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This is an author's accepted manuscript of an article published in *boundary 2: an international journal of literature and culture* 45 (2), pp.35-62 in 2018. The final definitive version is available online at:

<https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-4381008>

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Pedagogy as “Cryptic Politics”: Benjamin, Nietzsche, and the End of Education

Matthew Charles

In a review article published in *boundary 2* in 2003, T. J. Clark asks, “Should Benjamin Have Read Marx?” His answer is ambiguous: rejecting a scholarly tendency to dismiss Benjamin’s “flirtation” with Marxism as a “period phenomenon” that “can only be seen as a cancer on Benjamin’s work,” Clark argues that a Marxist mode of thought “is pervasive, vital, and superficial” within *The Arcades Project* (2003: 41). When Benjamin seeks to reconceptualize revolution in terms of “innervations of the technical organs of the collective” by way of a “cracking open” of natural teleology – definitively declaring both as “articles of my politics” (1999a: 631) – Clark describes these articles and their accompanying declaration as “cryptic, . . . as if such a politics were being actively aired and developed elsewhere” (2003: 45-46).

Clark resists constructing a “Red Benjamin,” however, insisting instead that Benjamin’s merely superficial acquaintance with “Marxist method” inures him from its theoretical excesses of chialism and scientism (2003: 32, 44). As his subsequent writing makes evident, the alternative but latent perspective he seeks to rescue from *The Arcades Project* – whose success lies in sketching “the truly *dark* history of the working class . . . class poverty, exploitation, nihilism, and suicide . . . without consolation” for which “truly no redeemer liveth” – owes its descriptive analysis of bourgeois society to Marxism but its tragic historical prognosis to Nietzsche.¹ Esther Leslie (2008: 557-8) has rightly objected that Clark fails to register the extent of Benjamin’s more than superficial acquaintance with Marxist theory but it is also important to

recognize, contrary to Clark's suggestion, that Benjamin's attempts to restore a "genuinely messianic face...to the concept of classless society...in the interest of furthering the revolutionary politics of the proletariat itself" (2003: 403) constitutes the precise *political* inversion of Nietzsche's early philosophy.

Celebrating the fall of the Paris Commune of 1871 in a letter to Baron von Gersdorff, Nietzsche declares himself in good spirits because not everything had capitulated to what he calls "Franco-Jewish levelling" and "the greedy instincts of *Jetztzeit*" (Lukács 1981: 235). Nietzsche was particularly agitated by reports circulating in the European press that the retreating Communards had torched the Louvre and the anti-egalitarian view of culture put forward in *The Greek State* is formulated against the backdrop of these events:

Accordingly, we must learn to identify as a cruel-sounding truth the fact that slavery belongs to the essence of a culture: a truth, granted, that leaves open no doubt about the absolute value of existence.... The misery of men living a life of toil has to be increased to make the production of the world of art possible for a small number of Olympian men.... Therefore, we may compare the magnificent culture to a victor dripping with blood, who, in his triumphal procession, drags the vanquished along, chained to his carriage as slaves. (2007: 166)

Significantly, Benjamin does not object to or criticize this conception of culture in the famous lines from the late theses "On the Concept of History," but draws from it the opposite political conclusion:

Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called

cultural treasures, and a historical materialist...cannot contemplate [them] without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. (2003: 391-2)

Benjamin's inverted Nietzscheanism retains a critical suspicion towards culture and a rejection of certain bourgeois values but is oriented towards a historical remembrance of the oppressed and an overcoming of the oppressive material conditions of existing cultural production and reproduction.² In this it perhaps has less in common with Clark's tragic nihilism and more with Malcolm Bull's strategy of sidestepping Nietzsche's rhetoric by identifying with the victims of these texts: "In order to read like a loser you have to accept the argument but turn its consequences against yourself" (Bull 2011: 37). To speak of Benjamin's anti-Nietzscheanism is, however, not to devalue the enduring significance of Nietzsche's philosophy for his thought but to indicate the struggle to delineate an alternative exit route from its tragic perspective than that proposed in the aesthetic affirmation of Nietzsche's early works or the Zarathustran overcoming of his later ones. This approach provides Benjamin with a catastrophic vision of history redeemable by a recuperation of the same revolutionary *Jetztzeit* that Nietzsche identified with the "Franco-Jewish levelling" of the Communards.³

The following discussion seeks to extend the implications of this anti-Nietzscheanism – and in particular its valorization of revolutionary *Jetztzeit* and social levelling – beyond the more familiar terrain of Benjamin's dialectical engagement with the crisis of art and culture (most famously in the *Work of Art* essay's opposition to the aestheticization of politics) into what has been declared – from Hannah Arendt (2006 [1954]: 172) to Martha Nussbaum (2010: 73-7) – to

be a comparable crisis in formal systems of mass education over the last half century. To do so, it will begin by exploring the influence of Nietzsche's early educational writings on Benjamin's own early understanding of the cultural significance of Youth, before examining Benjamin's attempt to distance himself from the tragic consequences of this position in his later writings. The argument in the first part of this article is that the nature of Benjamin's break from certain Nietzschean features of his own writings on Youth constitutes the "cryptic" submerging – but not disappearance – of this pedagogical layer of his philosophy.

I.

For the first time in my life, I understand Goethe's words: "Only where you are let everything be— always childlike [*Nur wo du bist sei alles—immer kindlich*]. Thus you are everything – you are invincible."

- Walter Benjamin (letter of May 5, 1913)

Nietzsche's early reflections on the political foundations of classical and modern culture in *The Greek State* (and *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which the essay was originally intended to be included) are the prelude to a broader analysis of education developed in a series of public lectures *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* and in the *Untimely Meditations*.⁴ In his first lecture, Nietzsche – comparing himself to a Roman *hauerspex* who steals a glimpse of the Future from the sacrificed entrails of the Present – discerns two tendencies in German educational institutions: the tendency to *maximize and extend* education to the greatest number of people and the tendency to *minimize and impoverish* education by professionalizing it in relation to the State (Nietzsche 2009).

The first is driven, in part, by an enlightened fear of the oppressive nature of older religious power, and would promote culture through education as a secular counterforce capable of scattering these religious instincts. But it is also motivated by what Nietzsche pointedly calls the “dogmas” of modern political economy: a narrow and short-term utilitarianism of needs that stems from the factitious bond drawn between intelligence and property. Education furthers the interests of the economy to the extent that, in as rapid a manner as possible, it rears men who are current in the same ways coins have currency. Here, Nietzsche anticipates the secularized and foreshortened version of the religious concept of ‘the vocational’ that dominates the rhetoric of contemporary systems of mass education and, in the linking of intelligence and property, its accompanying drive to credentialism (see Osborne 2010). Consequently, the bourgeoisie seeks to conserve and reproduce its power by furthering the modern forces of culture against the older ones of religion, while attempting to yoke and tame the liberating powers of culture in accordance with its own economic interests.

