibt nur Ingeborg< but caught herself after the first three words. Maman *makes to*

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<sup>116</sup> As assumed by Brigitte von Witzleben (»Dabei fällt der Hund tot um« - *Untersuchungen*, p.43), Stephens (»was die Mutter sieht, ist nicht Ingeborg selbst, sondern nur ihre tödliche Wirkung auf den Hund Cavalier«, *Strukturanalyse*, p.144) and Henninger (in his interesting remarks on the *etwas Kurzes, Einsilbiges* spoken by the father to the servant - "Quelques aspects du non-dit dans *Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge*", p.156).

<sup>117</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXVII, p.517.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

summon Ingeborg; Cavalier reacts as if Ingeborg had just been summoned. *Er lief ihr entgegen, obwohl sie nicht kam; für ihn kam sie...* Are we not tempted to find here another incident spiritistically misconstrued, in which Cavalier, a canine Clever Hans, behaves like the common dog whose master has only to look casually at its lead for it to break into a frenzied reaction - *without the all-important word even needing to be voiced, without the lead even needing to be much as touched...*? Might we not interpret this as a double misinterpretation - first the dog's, then Maman's?

We have in the Ingeborg Paper two competing readings, one of an authentically spectral presence, the other of erroneously interpreted canine excitement, fatal or otherwise. Each version is in its own way deeply problematical for Malte. If Ingeborg's ghost really appeared, then not alone was it an *invisible appearance*, but one *doubly invisible* to the absent Malte.<sup>119</sup> His own narrative of Death's entrance into the room with his dog seems almost to enter into competition with his mother's superior narrative, leaving Malte very much the >late< Brahe bereft of the matrilineal intimacy with the occult.<sup>120</sup> If, on the contrary, Maman was actually in error, then Malte may be

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<sup>119</sup> Christian Klein notes the layers of spectrality which Malte's act of narration places around Ingeborg: »Rilke déploie [...] une parole mythique à partir d'un récit descriptif qui matérialise l'immatériel et met en place une légende familiale. On peut même dire que la famille se constitue autour de ses >revenants<. La scène produit son métadiscours sur l'écriture« ("Le carnet 38, ou la Licorne", in: C. K. [ed.], *R. M. Rilke et >Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge*, pp.83-96, here: p.88). Thus, Malte's own text commemoratively invokes his spirit, permitting him to (once again) commemoratively invoke the spirit of his mother, who in turn commemoratively invokes the spirit of her family, who, as they sit in the garden, in their turn mournfully invoke the spirit of Ingeborg. And, as suggested, even Cavalier's behaviour towards Ingeborg's spirit may be more commemorative than cognitive, more a mechanical than a spontaneous response.

<sup>120</sup> And we have already noted Malte's important information in the next Paper: the Ingeborg narrative made him want to match his mother's memory with one of his own - the *Hand* incident (Paper XXIX, p.518).

forced to review the same Brahe heritage as a canon of spiritistic anecdotes uncomfortably vulnerable to demystification.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> To give another example of where such a review of the Brahe heritage might lead. In the Urnekloster Paper, Malte relates from the Brahe annals one of Graf Brahe's fabled premonitions: »Er soll einmal einer gewissen jungen Frau von ihren Söhnen gesprochen haben, von den Reisen eines dieser Söhne insbesondere, während die junge Dame, eben im dritten Monate ihrer ersten Schwangerschaft, fast besinnungslos vor Entsetzen und Furcht neben dem unablässig redenden Alten saß.« (Paper XV, p.475). *But what of it?* Was the premonition ever verified? Macbeth goes on to become Thane of Cawdor and King as the weird sisters said he would, Oedipus goes on to beget a family curse in line with Tiresias' prophecy, Schnitzler's flautist ends up rushing onto a stage after his wig in exact fulfilment of Marco Polo's *Weissagung* (in the 1904 story of the same name). Hearing of Graf Brahe's premonition but not of its aftermath hardly confirms an oracular charism (cf du Prel, *Rätsel des Menschen*, p.115). An archer's shot minus a target, his words remains emptily >intransitive< or (to negative a favoured word of Anglo-Saxon Psychical Researchers) >unveridical<. Cf Engelhardt on the way in which Malte's response to occult phenomena, including the purported powers of the Graf, involves a comic evasion of falsifiability - a case of bad faith inoculating itself against reflective interrogation ("Der Versuch, wirklich zu werden", pp.114f). One might also consider anew Abelone's account of Graf Brahe's attempt at a *Zitieren* of Saint-Germain / Marquis de Belmare: »Seit einer Weile schon redete der Alte nicht mehr auf Abelone ein, die er vergessen hatte. Er ging wie rasend auf und ab und warf herausfordernde Blicke auf Sten, als sollte Sten in einem gewissen Augenblicke sich in den verwandeln, an den er dachte. Aber Sten verwandelte sich noch nicht. / >Man müßte ihn sehen<, fuhr Graf Brahe versessen fort« (MLB, Paper XLIV, p.562, emphasis added except on *sehen*). Might not Sten here be failing to play the >mediumistic< rôle played so consummately, as I have read it, by Mathilde in Paper XV? And might not Graf Brahe's frustration in this scene represent a further sign that the occultistic *Blütezeit* which Malte feels he has arrived too late for has in fact always already been just-past for members of the Brahe family?

### III.v

#### »es stürbe sich hier«:

#### Paris-la-Morte

We have visited Malte's three ghost stories and found their ghosts ghosted by alternative possibilities. But how many ghosts in all would Malte have us have him see? What is the full locus of spectrality in the book? Martine Carré offers a rather strict delimitation:

Si l'on s'intéresse aux épisodes de >l'étrange< dans le roman, on constate qu'ils y sont relativement rares et qu'ils s'inscrivent exclusivement dans la partie centrale de l'ensemble, celle qui est consacrée aux souvenirs d'enfance. L'entrée dans ce monde insolite intervient au carnet 15 avec l'apparition de Christine Brahe [...] Le chapitre fantomatique est clos au carnet 42 avec l'évocation du château disparu des Schulin [...] Entre ces deux manifestations de l'étrange s'insère l'apparition, centrale au plan formel, de la figure d'Ingeborg.<sup>122</sup>

In the Schulin Paper mentioned here (Paper XLII), Malte recalls a very early seizure of »etwas wie Gespensterfurcht«.<sup>123</sup> During a visit with his parents to the Schulin manor, the Gräfin, synaesthetically smelling with her ears, gets wind of a sinister smell in the room and alerts all present to the danger. The Schulin family, paranoid in the wake of a fire which has recently burned down part of the manor, are immediately panicked into a hunt for the source of the smell. Malte finds their behaviour eery:

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<sup>122</sup> Carré, "Des >revenants< dans *Les Carnet de Malte Laurids Brigge*", p.43.

<sup>123</sup> *MLB*, Paper XLII, p.556.

Es wurde mir klar, daß alle die deutlichen großen Menschen, die eben noch gesprochen und gelacht hatten, gebückt herumgingen und sich mit *etwas Unsichtbarem* beschäftigten; daß sie zugaben, *daß da etwas war, was sie nicht sahen*. Und es war schrecklich, daß es stärker war als sie alle.<sup>124</sup>

The correlation of unseen phenomenon and heightened presence is described here in explicitly spectral terms. But this same correlation has already shown its dominance in the very earliest Papers, where we saw an obsessive recurrence of invisibility and its related modality, absence. To recall Rilke's words to Betz on these first Papers: »Er [Malte] lernt sehen, er lernt auch hören: das, was da ist, und vor allem das, was nicht da ist: die Abwesenheit von Geräuschen, Bildern, Menschen ... Manchmal ist es gerade diese Abwesenheit, die ihm den Schlüssel der Dinge gibt.«<sup>125</sup> Rilke goes out of his way - note the emphatic *vor allem* - to identify absence and invisibility as the real centre of gravity in these fragments. Now if we recall Malte's *Sehenlernen* in the first thirteen Papers and find that *it obeys the very same grammar of perception as that identified as spectral* by Malte in Paper XLII, is it not reasonable to revisit these early Papers under a supernatural rubric? If we do so, I believe we may find ourselves drawing rather more expansive parameters for the presence of *l'étrange* in the *Malte*-book than those set down by Carré.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., emphases added.

<sup>125</sup> *MLB-Materialien*, p.160.

»So, also, hierher kommen die Leute, um zu leben, ich würde eher meinen, es stürbe sich hier«. <sup>126</sup> The opening words of Paper I announce its *idée maîtresse* by bracketing the notion of Paris as a »vitale Metropole« and stylising it into a »Nekropole« (Gutjahr). <sup>127</sup> Yet we have seen how this bracketing out has, by Paper's end, itself been bracketed out: »Die Hauptsache war, daß man lebte. Ja, das war die Hauptsache«. <sup>128</sup> The necropolis is strangely reinstated as metropolis. Now the laconic *das war die Hauptsache* will recur in Paper XVI, when Malte pays homage to the (unnamed) Flandish poet Francis Jammes whom he is reading in the Bibliothèque Nationale: »Er weiß von Mädchen, die vor hundert Jahren gelebt haben; es tut nichts mehr, daß sie tot sind, denn er weiß alles. Und das ist die Hauptsache«. <sup>129</sup> The contrast is all too clear: where Malte intends (*meinen*) dead figures but sees only the living, Jammes presides over some quasi-occult knowledge (*er weiß alles*) of figures over one hundred years dead. (Later, of course, Malte will claim to have seen one such figure in Christine Brahe). <sup>130</sup>

*Das war / ist die Hauptsache*: the living and the dead... the morbidity of cognitive mood in Paper I, with Malte clustering all under the shadow of the *Hospitaler*, may have a second, more intense level: *Malte's presentiment that he*

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<sup>126</sup> *MLB*, Paper I, p.455.

<sup>127</sup> Gutjahr, "Erschriebene Moderne", p.371. On morbidity and vitality as a prevalent binary around 1900, see Fick, *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele*, p.10.

<sup>128</sup> *MLB*, Paper I, p.455.

<sup>129</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVI, p.482.

<sup>130</sup> Giloy dismisses Malte's Jammes-homage as »die Schilderung einer naiv, ja kitschig kleinburgerlich ausgemalten Idylle, in der >sein Dichter< angeblich wohnt« (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.59). But this to miss the implicit linkage between Jammes' gift and that of Graf Brahe. Malte's poet *wei alles* not as a result of archival reconstruction of their existences, nor as an achievement of creative imagination, but through a kind of psychometric access to the intimate histories emanating from their letters, journals and clothes (*MLB*, Paper XVI, p.483).



will see ghosts wandering the streets of Paris, the city characterised in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* as a »Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,/ Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!«.<sup>131</sup> The Brahe in him has arrived in Paris in much the same mood as that of Georges Rodenbach's protagonist Hugo Viane in the 1892 Belgian symbolist novel *Bruges-la-Morte*. Aged forty, Viane is in mourning for his wife, who died five years ago. The »symbolistisch-magische Konzeption«<sup>132</sup> behind the novel is that Viane has come to Bruges because it offers him a quasi-mystical *correspondance*<sup>133</sup> with his own inner morbidity: »cette Bruges douloureuse, soror dolorosa. Ah! comme il avait bien fait d'y venir au temps de son grand deuil! Muettes analogies! Pénétration réciproque de l'âme et des choses! Nous entrons en elles, tandis qu'elles pénètrent en nous«.<sup>134</sup> The symbolist >dead city< finds in this work perhaps its most programmatic treatment:

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<sup>131</sup> Baudelaire, "Les Sept Vieillards", *Oeuvres Complètes I*, p.87. Baudelaire's *fourmillante cité* will enter the canon of English letters when T. S. Eliot fuses it with Dante's *Inferno* (III.55-57) in "The Waste Land" of 1922 to stylise London into a necropolis: »Unreal City, [...] I had not thought death had undone so many« (T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays*, London: 1969, p.62). Keith Thomas makes an unsettling linkage between modern morbidity patterns and modern spiritism: »The relative absence of ghosts in modern society can [...] be seen as the result of a demographic change - >the disengaged social situation of the majority of the deceased< [R. Blauner, "Death and Social Structure", in *Psychiatry* XXIX, 1966]. The dead, in other words, fade away before they die. In earlier periods, by contrast, it was commoner for men to be carried off at the prime of their life, leaving behind them a certain amount of social disturbance, which ghost-beliefs helped to dispel« (*Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England*, London: 1971, p.723). One is put in mind here of the resurgence in spiritistic interest in the wake (literally) of the Great War. A shameful corollary suggests itself: the ghostlike existence to which modern Western society consigns so many elderly human beings.

