

"THE THREAT THEORY": A TRANSLATION OF THE STORY
BY BOTHO STRAUSS WITH A GENERAL INTRODUCTION
TO THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORKS TO DATE

BY

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THESIS

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For my Mother and Father

and for Kalldewey...

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I. A General Introduction to the Author

Botho Strauss and his Works to Date

Botho Strauss, the author of "The Threat Theory," was born in Germany in Naumburg on the Saale in December of 1944, attended schools in the Ruhr area and in Hessen, and then studied German literature, sociology, and the history of theater at the Universities of Cologne and Munich. From 1967 until 1970 he worked on the editorial staff of and was a critic for Theater heute, a German theater publication, and beginning in the 1970-71 theater season he worked as a playwright in conjunction with the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer, a prominent theater in Berlin that is now situated at Lehniner Platz. At present, Strauss lives in Berlin as a freelance author and writes, alternately, plays and prose.

Strauss is considered by many critics to be the best of the "new subjectivist" writers in Germany. The classification "neue Subjektivität," also referred to as "neue Empfindsamkeit," "neue Sensibilität," and "neue Innerlichkeit" (new sensitivity/sensibility/inwardness), has been applied to a large portion of the literature written in German-speaking countries since about 1970. This literature, in which it is again "permissible" for the author to write about the situation of the individual--even about himself--

is "new" in comparison with much of the more politically and "objectively" oriented, Brecht-influenced literature written between World War II and the student revolt in Germany in 1968. This is not to say that the "new" German authors are any less concerned with societal and political issues; rather, their concern is expressed through a representation of the problems of the individual in day-to-day life. As Gerhard vom Hofe and Peter Pfaff characterize the situation in the introduction to Das Elend des Polyphem:

Die Wendung zum Einzelnen, gar zur Autobiographie, muß...nicht in politisch unverbindlicher Privatheit enden...Das Individuum--und zwar nicht als ein idealtypisches oder sozialgeschichtlich bestimmtes Konstrukt, sondern in seiner spezifischen Selbstbezogenheit--wird wieder zum Maß auch der gesellschaftlichen Widersprüche.¹

Strauss writes about people who live in the world as he experiences it: a world in which being "separated" is the rule and being "together" is the exception, in which loving also means hating, and in which even togetherness means being "united back to back."² Strauss's characters feel isolated, are not supported by a societal "network," and generally cling to a love somewhere in their pasts in which they vainly put their hopes for the future, leading Helmut Schödel to call Strauss's an "Ästhetik des Verlustes"³ (aesthetics of loss). Moreover, the identities of these individuals are not something they can count on: At any moment they may be faced with their own "dissolution." Confusions of identity, then, separation, aloneness, remembering and forgetting,

melancholia, paralytic self-observation and hypochondria, reading and writing as the "last frontiers" of experience, a distanced critique of society, and even fears of insanity are subjects inherent to Strauss's works. As Strauss wrote in an essay in Theater heute in 1970, it would seem that society creates "insanity" in the individual today, who is forced to live only "inside himself," in his own memories, desires, and fantasies:

Zur Zeit ist das Irresein, so scheint es, eine ganz gewöhnliche Metapher für das Befinden des Individuums überhaupt, für die internierten Kräfte seiner Fantasie, inmitten einer Gesellschaft, welche nur zur Raison zu bringen versteht, welche im Namen der Vernunft eine perverse Unterdrückungsherrschaft ausübt.⁴

In light of this view of middle-class man in the western world ("Reich und vernünftig...das geht nicht zusammen."⁵) it is not surprising that Botho Strauss, even before he began writing plays himself, called for the development of a "Bewußtseinstheater,"⁶ a "mentales Theater," in contrast to the documentary plays which were prevalent in the 1960's.⁶

The characters in Strauss's first play, Die Hypochonder, written in 1971, as well as the characters in his subsequent plays and prose writings, do live very "mentally": from one moment of feverish intensity to the next. In Die Hypochonder Strauss represents feelings, thoughts, and conflicts not only through words but through highly visible symbols, gestures, and actions, so that they become as graphic and dramatic for the theater public as they are for

the characters interacting within the play: Vladimir makes his first appearance on stage with a violent psychosomatic nosebleed,⁸ is later revealed to be wearing a suit of leather "armor" over his skin,⁹ and, in the end, dressed as his father, he stabs his wife to death.¹⁰ This technique of Strauss, which allows a subconscious, fantastical and/or irrational thought or feeling--the "interior" of a character--to pop^{up} at any moment with just as much "realism" as is present in the most "realistic" scenes, has been used by the author repeatedly: In Strauss's second play, Bekannte Gesichter, gemischte Gefühle, written in 1974, Doris develops a "Doppelgängerin"¹¹ and Stefan commits a symbolic suicide in the deep freeze.¹² In "Theorie der Drohung," the character Lea appears and disappears in ways that cause the reader to doubt the "reality" of her existence,¹³ and in Kalldewey, Farce, "the man" is suddenly pulled apart limb from limb by three women and stuffed into a washing machine, only to reappear uninjured--except for a band-aid--later in the play.¹⁴ Such scenes, in the glory of their clichéd bluntness, emphasize the difficulties suffered by Strauss's characters with their identities, their emotions, and with attempts at communication, as well as the seemingly unavoidable repetition of power struggles between the sexes that they experience--beginning already in childhood and recurring throughout their lifetimes.