The second tendency to weaken education is not opposed to this extension but complements it through the subordination of all strivings after education to reasons of State, as manifested in the idea of the *Kulturstaat* associated with Hegel, Fichte, Humboldt, and others (Jarausch 1982: 160-161). In contrast to the classical and aristocratic ideal of a genuine education for culture, measured by the cultivation of great spiritual, philosophical and artistic individuals, the State must intervene in education to drive the few individuals of genius into exile in order to “liberate” the masses into barbarism by convincing them they are capable of thinking, acting and discovering for themselves, under the guidance of the State.

In a sentiment similar to that expressed in *The Greek State*, one of the young student interlocutors in *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* recalls the “cardinal principle of

all culture,” as taught by the older philosopher: “[N]o one would strive to attain culture if he knew how incredibly small the number of really cultured people actually is, and can ever be” and how reliant such culture is on “the prodigious multitude” who, “led on by an alluring delusion...devote themselves to education” even though they can never themselves be cultured (Nietzsche 2009). Those who pursue the education of the “stupid, dull masses” and “regard as their goal the emancipation of the masses from the mastery of the great few” therefore seek to overthrow the most sacred hierarchy in the kingdom of the intellect: “the servitude of the masses, their submissive obedience, their instinct of loyalty to the rule of genius.”

In an important and characteristic development, Nietzsche makes clear that these two destructive tendencies find their perfect combination in journalism. Since journalism is defined by its devotion to the present – the reproduction of the *timely* or *fashionable* aspects of the day (*jour*) – it radically deflates the temporal horizons of education, conflating the means and the end of education into the “present day”: a journalistic pseudo-education aims at nothing but – indeed, already is – a journalistic pseudo-culture. To adapt Bill Readings’s argument in *The University in Ruins*, the subsequent academic institutionalization of Cultural Studies in the late twentieth century “must be understood to arise when culture ceases to be the animating principle of the university [that is, its goal or end] and ...becomes instead an object of study among others” (1996: 92). When Nietzsche’s young student complains that, the “very style” of a “newspaper, the latest novel, or one of those learned books...already bears the revolting impress of modern barbaric culture,” he introduces the milieu of the cultural philistine, explored in further detail in the *Untimely Meditations*.

Here the very eternity and individuality of the spiritual and cultural leader – who for Nietzsche is an *unhistorical* or *transhistorical* individual – is rejected for the topicality of the

political, literally reducing the new to the political novelty of the news. In this respect, the greedy instincts of *Jetztzeit* may similarly be said to be at work. For, every “philosophy which believes that the problem of existence is touched on, not to say solved, by a political event is a joke- and pseudo-philosophy,” Nietzsche writes, for how “should a political innovation suffice to turn men once and for all into contented inhabitants of the earth?” (1997: 147-8). The vocational professionalization of educational institutions in the interests of the State privileges the narrowest measure of social utility, one that results in a destructive tendency towards increasing academic specialization and that renders the expertise of the intellectual incapable of passing judgement on anything but the smallest aspect of contemporary society.

The corrupting substitution of an education-for-culture for a journalist education-as-politics simultaneously liberates the true intellectual from the antagonistic demands of cultural greatness, such that the tensions of philosophical life dissipate into the chatter of journalistic self-expression. This levelling of cultural distinctions represents a “flight from one’s self,” Nietzsche claims, “an ascetic expiration of their cultural impulses, a desperate attempt to annihilate their own individuality” (Nietzsche 2009). Journalism represents the corruption of artistic or cultural *style* for Nietzsche. If culture is defined as a “unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people,” as Nietzsche suggests in the *Untimely Meditations* (1997: 5), modern pseudo-culture is precisely that ephemeral multiplicity of styles that appears unified only to the cultural philistine - who, unlike the philistine of the past who is *opposed* to culture, is precisely the philistine who *thinks* he or she is cultured – because it reflects back his own chaotic lack of style (1997: 7-8). As he writes a decade later in *The Gay Science*, “One thing is needful. To ‘give style’ to one’s character – a great and rare art!” (2001: 163-4). Nietzsche’s writings themselves reveal, he confesses, a “modern character ...marked by weakness of personality” (1997: 116).

Perhaps the great exemplar of such character for Nietzsche is the genius of Goethe, the only European who experienced the egalitarianism of the French Revolution with nausea and the precursor of what, in his later writings, he will define as the *Übermensch*: “A strong highly cultured human being... What he aspired to was *totality* ...he disciplined himself to a whole, he *created himself*” (2005: 222).

The Politics of Youth

As James McFarland has noted, Benjamin’s own early writings for the German Youth Movement are “the place in [his] oeuvre where explicit references to Nietzsche cluster most densely,” but also where “a uniquely Benjaminian engagement with the thinker is marshalled and simultaneously obscured” (2013: 17-18). That which Irving Wolfarth has called the “politics of Youth” (1992: 164) contained in Benjamin’s early writings is indebted to the ideas of the progressive educational reformer Gustav Wyneken, whose pedagogical commitment to the Free School Community is informed by a classical ideal of erotic education influenced, among other things, by aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophical writings. These ideas are developed in accordance with Benjamin’s subsequent involvement in the Freiburg and Berlin branches of the Independent Students Association, an involvement which eventually led to his break with Wyneken.

Benjamin’s politics of Youth draws on a philosophy of history and culture contained in the second of Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations* on “The Use and Abuse of History for Life.” Here Nietzsche protests against the “*historical education of modern people*” that has in part sprung from Hegelian philosophy and that paralyses the natural poetic impulse of Youth, “the first generation of fighters and dragon-slayers which will precede a happier and fairer culture and

humanity” and “from which alone, as a fruitful soil, a deep and noble culture can grow forth” (1997: 116, 121; 2009). Benjamin’s early writing for the German Youth Movement shares a similar valorization of Youth as a cultural or even metaphysical concept and as a critique of contemporary education, involving an anarchic rejection of the State and a promotion of a higher ideal of culture. Benjamin explicitly utilized Nietzsche’s lectures on education in his address to the Free Student Congress in 1914 (1994: 66). In “School Reform: A Cultural Movement,” he writes that: “The school receives a generation...full of images, which it brings with it from the land of the future. After all, the culture of the future is the ultimate goal of school – and for this reason *it must remain silent* before the future that comes toward it in the form of youth” (2011: 59-60, emphasis added).

