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A KALEIDOSCOPE OF MOURNING

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IT IS FINISHED can never be said of us
(Emily Dickinson)[1]

The Rhetoric of Mourning had been always already established on the premises of the mourning of rhetoric. Inspite of the fact that there is no better example of mere rhetoric than the emptiness of a merely rhetorical mourning, there is no discipline closer to mourning than rhetoric. Like rhetoric's art of memory, rhetoric's ways of mourning have been forgotten; they have been denounced for being just that, rhetoric. But while the art of memory, rhetoric's most artful art, conceals its art, rhetoric's mourning has never become an art as such; as the absolute non-artifical beyond of any art, mourning remained implied in the concealment of memory. The absolute other of rhetoric's art, mourning, was, and still is, the art of memory's hidden center, the inaccessible crypt of what is to be thought of, though never to be controlled by, this or any other art's design.

The most famous account of this hidden, and in its hiding well preserved, implication of mourning within memory is Cicero's, and after Cicero's account Quintilian's, of how the Greek poet Simonides invented the art of memory. The story is well known enough, but also intricate enough to deserve a closer reading, a reading that would be aware of the art of rhetoric's modes of implication and concealment.[2]

> Simonides was dining at the house of a wealthy nobleman named Scopas at Crannon in Thessaly, and chanted a lyric poem which he had composed in honour of his host, in which he followed the custom of the poets by including for decorative purposes a long passage referring to Castor and Pollux; whereupon Scopas with excessive meanness told him he would pay him only half the fee agreed on for the poem, and if he liked he might apply for the balance to his sons of Tyndareus [Castor and Pollux], as they had gone halves in the panegyric. The story runs that a little later a message was brought to Simonides to go outside, as two young men were standing at the door who earnestly

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[1] See Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time*: *Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1979), 136.

[2] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Oratore* II, 352-53; trans. E.W. Sutton/H.Rackham [Loeb Classical Library] (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1942), 465.

> requested him to come out; so he rose from his seat and went out, and could not see anybody; but in the interval of his absence the roof of the hall where Scopas was giving the banquet fell in, crushing Scopas himself and his relations underneath the ruins and killing them; and when their friends wanted to bury them but were altogether unable to know them apart as they had been completely crushed, the story goes that Simonides was enabled by his recollection of the place in which each of them had been reclining at table to identify them for separate internment; and that this circumstance suggested to him the discovery of the truth that the best aid to clearness of memory consists in orderly arrangement.

Because of the notoriety of the story, Cicero has no qualms to be excessively ironic, to the point of being unreadable for readers unfamiliar with the prehistoric background of early Greece. Half a thousand years later, Cicero's version repeats the poet Simonides' early irony in dealing with what is reported in it -- the nobleman Skopas being, as a matter of fact, a successful boxing champion, the poem commissioned a panegyric on his successes, and the "decorative purposes" the minimum requirements of a job, whose authorship is based on divine inspiration rather than the praise-worthy evidence of sheer force and fortune. But what is more important than this irony, the mark of the trade that rhetoric is, is another irony easily overlooked and even more easily underestimated. The claimed invention of the art of memory draws its authority from an older cult of the dead, whose memory is to be kept after all and above all.[3] The art of memory's remembrance has as its primal scene a catastrophe of dismemberment and is itself to be remembered as the literal re-membering of dead members. The rites of mourning are encrypted, but remain to be deciphered, in an ironic fable, which is, at the same time, rhetorically speaking, a story of memory's metaphorical building upon its literal origins in mourning. The individuality of graves, of proper places according to proper names, is the basis of memory's artful development. And the categorical imperative buried in the groundwork of this irony's fable includes the remembrance, against the grain of its narrative, even of the shattered Skopas' name.

The insistence of mourning within the art of memory's rhetorical design is again evident in Quintilian's *Institution of Rhetoric*, after centuries of consolidated practice rhetoric's canonical

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[3] See Stefan Goldmann, "Statt Totenklagen Gedächtnis: Zur Erfindung der Mnemotechnik durch Simonides von Keos," *Poetica* 21 (1989), 43-66.

handbook for centuries to come. Quintilian re-tells Cicero's story of Simonides' invention, adding more irony and a refinement that will be lost on later generations of dogmatically minded practitioners, but is still readable to others, especially the poets.[4] When it comes to the systematical treatment of memory in book VI of his treatise, Quintilian underlines the origin of memory in mourning in prefacing the whole book with the seemingly contingent -- but what if not contingent could mourning be -- account of his wife's and, finally, his son's death. The significance of the scene was still recognized by someone like Hugh Blair in the late 18th century, whose handbook on *Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* gives it as an example of the finest apostrophe, addressed to the dead and authenticated by their death.[5]