<sup>132</sup> Burkhard Dohm, "Neue Heilslehren in der Literatur um 1900", in: *Der Deutschunterricht*, Heft 2, April 2000, pp.5-14, here p.9.

<sup>133</sup> Cf the italicised reference to such in Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris* piece "L'Invitation au voyage" (*Oeuvres complètes I*, p.303) - as well of course as the *Fleurs du mal* poem "Correspondances" itself (*ibid.*, p.11).

<sup>134</sup> *Bruges-la-Morte*, edited by Jean-Pierre Bertrand & Daniel Grojnowski (Paris: 1998), p.193.

Les villes surtout ont ainsi une personnalité, un esprit autonome, un caractère presque extériorisé qui correspond à la joie, à l'amour nouveau, au renoncement, au veuvage. Toute cité est un état d'âme, et d'y séjourner à peine, cet état d'âme se communique, se propage à nous en un fluide qui s'inocule et qu'on incorpore avec la nuance de l'air.<sup>135</sup>

In his *Avertissement* to the novel, Rodenbach justifies his insertion of photographs of Bruges into the text on the basis that the city is a character in its own right and merits pictorial profile:

Dans cette étude passionnelle, nous avons voulu aussi et principalement évoquer une Ville, la Ville comme un personnage essential, associé aux états d'âme, qui conseille, dissuade, détermine à agir [...] Voilà ce que nous avons souhaité de suggérer: la Ville orientant une action; ses paysages urbains, non plus seulement comme des toiles de fond, comme des thèmes descriptifs un peu arbitrairement choisis, mais liés à l'événement même du livre.<sup>136</sup>

Viane wanders the streets of Bruges as an occulto-mystical *flâneur*, registering a perfect objective correspondence between his inner grief and the city's outer atmosphere.

In his letter to Rudolf Zimmermann of 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1921, Rilke writes:

Diese >Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge< enthalten eine an der Figur eines jungen Dänen (also an einer durchaus erfundenen Gestalt) aufgewiesene Abrechnung mit den eigentlichen Unlösbarkeiten des *inneren Daseins*: Paris, das die *Sichtbarkeit alles Erlebbar* steigert und Himmel und Höllen beschwört, wo ein anderes Milieu nur eben Annehmliches und Lästiges zu bieten hat. -Paris ist der Hintergrund und die Atmosphäre dieser in jedem Augenblick vom eigenen Untergang geprüften Existenz [...].<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp.59f, emphasis added.

<sup>137</sup> *MLB-Materialien*, p.125, emphases added.

The fundamental crisis diagnosed relates to *d[ie] eigentlichen Unlösbarkeiten des inneren Daseins*, with Malte's *état d'âme* finding correspondence and aggravation in the Paris of extremes. Malte turns Paris into what Vanoosthuyse calls »*le dehors du dedans, la doublure du sujet, miroir qui lui renvoie son image et écran où il projette ses terreurs* [...]«.<sup>138</sup> Might not Rodenbach's novel have given Rilke the idea of creating a Viane-like character, giving him, by way of tacit tribute, a phonetic first cousin of >Brügge< as surname<sup>139</sup> and transposing him to Paris-la-Morte, a city which Balzac, Baudelaire, Maupassant and others had made phantasmagorical?<sup>140</sup> If so, then Rilke has brought the *ville morte* tradition of symbolist prose out of the provinces,<sup>141</sup> making his character walk around necropolitan Paris »als ein

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<sup>138</sup> Vanoosthuyse, "L'abject et le sublime", p.135. Vanoosthuyse is not, however, referring to a phantasmagorical dimension here.

<sup>139</sup> Elke-Maria Clauß etymologises >Brigge< to >Brücke<, which she takes to symbolise Malte's mediation between the realms of life and death - "Orpheus in Paris. Zur Poetik der Erinnerung in *Malte Laurids Brigge*", in: *Wirkendes Wort* 1/97, pp.31-45, here: pp.37f.

<sup>140</sup> Cf Baudelaire in "Au Lecteur", the introductory poem of *Les Fleurs du mal*: »Serré, fourmillant, comme un million d'helminthes, / Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons, / Et, quand nous respirons, la Mort dans nos poumons / Descend, fleuve invisible, avec de sourdes plaintes« (*Oeuvres complètes* I, p.6). Several years after the completion of the *Malte*, Rilke will be greatly taken by a series of lectures given by the George-Kreis mythologist Alfred Schuler on the *Wesen der ewigen Stadt*, in which, as Lorenz writes, he »entfaltete [...] die Vorstellung von einem Totenreich als dem wahrhaften, ununterbrochenen Dasein, von dem der Mensch nur während seiner kurzen Lebensspanne ausgeschlossen sei: die Vision eines zeitindifferenten Bewußtseinszustands, der weder den Unterschied zwischen Leben und Tod noch den zwischen Subjekt und Objekt kennt« (*Schweigen in der Dichtung*, p.155. Lorenz, *ibid.* pp.155f, suggestively links Schuler's »dunkle Spekulationen« to Rilke's figure of *das Offene* in the *Achte Elegie*). See also Siegfried Mandel, "Rilke's Readings and Impressions from Buber to Alfred Schuler", pp.264f, on Rilke's interest both in Schuler's necropolitan realm and in his belief in transmigration of souls.

<sup>141</sup> The traditional >dead cities< tended, in Donald Flanell Friedman's words, to be »actual urban loci of desuetude« - such as, in Belgian symbolism, Bruges, Ghent, Furnes and Malines ("Rodenbach, Hellens, Lemonnier: Paradisal and Infernal Modalities of Belgian Dead City Prose", in: *Georges Rodenbach: Critical Essays*, edited by Philip Mosley, New Jersey, London & Mississauga, Ontario: 1996, pp.99-112, here: 101). As Friedman indicates, however, such topographical restriction to the parochial city is not an aesthetic requirement as such: »No matter which urbanscape is chosen as the artist's domain of subjectivity, symbiosis between the exterior world and the inner world of its observer must be pronounced. Any city could become a symbolist >ville morte< if made to convey the poet's inner world in a manner that is

anderer Orpheus« (as Burkhard Dohm describes Hugo Viane).<sup>142</sup> In his 1907

*Furnes*-essay, Rilke writes:

Brügge übertrifft nichts; es enttäuscht die meisten. Seine Zurückhaltung ist es, die ihm den Ruf des >toten Brügge< eingetragen hat, und man begnügt sich, sie zu konstatieren. *Das Brügge Rodenbachs ist bekannt geworden; man vergißt, daß es ein Gleichnis war, von einem Dichter erfunden für seine Seele, und man besteht auf dem Wortlaut.*<sup>143</sup>

Now, while the existential horrors of Malte's Paris will undergo no ironisation in the text - his deepening poverty, his utter isolation - a question which I asked in Chapter Two now takes a step up in intensity as it incorporates a distinctively occult phenomenology along with the more mundane sort: *When will Malte actually see something commensurate to his capacity for horror?* Paris has become the *Gleichnis* which he symbolistically enlists in his occultistic temper, putting (in Odilon Redon's memorable phrase from his journal *À soi-même*) »the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible«. <sup>144</sup> The gothically tinged *Ich würde eher meinen, es stürbe sich hier*, which inaugurates what Carré calls »une récurrence obsessionnelle« of the

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life-subtractive and mysterious in its emphasized absence, isolation, fading of the present, and suspended animation« (ibid., p.111).

<sup>142</sup> Dohm, "Neue Heilslehren in der Literatur um 1900", p.8. Henninger counts some twenty deaths in the *Malte* ("Quelques aspects du non-dit dans *Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge*", p.153). Yet most (if not indeed all) take place outside Malte's present-tense Paris.

<sup>143</sup> KA IV, pp.639f, emphasis added.

<sup>144</sup> Cited in Martin Jay (*Downcast Eyes*, p.157). See Peter I. Barta, "Symbolization of Urban Space in *Bruges-la-Morte* and in Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*" (in: Mosley, ed., *Georges Rodenbach: Critical Essays*, pp.161-174, here: p.168), on the symbolist principle of » an ascent from reality to a higher reality, >a realibus ad realiora<«, such that »the concrete image may expand in meaning to encompass abstract states of mind«. As Barta notes elsewhere in his essay, the Theosophists will systematise the mysterious thought behind this symbolist credo into a methodical paranormal programme whereby consciousness, through >cerebral play<, actually seeks to create form on the >astral plane< or in the >fourth dimension< (ibid., p.174, footnote 33).

theme of death,<sup>145</sup> is continually brought into dialectical battle with the counter-claim that nothing morbid or fantomatic is actually going on at all: *Die Hauptsache war, daß man lebte.*<sup>146</sup> Donald Flanell Friedman, describing symbolism as »the most death-haunted of literary movements« whose »enduring fascination« lies in its »morbidity and thanatopsis«, defines it as

<sup>145</sup> Carré, "Des >revenants< dans *Les Carnets de Malte Laurids Brigge*", p.53. Carré, following Sokel, notes that Malte is more Brahe than Brigge here, as »le monde briggien« is portrayed as a concerted denial of death's reality (ibid., p.54).

<sup>146</sup> Rodenbach too ironises his character, again and again suggesting that: »Le démon de l'Analogie se jouait de lui!« (*Bruges-la-Morte*, p.102). Naturally the third person form makes the ironist's task considerably easier than the less distanced *Ich*-form within which Rilke is working in the *Malte*. The *Brigge-Brügge* resonance does not begin to end with the >dead city< trope they have in common. Viane encounters a young *danseuse* named Jane Scott who so resembles his deceased wife that Viane falls under the »sortilège de la ressemblance«. (ibid., p.105; cf Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris* text "Laquelle est la vraie?", *Oeuvres complètes I*, p.342, which contains the germ of this idea, itself inspired by Poe, in the relationship of its narrator to the mysterious figure of Bénédicte.) Viane ascribes occult significance to the resemblance »qui maintenant donnait presque l'illusion d'une présence réelle« (*Bruges-la-Morte*, pp.82-5 [text-flow interrupted by two pages of photographs]) and enters into a relationship with Jane under the notion that he is miraculously resuming relations with the returned incarnation of his wife. Dohm locates Rodenbach's *Wiedergängerin*-motif within an occult tradition going back to Hoffmann (*Die Elixire des Teufels*, *Ritters Glück*) and Poe (*Ligeia*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *Berenice*, *Morella*) and forward to Gerhart Hauptmann (*Bahnwärter Thiel*), Schnitzler (*Tagebuch der Redegonda*, *Die Nächste* - this last text itself inspired by *Bruges-la-Morte*) and Georg Trakl (the sister-figure in the early poetry) ("Neue Heilslehren in der Literatur um 1900", pp.6ff). I would suggest we cast a careful eye over one of the strangest motifs in the *Malte Laurids Brigge*: the imago of Malte's own *défunte*, his mother. In conjunction with Hoffmann's *Doppelgänger* motif, which it cites, Viane's mystico-aesthetic law of occult resemblance seems to be in full force here, with Malte's trope of female resemblance creating a pattern of what Stephens calls »[d]ie Vertauschbarkeit der weiblichen Gestalten« (*Strukturanalyse*, p.161; see also Haag, "Apprendre à voir la femme", pp.115ff). Where Viane is spellbound by a face that becomes cognitively overlaid with the face of his deceased wife, Malte's orphan grief sees simulacra of his mother in Mathilde, >Christine< and, later in the book, Abelone. (Stephens felicitously describes this last figure as an »Emanation der Mutter«: *Strukturanalyse*, p.159. In Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne*, the young Niels falls in love with his aunt Edele: *Niels Lyhne*, p.269). Abelone in turn becomes a *Vorwand* for Bettine von Arnim (*MLB*, Paper LVII, pp.597ff), while a Danish singer becomes a *Vorwand* for both Abelone and Bettine (*MLB*, Paper LXIX, pp.623ff). As Haag notes ("Apprendre à voir la femme", p.117), Malte's mother herself at one point becomes a >transparency< for Ingeborg (*MLB*, Paper XXVIII, p.514: »[...] dann lachte sie in der Erinnerung an Ingeborgs Lachen, dann sollte man sehen, wie schön Ingeborg gewesen war«). This chain of resemblance is poetically compressed in the *La Dame a la Licorne* tapestry described in loving detail in Paper XXXVIII: Malte insists, against the grain of received opinion, that the tapestries depict the same lady in each case (*MLB*, p.544: »aber immer dieselbe«; cf Naumann, *Gesammelte Malte-Studien, Erster Teil*, p.97; see also Haag's proposal, "Apprendre à voir la femme", p.125, for a »double lecture« of Malte's closing words, »Abelone, ich bilde mir ein, du bist da«, *MLB*, p.546). On Malte's phantasmatic - and Hoffmannesque - *Doppelgängerei* complex, see Rainer Warning, "Der Zeitungsverkäufer am Luxembourg", in: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 2/2002, pp.261-270, here: p.266.