In his discussion of ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’ from the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche declared that “our schools and professors simply turn aside from any moral instruction or content themselves with formulae... Never were moral teachers more necessary and never were they more unlikely to be found” (1997: 133). Benjamin takes up this problem in his 1913 essay “Moral Education” and, in connection with ideas developed there, in letters to his friend Carla Seligson. This discussion extends (via a reference to Nietzsche) the idea of a “new youthfulness” into the sphere of “what is probably philosophy of history” (1994: 50). The necessity of a moral education charged with the task of the ethical cultivation of students is everywhere demanded, and yet the belief that the exertion of moral influence is highly personal frequently renders this demand contradictory within formal systems of education. The problem arises because (in Kantian terms), “the aim of moral education [*sittlichen Erziehung*] is the formation [*Bildung*] of the moral will” and yet this pure will is no psychological entity and so not subject to empirical influence. This task can therefore “have nothing to do with any type of

instruction [*Unterricht*],” understood as a rationalized means or science of teaching. Benjamin’s investigation thus proposes to question “in what way moral education is related to absolute pedagogic demands” (2011: 107).

In the absence of such a critique, the pedagogical groundlessness of moral instruction means that “nothing further remains than for it to conduct a peculiar sort of civic – instead of moral – education, in which everything at bottom *voluntary* becomes necessary” and ultimately justified through appeal to rationalistic or psychological examples intended to influence the student (2011: 110-111). Today, the continuing emphasis on vocationalism, credentialism and narrow specialization in the instruction pertaining to systems of mass education has led to a similar concern with the reintroduction of moral or civic education for the development of good character, citizenship or resilience.⁵ As Benjamin points out, the lack of any *theoretical* consideration of how such comportment could be learned within the framework of mass systems ensures its amounting to little more than political posturing, however time-consuming and wasteful of resources.

His own problematic solution is to appeal to the “principle of the Free School Community, the principle of ethical community,” which is founded on a philosophical idea of religiosity (2011: 109). The religious dimension of this community is grounded in the sense that “all morality and religiosity originates in solitude with God” (2011: 110). In a letter of 1913, Benjamin writes similarly that “we need only to live in rational solitude, somewhat less concerned about this difficult present and about ourselves. We will steadfastly rely on young people who will find or create the forms for the time between childhood and adulthood” (1994: 40). Claiming that “the ideal person in relationship to the idea” constitutes a profound form of loneliness that is possible only within a perfect community, Benjamin adds that such loneliness

“destroys what is human about him” (1994: 50). Another letter asserts that, “in every individual who is born, no matter where, and turns out to be young, there is, not ‘improvement,’ but perfection from the very start. This is the goal that [Viktor] Hueber so messianically feels is near. Today I felt the awesome truth of Christ’s words: Behold, the kingdom of God is not of this world, but within us” (1994: 54). In “The Religious Position of the New Youth” (1914), Benjamin compares this religiosity to that of the “first Christians, to whom the world likewise appeared to be so utterly overflowing with the sacred – which could arise in each and all – that it deprived them of the power to speak and act.” And yet youth is compelled to struggle “as long as the religious community does not yet exist”: in such struggle the “figure of the sacred reveals itself” (2011: 170). This latter process constitutes a further source for Benjamin’s messianism of youth: “It may dismiss no object, no person, for in each (in the advertising kiosk and in the criminal) the symbol or the sacred can arise” (2011: 169).

Yet the conditions for such a community are absent, Benjamin admits in writing to Seligson, and the “greatest obstacle the youth of today must overcome” is the assessment of them as possessing a naïve and sentimentalized innocence that needs to be protected (1994: 51). He names the self-awareness of a calling – the older, religious idea of a vocation – knowledge and identifies this with guilt. Consequently, “youth must lose its innocence (animal-like innocence) in order to become guilty,” but guilt may be expiated only through action, which is always innocent: “through the most active, most fervent, and blind fulfilment of duty.” In this way, a different kind of innocence – one beyond *good and evil* – comes about *through* action, an innocence of the sort that Benjamin, like Nietzsche, associated with Goethe (1994: 51).

In the absence of a broader community, this blind fulfilment of duty was to resolve itself in the most tragic ways. The Youth movement grew significant enough that Wyneken was eventually denounced in Bavaria by the Minister for Culture, their journal *Anfang* banned, and the “talking-rooms” in which the students conducted their debates, forced to close. Similar accusations were made in the Prussian and Baden parliaments, leading to Wyneken’s expulsion from the coalition of Free German Youth and the splitting into factions of the movement’s leadership. The outbreak of war in 1914 and Wyneken’s perhaps expedient public support of the German war effort sealed these divisions (see Utley 1979 and Utley 1999). As a generation of young men were sent to be slaughtered at the front, several members of Benjamin’s student circle committed suicide, either in nihilistic despair or political defiance. In particular, the double suicide of his closest friend Fritz Heinle in a pact with Rika Seligson (Carla’s sister) in 1914, which took place in the branch headquarters of the movement, was compounded by Wyneken’s subsequent betrayal of Youth.

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of these experiences for Benjamin. In Benjamin’s early politics of Youth, suicide – the self-sacrifice of the individual as mute protest against the inadequacy of justice – represents the intoxicating and dangerous limit of an essentially tragic vision. It is precisely this tragic dimension that Benjamin (not to say Nietzsche himself) seeks – and perhaps ultimately fails – to distance himself from in his philosophy. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that Benjamin’s traumatic break from the Youth Movement does not simultaneously constitute an abandonment of this thought, but contributes to the submerging of his political position into what he himself calls a ‘harder, purer, more invisible radicalism.’⁶ As such, it constitutes an unforgettable historical layer of the underground or cryptic politics of his later writings.

II.

The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.

- Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

Benjamin's next sustained attempt to develop his political thought was to be a large-scale study begun in the early 1920s (Steiner 2001: 44, 66). As Uwe Steiner notes, while Benjamin's political thought should be placed "in the context of the Nietzsche-reception in the milieu of early Expressionism," his own "definition of politics" as "the satisfaction of unenhanced humanness" is constructed in direct opposition to any Zarathustran politics of the *Übermensch*, which Benjamin now reads as "the most radical and most magnificent realization of the religious essence of capitalism" (Steiner 2001: 61-2).

In his essay *Fate and Character* from 1919, the contours of an alternative exit route from tragic suffering begin to be delineated. Given the melancholic features often associated with the character of Benjamin, it is remarkable that this reference to happiness is rooted in a discussion of comedy. Yet, although ostensibly a discussion of ancient tragedy and modern comedy, at its heart this essay involves a subtle disengagement from Nietzsche. Specifically, Benjamin takes issue with Nietzsche's Heraclitean aphorism in *Beyond Good and Evil*, that "if a man has character, he has an experience that constantly recurs" (1996: 202). Benjamin takes this as indicative of a conception of fate that conflates fate (the constantly recurring experience) with character, understood in a vague sense as the cause of this fate. This understanding of fate and character regards the latter as a network of threads, composed of broad character traits that are

connected by finer strands to external events of fate, a network that knowledge tightens – like the net of fate – into a dense fabric, from which the cloth of character is cut (1996: 203-204).