> With what spirit, and how much to the admiration of the physicians, did he bear throughout eight months his lingering distress! With what tender attention did he study, even in the last extremity, to comfort me! And, when no longer himself, how affecting was it to behold the disordered efforts of his wandering mind, wholly employed on subjects of literature! Ah! my frustrated and fallen hopes! Have I then beheld your closing eyes, and heard the last groan issue from your lips? After having embraced your cold and breathless body, how was it in my power to draw the vital air, or continue to drag a miserable life? When I had just beheld you raised by consulat adoption to the prospect of all your father's honours, destined to be son-in-law to your uncle the Praetor, pointed out by general expectation as the successful candidate for the Prize of Attic eloquence, in this moment of your opening honours must I lose you for ever, and remain an unhappy parent, surviving only to suffer woe.

There is no answer, to be sure, either in Quintilian or in the use Blair's account of "bold figures" is able to make of it. Quintilian and his narrative are taken as an example of poetic authentification bringing back to life what is absent or dead. But more important than this strategy is the very scene of instruction, in whose business the rhetorician Blair is unwittingly involved. Because it is, of course, the very paradigm of the father instructing his son that is destroyed through the event of the son's untimely death, and the rhetorician literally teaching his son is to be replaced by the tradition of rhetoric.[6] Blair mistranslates what he does no longer

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[4] Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *Institutio oratoria* XI, ii, 16-18; ed. Jean Cousin I-VII (Paris: Édition Les belles lettres 1975-80), VI: 362-65.

[5] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* VI, proem.; trans. Hugh Blair, *Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (),

[6] See Jacques Derrida, "Psyche: Inventions of the Other," *Reading De Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters/Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press 1989), 25-65.

understand in the mechanical tradition of the trade, the rite of receiving in the mouth the last breath of the dying and bringing it over into the common air of the continuing life. What is to be saved thus is the spirit of the dead for the survival of the living, a spirit that is to inspire the tradition of rhetoric. What Quintilian is unable to give to his son, he is bound to give to the institution of rhetoric; and what survives in the memory of rhetoric, is built upon the crypt of its institution, from the scattered bodies to be remembered in Thessaly to Quintilian's little Quintilian.

Like Quintilian, who had worked through his mourning in the writing of his rhetoric, Freud had to mourn a son, his daughter's son to be more precise, when after "Mourning and Melancholia" his melancholy deepened in the writing of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Jacques Derrida, who, in his dislocation of philosophy, has reinspired the rhetoric of mourning, has also reinterpreted the rhetorical move from "Mourning and Melancholia" (we have to come back to this text in a moment and more than once) to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. About three years after "Mourning and Melancholia," while finishing *Beyond*, Freud had lost his daughter Sophie, mother of two sons. Three years later, while warning friends to draw any conclusions from the curious coincidence of the "overlapping" of *Beyond* and Sophie's death, he has to undergo the first of altogether thirty-three mouth-operations that will accompany his life unto death.[7]

> In 1923, then, first operation on the mouth. On the grand-father's mouth, yes, but also, almost on the same time, on Heinerle's (Heinz Rudolf) mouth, Sophie's second son, Ernst's [the elder son's] younger brother. Tonsils. He is the preferred grandson, the preferred son of the preferred daughter. His grandfather considered him, says Jones [Freud's biographer], "the most intelligent child he had ever encountered." (He did not think as much of Ernst, the elder brother.) They talk together about their operation, as if it were the same, of their mouth, as if it were the same, the mouth eating itself and speaking through what it eats: "I can already eat crusts. Can you too?"
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> Following the operation, and then weakened by miliary tuber-culosis, less resistent than his grandfather, Heinerle dies. On 19 June 1923: Freud is seen to cry. For the only time. The following month he confides to Ferenczi that he feels depressed for the first time in his life. Several years later, in 1926, Binswanger looses his elder son, and on this occasion Freud tells Binswanger what Heinerle had been for him: he who had taken the

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[7] Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press 1987), 333-34.

> place of children and grandchildren. Thus he lives the death of his entire filiation: "This is also the secret of my indifference -- it was called courage -- toward the danger of my own life." The following year to Ferenczi: "I have survived the Committee that was to have been my successor. Perhaps I shall survive the International Association. It is to be hoped that psychoanalysis will survive me. But it all gives a somber end to one's life."