»an *écriture* and a *mystique* unconcerned with mimetic representation of objects and events in their historical reality, but concerned with evocation of mood«. <sup>147</sup> As we have seen, Malte's parapsychological pretensions do not allow his often cavalier disregard for mimetic fidelity to be quite so free of referential concerns. His *ville morte* prose may thus be regarded as >post-symbolist<, aiming simultaneously at symbolist »imbrications of psychic states and exterior environment« (Friedman)<sup>148</sup> and at realist objective precision. In other words, Malte is trying to have it both ways. Were he not, the alienation of inner and outer would not represent such an utter disenchantment.

If we proceed to Paper II, we find Malte, sensitising his ears to things that go bump in the night, to *Poltergeist*-like figures outside his visual range but within earshot.<sup>149</sup> Malte finally expresses relief at the the apotropaic crowing of the cock, signal that the night of haunting is coming to a close.<sup>150</sup> Paper III thematises the cognate phenomenon of things *about to* go bump in the night, their imminence fixating the tantalised auditor.<sup>151</sup> In Paper V,

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<sup>147</sup> Friedman, "Rodenbach, Hellens, Lemonnier", p.99.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.101.

<sup>149</sup> Compare Schopenhauer: »[...] die Kundgebung [wird] *bloß hörbar* ausfallen und dann sich durch mancherlei Töne manifestieren, am häufigsten durch Klopfen, welches besonders Nachts, meistens gegen Morgen, einzutreten pflegt [...]« ("Versuch über Geistersehen und was damit zusammenhängt", p.298).

<sup>150</sup> Cf the crowing of the *Hahn* at a moment of heightened spectral tension in Hoffmann's *Das Majorat* (*Nachtstücke*, p.211). See also Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, I.i., lines 152-162. On this tradition - »of great antiquity« - of the cock as *oiseau céleste*, see Harold Jenkins' editorial note in the Arden edition of the play (*The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, London & New York: 1982, p.431). The confusion of tenses in Paper II, which was noted in the last Chapter, may be pertinent as a specimen of Malte's paranormal insinuation: the mix of constancy (*laufend*) and punctuality *within a continuous present tense suggesting recurrence*, subtly cites the tradition of the spectre's regular nocturnal activity (e.g. Kleist's *Bettelweib*, Hoffmann's *Das öde Haus* and, once again, *Das Majorat*).

<sup>151</sup> *MLB*, Paper III, p.456.

Malte's claim to have become conscious of people's changing personae is predicated on a naturalistically implausible, parapsychical conceit that, having been in Paris just weeks, he can compare a stranger's face with his or her previous faces<sup>152</sup> - a heightened physiognomy<sup>153</sup> related closely to Graf Brahe's professed ability to transcend linear time.<sup>154</sup> In Paper XI, the figure of »ein sehr großer, schlanker Mann« appears through the fog, sporting a walk that is »ungewöhnlich leicht« and »voll von Erinnerung an früheres Gehen« - for all the world a literal *Wiedergänger, revenant*.<sup>155</sup> In Paper XII, the crescent moon - whose occult significance need hardly be laboured<sup>156</sup> - transfixes Malte with its »dialectically double action of revelation and mystification«,<sup>157</sup> which redefines the cityscape in a unifyingly spectral direction. Malte's psychism is in real trouble in this Paper: just as the writing

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<sup>152</sup> *MLB*, Paper V, p.457.

<sup>153</sup> Cf Kruse's suggestion that *Gesicht* in this episode carries connotations of »die Fähigkeit, Erscheinungen zu sehen, Visionen zu haben [...]« (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.105).

<sup>154</sup> Cf *MLB*, Paper XV, p.475.

<sup>155</sup> *MLB*, Paper XI, p.465, emphasis added. Similarly the *Fortgeworfenen* for whom, as Antonowicz points out: »le brouillard [...] est leur élément« ("Cet infernal couvercle", p.99, footnote 6, referring to *MLB*, Paper LX, p.603: »Der Nebel kommt und macht sie undeutlich und ungewiß: sie sind gleichwohl«) Cf Dohm's commentary on the quasi-spectral »Auftritt in Nebel und Dämmerung« of Jane Scott in *Bruges-la-Morte* ("Neue Heilslehren in der Literatur um 1900", p.9).

<sup>156</sup> See for example Rudolf Steiner's lecture delivered in Berlin on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1909: "Einiges über den Mond in geisteswissenschaftlicher Beleuchtung" (in: R. S. *Pfade der Seelenerlebnisse*, Dornach: 1929, pp.78-106). Steiner covers, amongst other things, the >Mondenstreit< between Schleiden and Fechner (*ibid.*, pp.82f), which became a totemically important *cause célèbre* in the battle between materialistic and monistic worldviews; Goethe's preoccupation with the moon's influence as he worked on his *Witterungslehre* (pp.89ff); and the esoteric correlation of »das andere Himmelslicht« with the *Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft*, whereby sun and moon are each seen as both symbol and factor of ordinary and occult perception respectively (*ibid.*, p.79). Cf *Mondwechsel* as esoteric motif in Kant's *Träume eines Geistessehers*, p.167. On the moon as an occult symbol, see Fred Gettings, *Dictionary of Occult, Hermetic and Alchemical Sigils* (London, Boston & Henley: 1981): »[the crescent] semi-circle is [...] the symbol of the Moon and represents the *soul* in man, that which is neither wholly spiritual nor wholly material, but partakes of the nature of both and is the connecting link between the spirit and the physical body« (p.175 & f).

<sup>157</sup> As Rignall writes of the moon's action in Chapter 48 of Dickens' *Bleak House* ("Benjamin's *flâneur* and The Problem of Realism", p.114).

on the book covers are blurred by the air, so too does Malte need a the *estompe* effect of a *mondene Welt*<sup>158</sup> to blur the city-text into a kind of Rorschach ink blot, thus rendering it *lisible* under a spectral or hypnagogic mood.<sup>159</sup> This is *Welt als Wolle und Verstellung*. Compare, for example, the unifying *estompe* which Rodenbach enlists to gratify the spectralising consciousness that presides over *Bruges-la-Morte*: »Il y a là, par un miracle du climat, une pénétration réciproque, on ne sait quelle chimie de l'atmosphère qui neutralise les couleurs trop vives, les ramène à une unité de songe, à un amalgame de somnolence plutôt grise«. <sup>160</sup>

The boundary between what for Malte is mere audition (sometimes in a double sense) and what is suspected as a genuine encounter with the spirit world is left strategically fluid. Malte's sophisticated paranormal discourse leaves these >sightings< and >auditions< preserved in the amber of insinuation. The fear of *putting his intuitions to the test* and having them falsified by empirical observation turns these early Papers into >dress rehearsals<, so to speak, for a command performance which is both feared and energetically anticipated.

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<sup>158</sup> Cf the late poem "In Karnak wars..." (KA II, p.174, l.5).

<sup>159</sup> Cf Friedman, "Rodenbach, Hellens, Lemonnier", p.101: »The geographical cities were transformed into literary cities of the soul and other worlds, psychic terrain, by means of imagery of >estompe<, atmospheric conditions such as incessant rain and mist that blur and enshroud the real, negate its substantial qualities [...]« ("Rodenbach, Hellens, Lemonnier", p.101). Compare Malte's cognitively sophisticated use of his own tears as refractors of light as he attempts to see his mother in the figure of Mathilde: »>Tante<, sagte ich schließlich und versuchte in ihrem *zerflossenen* Gesicht die Züge meiner Mutter zusammenzufassen: >Tante, wer war die Dame?« (MLB, Paper XV, p.478, emphasis added).

<sup>160</sup> *Bruges-la-Morte*, p.130, emphasis added. Cf Baudelaire's prose-poem "Les Beinfaits de la lune" (*Oeuvres complètes I*, pp.341f).



This last point is critical. Time and time again, Malte will leave his intuitions in the subjunctive mood, afraid to let them fall into a disappointing indicative. *If he had looked from the hands to the facial area, what if anything would Malte have seen?*(Paper V). *If he had managed to penetrate one of the closed Droschken, what does Malte think he would have found there?* (Paper VI). *If he had approached the Man in the Tuileries, whom does he think he would have found there?* (Paper XI).<sup>161</sup> Malte is haunted in these texts not by a haunting but by a lack of haunting; not by the grotesque but by an implosion of grotesquerie; not by death but by a dearth of death; not by the negative sublime but by a negating of the sublime; not by uncanny intuition but by intuition that is not canny. Hence the triple alliance of a) serial phenomenological evasion, b) the motif of a blocked view or *Vorwand*, and c) habitual promotion of subjunctive, virtual *Vorstellung* over indicative, direct, empirical observation.<sup>162</sup>

Malte's early Papers, then, conjure up no more than the ghosts of a few ghosts,<sup>163</sup> suggesting that he is giving us corners of Paris (half-)seen through a morbid sensory apparatus.<sup>164</sup> And the two childhood phantom stories turn

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<sup>161</sup> Cf Malte's later refusal to approach the *Zeitungsverkäufer* in Paper LIX: »Ich habe niemals gewagt, von ihm eine Zeitung zu kaufen« (MLB, p.599).

<sup>162</sup> E.g. the collapsed person surrounded by the crowd (Paper I); the woman's unseen *Nichtgesicht* (Paper V); the *ungemein anregende Milchglasfenster* over against the disappointing *offene Droschken* (Paper VI); the unseen deaths of the rich (Paper VII) and of Kammerherr Brigge (Paper VIII); the disruptive upward glance of the dancing tambourine girl (Paper XIII).

<sup>163</sup> In arguing this, I am suggesting more general applicability for Baßler's point about the surreptitious signalling of spiritistic motifs in the text: »Alle diese Bezüge sind in Rilkes Roman wie gesagt nicht erzählt, nur über das angespielte diskursive Umfeld laden sich die >blinden Motive< mit Bedeutung auf - ohne freilich semantisch eindeutig zu werden« ("Maltes Gespenster", p.242, Baßler here referring specifically to the *Herzstich* of Malte's father).

<sup>164</sup> Cf the "Manifesto of the Five against *La Terre*" of 1887, in which former acolytes of Zola mock his naturalist programme on the basis that: »>A corner of nature, seen through a temperament< has been transformed with respect to Zola into >a corner of nature seen through a morbid sensory apparatus<« (quoted in Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p.174).

out to be just that: *phantom ghost stories*. *Die Hauptsache*, for all Malte's paranormal phenomenology and spectralised memory, may come down to one simple, dis-appointing thought: *daß man lebte*.