Consequently, these threads of character are judged in quasi-ethical terms.

Benjamin refuses such a conflation on the grounds that, if it is problematic to assert that a person's future can be read from distant external features (the stars, for example), it is no less problematic to suppose that inner character can be read from proximate external ones (physiognomy or gestures, for example). But if character *can* be read from such external signs, then a pragmatic conception of the person as active or practical, and thus capable of changing bodily features or physical surroundings, implies that the production of signs cannot be limited to immediate causal connections but extends to the whole realm of wider experience, such as changes to the natural environment (1996: 201-2). Since this “active” or “pragmatic” conception of the person intervenes in that sphere previously associated with the fate that passively befalls a person, what Benjamin calls “character” cannot be delimited to the immediate context of the “inner” or “private” realm, and it thus threatens to contravene the very concept of character.

Benjamin proposes that an adequate conception of character therefore needs to be delimited more clearly from the concept of fate. To do so, he introduces the distinction between cultic myth and theological justice: fate must be detached from its association with religious punishment, Benjamin insists, since this conception refers to misfortune only as divine punishment of the guilty, without any historical index of good fortune or happiness and the liberation from guilt. This touches upon what Steiner identifies as the central idea of Benjamin's politics in this period: the realization of happiness.

In his fragment on capitalism as religion, this understanding of fate pertains to the mythical domain of the absolute cult, whose modern apotheosis is a capitalism which knows only duties and punishment and nothing of redemption and bliss. Benjamin identifies such fate with the law as “a residue of the demonic stage of human existence” (1996: 203), a demonic ambiguity associated in the *Critique of Violence* with the false equality of abstract rights, which are one manifestation of the violent *power* exerted in all mythical lawmaking (1996: 249). This demonic ambiguity perhaps finds its modern apotheosis in education, to the extent that the *right* to education is, in many instances, exceptional in simultaneously being a legally policed *compulsion* that must be exercised (see Blacker 2013: 196-97).

The moral speechlessness and self-sacrifice of the tragic hero invokes the idea of justice against this cultic or demonic domain not by demanding compensation but by a protest that calls into question the very existence of this whole mythological order. But this tragic response, in its moral protest, remains at the same time sublimely bound to the mythical schema of sacrifice, the fatal nexus of misfortune and guilt. Turning then from tragedy to comedy (and perhaps influenced by Jean Paul’s the aesthetics of humor, discussed below), Benjamin seeks a dialectical, but also distinctively modern, counterpart to the sublimity of the tragic. If tragedy calls into question the mythical concept of fate that lacks any index of happiness, comedy calls into question a concept of character judged in ethical terms of guilt rather than the freedom of innocence. In comedy, characters are basically stripped of inner moral and psychological significance; as a consequence, they come to seem amoral types, for only *actions* are moral, Benjamin continues to insist, never traits of character. For example, in Molière “character develops...like a sun, in the brilliance of a single trait, which allows no other to remain visible in its proximity” (1996: 205): character as a shining beacon of innocence that illuminates the

freedom of actions. Freedom is revealed here through the comedic antihero's or antiheroine's moral and psychological innocence, understood in terms of simplicity, anonymity, and a certain asociality. If tragedy responds to the mythical concept of fate (which never condemns the *individual*, Orestes, as guilty but only the *type*, the doomed house of Atreus) with the moral *individual*, comedy responds to a modern concept of character – the ethical judgement of psychological individuality – with the happiness, innocence and simplicity of the amoral *type*.⁷ There is, here, a shifting and blurring of the traditional privileging of Sophoclean philanthropy - the valorization of endured suffering - over Molière's misanthropic delight, and of the traditional differentiation of inner/outer or private/public. Only where moral education integrates the humorous – beyond the tragic heroism of educational responses to social fate – might the true salvation of character be possible.

The Destructive Character

This points us not to the ethical suffering and the “solitude” of the creative individual but to the cheerfulness of the destructive character, who “must be constantly surrounded by people” (1999b: 542). Benjamin's articulation of the destructive character type in the early 1930s is, among other figures, associated with his immanent critical engagement with Karl Kraus, author of the long-running and bitterly satirical journal *Die Fackel*, which Benjamin began reading in 1918-1919, and in which Kraus raged against journalism and the press. Kraus's condemnation of the corrupting influence of journalistic language was driven by recognition of the dissolution of intellectual and cultural life into what Benjamin calls “the satiety of healthy common sense, and the compromise intellectuals made with it in order to find shelter in journalism” (1999b: 446): in other words, the situation of educational culture, as conditioned by modern political economy,

that Nietzsche deplored. Nietzsche is also present in the subtitles to the sections of Benjamin's essay of 1931, "Karl Kraus": not merely in the inversion of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* in the final section, entitled *Unmensch* (the "Inhuman" or "Monster"), but also in the resonances between the first section on the *Allmensch* (the "All-Human," translated into English as "Cosmic Man") and Nietzsche's *Allzumenschliches* ("All-Too-Human").

Benjamin recognizes in Kraus's writings on modern journalism the condemnation of a thoroughly impoverished humanity, played out for Kraus in the erosion of the distinction between "private" and "public" life enacted by contemporary journalism. Against this, Kraus sides with the last vestige of the "creaturely" or "created" in human individuals: the withered interior of "private life" whose intellectual and sexual poles are under attack by a hypocritical public morality. For Benjamin, however, Kraus's philanthropic interest in humanity stands out all the more clearly against the misanthropic background of the mythically demonic in which he is still immersed. It is not a profound "love of humanity" that really underlies Kraus's satirical condemnation of intellectuals and journalists but a destructive and violent desire for vengeance. Kraus's condemnation of humanity is, from this perspective, secretly rooted in capitalism's cult-like condemnation of humanity's guilt. The antinomies diagnosed in Kraus's thought by Benjamin reveal affinities with a Nietzschean vision of cultural emancipation through a *natural* (rather than *historical*) overcoming of the human in the figure of the *Übermensch*.

Benjamin seeks an intervention within Kraus's thought that would redeem the figure of emancipation from individualism and naturalism (where character *is* fate). To this end he identifies Kraus's reaction against the classical ideal of humanity (his retreat from philanthropy into misanthropy staged as a withdrawal into withered private life) with an effectively

unconscious confession of the “materialist humanism” of the young Marx.⁸ Reading Kraus through Marx, Benjamin invokes an anthropological materialism, in which revolutionary *political* emancipation (the redemption of the “second nature” of the social order) is simultaneously the precondition and concomitant of the higher, *collectively social* emancipation of individual humans themselves (the redemption of “first nature” of human bodily life).