"That he hoped for this survival of psychoanalysis," Derrida adds, "is probable; but *in his name*, survival on the condition of his name: by virtue of which he says that he *survives* it as the place of the proper name." One cannot say that much about Quintilian and the institution of rhetoric. But there is no doubt that Freud has begun to revive rhetoric by going back to what appears to be rhetoric's origin in mourning. Within the hidden, well concealed mechanism of mourning, rhetoric deals, under the guise of the proper, with the proper name. The survival of the name has as its proper place the authorship of fathers, implying that a mother's mourning is the only true mourning available. As a true, unfailing holding on to their lost children, however, the mourning of mothers turns out to be the precedent for what Freud was willing to keep apart from mourning as melancholia. While the fathers finally manage to survive in their name, the mourning of women is to remain the mourning of woman's condition in the service of (the rhetorical institution of) the father's name. The Trojan woman Andromaque, thought of by Baudelaire in the apostrophe "Andromaque, je pense à vous," is the exemplary mourner whose mourning is about losses not so much, but love's lost labours. She is the counter-example to Antigone's aporetic work of mourning. While Antigone mourns a fallen father's son, Andromaque mourns the lot that is such a mourning's loss.

John Locke, who was ready to blame it all on the "wrong connection of ideas," had a good eye for a mother's predisposition to chronic melancholia, when he gave a mother's sorrow as a case in point.[8]

> The death of a child that was the daily delight of its mother's eyes, and a joy of her soul, rends from her heart the whole comfort of her life, and gives her all the torment imaginable. [...] Till time has by disuse separated the sense of that enjoyment and its loss, from the idea of the child returning to her memory, all representations, though ever

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[8] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* I-II, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), I: 532 (4th edition).

> so reasonable, are in vain; and therefore some in whom the union between these ideas is never dissolved, spend their lives in mourning, and carry an incurable sorrow to their graves.

What Locke calls "an incurable sorrow," and what Freud came to distinguish as melancholia from mourning, stems from an inability, it seems, to "dissolve" a wrong connection of ideas, for example the mother's outdated expectation, which keeps "the child returning to her memory." It is memory that accounts for melancholy, according to Locke, the misled memory of an outdated association of ideas. Consequently, Hölderlin's account in his poem "Mnemosyne" of an "error in mourning" reports the death of Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses, while Keats's "Ode on Melanchoy" begins with a defense against Lethe, the river of forgetting. The crypt of mourning inscribed and preserved in the memory of rhetoric turns out to be less and less accessible, and "the neurosis of empiricism," as Cathy Caruth has explained it, provides the symptoms.[9] That a mother falls for the memory of her dead child, is no healthy mourning, but faulty melancholy, an age-old error in mourning, which Christian believe thought to have overcome, unconsolable mothers notwithstanding. The picture of Christ's mother mourning the dead body of her son is the emblem of an impasse, the ever returning picture of a death to be overcome.

Freud's psychoanalysis will provide an explanation for the mother's emblematic role of a mourner. Attending to the symptoms of a return of what is repressed in melancholia, Freud's distinction of melancholy from serious work of mourning seems to proceed along the lines of the old verdict against too much mourning. "He that feares death, or mourns it, in the iust, Shewes of the resurrection little trust," is one of the possible mottos (from Ben Jonson's "Of Death") for the crisis of Christian consolation.[10] Melancholy, if anything, seemed the only appropriate response to the fallen state of a world without eschatology. Walter Benjamin's study of the baroque "plays of mourning" was one of the first to understand, and to respond to, Freud's concern with

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[9] See Cathy Caruth, *Empirical Truths and Critical Fictions*: *Locke*, *Wordsworth*, *Kant*, *Freud* (Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1991), 34.

[10] See C.W. Pigman, *English Renaissance Elegy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), 1.

mourning not before, but within melancholia.[11] There is a work of mourning that insists within melancholy and is far from a healthy way out of both, the grievance of the mourner and the brooding of the melancholic. Benjamin revises Freud's preference for mourning instead of melancholia (not a medical term in Freud's days anymore, but a rather outdated allusion to the classical idiom)[12] and works against the persistence of melancholy's devaluation in the polemics of enlightened discourses.

The pervasive currency of melancholia had been renewed at least since Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, a book in which mourning is mentioned only occasionally under the broader heading of "Death of friends, Losses, &c."[13] Burton illustrates best Benjamin's quotation from baroque sources, that there is "nothing more mournful than books." The point buried in Burton's vast rearrangement of the classical canon seems strange enough: the access to mourning through a mournful tradition of writing is what the work of mourning comes down to; or rather, what it amounts to. Obliterated by the Christian expectation of resurrection, mourning remained to be read and rewritten in the hidden files of rhetoric's memory. Tristram Shandy uses Burton that way and keeps rereading what Burton the collector had put together. When Tristram's father "received the letter wich brought him the melancholy account of [his] brother Bobby's death" (which marks for Tristram's father the end of his filiation as well as re-marks Tristram's mutilation), it takes a while until he finds in working through the bulk of Burton a piece of reading that finally, though silently, voices his mourning. "-- He got rid of it, however," is Tristram's preliminary satisfaction. Running through an arbitrary list of misplaced fragments on mourning, invoking all sorts of historical cases, among them Cicero's mourning for his

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[11] See Anselm Haverkamp, *Mourning Leaves* (Albany NY: SUNY Press 1994).