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### III.vi

## »Es ist nichts geschehen«:

### The Occult Flâneur

Let us probe more deeply into the Paris-based Papers in the light of this hypothesis of an ironic play of ever-so-gently insinuated paranormal significance and ever-so-gently insinuated anti-climax.<sup>165</sup>

The sixteenth fragment, set in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, includes a long meditation on the figures of the *Fortgeworfenen*:

Denn das ist mir klar, daß das die Fortgeworfenen sind, *nicht nur Bettler*; nein, es sind *eigentlich keine Bettler*, man muß Unterschiede machen. Es sind Abfälle, Schalen von Menschen, die das Schicksal ausgespien hat. Feucht vom Speichel des Schicksals kleben sie an einer Mauer, an einer Laterne, an einer Plakatsäule, oder sie rinnen langsam die Gasse herunter mit einer dunklen, schmutzigen Spur hinter sich her.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> To return to a point made by Liu: »Maltes Eindrücke von der Großstadt Paris bleiben nur voneinander isolierte Teilerfahrungen, die sich nicht additiv zu einem Ganzen zusammenschließen« (*Suche nach Zusammenhang*, p.77). I am suggesting that Malte does not even see things, fragmentary or otherwise, in the first place - and this failure / refusal to see is necessary to the logic of his stylisation of Paris into a Gothic, necropolitan totality. Similarly, Liu's argument that Malte's consciousness cannot keep up with events (»Geschehnisse«) (*ibid.*, pp.62f) needs rewriting, if not reversal: Malte is struggling to keep up with *non-events*.

<sup>166</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVI, p.481, emphases added.

This evocation of a worldly wretchedness intensified beyond what is existentially imaginable<sup>167</sup> is followed by an exclamation of perplexity on Malte's part as to their behaviour towards him:

Was in aller Welt wollte diese Alte von mir, die, mit einer Nachttischschublade, in der einige Knöpfe und Nadeln herumrollten, aus irgendeinem Loch herausgekrochen war? Weshalb ging sie immer neben mir und beobachtete mich? Als ob sie versuchte, mich zu erkennen mit ihren Triefaugen, die aussahen, als hätte ihr ein Kranker grünen Schleim in die blutigen Lider gespuckt. Und wie kam damals jene graue, kleine Frau dazu, eine Viertelstunde lang vor einem Schaufenster an meiner Seite zu stehen, während sie mir einen alten, langen Bleistift zeigte, der unendlich langsam aus ihren schlechten, geschlossenen Händen sich herausschob. Ich tat, als betrachtete ich die ausgelegten Sachen und merkte nichts. Sie aber wußte, daß ich sie gesehen hatte, sie wußte, daß ich stand und nachdachte, was sie eigentlich täte. Denn daß es sich nicht um den Bleistift handeln konnte, begriff ich wohl: *ich fühlte, daß das ein Zeichen war, ein Zeichen für Eingeweihte, ein Zeichen, das die Fortgeworfenen kennen; ich ahnte, sie bedeutete mir, ich müßte irgendwohin kommen oder etwas tun. Und das Seltsamste war, daß ich immerfort das Gefühl nicht los wurde, es bestünde tatsächlich eine gewisse Verabredung, zu der dieses Zeichen gehörte, und diese Szene wäre im Grunde etwas, was ich hätte erwarten müssen.*<sup>168</sup>

The actions of the wretched figures<sup>169</sup> are stylised at once into a mysterious initiation ceremony that forcibly draws Malte into the symbology of a secret society.<sup>170</sup> Yet this principle of symbolic conversion from object (*Knöpfe und*

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<sup>167</sup> Compare Charcot's description of the utter social marginalisation of his male hysterics: »Ils n'ont pas de domicile fixe [...] Il mène une vie errante [...] Il vit de la profession de chanteur des rues, dans la banlieue de Paris [...] couchant par-ci par-là« (quoted in Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, p.50). Interesting, given Rilke's use of the word *Fortgeworfen*, is the definition of hysteria which a contemporary specialist by the name of Charles Lasègne gives: »la corbeille à papier de la médecine où l'on jette les symptômes inemployés« (quoted by Beizer, *ibid.*, p.35, who is in turn citing from Henri Cesbron's *Histoire critique de l'hystérie* of 1909).

<sup>168</sup> MLB, Paper XVI, pp.481f, emphases added.

<sup>169</sup> Cf Baudelaire's "La Femme sauvage et la petite-maitresse", with its reference to »les glaneuses sexagénaires et [...] les vieilles mendiannes qui ramassent des croûtes de pain à la porte des cabarets« (*Oeuvres complètes I*, p.289).

<sup>170</sup> Giloy (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.62) diagnoses »einen massiven Verfolgungswahn« in Malte's response to the *Fortgeworfenen* (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.62), as does Uwe Steiner, who writes of Malte's »paranoische[] Bedeutsamkeitswucherung« (*Zeit der Schrift*, p.386). Cf the *mendant-*

*Nadeln... Bleistift*) to mysterious meaning (*ein Zeichen für Eingeweihte*) is comically shadowed by another, more deflatingly mundane<sup>171</sup> principle of symbolic conversion: commodification. This at any rate is the direction in which we are sent by the source text for the *Fortgeworfenen* passage, Rilke's letter from Paris of July 18<sup>th</sup> 1903 to Lou Andreas-Salomé:

Und waren andere alte Frauen, die mit den Schubladen eines alten Nachttisches in der Hand umhergingen und jedem zeigten, daß drinnen zwanzig verrostete Stecknadeln herumrollten, *die sie verkaufen mußten*. Und einmal spät im Herbst stand Abends eine kleine Alte neben mir im Scheine eines Schaufensters. Sie stand ganz still und ich glaubte sie gleich mir mit der Betrachtung der ausgelegten Sachen beschäftigt, und achtete ihrer kaum. Schließlich aber fühlte ich mich von ihrer Nähe beunruhigt, und ich weiß nicht weshalb ich plötzlich auf ihre eigenthümlich zusammengelegte abgetragenen Hände sah. Ganz ganz langsam stieg aus diesen Händen ein alter, langer, dünner Bleistift hervor, er wuchs und wuchs und es dauerte sehr lange bis er ganz sichtbar war, sichtbar in seinem ganzen Elend. Ich kann nicht sagen, was so entsetzlich wirkte in dieser Szene, aber es war mir als spielte sich vor mir ein ganzes Schicksal ab, ein langes Schicksal, eine Katastrophe, die sich furchtbar steigerte bis zum Augenblick da der Bleistift nichtmehr wuchs und ganz leise zitternd herausragte aus der Einsamkeit dieser leeren Hände. *Ich begriff schließlich, daß ich ihn kaufen sollte...*<sup>172</sup>

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*magnétiseur* collocation in Baudelaire's "Assomons les pauvres!": »[...] un mendiant me tendit son chapeau, avec un de ces regards inoubliables qui culbuteraient les trônes, si l'esprit remuait la matière, et si l'œil d'un magnétiseur faisait mûrir les raisins« (*Oeuvres complètes I*, p.358).

<sup>171</sup> Though in its own way, Marx would say, no less uncanny. Kruse limits the specifically supernatural dimensions of Malte's experience to his childhood experiences (*Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.31), registering invisibility as a wholly *socio-political* problem for Malte in Paris (»die historisch-sozialen Gegenstandsbedeutungen [entziehen] sich dem unmittelbaren Zugriff der Sinne«, *ibid.*, p.40) and locating the continued uncanny spectrality of the Paris scenes in the invisible action of capital on human lives, which he sees as a »Rückzug[] des gesellschaftlichen Handelns und der gesellschaftlichen Kräfte ins Unsichtbare, das seine wesentliche Ursache in den bekanntlich hinter dem Rücken der Menschen sich durchsetzenden Gesetzen des Kapitals besitzt [...]« (*ibid.*, p.28). Kruse is writing here very much in the spirit of Adorno, for whom the only *qualitas occultas* at work in occultism is the »Fetischcharakter der Ware«, whereby capitalism's commodification of the factory-worker's soul in the concrete object makes a banal reappearance in the séantistic attempt to materialise spirit(s) ("Thesen gegen den Okkultismus", p.272).

<sup>172</sup> *MLB-Materialien*, pp.24f., emphases added.

In moving from this source experience to the refashioned *Malte*-passage, Rilke has engaged an ellipsis, swerving the scene away at the last moment from its original significance.<sup>173</sup> In Rilke's letter, the *verrostete Stecknadeln* and the *Bleistift* become necessary symbols of the indigents' desperation to engage strangers in exchange. The pathos is brought to an unbearable pitch by the very uselessness of these goods being placed on sale: the horror of trying to squeeze exchange value out of negligible use value is eloquently expressed in the woman's dismal fetishisation of the pencil, her attempt to engage Rilke's curiosity by gradually disclosing it from her sleeve.<sup>174</sup>

But Malte, as we have seen, reads a very different substitution principle into the proffering of the pencil: that it is an arcane semiotic instrument. The effect of such an inflexion on Rilke's part from autobiographical account to fictionalisation is to cast a necessary occultation of meaning over Malte's experience. Yet this arcanisation is not, as Ernst Feodor Hoffmann would seem to have it, simply a matter of making life difficult for the reader - although it is surely that too. An ironic transparency accompanies it, threatening to drain it of its power. The reader, offered an episode of obscure meaning, is being simultaneously nudged towards an obvious and sober counter-reading. This systematic reinforcement of the possibility of ironic gap between authorial and *Ich*-narratorial perspectives is

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<sup>173</sup> I obviously tend strongly to the view of Ernst Fedor Hoffmann that the ellipsis forms part of a careful strategy on Rilke's part to place incomprehensibility and mystery at the heart of the book's aesthetic ("Zum dichterischen Verfahren in Rilkes *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*", in: *MLB-Materialien*, pp.214-244, here: pp.214ff).

<sup>174</sup> One is however all too easily seduced into the thought that the woman's pornographic manipulation of the phallic pencil is meant to literally point Malte in the direction of a certain other method of converting concrete sensuousness into abstract exchange value.

what allows us to read Malte's text-internal account *gegen den Strom*, as it were.<sup>175</sup> The reader of the *Malte*-passage, in other words, will be tempted to read his distinctive response as an alarmingly banal case of the penny (literally) not dropping. The *Schaufenster* gives us the cue which Malte seems to miss, for it positions him as consumer, his *Schau* becoming the *interested* gaze of the potential participant in a commodity exchange. Note that Malte has already taken the *Fortgeworfenen* out of the realm of the *Bettler* - as though their existential destitution has placed them even beyond the orbit of impecuniosity.<sup>176</sup> This resistance to a simple economic categorisation of the *Fortgeworfenen* is accompanied by a blindness to the miserable economic logic driving their engagement of his attention in the street.

But what might be motivating this apparent interpretive retreat on Malte's part from the harsh space of the socio-economic? And how might this be related to the whole area of his paranormal apprenticeship?

The opening passage of the fragment offers us a pointer:

*Bibliothèque Nationale*

Ich sitze und lese einen Dichter. Es sind viele Leute im Saal, aber man spürt sie nicht. Sie sind in den Büchern. Manchmal bewegen sie sich in den Blättern, *wie Menschen, die Schlafen und sich umwenden zwischen zwei Träumen*. Ach, wie gut ist es doch, unter lesenden Menschen zu sein. Warum sind sie nicht immer so? Du kannst hingehen zu einem und ihn leise anrühren: *er fühlt nichts*. Und stößt du einen Nachbar beim Aufstellen ein wenig an und entschuldigst dich, so nickt er nach der Seite, auf der er

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<sup>175</sup> All the more so as nothing comes of these approaches. In the >pan-significatory< world of fantastic literature, by contrast, there will always be a *sequel* of some description (e.g. the *Armenier* at the start of Schiller's *Der Geisterseher*; the approaches made to Theoder by the *Italien Tabuletkrämer* in Hoffmann's *Das öde Hau*; the stranger's »clignement d'œil significatif« in Baudelaire's "Le Joueur généreux", which lures the narrator to the devil's lair; the attentions which Harry Haller receives early into Hesse's *Steppenwolf*).

<sup>176</sup> Cf the description of the destitute in the *Buch von der Armut und vom Tode*: »wie Scherben fortgeworfen« (KA I, p.243).

*deine Stimme hört, sein Gesicht wendet sich dir zu und sieht dich nicht, und sein Haar ist wie das Haar eines Schlafenden. Wie wohl das tut. Und ich sitze und habe einen Dichter. Was für ein Schicksal.*<sup>177</sup>

On one level, Malte's relief at finding a space where people take no notice of one another can be seen as the reflex of a tortuous self-consciousness. After all, as will soon emerge from the internal chronology of the Paper, he has just fled his indigent pursuers with their unnerving gaze. If the *Fortgeworfenen* have turned Malte into »an object of the gaze rather than its privileged subject« (Huyssen),<sup>178</sup> then the library restores his sovereignty. Yet, is not this opening passage governed also by the logic of certain occult analogies? Malte's library readers are depicted in an altered state of consciousness - as Giloy puts it, »hingegen an eine fiktive Welt wie an einen Traum«.<sup>179</sup> When Malte touches them, they do not feel his body; when he speaks, they hear him; but when they look at him, they do not see him. He is thus heard but not seen, present but only in a non-corporeal sort of way.