The antiheroism of the asocial types of Moliere’s satirical *Misanthrope* is here brought into conjunction with an understanding of the utopian features of the misanthropy of the destructive character. This occurs in the final section of the 1931 essay on Kraus, where Benjamin reconstructs the wrath of Kraus as the beckoning of the *Unmensch* towards the Nietzschean *Übermensch*: “And therefore the monster stands among us as the messenger of a more real humanism ...One must have ...seen Klee’s *New Angel* (who preferred to free men by taking from them, rather than make them happy by giving to them) to understand a humanity that proves itself by destruction” (1999a: 452, 456). Simplicity of character and innocence of action are the preconditions for an affirmative conception of the poverty of experience and a positive revaluation of the barbarism (or, in artistic terms, the dadaism) of the cultural philistine. With the monstrous figure of the inhuman, character becomes realigned with a freedom not, in the existential sense, to annihilate itself but, in the messianic sense, to annihilate the inhumanity of the world around it.

III.

If they are fit and well, children are absolute monsters of activity:...tearing up, breaking up, building, they’re always at it.

- Paul Valéry, *Ideé Fixe*

If Benjamin's anti-Nietzscheanism culminates in the figure of the *inhuman*, this is typically associated with the male, adult characters he invokes: Gustav Glück, Bertolt Brecht, Karl Kraus. This final section seeks to resituate the childlike inhumanism of the destructive character back into the context of education by retracing the development of an alternative pedagogical model, a model expounded against the tragic nihilism of the early writing on Youth and expanded into what Clark calls the "cryptic politics" of the later writings. In seeking to demonstrate the fundamentally pedagogical nature of Benjamin's philosophy, it will conclude by drawing out the implications of an anti-Nietzschean pedagogy for the contemporary crisis of mass education.

The religiosity that, in his earlier writings, resides in the solitude of community provides a problematic solution to the antinomy of moral education. As a consequence, the role of the educator becomes vexed. If "as we suspect, it is the case that all morality and religiosity originates in solitude with God," Benjamin asks, who today would introduce the role of the *mediator* [*Mittlerrolle*] (between the individual and God) in the sphere of education (2011: 110)? The moral speech of the educator who seeks to mediate between Youth and culture is as clumsy and inept as the interfering cleric of Goethe's *Elective Affinities*. Perhaps what is required instead is the example of a cultural leader: an *educator* (as Schopenhauer was for Nietzsche) but never an *instructor*.

Benjamin provides some pedagogical answers to this problem in a letter to Scholem in 1917. It is useful to read this response in the context both of his explicit break from the leadership of Wyneken, with the consequent submerging of his "politics of Youth" into a harder radicalism, and the development of an anti-Nietzschean account of character as the *agent* rather

than *object* of education. Responding to Scholem's claim (originally made in a discussion of the Blau-Weiss group of the Jewish Youth Movement) that "All work whose goal is not to set an example is nonsense," Benjamin insists that the concept of "example" and of "influence" (and associated ideas of moral leadership) should be "excluded from the theory of education" (1994: 93). In this context, the vaunted model of "example" is always limited to the *empirically* possible and educational "influence" to issues of *power*. "The life of the educator [*Das Leben des Erziehenden*], however, does not function indirectly [*mittelbar*]," Benjamin writes, "by setting an example" (1994: 93). Benjamin now abandons the promise of solitude within religious community that the "Free School" movement once granted and returns to the significance of formal instruction previously rejected. Here, instruction [*Unterricht*] is defined as "education by means of teachings [*Lehre*] in its actual sense," so that teaching itself "must therefore be in the middle [*in der Mitte*] of all ideas about education [*Erziehung*]" (1994: 94). Significantly, though, the teacher does not "learn before others" (as an *example* of learning in process) but is the one whose own learning has evolved into teachings.

Since there is a continuous temporality involved – the qualitative transition from learning to teaching in the person of the educator, by which one is continually transformed into the other – Benjamin proposes that the concept of example be replaced by a concept of tradition as "the medium in which the person who is learning [*der Lernende*] continually transforms himself into the person who is teaching [*in den Lehrenden verwandelt*]" (1994: 94). The significance of instruction involves making teachings communicable to others to receive in their own way: "Knowledge becomes transmittable [*überlieferbar*] only for the person who has understood his knowledge as something that has been transmitted [*überliefertes*]" (1994: 94). In this way, the educator's relation to instruction resembles that of the older storyteller, in the sense that he or she

“takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale”; that is, he or she *transmits* it (2002: 146).

While the novel concerns the “solitary individual” and has no place for “instruction” [*Unterweisungen*], the storyteller’s connection to a “chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation” brings the storyteller into the ranks of teachers and sages (2002: 154). In Kafka’s writings, which represent the very “sickness of tradition” manifested in the epoch of the novel, one can see how it is possible to cling to the form of “transmissibility,” even if this must be at the expense of the content of truth.⁹ This is, Benjamin reminds us, the radiant serenity of Kafka’s messianic hope: “only a fool’s help is real help” and folly belongs to the creatures and (teaching) assistants (2002: 318-320).

In this sense, the instructor – who in playing a mediating role interrupts the solitude of the individual learner and intrudes upon the silence of the older generation of the school towards Youth – is not the block to education but rather its precondition: the one who mediates the relationship *between* generations. For the educator, like the breaking wave in the surging sea of teachings, “the only things that matters ...is to surrender itself to a motion in such a way that it crests and breaks” (1994: 94). Here, we are introduced to something akin to an alternative and law-*destroying* violence that *The Critique of Violence* identifies with justice (1996: 249). This is manifested not only by religious tradition, he claims, but also in “educative power, which in its perfected form stands outside the law” and serves as an “expiating moment” that may annihilate “goods, right, life, and suchlike” but never, we might say, the innocence of character (1994: 94). This breaking “is education in its actual sense” and instruction is the moment in which tradition emerges, becomes visible and free: “the only nexus of the free union of the old with the new

generation”. It leads to a new understanding of education as medium in which “everyone is an educator and everyone needs to be educated and everything is education.”

This new conception of education as transmission provides the seed of the political positions developed across Benjamin’s subsequent work. It can be genealogically traced through notes associated with his major writings on *The Concept of Criticism in Early German Romanticism* (1919), *One Way-Street* (written 1923-6; published 1928), *The Arcades Project* (began in 1927) and early versions of the *Work of Art* essay (from the mid-1930s). In notes related to *The Concept of Criticism in Early German Romanticism*, for example, Benjamin speaks of a form of nonviolent control which “has more influence on the child in essential matters than anything else (more than corporeal punishment and, above all, more than the much vaunted power of example),” associating this with the Late Romantic theory of observation (1996: 286). Unlike early German Romanticism, the latter is centered not on reflection but on love, specifically on a form of pedagogic observation: “For the late Romantics, observation was a sun beneath whose rays the object of love opens up to further growth. But if its rays were withheld, the object of love remained in the dark and wilted” (1996: 285).