[12] See Jean Starobinski, *Geschichte der Melancholiebehandlung von den Anfängen bis 1900* [Documenta Geigy, Acta psychosomatica, 4] (Basel: Geigy, 1960), 9.

[13] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* I-III, ed. Holborn Jackson (London: Dent 1932), I: 357.

daughter Tullia (shifting thus from a son to a daughter), Tristram's father settles at last with the following quotation from Burton's collection.[14]

> ' Returning out of Asia, when I sailed from Aegina towards Megara,' (*when can this have been*? *thought my uncle Toby*) 'I began to view the country round about. Aegina was behind me, Megara was before, Pyraeus on the right hand, Corinth on the left.--What flourishing towns now prostrate upon the earth! Alas! alas! I said to myself, that man should disturb his soul for the loss of a child, when so much as this lies awfully buried in his presence--Remember, said I to myself again--remember thou art a man.'--
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> Now my uncle Toby knew not that this last paragraph was an extract of Servius Sulpicius's consolatory letter to Tully [Tullius Cicero].--He had as little skill, honest man, in the fragments, as he had in the whole pieces of antiquity.-- [...] And pray, brother, quoth my uncle Toby, laying the end of his pipe upon my father's hand in a kindly way of interruption--what year of our Lord was this?--'Twas no year of our Lord, replied my father.--That's impossible, cried my uncle Toby.--Simpleton! said my father,----'twas forty years before Christ was born.

The sentimental uncle is ready to cry for his brother's melancholy "disorder," unable to realize the work of mourning embedded in it. The incompetence in question goes back, precisely, to the years *after* Christ was born. The simpleton's tears are everything but simple, while the melancholy reader's mourning goes back to a time, when it looked almost simple.

Lessing, who had called Simonides the Voltaire of ancient Greece, tried to see through the melancholy veil Christianity had thrown on the matter. In a much disputed essay on *How the Ancients Represented Death*, he confronts the baroque emblem of death and result of all anatomies, the skeleton, with the ancient image of Death's brother, Sleep.[15]

> Where is there the faintest trace in any Greek or Roman poet which could ever allow us to suspect that he found Death represented as a skeleton or so thought of it himself?
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> Pictures of Death are frequent among the poets and often very terrible. He is the pale, pallid, sallow Death; he roams abroad on black wings; bears a sword; he gnashes hungry teeth; he suddenly opens a voracious jaw; he has bloody nails with which he indicates his

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[14] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinion of Tristram Shandy* V,3; ed. Graham Petrie (London: Penguin English Library 1967), 350.

[15] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet*; trans. Helen Zimmer (London: Bohn).

> destined prey; his form is so large and monstrous that he overshadows a whole battlefield, that he hurries off with entire cities [...]
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> The condition of being dead has nothing terrible, and in so far as dying is merely the passage to being dead, dying can have nothing terrible. Only to die thus and thus, at this moment, in this mood, according to the will of this or that person, to die with shame and agony, may be terrible and becomes terrible. But is it then the dying, is it Death, which has caused the terror? Nothing less; Death is the desired end of all these horrors, and it is only to be imputed to the poverty of language if it calls both conditions, the condition which leads unavoidably to Death, and the condition of Death itself, by one and the same name. I know that this poverty can often become a source of pathos and that the poets thus derive advantage from it [..].

The absence of mourning in the melancholy observation of what is left in the skeleton is confronted with the threat it embodies of old, and no anatomy is able to scare it away. The pathos that thrives on it is profoundly phony in that it takes advantage of a linguistic confusion, a rhetoric haunted by what it originally, in the days of Simonides, was able to keep at bay. The horror of Death in the "pictures" Lessing quotes from ancient sources seems to be baroque enough; it brings back what the baroque skeleton is unable to console us with. But while the skeleton is no longer able, in the age of anatomy, to persuade us of resurrection, there remains the one thing that it manages allright, to prevent us, in the shadow of Death, from the loving memory of the dead.