Now the suggestion that Malte is tendentiously comparing his freedom in the library with a phantom's freedom to pay an invisible visit to the somnolent (or somnambulistic) will no doubt seem rather forced. Yet it finds surprisingly explicit support further on in the Paper when the library visits are transfigured in the mode of a spectral *als ob*:

Ich gehe ein wenig scheu, wie man sich denken kann, durch die Straßen, aber schließlich stehe ich vor einer Glastür, öffne sie, als ob ich zuhause wäre, weise an der nächsten Tür meine Karte vor (ganz genau wie ihr [d.h. die Fortgeworfenen, D.D.] mir eure Dinge zeigt, nur mit dem Unterschied, daß man mich versteht und begreift,

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<sup>177</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVI, pp.479f, emphases added.

<sup>178</sup> Huyssen, "Paris / Childhood", p.130.

<sup>179</sup> Giloy, *Aporie des Dichters*, p.59.



was ich meine -), und dann bin ich zwischen diesen Büchern, bin euch weggenommen, *als ob ich gestorben wäre*, und sitze und lese einen Dichter.<sup>180</sup>

Like Orestes taking refuge from the Furies in the temple, Malte flees into the library to escape the *Fortgeworfenen* and their perplexing initiatory pressure. The library space offers him a gratifyingly unreal and unthreatening atmosphere where he can temporarily go beyond the bare, harsh conditions of existence - even to the extent of feeling like one who, having already departed the straitjacket of mortal flesh and entered a realm of pure spirit.<sup>181</sup> In turn,

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<sup>180</sup> MLB, Paper XVI, p.482, emphasis added.

<sup>181</sup> Saalmann reads the library thanatopsis somewhat differently, as a symbolic consummation in which Malte's >death< is coincident with his act of reading: »Im Lesesaal der Bibliothèque Nationale entfaltet sich dann die wesentliche Identität von metaphysischem Tod und dichterischer Existenz, die Notwendigkeit des Bewußtseins, >Selbstmord< zu verüben [...]« (*Würfelwurf nach dem Absoluten*, p.65). In fact the library offers Malte a double sort of >death<, for within its walls he alternates as literally >absent-minded< book-reader and >present-minded< reader-reader. (Quite where he finds the time to be *Aufzeichner* too is another matter: does not *Ich sitze und lese einen Dichter* inscribe a phantom present tense?) Although the rôles of book-reader and reader-reader cannot be played simultaneously, Malte finds in each a temporary relief from ego-consciousness. a) The poet's words allow him, like a discarnate spirit out of Swedenborg or du Prel, to enter (if only temporarily) into the poet's consciousness. Readers, as Aleida Assmann's points out, are »im Grunde Schamanen [...], die ein Dauergespräch mit den Stimmen der Vorfahren und den Geistern der Vergangenheit unterhalten. Sie beschäftigen sich nicht nur mit Medien im technischen Sinn, das heißt mit Texten und Aufführungen, sie *sind* Medien im okkulten Sinn, indem sie zum allgemeinen Wohl Kontakt mit einer transzendenten Welt herstellen und aufrechterhalten« ("Texte, Spuren, Abfall: die wechselnden Medien des kulturellen Gedächtnisses. Gespräch mit den Toten: der Text als Medium des kulturellen Gedächtnisses", in: *Literatur und Kulturwissenschaften. Positionen, Theorien, Modelle*, edited by Hartmut Böhme & Klaus R. Scherpe, Reinbek bei Hamburg: 1996, pp.96-111, here: p.96). (One must query the use of the word *transzendente Welt* in Assmann's final line.) When Malte reads he enters into at least the illusion of shared consciousness, of temporary metempsychosis (just as this last sentence is predicated on just such an illusion...). b) The lack of attention paid to him by his fellow-readers comes as a blessed relief to his acute self-consciousness. As if magnetised, his fellow readers themselves seem transported into existentially evacuated phantom spaces - the virtual spaces within the texts they are reading. They are the epitome of *Geistesabwesenheit*, enjoying a spectral *anwesend-abwesend* status. As will emerge towards the close of Chapter Four, this pattern of *anwesend-abwesend* establishes a covert and ironic comparison between Malte, the library readers and the >Fortgeworfenen< outside. For these too are depicted as having taken leave of the normal physical, psychological and social parameters of existence, as having >died< to the material world - a condition which will lead Malte to ascribe both occult and religious significance to them. For Giloy, Malte's words »ich sitze und habe einen Dichter« (MLB, Paper XVI, p.480) are little more than a matter of second best for one who has himself failed to *be* a poet: »Wenn er sich nun damit begnügt, einen Dichter zu >haben<, kommt dies einer Resignation gleich« (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.63). Yet this is to miss both the occultistic overtones in Malte's declaration and the circumstance that, as I have argued and shall argue

finally, his poet is envied not just for the tranquillity of his surroundings but also for his Graf Brahe-like ability to experience »l'indifférenciation temporelle« (Carré) by metempsychotically entering into the hearts of his *jeunes filles*.<sup>182</sup>

We have seen how the *Ich habe gesehen* of the opening Paper recurs with a more explicitly spectral overtone in the Ingeborg Paper. In Paper XVIII, we find the phrase playing a curiously emphatic rôle at the foot of a descriptive passage:

Irgendwo habe ich einen Mann gesehen, der einen Gemüsegarten vor sich herschob. Er schrie: Chou-fleur, Chou-fleur, das fleur mit eigentümlich trübem eu. Neben ihm ging eine eckige, häßliche Frau, die ihn von Zeit zu Zeit anstieß. Und wenn sie ihn anstieß, so schrie er. Manchmal schrie er auch von selbst, aber dann war es umsonst gewesen, und er mußte gleich darauf wieder schreien, weil man von einem Hause war, welches kaufte. Habe ich schon gesagt, daß er blind war? Nein? Also er war blind. Er war blind und schrie. Ich fälsche, wenn ich das sage, ich unterschlage den Garten, den er schob, ich tue, als hätte ich nicht bemerkt, daß er Blumenkohl ausrief. Aber ist das wesentlich? Und wenn es auch wesentlich wäre, kommt es nicht darauf an, was die ganze Sache für mich gewesen ist? Ich habe einen alten Mann gesehen, der blind war und schrie. Das habe ich gesehen. Gesehen.<sup>183</sup>

*Das habe ich gesehen. Gesehen.* It took nothing less than a ghost to inspire Maman's insistence: »Ich hab es gesehen, Malte, ich hab es gesehen«;<sup>184</sup> while, in Paper XLIV, it will take the legendary alchemist Marquis de St. Germain to

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further, Malte's vocational ideas may already be moving away from a primary focus on the >poetic<.

<sup>182</sup> Carré, "Des >revenants< dans *Les Carnets de Malte Laurids Brigge*", p.48. In this, notes Carré, Jammes also shares Ibsen's cavalier attitude to time (although not under the sign of failure).

<sup>183</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, pp.484f.

<sup>184</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXVIII, p.517.

inspire Graf Brahe's occult boast: »Man müßte ihn *sehen* [...] Aber ich hab ihn gesehen«. <sup>185</sup> Why Malte's *reiterative reiteration* here in the context of what, at first shine, appears a less than consequential sight? *Das habe ich gesehen. Gesehen.* Malte seems to be urging us to believe him when he swears that, difficult as it may be to believe, *he actually saw this.* <sup>186</sup>

At one level, the passage comes across as an exercise in phenomenological rigour, rather like what one might find in early Husserl. Malte seems to be trying to reduce the sight of the *Chou-fleur* man down to one formula, one minimal statement that would convey to a reader the essence (*wesentlich*) of what he has seen. As a definitive statement is slowly finalised, details begin to compete for inclusion. And here the man's blindness is surely being played off against the reader's (for, unlike Malte, we have not had the privilege of *seeing* this scene, *seeing* it). The details are leaked in carefully administered drips: the man pushing a vegetable cart; the man shouting *Chou-fleur*; the woman prodding him to shout; the man's own mistimed shouts; the man's blindness... until, finally, Malte alights on a summative declaration: *Ich habe einen alten Mann gesehen, der blind war und schrie.* <sup>187</sup> The man was *alt*? The first we have heard of it. An unexpectedly late point indeed for a new detail to creep in, serving to remind us of Malte's

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<sup>185</sup> *MLB*, Paper XLIV, p.562.

<sup>186</sup> Incidentally, a synaesthetic illogicality might be noted in the sentence: *Ich habe einen alten Mann gesehen, der blind war und schrie.* Did Malte see him shout?

<sup>187</sup> Cf this sentence's syntagmatic twin in Paper I (*MLB*, p.455): »Ich habe einen Menschen gesehen, welcher schwankte und umsank«. Wyler-Zimmerli reduces this scene to the level of simple, if inscrutable, pathos: »[...] für Malte ist es nur wesentlich, dass er den alten Mann gesehen hat und dass er davon berührt war; er kann keine weitergehende Bedeutung oder über das Einzelne hinausweisende Bezüge finden« (*Zeit und Raum*, p.11).

selectivity<sup>188</sup> and of our consequent vulnerability as blind spectators to the suppression of key facts.<sup>189</sup>

So what *is* it about this odd couple that seems to intrigue Malte so? With only Malte's text hitting my retina, I am intrigued by two details, one preceding their appearance, the other succeeding it.

Malte writes of his day's walking: »Ich bin immer unterwegs gewesen. Weiß der Himmel in wie vielen Städten, Stadtteilen, Friedhöfen, Brücken und Durchgängen. Irgendwo habe ich einen Mann gesehen [...]«.<sup>190</sup> *Städten?* With this one word, Malte's *flânerie* suddenly breaks free of its empirical moorings, floating away into a realm of *rêverie* and *Geistesabwesenheit* (a word which Benjamin uses to characterise Baudelaire's own personal mode of *flânerie*).<sup>191</sup> Such transportations of consciousness from one's immediate surroundings in the street can herald an out and out spiritistic event.<sup>192</sup> In *Träume eines Geistersehers*, for instance, Kant mentions one of the three ways in which Swedenborg would commune with the spirit world:

Die zweite [Art] ist, vom Geiste weggeführt zu werden, da er etwa auf der Straße geht, ohne sich zu verwirren, indessen daß er im Geiste in ganz anderen Gegenden ist, und anderwärts Häuser, Menschen, Wälder u.d.g. deutlich sieht, und dieses wohl

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<sup>188</sup> See Kruse, *Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, p.105.

<sup>189</sup> Engelhardt writes of a »Problematischerwerden von Beschreibung« in this scene that demonstrates by the same token how blind the fiction-reader's generally is: »die Adäquanz einer Beschreibung in einem Roman [kann] nicht überprüft werden« (»Der Versuch, wirklich zu werden«, pp.108f)..

<sup>190</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.484.

<sup>191</sup> Benjamin, »Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire«, *Gesammelte Werke I.2*, p.572. See Becker, *Urbanität und Moderne*, pp.120f, for an attentive scrutiny of this episode's dreamlike quality.

<sup>192</sup> Cf the transported consciousness of the readers in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paper XVI. Only in *Geistesabwesenheit* can one commune with the *Geister*.

einige Stunden lang, bis er sich plötzlich wiederum an seinem rechten Orte gewahr wird.<sup>193</sup>

*Irgendwo habe ich einen Mann gesehen...* Given the reference to *Städte* which Malte has just dropped into the previous sentence, his use of *irgendwo* here may be hinting at more than the fact that he has lost his bearings in the metropolis, it may in fact be insinuating *en passant* a state of heightened psychic receptivity.