The reference to late Romanticism here seems most directly to invoke Friedrich Schlegel’s pessimistic recasting of his earlier theory of irony (understood, as Benjamin explains in *The Concept of Criticism*, as “poetic reflection” which can progressively “raise this reflection to higher and higher powers” and so rise infinitely above all finiteness) into something more sceptical and tragic, as evinced in his last lectures: “Genuine irony is the irony of love. It arises from the feeling of finiteness and of one’s own limitations and the apparent contradiction of these feelings with the concept of the infinite inherent in all genuine love” (Behler 1998: 45-46).

However, a less direct but more apposite comparison – and one more in line with the comedic strand being emphasised in this approach – might be made to Jean Paul’s doctrine on education *Levana*. This also deploys the romantic trope of the learner blooming in the warmth and light of the educator’s consciousness: “whenever a sunbeam strikes [the child’s consciousness] ...(for all teaching is warming into life rather than sowing) there the green leaves burst forth,” and the “fruit” of self-consciousness “bursts through the clouds like a sun, and wonderfully reveals a beaming universe” (1891: 103). Jean Paul, like Benjamin in his discussion of Late Romanticism, distinguishes this self-consciousness from both the reflection of early Romanticism and the supersensible moral faculty discovered through the experience of the sublime; it marks not what he regards as the empty mirroring of Fichtean reflection but a more simplistic “inner sense” (1891: 114). In the aesthetic theory laid out in *On the Natural Magic of Imagination* and the *Preschool for Aesthetics*, Jean Paul deploys the idea of humor against the similarly conceived infinite progress of Romantic irony and the punctual sense of being overwhelmed of the Kantian sublime (Fleming 2006: 48). The humor of what he calls “Romantic comic poetry” deflates *both* the infinite contrasts of Romantic poetry (and their tragic aftermath) and the finite contrast of comedy by contrasting both perspectives *against each other*, resulting in a negative infinity that “annihilates both great and small, because before the infinite, everything is equal and nothing” (1973: 88-89). This idea of humor “as the inverted sublime annihilates not the individual,” however, “but the finite through its contrast with the idea. It recognizes no individual foolishness, no fools, but only folly and a mad world” (1973: 88).¹⁰

To return to Benjamin’s discussion of education: what is key is that this model of observation (which “is much more important ...than reflection” and “exemplary” in the sphere of pedagogy) is a medium in which both the growing child, who is educated by the regulating

observation of the adult, and the observing adult, whose eye is regulated and “learns to see what is appropriate to the child,” are mutually interactive (1996: 285). This posits education as a medium of intergenerational and pragmatic transmission, at once theoretical and practical, in which both educator and educated are simultaneously educated. The problem that occurs when this model is transposed to the sphere of historical growth within human society, as happens with the later Romanticism of Schlegel and Carl von Savigny, is that *historical* development concerns not solely peaceful growth but also bloody conflict, and therefore requires the introduction of theological concepts of justice as well (Benjamin 1996: 285).

Benjamin himself takes up this pedagogical model on a grand, historical scale in *One-Way Street* and in the earlier version of the *Work of Art* essay, where he claims that the purpose of technology is misconceived as the imperialist mastery of nature in the same way that the cane-wielder teaches the purpose of education to be the mastery of children (1996: 487). Correcting this misconception, he counters: “Is not education, above all, the indispensable *ordering* of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of *that relationship* and not children? And likewise technology is the mastery not of nature but *the relationship* between nature and humanity” (487). In the *Work of Art* essay, this romantic model of pedagogy therefore provides Benjamin with his messianic distinction between “first” and “second” technology. The former aims at a mastery over nature through the maximal possible utilization of human beings, whose consequences are valid for all time (a vision culminating in mythical guilt and sacrifice). The latter is distinguished from the first in seeking the minimal possible use of human beings through provisional and improvised experimentation and testing, whose goal is not mastery over nature but an interplay between nature and humanity that is liberating for both.

In this way, Benjamin's pedagogical position – itself constructed out of the submerged tragic failings of the Youth Movement itself – resurfaces in his later work (in connection with the intellectual influence of Asja Lacis's own theory of pedagogic observation)¹¹ to constitute the basis of the political positions developed around the historical transformation of culture and technology. Education, conceived on the model of a *transmissibility* (rather than *discipline* or *example*) that mediates between historical generations, is here generalized to provide the framework for a cosmic understanding of a non-mythical, theologically-infused technology as the mediation *between* humanity and nature. In this world-historical context, technology assumes the educative power ascribed to the transmissibility of *tradition*: it is the bridge (and not the threatened breach) between humanity and nature and a source of their mutual interplay and transformation.

The preceding sections have sought to show how Benjamin's rejection of his earlier, Nietzschean-inspired "politics of Youth" constitutes the submerged and therefore "cryptic" foundations from which he attempts to wrest an anti-Nietzschean politics. This involves not a break from his youthful interest in pedagogy but its cosmic reframing and expansion to encompass the transformation not just of every younger generation but of humanity as a whole in its relationship with technology and nature. For Benjamin, the barbaric or Dadaist destruction of bourgeois culture and of the solitariness of the bourgeois individual represents the inception of a new collective and technologically interconnected *physis*. Given the sense that now *everything becomes education*, most notably issues pertaining to revolutionary social struggle, it is possible to understand the "cryptic politics" concealed in *The Arcades Project* as a circling around this idea of revolution as pedagogical.

The Inhumanities

If revolutionary politics assumes a pedagogical dimension in the anthropological materialism of Benjamin's mature writings, the more specific question of the end of formal education with which this discussion started might now be considered from the perspective of an anthropological materialist understanding of pedagogy. What lessons might Benjamin's mature anti-Nietzscheanism hold for the contemporary crisis of educational systems, as they undergo the transforming pressures of a short-term "politicization" (often led by the State or by corporations acting in the interests of the State) and encounter the expectations of social justice connected to expansion and "massification"? Here, I want to draw together the strands of Benjamin's anti-Nietzscheanism delineated in the foregoing discussion: first, the way in which the centrality of instruction in the process of transmission involves not the silencing of one generation before another but the concentrated historical transmissibility or dialogic interplay between generations; second, the way in which the simplicity, generality and innocence of student character might be foregrounded not as a social problem for education to resolve (in the formation or cultivation of "character" through moral or civic education) but as possessing a positively monstrous and destructive agency in relation to this educational process.