Sören Kierkegaard, whose name, one should not forget, is churchyard, and whose first book dealt with the ancient concept of irony, drew the conclusion from the dead end of Christian melancholy and its baroque images. For him, the dead are the only ones to be loved in a faithful way, free from any anxiety of, or interest in, survival. In the sermon entitled "The Work of Love in Remembering One Dead," Kierkegaard enters the crypt of the dead inscribed into the memory of rhetoric and kept secret in the rhetoric of memory.[16]

> Yes, once again go out to the dead in order *there* to get a look at life [...] Do not choose an evening hour for the visit, for the evening quiet of an evening spent among the dead is often not distinguishable from a kind of overstraining which tenses and surfeits with

[16] Sören Kierkegaard, *Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses* IX; trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press).

> unrest and gives rise to new riddles instead of explaining those already given. No, go out there earlier in the morning, when the morning sun peeps in among the grave-stones with shifting lights and shadows, when the beauty and friendliness of the woods and the different forms of life and the twittering of the birds almost let you forget that you are among the dead. Then it will seem as if you had entered into a foreign land which has remained unacquainted with the confusion and fragmentation of life, into the world of childhood consisting only of small families. Out there, in fact, there is an attainment of what in life is vainly sought: equal distribution. [...]
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> [...] when one relates himself to one who is dead [...] the one who is living becomes revealed; here he must show himself as he is, for one who is dead -- yes, he is a clever fellow -- has withdrawn himself completely; [...] he is only the occasion which continually reveals what resides in the one living who relates himself to him [...]
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> One who remembers lovingly can perhaps also say: "A long life lies before me dedicated to remembering, but the prospect first and last is the same; in a certain sense there is no threat at all in the prospect, for there simply is no prospect." O, in a certain sense it is so hopeless; it is such a thankless job, as the farmer says, such a disheartening occupation to remember one who is dead! For one who is dead does not grow and thrive toward the future as does the child: one who is dead merely crumbles away more and more into certain ruin. One who is dead does not give joy to the rememberer as the child gives joy to its mother, does not give him joy as the child her joy when to her question about whom he loves most he answers, "Mother"; one who is dead loves no one most, for he seems to love no one at all. O, it is so dejecting that he remains quiet this way down there in the grave while the longing after him grows, so dejecting that there is no change conceivable except the change of dissolution, more and more! [...]
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> But watch out for the dead! For one who is dead is a resolute and determined man; he is not like the rest of us who are able in fairytale fashion to go through many droll experiences and seventeen times forget what we have said. [...] No, whether or not you will begin again where you two left off, one who is dead begins again with the most scrupulous accuracy where the two of you left off. For one who is dead is a strong man, although one does not see this in him: he has the strenght of unchangeableness. And one who is dead is a proud man. [...] We should be truly careful about poetically drawing forth the dead for the sake of remembrance: the most frightful of all is that one dead gives no hint at all. [...] For no person who has really forgotten what one had said to him can express more definitely than one who is dead that it is forgotten, that the whole relationship to him, the whole affair with him, is forgotten.

Kierkegaard uses the address of the sermon in order to overcome its rhetorical competitor, the *prosopopeia* of the poets, drawing forth the voices of the dead. He proposes a different strategy, no tragic drama, and no rhetoric from beyond the grave; a comedy, rather, if less divine. "Death is not earnest in the same way as the eternal is. To the earnestness of death belongs precisely that remarkable capacity for awakening, that resonance of a profound mockery which, detached from the thought of the eternal, is an empty and often brash jest, but together with the thought of the

eternal is [...] utterly different from insipid solemness [...].” It is part of this comedy that the dead withdraw and remain in power through withdrawl rather than their return. Adorno saw reason to see in this power of the powerless the “dialectical image” of an eternal life.[17] Whether we see it also or not, we feel the withdrawl and have reason to remember. Adorno dedicated this part of his book on Kierkegaard, a supplement to the original edition, to the memory of Agathe Calvelli-Adorno, the sister of his mothers, who together with his mother raised him and from whom he derived his author-name (a name – Adorno – by the way, not without meaning in the rhetoric of epitaphs); and he added as a date “Easter 1962.”[18] The American translator of the book took offence at this unwarranted reference to resurrection (“redemption” being also the last word of the article and, consequently, of the whole book) and found reason to exclude the supplement from the American edition, thereby withholding the dedication and the memory of an aunt’s and mother’s belief – or is it, rather, the crypt of the son’s ambition?

New York, All Souls 1992.

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[17] Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard*: *Konstruktion des Ästhetischen*. Mit einer Beilage (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag 1962), 290.

[18] “Notiz” at the end of the book, explaining that the supplement excluded from the American edition served as a lecture given “in English at the end of the thirties in a circle of theologians and philosophers in New York.”