Immediately after the emphatic close of the *Chou-fleur* passage - *Das habe ich gesehen. Gesehen.* - we find at the head of a new paragraph the words: »Wird man es glauben, daß es solche Häuser giebt? Nein man wird sagen, ich fälsche. Diesmal ist es Wahrheit, nichts weggelassen, natürlich auch nichts hinzugetan.«.<sup>194</sup> Once again, as though he were collecting >serapionistic< anecdotes for some late-night fireside colloquy, Malte worries about a credibility gap. But with *this* material? The demolished houses which Malte goes on to describe may be striking but hardly to the point of exciting astonished disbelief:

Häuser?<sup>195</sup> Aber, um genau zu sein, es waren Häuser, die nicht mehr da waren. Häuser, die man abgebrochen hatte von oben bis unten. Was da war, das waren die anderen Häuser, die danebengestanden hatten, hohe Nachbarhäuser. Offenbar waren sie in Gefahr, umzufallen, seit man nebenan alles weggenommen hatte; denn ein ganzes Gerüst von langen, geteernten Mastbäumen war schräg zwischen den Grund des Schuttplatzes und die bloßgelegte Mauer gerammt. Ich weiß nicht, ob ich schon gesagt habe, daß ich diese Mauer meine.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers*, p.173, emphasis added.

<sup>194</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.485.

<sup>195</sup> Cf later in the same Paper: »Sterbende?« (p.489).

<sup>196</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.485. Note the orality in the final line here.

The *Chou-fleur* couple and the vanished houses: on their own, these sights seem to invite a mystifying excess of mystificatory attention from Malte. But what if the *contiguity* of these two sights is meaningful, what if they only become uncanny if related to one another? *What if Malte has seen two figures trying to sell cauliflower to houses which are no longer there?* Is it not possible that he has been so astonished by the incongruity as to postulate an uncanny time-slip, leading him inexorably to thoughts at once horrifying and gratifying of the spectral? (*Have I seen two ghosts revisiting an old haunt and, caught in their spectral zone, perceiving it only as it was when it still stood? Or have I entered a twilight zone and seen two living human beings selling their wares in front of houses of whose future condition I have had a sudden premonition?*) After all, this would not be the first phantom building to have mesmerised Malte, who will proceed, very much in the manner of the visionary Latimer in George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*, to assure us that his lingering, synecdochal reconstruction of the lives lived inside one of the demolished houses is based on but a momentary glimpse:<sup>197</sup>

*Man wird sagen, ich hätte lange davorgestanden; aber ich will einen Eid geben dafür, daß ich zu laufen begann, sobald ich die Mauer erkannt hatte. Denn das ist das Schreckliche, daß ich sie erkannt habe. Ich erkenne das alle hier, und darum geht es so ohne weiteres in mich ein:*<sup>198</sup> es ist zu Hause [!] in mir.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> We will soon see how, later in the Paper, Malte's long account of the last moments of the stranger in the *crémérie* will turn out to be identically based upon nothing but *a glimpse followed by an immediate flight from the scene*. Incidentally, Malte's intricate description of the wall bears marked similarities to Franz Hellens' *Ruinenästhetik* in his 1906 novel *En ville morte* (1906) - see Friedman, "Rodembach, Hellens, Lemonnier", pp.103f.

<sup>198</sup> Recall Paper IV: »Ich habe ein Inneres, von dem ich nicht wußte. Alles geht jetzt dorthin« (MLB, p.456).

<sup>199</sup> MLB, Paper XVIII, p.487, emphases added.

The sights of the *Chou-fleur* sellers and the demolished houses, whether related or not, combine to drive the exhausted Malte into a *cr merie*, where he is delivered a major vicarious trauma:

Also ich trat ein und sah zuerst nur, da  der Tisch, an dem ich  fters zu sitzen pflegte, von jemandem anderen eingenommen war. Ich gr u te nach dem kleinen Buffet hin, bestellte und setzte mich nebenan. Aber da f hlte ich ihn, obwohl er sich nicht r hrte. Gerade seine *Regungslosigkeit* f hlte ich und begriff sie mit einem Schlage. Die Verbindung zwischen uns war hergestellt, und ich wu te, da  er erstarrt war vor Entsetzen. Ich wu te, da  das Entsetzen ihn gel hmt hatte, Entsetzen  ber etwas, was in ihm geschah. Vielleicht brach ein Gef   in ihm, vielleicht traf ein Gift, das er lange gef rchtet hatte, gerade jetzt in seine Herzkammer ein, vielleicht ging ein gro es Geschw r auf in seinem Gehirn wie eine Sonne, die ihm die Welt verwandelte.<sup>200</sup>

The epistemological confidence behind Malte's first intuitive response to the shadowy presence beside him (*begriff ...wu te... wu te*) modulates into a tone of uncertainty and open speculation (the triple recurrence of *vielleicht*). Yet again, we see Malte responding not to a positive signal, but to an absence of signification or action. Where in earlier episodes silence or invisibility became triggers of indirect perception, so here the man's *Regungslosigkeit* supplies the negative cue. On the basis of this absence of action, Malte, »mit einer w nschelrutenartigen Sicherheit« (Liu),<sup>201</sup> intuits an extrasensory *Verbindung* with the man's stupor which leads him to posit a morbid event.

Then comes the crunch moment. Malte determines to proceed from indirect to direct observation, from speculation to verification: »Mit *unbeschreiblicher Anstrengung* zwang ich mich, nach ihm hinzusehen, denn ich

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<sup>200</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.489.

<sup>201</sup> Liu, *Suche nach Zusammenhang*, p.91.

hoffte noch, daß alles Einbildung sei«. <sup>202</sup> This is the possibility - in this instance expressed as hope - that has repeatedly inscribed itself into Malte's problematical perceptions: *that he is only imagining things*. The sequence of events is by now familiar. Malte senses that something is going on outside of his visual field and finds himself both repulsed and fascinated by the thought of what he would see if he were to turn and look directly. With the woman's *Nichtgesicht*, Malte sustained the *unbeschreibliche Anstrengung* of stopping himself from looking her way. <sup>203</sup> But in the *cr merie* he goes that critical step further, turning the same *unbeschreibliche Anstrengung* to opposite effect. Having himself diagnosed the problematic of speculative observation, he screws up his courage and takes a look. The result is interesting:

Aber es geschah, da  ich aufsprang und hinausst rzte; denn ich hatte mich nicht geirrt. Er sa  da in einem dicken, schwarzen Wintermantel, und sein graues, gespanntes Gesicht hing tief in ein wollenes Halstuch. Sein Mund war geschlossen, als w re er mit gro er Wucht zugefallen, aber es war nicht m glich zu sagen, ob seine Augen noch schauten: beschlagene, rauchgraue Brillengl ser lagen davor und zitterten ein wenig. Seine Nasenfl gel waren aufgerissen, und das lange Haar  ber seinen Schl fen, aus denen alles weggenommen war, welkte wie in zu gro er Hitze. Seine Ohren waren lang, gelb, mit gro en Schatten hinter sich. <sup>204</sup>

So it has come to this: a grim physiognomic description not of a death but of a man supposedly dying. Yet, as in the case of the collapsed figure in the very first fragment, Malte stops short of a genuinely verificatory follow through on

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<sup>202</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.489, emphasis added.

<sup>203</sup> »Es kostete mich *unbeschreibliche Anstrengung*, bei diesen H nden zu bleiben und nicht zu schauen, was sich aus ihnen abgerissen hatte« (*MLB*, Paper V, p.457, emphasis added).

<sup>204</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.489.



his observation. He flees,<sup>205</sup> leaving the man's death in perpetually suspended subjunctive futurity:

Ja, er wußte, daß er sich jetzt von allem entfernte, nicht nur von den Menschen. Ein Augenblick noch, und alles wird seinen Sinn verloren haben, und dieser Tisch und die Tasse und der Stuhl, an den er sich klammert, alles Tägliche und Nächste wird unverständlich geworden sein, fremd und schwer. So saß er da und wartete, bis es geschehen sein würde. Und wehrte sich nicht mehr.<sup>206</sup>

In the prospective retrospect of this *Irrealis*, Malte's physiognomic decipherment is in full flow. Having described the external features of the man's face, he goes into empathic-telepathic overdrive, offering a vicarious phenomenology of the dying subject's disattention of consciousness. But by fleeing the scene, he has preserved the episode's obscenity, leaving the man's death under the ambiguity of *bis es geschehen würde*.<sup>207</sup>

The verb *geschehen* has an insistent presence in this episode as a cipher for psychological death to the world.<sup>208</sup> Yet the only instance where it enjoys an indisputably indicative sense is in the words: *Aber es geschah, daß ich aufsprang und hinausstürzte...*<sup>209</sup> In other words, the sole event Malte can positively establish is his own flight from the scene of the event. As the true reference of *geschah*, Malte's flight takes the place of what is actually taking

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<sup>205</sup> - »statt hinzugehen und zu helfen«: Freisfeld (*Das Leiden an der Stadt*, p.99).

<sup>206</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, pp.489f. Compare the cognitive distancing evoked in the »Sieh, die Sterbenden [...]« reflection in the *Vierte Elegie* (KA II, p.212).

<sup>207</sup> Thus Neumeyer: »So muß offenbleiben, ob all das, was Malte über den Mann in der Crémérie äußert, überhaupt auf diesen zutrifft [...]« (*Der Flaneur*, p.222).

<sup>208</sup> As it does in *Der indische Idealismus*, Kassner evoking the saintly *metanoia* when »das Große geschehen ist und alles sich in der Zeit erfüllt hat und der Heilige geworden ist [...]« (p.53, emphasis added) and describing the condition of the »Erkennende« in Indian idealism: »Es ist für ihn immer alles geschehen« (ibid., p.88).

<sup>209</sup> Compare the less secure instances of *geschehen* in the episode: »[...] Entsetzen über etwas, was in ihm geschah« (*MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.489); »[...] und wartete, bis es geschehen sein würde [...] Ich sage mir: es ist nichts geschehen, und doch [...]« (ibid., p.490).

place with the stranger.<sup>210</sup> Paper XVIII itself has opened with the words: »Es ist gut, es laut zu sagen: >Es ist nichts geschehen.< Noch einmal: >Es ist nichts geschehen.< Hilft es?«.<sup>211</sup> This theme of non-event runs through Malte's account of the *crémérie* episode, undermining the intelligence of his extreme reaction. When he finally brings himself around to an account of the episode, he enshrouds it once again in doubt and ambiguity:

Ob er [der >Sterbende<, D.D.] wohl auch in einem Duval gewesen wäre? Nein. Dort hätte er nicht auf mich warten dürfen. Sterbende läßt man nicht hinein. Sterbende? Ich sitze ja jetzt in meiner Stube; ich kann ja versuchen, ruhig über das nachzudenken, was mir begegnet ist. Es ist gut, nichts im Ungewissen zu lassen. Also ich trat ein [...]<sup>212</sup>

The interrogative mark after the second use of *Sterbende* marks out the real, epistemological crisis behind Malte's *crémérie* experience.<sup>213</sup> He has reacted with utter terror to an event whose character he is now himself beginning to question. Now back in his room,<sup>214</sup> he is afforded reflective sanctuary: »ich kann ja versuchen, ruhig über das nachzudenken, was mir begegnet ist. Es ist gut, nichts im Ungewissen zu lassen.«.<sup>215</sup> This recalls the wording in the first *große Frage* (Paper XIV), where Malte writes of a three-stage cognitive

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<sup>210</sup> In addition, Malte's next words - *denn ich hatte mich nicht geirrt* - offer another false confirmation, given that what follows will fail to confirm his interpretation of the event beyond doubt.

<sup>211</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.484. *Hilft es?* may of course be a meta-textual tease for the reader. Cf Paper XIV, p.XXX: »Es ist so gut wie nichts geschehen.«.

<sup>212</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.489.

<sup>213</sup> Malte catches himself out with the illogicality of *Sterbende läßt man nicht hinein*. The man would have been inadmissible to Duval society surely not because he was about to die (how would the proprietors have known in advance of this sudden event?) but because he was an indigent.

<sup>214</sup> Having been subjected to a Bakhtinian Fasching crowd which gives him an terrifying *bain de multitude*.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*.

procedure: »zu schauen, nachzudenken und aufzuzeichnen«. <sup>216</sup> Here, in the aftermath of the *crémérie* experience, he must make the move from what he has *seen* to the analysis he can arrive at through *reflection* and *inscription*. The resulting *Aufzeichnung* fails, as in so many other cases, to avoid a discrepancy between the impetuous conclusions of *Schauen* and the reflective indeterminacies generated by *Nachdenken* and *Aufzeichnen*.