Kraus's highest achievement, for Benjamin, is that he makes even the newspaper quotable, wrenching it destructively from its context but thereby transporting the empty phrase into his own sphere, simultaneously *punishing and saving* it. In connection with this, Benjamin invokes the figure of the child, as the teacher of humanity: Kraus "never envisaged the child as the object of education; rather, in an image from his own youth, he saw the child as the antagonist of education who is educated by this antagonism, not by the educator" (1999b: 452). Here, the role of student as antagonistic agent in relation to the teacher as transmitter of learnings

is clarified: the teacher must transform what he or she has learned in order to make it transmissible or quotable for the learner who provokes such transformation; education is the antagonistic medium of such transmissibility. In a comedic blow to the vanity of academics, it assigns the educative force that Benjamin discerned as a manifestation of divine violence to the learner rather than the educator, who is nonetheless required as the intermediary object of this force.

Speaking of the literary impoverishment of the genius into journalism in “The Author as Producer,” as in the *Work of Art* essay, Benjamin writes: “The scene of this literary confusion is the newspaper, its content, ‘subject matter’ that denies itself any other form of organization than that imposed on it by readers’ impatience. And this impatience is not just that of the politician expecting information, or of the speculator looking for a stock tip; behind its smoulders the impatience of people who are excluded and think they have the right to see their own interests expressed” (1999b: 771). Journalism therefore conceals a dialectical moment: the dissolution of the conventional distinction between the author and public. Benjamin thus asserts the pedagogical usefulness of this impoverishment of culture into journalism, against Nietzsche’s untimely meditations on the eternal value of culture: “It is, in a word, the *literarization* of the conditions of living that masters the otherwise insoluble antinomies [of the literary apparatus]. And it is at the scene of the limitless debasement of the word – the newspaper, in short – that salvation is being prepared” (1999b: 772).

It is only more recently that social and technological innovations in education have brought the same tensions that previously manifested themselves in the sphere of literature and culture to a comparable critical moment. How might we therefore begin to think our contemporary *pedagogization*¹² of living conditions – the conflation of the time and space of

education with that of political society – as containing a dialectical kernel, and what are the implications for instruction in the new spaces of massified and increasingly privatized education? Here, we might begin to think about not merely the impatience of students but also the affective dimensions of their distraction, boredom, frustration and desire to be entertained, much of which is technologically shaped in relation to new forms of (anti-)social media, as instances of pedagogical agency themselves.

This is intended to serve as a polemical rebuke to any overly-simplistic rhetorical construction of students as consumers, which tends to narrow the criteria of student agency to legitimated models of creative, social behavior (modelled on that practiced by the educators) and therefore to cast the student as predominantly passive or apathetic. Too often, this fails to distinguish effects of the commodification, marketization and privatization of educational institutions from the longer ongoing process of massification in both a social and historical sense. A key historical locus of antagonism within current intergenerational transmission, for example, is that between the experiences of so-called “digital natives” being taught and the “digital immigrants” teaching them (Prensky 2001). Equally, the creative self-formation of individual students so prized by the liberal arts and humanities often fails to register the extent to which these soft skills of character, resilience, empathy, spontaneity, critical thinking and so on are increasingly valued as “human capital” not merely in the creative and service industries but by businesses in general (Martin 2008). This is therefore also a call to remain committed to the antagonistic spaces of mass education as sites of continuing struggle and transformation, and not to voluntarily abandon them at the historical moment they have become, relatively speaking, ever more diverse in terms of the class, gender and ethnicity of the student body.

In an unpublished fragment associated with his writings on the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche proclaims: “Now one can only place hope in the strata of the lower, uneducated humans.... Those humans who still know what misery is will also feel what wisdom can be for them. The greatest danger is when the uneducated strata [*ungelehrten Klassen*] become infected with the yeast of present education [*jetzigen Bildung*]. Every alliance with the ‘educated’ [*Gebildeten*] is to be rejected” (Hutter 2006: 34). In contrast, the process of *pedagogization*, anticipated in negative terms as the ongoing merging of the “educated” and the masses through education in Nietzsche’s early writings, holds open the possibility for a Benjaminian analysis of the debasement and salvation of education itself: it is the scene of an interplay between generations in which the antagonistic and destructive demands of the student provoke ever-new transformations and revisions of the educator, the educational institution, and the documents of education, so as to render them transmissible for the coming generation.

It is this revolution that Benjamin anticipates when, in his unpublished note on re-examining the relationship between teaching and research, he imagines an alternative approach to education based on the principle that “teaching is capable of adapting to new strata of students in such a way that a rearrangement of the subject matter would give rise to entirely new forms of knowledge” (1999b: 419-20). Accordingly, “subjects that have long been investigated and appropriated by scholars need to be emancipated from the forms in which such scholarly acquisition took place, if they are still to have any value and any defined character today;” such emancipation would lead to “a less banal, more considered learning,” but also to the overthrow of “the whole pernicious spectrum of critical methods” favored by researchers. “In short,” Benjamin concludes, “we should not look to research to lead a revival in teaching; instead, it is

more important to strive with a certain intransigence for an – albeit very indirect – improvement in research to emerge from the teaching” (1999b: 419).

This kind of teaching-led research is not about improving the quality and learning outcomes of teaching through the research of the educator or empirical research into education; nor is it about turning the student as consumer into the student as producer or researcher, as is understood within the existing apparatus of scholarly knowledge. Rather, it seeks to reconsider the dialectical value of *destruction* and *de-formation* (rather than the uncritical valorization of *creation* and *formation*) within the educational process and – in contrast to the usual understanding of this process encroaching on education from without – to ascribe this agency to the learner, whose object is the educational apparatus itself.

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- ¹ Clark 2003: 44-5. For "the left in our time ...the survival of a tradition of thought and politics depends on ...politics being transposed to a new key ...into a tragic key," a perspective that entails a pessimistic and "grown up" recognition of the "human propensity to violence" (Clark 2012: 1-7). What "a truly worldly politics of the left would look like – a politics without

illusions, without the future in its bones, truly and properly pessimistic, and *therefore* maximalist in its demands – is a question that can only be broached ...with Nietzsche’s help” (Clark 2009: 83).

² This is a generalization of Rainer Nägele’s claim that the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*’s grounding of art in human existence “is articulated as an inversion of Nietzsche,” specifically of the “abyss of aestheticism” opened up in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (Nägele, 1996: 121). For a rejection of this interpretation, see Cohen 1998: 120n23.

³ Although the significant influence of Marxism should not be underestimated in this struggle, the complex nature of Benjamin’s critical engagement not merely with Marxist theory and practice but also with the writings of non-Marxist socialists (most notably, in *The Arcades Project*, the utopian socialism of Fourier) requires a fuller consideration than the narrower Nietzschean focus of this article permits.

⁴ The appellation “untimely” (*unzeitgemässer*) was, as Daniel Brezeale notes (Nietzsche 1997: xlv), in part a response to his reading of August Berger’s treatise on *The Idea of Technical High School Expounded for Friends and Supporters of Higher and Up-to-Date [zeitgemässer] Secondary Education*, which Nietzsche read in 1872 in preparation for his own lectures on *The Future of our Educational Institutions*.

⁵ In the UK context, which often draws inspiration from the Charter School movement in the US, a recent research report on *Character Education in UK Schools* cites how a “renewed attention to character has given rise to an increasingly global-character education movement.” (Lickona 2015: 4). Good character is defined here as “moral virtues such as honesty and kindness, civic virtues such as community service, intellectual virtues such as curiosity and creativity, and performance virtues such as diligence and perseverance” (Lickona 2015: 4). Similar

recommendations have been made in the UK government's *Character and Resilience Manifesto*, released by the all-party parliamentary group on Social Mobility, which calls for the Office for Standard in Education (Ofsted) to "build 'character and resilience'" measures – defined as "non-cognitive" social and emotional skills such as application, self-direction, self-control and empathy – into its inspection framework, and for teaching, training, and career development programs to explicitly focus on the area (Paterson, Tyler and Lexmond 2014: 8-11). This has been echoed by the UK Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan: "Character education is a central part of our plan for education, and we are investing £10 million to ensure pupils develop the resilience and grit they need to succeed in later life" (Department for Education 2015). In many cases, such moral or civic education of character is identified with more traditional, classical and minority systems of private education, which are then advocated for the sector as a whole (see Seldon 2014: 48-51).

⁶ Benjamin 2011: 12. As James McFarland observes, the word Youth is avoided in Benjamin's writings from this point on, replaced instead by younger figures of childhood. As McFarland elaborates in relation to a dream recounted in Benjamin's *One-Way Street*, the corpse of youth had to be walled into the foundations of Benjamin's personality "as a totem against its self-destructive fate" (McFarland 2013: 54-55). For a longer and more complex discussion of Benjamin's complicated disengagement from the Youth Movement, see McCole 1993: 35-63. Both Carlos Salzani (2009) and Irving Wolfharth (1992) have emphasised the enduring legacy of this early "politics of childhood" or "politics of Youth" for Benjamin's later politics, especially the way in which the child's "alternative form of experience" remains "implicit" and "secondary" in *The Arcades Project* (Salzani 2009: 196-98). For more general discussions of the

revolutionary figure of the child in Benjamin's later politics, see Buck-Morss 2009: 263-65, Mellamphy 2009, and Gess 2010.

⁷ For this reason, when Benjamin returns to the question of fate in his "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem" a few years later, a distinction is now drawn between corporeality [*Körper*], which is the seal of our solitariness with God, and the body [*Leib*] with which we are joined to the collective *physis* of humanity and, through technology, draw nature into our collective life (1996: 395). This is, it should be noted, an inversion of Ludwig Klages' own Nietzschean-infused cosmology: Klages distinguishes between the embodied soul [*Seele*] and the spirit [*Geist*], an intruding force which drives a wedge between the soul and the body. Benjamin, although clearly influenced by Klages, retains a commitment to the unity of *Geist* (the "genius" of the embodied mind) and instead connects the destructive outpourings of Western modernity to "the utter decay of corporeality" and the loss of the spellbinding power of eros (1996: 400).

⁸ The target of the young Marx's critique, Bruno Bauer, invoked the secularized political situation in France as ideal, a situation in which the emancipated human appears as the *public* citizen (with abstract civic rights), and the fulfilment of religious duties is "left to [such citizens] as a purely private affair" (Marx 1992: 215). But Marx recognizes this splitting of the person into a *public* and a *private* entity as pertaining to the sophistry of the political State itself, which merely transposes the religious conflict between a spiritual humanity and earthly individuals into social conflicts, "whether they be material elements, like private property, etc., or spiritual ones, like culture [*Bildung*], Religion" (Marx 1992: 221). This is, Marx famously writes, the *perfection* of religion: heaven brought down to earth in the secular and democratic distinction *between* abstract public equality and concrete private inequality: the demonic realm of capitalism as religion.

⁹ Benjamin 2002: 318-320. In an interesting mirroring of their 1917 disagreement (over education by example versus education as transmission), Scholem responds to Benjamin in a letter from 1938 insisting that Kafka's works represent a crisis of tradition, but to the extent they comment on a wisdom *whose truth is not transmissible* (Scholem 1989: 237).

¹⁰ As Paul Fleming suggests, "Jean Paul's elevation of humour to the modern aesthetic category" supplied the "theoretical framework for making beauty suffer" (2006: 19). This might be contrasted with the sublime perspective of the Futurists, attacked in the *Work of Art* essay, which seeks to make suffering beautiful. Here, then, the sublimity produced by the catastrophic reversal of tragedy suffers its own earthly collapse into Dadaist fits of laughter. For a further consideration of Jean Paul's concept of humor, one that takes issue with Fleming's interpretation, see Banki 2014. Sean Frazel's discussion of the similarities between Jean Paul's principle of humor and Walter Benjamin's subversive techniques in *German Men and Women* is suggestive in this respect (Frazel 2012). It is possible that Benjamin's interest in Molière's satire was influenced by his reading of Jean Paul, who makes a brief appearance in Benjamin's dissertation on *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism* (1996: 165) but more significantly in his writings on color, imagination and childhood experience from the beginning of the 1920s (1996: 265, 280-283). Along with Fourier, Jean Paul's aesthetic and pedagogical writings become increasingly important to the development of a second layer of the cryptic politics of *The Arcades Project*.

¹¹ Asja Lacis called observation "the point of departure" for the practical innovations of her proletarian children's theatre, which form the ostensible grounding of Benjamin's theoretical formulations on communist pedagogy: "The children observed things, their relationship between each other and their changeability; the educators observe the children to see what they have

achieved and how far they can apply their abilities productively” (Lacis 1971: 28-29; Lehmann 1996: 184).

¹² The work of Marc Depaepe, Paul Smeyers and others provides a useful attempt to investigate the historical process of pedagogization or educationalization from a philosophical perspective. They trace the origin of the concept back to the work of sociologist Janpeter Kob at the end of the 1950s, where it was used to characterize the expansion of pedagogical power as a central feature of the modern welfare state. In the 1980s, it began to be employed as an umbrella term for an important feature of the process of modernization itself (see Keiner 2006: 176-78; Depaepe 2008, Depaepe 2012).