Thus, when Malte follows up his account of the *Crémérie* episode with a direct commentary upon his intuitive-empathic relationship to the other man, he trammels himself in solipsistic circularity: »Ich sage mir: es ist nichts geschehen, und doch habe ich jenen Mann nur begreifen können, weil auch in mir etwas vor sich geht, das anfängt, mich von allem zu entfernen und abzutrennen«. <sup>217</sup> I intuited that the man was dying because I am myself undergoing some sort of psychic death; that the man was in fact dying is confirmed by the fact that I intuited this fact so strongly; that I intuited this death so strongly demonstrates my own kindred crisis... Without a more reliable verification of the man's actual death, reflection on the meaning of this subjunctive event is debilitated at source.

It might be useful by way of contrast to juxtapose this purported death-scene in the *crémérie* to the only (human) death-scene properly

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<sup>216</sup> *MLB*, Paper XIV, p.468.

<sup>217</sup> *MLB*, Paper XVIII, p.569.

reported by Malte *as eye-witness*<sup>218</sup> - that of a young girl in Naples (Paper XLVII):

Oder in Neapel damals: da saß diese junge Person mir gegenüber in der Elektrischen Bahn und starb. Erst sah es wie eine Ohnmacht aus, wir fuhren sogar noch eine Weile. Aber dann war kein Zweifel, daß wir stehenbleiben mußten. Und hinter uns standen die Wagen und stauten sich, als ginge es in dieser Richtung nie mehr weiter. Das blasse, dicke Mädchen hätte so, angelehnt an ihre Nachbarin, ruhig sterben können. Aber ihre Mutter gab das nicht zu. Sie bereitete ihr alle möglichen Schwierigkeiten. Sie brachte ihre Kleider in Unordnung und goß ihr etwas in den Mund, der nichts mehr behielt. Sie verrieb auf ihrer Stirn eine Flüssigkeit, die jemand gebracht hatte, und wenn die Augen dann ein wenig verrollten, so begann sie an ihr zu rütteln, damit der Blick wieder nach vorne käme. Sie schrie in diese Augen hinein, die nicht hörten, sie zerrte und zog das Ganze wie eine Puppe hin und her, und schließlich holte sie aus und schlug mit aller Kraft in das dicke Gesicht, damit es nicht stürbe. Damals fürchtete ich mich.<sup>219</sup>

That this represents a >stronger<, more clearcut case of death than that recounted in the *crémérie* seems to be established both by the physiological data (the mouth's refusal of liquids, the rolling of the eyes, the lack of auditory responsiveness) and, crucially, by the intersubjective interpretive consensus (the stopping of the tram, the resuscitation efforts). Indeed, the mother's behaviour on the tram is almost a mirror-image reversal of Malte's behaviour in the *crémérie*: where he refuses to accept that the man may *not* be

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<sup>218</sup> Cf Zimmermann, "Malte Ludens", p.57. Immediately preceding the account of the girl on the tram is a mention of another death: »[...] wenn zum Beispiel jemand auf einer Bank verging und alle standen herum und sahen ihm zu, und er war schon über das Fürchten hinaus: dann hatte ich seine Furcht« (MLB, Paper XLVII, p.569). This account, which conforms perfectly to Malte's archetype of *dem Einen, um den sie herumstanden weil er fremd war und starb* (cf MLB, Paper XIV, p.469) and which recalls the collapsed and occluded figure in Paper I, is devoid of phenomenological detail due to the apparent fact that Malte's perspective has been blocked by the crowd. Thus I do not count it an eye-witness account in the proper sense.

<sup>219</sup> MLB, Paper XLVII, p.569.

dying, she refuses to accept the opposite possibility for her daughter; where she offers too much resuscitative intervention, he offers none at all. Yet the irony may lie precisely in this inadequation of response to event, for both Malte and the mother seem to be in denial, albeit in contrary directions.

Most telling, thought, is the contrast between Malte's response to each >death<. The crémèrie triggers a full traumatic convulsion, whereas the tram incident yields the curt comment: *Damals fürchtete ich mich*. Even on the quantitative level of reflective verbalisation, one finds a negative correlation of clarity of event and intensity of response.<sup>220</sup>

The anxiety behind the Crémèrie episode is consequently a double one. Malte is horrified firstly by the thought of what it must be like to experience the psychological-cognitive defamiliarisation of one who is dying;<sup>221</sup> and secondly by the barely confronted fear that he may have allowed a non-event to lead his dubious sensitive organs to commit yet another bathetic misprision.<sup>222</sup>

Malte's susceptibility as *flâneur* to events involving pure strangers is instanced in Paper XXI, where he pursues a man afflicted with nervous spasms. He is first alerted to the presence of »was Lächerliches« further down

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<sup>220</sup> A negative correlation already established for the cases of the *Nacht-* and *Tagesgeräusche* (Papers II and XIII respectively) and the *offene* and *verschlossene Droschken* of Paper VI. Again we can identify a law of anti-climax proportionate to actuality: Malte has much to narrate by way of possible events, little by way of indicatively established facticity.

<sup>221</sup> This represents the inside perspective on death bracketed out in the account of Kammerherr Brigge's death (Paper VIII).

<sup>222</sup> Discussion of the thematically critical *Zeit der anderen Auslegung* meditation into which the crémèrie >experience< shocks Malte will be deferred until Chapters Four and Five.

the street by the gesticulations of a group of waiters.<sup>223</sup> The object of their and others' amused scrutiny is a man whose excruciating attempts as he walks the Boulevard St-Michel to conceal the increasingly ferocious convulsions in his muscles immediately inspires extreme nervous solidarity in Malte:

Ja, noch ging alles gut; von Zeit zu Zeit griff auch die zweite Hand an den Stock und preßte ihn fester an, und die Gefahr war gleich wieder überstanden. Ich konnte nichts dagegen tun, daß meine Angst dennoch wuchs. Ich wußte, daß, während er ging und mit unendlicher Anstrengung versuchte, gleichgültig und zerstreut auszusehen, das furchtbare Zucken in seinem Körper sich anhäuften; auch in mir war die Angst, mit der er es wachsen und wachsen fühlte, und ich sah, wie er sich an den Stock klammerte, wenn es innen in ihm zu rütteln begann. Dann war der Ausdruck dieser Hände so unerbittlich und streng, daß ich alle Hoffnung in seinen Willen setzte, der groß sein mußte. Aber was war da ein Wille. Der Augenblick mußte kommen, da seine Kraft zu Ende war, er konnte nicht weit sein. *Und ich, der ich hinter ihm herging mit stark schlagendem Herzen, ich legte mein bißchen Kraft zusammen wie Geld, und indem ich auf seine Hände sah, bat ich ihn, er möchte nehmen, wenn er es brauchte. / Ich glaube, daß er es genommen hat; was konnte ich dafür, daß es nicht mehr war.*<sup>224</sup>

In an act of concurrent *passio a distante* and *actio in distans*, Malte silently offers a *Willensspendung*, a voluntaristic transfer of vital energy from himself to the man. The episode's terminal image is an evocation of Malte's state of mind (or no-mind) after the man finally succumbs to the spasms, flings his arms angelically into the air (»als ob er auffliegen wollte«)<sup>225</sup> and disappears from Malte's view as a crowd congregates<sup>226</sup> around him: »Was hätte es für einen Sinn gehabt, noch irgendwohin zu gehen, ich war leer. Wie ein leeres Papier

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<sup>223</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXI, p.500. Note that Malte requires this external cue in order to >tune in< to what is going on.

<sup>224</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXI, p.503, emphasis added.

<sup>225</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXI, p.504.

<sup>226</sup> Cf the collapsed figure in Paper I (p.455).

trieb ich an den Häusern entlang, den Boulevard wieder hinauf«. <sup>227</sup> One is put in mind of nothing so much as the exhausted *magnetiseur* at the end of a treatment session. <sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXI, p.504. Gutjahr, amongst others, cites this gratifyingly meta-textual image of the *leeres Papier* to support her case that Malte's crisis is pre-eminently poetological. Having conflated Malte's »Todesangst« with his »(schriftstellerische) Versagensangst« (»Erschriebene Moderne«, p.371), thereby ignoring the fact that, for Malte, true, mystical writing is *coincident with the death of ordinary consciousness* in the »Zeit der anderen Auslegung« (Paper XVIII, pp.490f), she continues: »Er treibt wie >ein leeres Papier< durch die Straßen von Paris und erzählt die Bilder, die sich ihm einschreiben« (ibid.). This treats the *Papier* image as a symbol of Malte's blank consciousness going out to be *inscribed upon (einschreiben)* by the pictorial impressions (*Bilder*) of the *Objektwelt*. But what Gutjahr cites as an image of Malte's starting-point when he takes to the streets as Parisian *flâneur* - *leeres Papier, tabula rasa* - connotes something very different in its context: an exhaustion, a loss of physical and psychical energy, the *result of rather than the point of departure for his reception of the Bild[]*, [*das*] *sich ihm einschreib[t]*. (In this, Malte is Baudelaire's splenetic *flâneur* in reverse: in »Les Foules«, the cognitive target offers up its *vacuité: Oeuvres complètes I*, p.291). Later in her essay, Gutjahr returns to the same episode. As part of an argument that Malte sees the *Fortgeworfenen* of Paris as »Allegorie[n] seiner eigenen erzählerischen Situation« (»Erschriebene Moderne«, p.377), she writes: »Auch im Erlebnis mit dem Veitstänzer spiegelt und überwindet Brigge seine problematische (Erzähl-)Situation [...] Den körperlichen epileptischen Anfall des Kranken erlebt er psychisch im Flottieren seiner Angst. Bevor der Kranke seine Selbstkontrolle verliert, macht Brigge ihm jedoch *ein symbolisches Geschenk*. Er legt von sich ein >bißchen Kraft zusammen wie Geld< und bittet den Zuckenden, davon zu nehmen. Diese Gabe wird *nicht nur symbolisch übergeben, sondern auch erzählerisch eingelöst*. Während beim Kranken die willentliche Kraft versagt und eine >Naturkraft< freigesetzt wird, setzt Brigge aus seiner Angst die Kraft des Erzählens frei, um der Gebärde des Zuckenden Ausdruck zu verleihen« (ibid., p.378, emphases added). The very notion that the Malte figure, in his account of the episode, may believe himself to have effected an actual intersubjective, telergetic, quasi-mesmeric transfer of willpower has been ruled out of court. It is, apparently, unthinkable that Malte's empathic direction of energies could be anything more than *ein symbolisches Geschenk*. Moreover, Gutjahr has coated the episode in a second layer of *Banalisierung*: Malte's gift to the spastic is *narratively redeemed* when the latter finally succumbs to his agony, for now Malte can turn his empathic *Angst* to good account by immortalising the man in a descriptive text. (As if the man needs any more >expression<.) And this aesthetic compensation, we are to understand, is the inner meaning of an episode of which Malte has earlier in the *Aufzeichnung* proleptically written: »[...] es war wieder etwas da, das mich nahm wie Papier, mich zusammenknüllte und fortwarf, es war etwas Unerhörtes da« (*MLB*, Paper XXI, p.499). In other words, a quotation which Gutjahr has earlier adduced to convey Malte's *schriftstellerische (Versagens-)Angst* turns out to be a commentary on an episode which Gutjahr would now have us read as paradigmatic of Malte's [*Überwindung*] *seine[r] problematischen (Erzähl-)Situation*.

<sup>228</sup> The high profile enjoyed by the word *Wille* in this episode - as in the later *Medizinstudent* episode of Paper L - brings Malte's discourse into clear relation with the non-physicalist traditions of mesmerism. In particular, it recalls Puységur's substitution of Mesmer's physical *fluidum* with the magnetiser's will as the true agent of the magnetic cure (see Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, p.72). Neumeyer contrasts Malte's essayed rôle as energy-donor in this episode with Baudelaire's unashamedly vampyric *flâneur*: »Dieses Moment der Ich-Hingabe verweist auf Baudelaires Flaneur-Konzeption, genauer auf die >steine prostitution de l'âme qui se donne tout entière, poésie et charité, à l'imprévu qui se montre, à l'inconnu

Yet for all Malte's subjective involvement in the man's predicament - his rising fear before the episode, his nervous exhaustion afterwards - the familiar question must return: just how credible is his interpretation of *his rôle* in events? If we take the episode as yet another test of his extrasensory faculties, and his account certainly foregrounds this aspect, then the evidence he gives us is weak indeed. His rising fear (*Ich fühlte, daß ein wenig Angst in mir anfing*) is triggered not by some intuitive sense that something is going on but by clear external cues provided by the waiters. And, more tellingly, his claim to have transferred willpower to the afflicted man must contend with the fact of his ultimate failure to save him from the violent eruption of »die gefangene Krankheit«:<sup>229</sup> *Ich glaube, daß er es genommen hat; was konnte ich dafür, daß es nicht mehr war*. Malte has promoted himself from passive observer to efficient participant. He cannot however establish securely whether his pulses of energy have been objectively effective vectors of energy or merely solipsistic projections. In the end, the by now familiar occultation of the key X-figure (*Denn schon waren viele Leute um ihn, und ich sah ihn nicht mehr*) distances Malte from the dénouement and inhibits further investigation of the event.

In the childhood episode with the mysterious hand, I suggested that the figure of Mademoiselle reading the page looking for »bestimmte Worte,

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qui passe« [”Les Foules”, *Oeuvres complètes I*, p.291]. Baudelaires Flaneur gibt sich allerdings den anderen nur hin, um aus ihnen für sich Lebenskräfte zu gewinnen« (*Der Flaneur*, p.225).

<sup>229</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXI, p.503.



die sie nötig hatte und die nicht da waren«<sup>230</sup> could be read meta-textually.<sup>231</sup>

A comparable meta-commentary, and one which just as richly conveys Malte's travails, may be at work in the *Zitterer* episode. Malte is following the man, watching his movements, wondering what the cause of general amusement is, when he sees him stumble: »[...] als er über irgend etwas stolperte. Da ich nahe hinter ihm folgte, nahm ich mich in acht, aber als die Stelle kam, war da nichts, rein nichts«.<sup>232</sup> Malte continues to methodically track the man's hopping and skipping and stumbling, only to find the same strange absence of material *Hindernis*:

Jetzt konnte man diese plötzliche Bewegung wieder ganz gut für ein Stolpern halten, wenn man sich einredete, es wäre da eine Kleinigkeit gewesen, ein Kern, die glitschige Schale einer Frucht, irgend etwas; und das Seltsame war, daß der Mann selbst an das Vorhandensein eines Hindernisses zu glauben schien, denn er sah sich jedesmal mit jenem halb ärgerlichen, halb vorwurfsvollen Blick, den die Leute in solchen Augenblicken haben, nach der lästigen Stelle um.<sup>233</sup>

If Mademoiselle's style of reading tipped the reader off as to the nature of what might be going on under the table, so too might a devious signal be found in the figure of the non-existent cause on the pavement. Malte is tracking the man's movements but establishing a complete lack of external trigger for his convulsions; *likewise, the reader is tracking Malte, in this as in other episodes, looking with some perplexity into his text to find deposited there material pretexts for his intense reactions.*<sup>234</sup> The man serves a double function for him: in

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<sup>230</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXIX, p.518.

<sup>231</sup> As an anticipation (to recall) both of the reader's attempt to establish unequivocally the status of the hand which Malte is to see (with the word *weiß* proposed as the word sought in vain) and of the young Malte's over-excited reading of the sign-system under the table.

<sup>232</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXI, p.501.

<sup>233</sup> *MLB*, Paper XXI, p.501, emphasis added.

the first place his spastic promenade offers an objective correlative for his own psychic dangers; secondly, he draws Malte into another experiment in paranormal phenomena.<sup>235</sup> As such, both the man and Malte come across as deeply *splenic* figures, in the Baudelairean sense of the term: they both seek in vain to ground their internal convulsions in an external cause. Malte, like Eliot's Hamlet, »is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear«.<sup>236</sup> For Malte, »Innerlichkeit kann sich nur spekulativ entäußern« (Engelhardt).<sup>237</sup> His Papers repeatedly raise the suspicion that he is not so much what a 1911 review of the book calls »ein auf leiseste Reize widerstandslos Reagierender«<sup>238</sup> as one who himself *generates* the *Reize* in the first place.

It is scarcely insignificant that this episode is the last in a cluster of three Papers bearing an insistently hysteriological theme (the Salpêtrière and

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<sup>234</sup> For other rich parables for Malte's autological gothicism, cf his *own* hand drawing back in terror from its shadow, to which it ascribes mysterious autonomy (Paper XXIX); his scaring *himself* before a mirror but ascribing this to a demonic other emanating from the costume (Paper XXXII).

<sup>235</sup> >Paranormal< here refers in the first place not to the man's physiological symptoms but to Malte's claimed transfer of energies. As far as the former are concerned, one ought to exercise caution before identifying the convulsive crisis with an epileptic fit (or a St. Vitus' dance), as such unconscious automatisms often have an hysteroid rather than epileptoid cause. Sokel's reading of a positive dimension into the man's condition is, however, most plausible ("The Devolution of the Self", pp.183ff), as the final description of the man's terminal crisis gestures strongly to a Kleistian *Grazie* as well as to the ecstatic flight or dance of shamanic and dervish traditions: »Der Stock war fort, er spannte die Arme aus, als ob er auffliegen wollte, und es brach aus ihm aus wie eine Naturkraft und bog ihn vor und riß ihn zurück und ließ ihn nicken und neigen und schleuderte Tanzkraft aus ihm heraus unter die Menge« (MLB, Paper XXI, p.504; compare. lines 4-10 of the *Fünfte Elegie*, KA II, p.214). See for example Mircea Eliade's scrutiny of >magical flight< traditions in his *Schamanismus und archaische Ekstasetechnik*, translated from the French by Inge Köck, Frankfurt/M: 1974, pp.441ff. The body as a monistic site of religious events is thematised by Kassner in *Der indische Idealismus*, where he writes of the somatic artistry of the Indian yogi: »Der Inder erfährt wie alle Mystiker das Denken am eigenen Leibe, und das ist der menschliche Sinn der Askese« (p.31).

<sup>236</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems", p.25.

<sup>237</sup> Engelhardt, "Der Versuch, wirklich zu werden", p.124.

<sup>238</sup> Quoted in Dieter Schiller, "Der Einsame und seine Welt", p.147.

*Krankheit* Papers being the first two). It could indeed be argued that the only convincing correspondence in Malte's Papers of psyche or *état d'âme* on the one side and physis or objective situation on the other comes *whenever his psychological state is inscribed in and on his own hysteroid body*: the *Große* in the Salpêtrière (Paper XIX), the physical symptoms of the hysterical *Krankheit* that keeps him in bed (Paper XX), and the nervous exhaustion resulting from events which, whether real, imagined or remembered, have real effects on his metabolism (most spectacularly, the man in the crémèrie, Paper XVIII, and the *Zitterer* in this Paper). Here alone, in the *Leib-Seele* nexus of hysterical discourse - Kruse talks convincingly of a »physiologische Hermeneutik«<sup>239</sup> - do we find the objective correlatives sought so problematically elsewhere. Here alone, in somatic symptoms, do mentality and materiality enter into coalition. Here alone does the projection outwards of an internal state become self-fulfilling. (Under suggestion, some of Charcot's subjects would even manifest blisters on their skin.)<sup>240</sup> In every other interaction with the objective

<sup>239</sup> Kruse, *Auf dem extremen Pol der Subjektivität*, pp.33ff.

<sup>240</sup> See Owen, *Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing*, p.197. Compare the young Malte's fear in the Schulin episode of an eruption from within: »Mir war, als könnte das, was sie suchten, plötzlich aus mir ausbrechen wie ein Ausschlag; und dann würden sie es sehen und nach mir zeigen« (MLB, Paper XLII, p.556). Kant, anticipating the hysteria-discourse of the late nineteenth century, writes of the *Geisterseher*, »daß sie das Blendwerk ihrer Einbildung außer sich versetzen, und zwar in Verhältnis auf ihren Körper, den sie auch durch äußere Sinne empfinden« (*Träume eines Geistersehers*, p.150). For the monists, the fact that hysteria demonstrates the action of psyche on soma does not lead to an equation between the two, still less a reduction of the former to material determinations. In contemporary discourses of the *Leib-Seele* problem, the privileged status of the hysterical body is not materialistically motivated, rather it is seen to provide a royal road to insight into deeper constitutional issues. Bergson, in his 1921 "Rapport sur un ouvrage de Ossip-Lourié: *La graphomanie, essai de psychologie morbide*", notes: »On a souvent dit que les états les plus intéressants pour le psychologue étaient ceux qui ne sont plus tout à fait la santé et qui ne sont pas encore la maladie grave« (in: H. B., *Écrits et Paroles III*, edited by R.-M. Mossé-Bastide [Paris: 1959], pp.490-1, here: p.490). Charcot, by contrast, shows a methodological preference for the *hysteria major* over mere *formes frustes* (see Owen, *Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing*, p.194). Cf William James's comment in his 1892 paper, "What Psychological Research Has Accomplished": »I

world, Malte has found himself driven into a bleakly post-symbolist space in which the gospel of *correspondances* and the mysterious law of analogy break down.

Malte unwittingly continues to profile himself as a >late< Brahe, a *Spätling*.<sup>241</sup> His apprenticeship in Brahesque occultism, whether set in the sub-spectral spleenscape of Paris and recalling doubtful childhood experiences of the uncanny, has been deflated further with each new episode. Both Paris and the past have proven an awkward speculum for his interiority. The deflation reaches its (anti-)climax, I believe, in two very late Paris-based Papers: the medical student (Paper L) and the newspaper vendor (Paper LIX). I accord

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remember saying, at a public meeting in Boston three years since, that a good psychical researcher let loose in an insane-asylum would be likely to discover facts in the patients which the doctors had overlooked«. James goes on to discuss Janet's treatment of a nineteen-year-old girl, Marcella, in the Salpêtrière (in: W. J., *Essays in Psychical Research*, edited by Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers & Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: 1986, pp.89-106, here: p.104 & ff). Janet Beizer gives an eloquent critique of the way in which the condition of hysterical patients would often be naïvely accorded faux-transcendental status -as a form of what Novalis had termed sublime hypochondriasis (see Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, p.216) - in nineteenth-century parapsychological discourse: »By means of a fetishistic reversal, the nineteenth century recuperates its hystericized margins: indefinability is endowed with the portent of meaning, secretions carry secrets, emotional overflow suggests lyrical flow, delirium is the troubled voice of revelation, and speech loss opens the space of an incommunicable sublime« (*Ventriloquized Bodies*, pp.53f). (In the 1960s, R. D. Laing will be accused of a similarly naïve translation of schizophrenic psychopathology into a form of existential authenticity - an accusation which he would typically rebut with rather Kierkegaardian arguments.) Cf Rilke on the *Krankhaftes* strain in the *Malte*: »Denn - scheint mir - auch das, was man >krankhaft< nennt, ist richtig, d.h. inständig, um der Gesundheit willen erlebt, nur eine Unbeholfenheit: und das Große, das nichts zu fürchten hat, kann dann auch davon angezogen und erbeten werden -.« (letter to Hedda Sauer, January 28<sup>th</sup> 1912, *MLB-Materialien*, p.97).

<sup>241</sup> Cf Giloy (*Aporie des Dichters*, p.58) on the distinctively generational framework of Malte's response to the Urnekloster haunting. *Visionarität* (like baldness) seems often to skip a generation: Friederike Hauße, Kerner's Seeress of Prevorst, for instance, was heavily influenced by her spiritistically gifted grandfather Johann Schmidgall (see Gruber, *Die Seherin von Prevorst*, pp.20f). Like Malte, incidentally, she was alienated by the »robust[ ], durchgreifende[ ] Sinn« of her father, tending instead to the more tender mother; again like Malte, she claimed to have seen her first ghost proper at twelve years of age (*ibid.*, p.22; cf *MLB*, Paper XV, p.470: »Zwölf Jahre oder höchstens dreizehn muß ich damals gewesen sein«).

privileged status to these Papers because of the extraordinarily detailed ways in which they reflect and thematise the resounding failure of Malte's parapsychological project. As such, I propose to devote Chapter Four almost exclusively to them.