Even more characteristic of Strauss's writing than

these glaringly manifest and often farcical "moments of insanity," however, especially in his later prose works Die Widmung, Rumor, and Paare, Passanten, are the author's precise--and sometimes grotesque--representations of more "subtly insane" moments of everyday life. Perhaps the author's greatest strength, in fact, lies in his ability to create "pictures of moments" ("Momentaufnahmen")¹⁵ with an extremely high degree of accuracy and attention to detail, whether the moment consist of a "still life," a small occurrence, an observation or realization, a monologue, a dialogue, a confrontation, or an accident, and whether its source be "real," imagined, dreamt, read about, or experienced through any number of other channels. Strauss would seem to be a "collector of moments," one could say--as well as of characteristics of people--and generally he writes from his perspective as "picture taker," observer, or even "outsider." While writing, he then combines and recombines these collected moments and human characteristics into variations on "typical" scenes, dramatic incidents, and characters--which, however, are anything but "typical" in the stylized, smoothly-functioning, "Hollywood" sense of the word: Strauss's unhappy figures may, characteristically, consider or reflect about suicide, call out quietly and out of context for help, look for understanding and sympathy in the eyes of passers-by or try to interpret a random sound as meaningful, break their eyeglasses, or fall down on the pave-

ment. Yet Strauss, who rarely writes what could be called autobiographically, has a perspective distant enough that the more humorous side of his figures' suffering is never far away. The all-too-human qualities and tragicomical actions of Richard Schroubek, the bookseller turned writer in Die Widmung, are in many ways standard for one of Strauss's "abandoned" characters: He spills a jar of honey on a white shag rug and frantically tries to clean it up,¹⁶ becomes hysterical when his toilet overflows,¹⁷ and is plagued, less amusingly, by a thoroughly described variety of psychologically-related skin problems.¹⁸

Also common among Strauss's works, and certainly not unrelated to his strength as a representer of "moments," is the fragmentary nature of their construction: The author is, in his own assessment, not a storyteller or novelist in the strict sense of the word, nor is it his aim to become one.¹⁹ Strauss would seem, again, to be representing the world as he experiences it: in all its discontinuity and lack of a sense of history. The author himself has attributed the fragmentary, montage-like structure of his works to "der vorherrschenden Erfahrung des Verlustes."²⁰ Although it is possible to speak of plots or at least of "points of departure" in his earlier works, the more recent play Kalldewey (1981) is made up only of thematically related "incidents" that are "spliced" together similarly to television sequences,²¹ and the prose work Paare, Passanten

(1981) is composed of a series of short "études"²² that, again, though thematically related, do not tell a story with any continuity--each is complete in and of itself and in all its incompleteness.

It is perhaps most profitable, however, to look at Strauss's works to date individually and chronologically in order to examine their respective plots, structural principles, and--to an extent--their critical receptions.

With the exception of the story "Schützenehre," which the author wrote in his teens and which is no longer in print, Strauss's first work was Die Hypochonder, first produced in 1972. This enjoyed a very mixed reception from both critics and the public. Die Hypochonder is not a simple play: Set in Amsterdam in 1901, it contains several plot "threads" or "puzzle pieces"--among them a love story, a mystery, a romantic horror story, and a family melodrama²³--which are "woven" or "shuffled" into such a dense text that they cannot immediately be kept distinct by the reading or viewing audience. Characters talk past one another and in half-meaningless, clichéd idioms, their appearances, gestures and actions often belie their words, and they "commentate" themselves excessively. Moreover, the sources of their physical symptoms may be left unclear, and their emotions are irrational, switching off suddenly and seemingly arbitrarily from general ambivalence to aggression and/or tenderness.

With this play, Strauss quite simply overtaxed his public. Although it is a fascinatingly intricate and humorous work to read and untangle, the author tried out so many complicating techniques at once and borrowed from so much of his own knowledge of literature ("Checkov, Ibsen...just lots of literature") and "film, including Hitchcock,"²⁴ that his theater audience felt left behind and deliberately mystified. After having gained practical experience working in a theater, Strauss soon changed his playwriting methods,²⁵ but already here, many of his basic themes--including the psychological difficulties of isolated people and the fears they may have of losing their identities entirely, whether due to insanity or to being trapped in a Kafkaesque "Manipulations-maschinerie"²⁶ that is above them and beyond their control--are quite visible, as are many smaller motifs that recur in his later works.

At first glance, Strauss's second play, Bekannte Gesichter, gemischte Gefühle, published in 1974 and premiered in 1975, seems to have been written by a different author than was Die Hypochonder, and this is largely due to the influence on his writing of Strauss's dramaturgical work at the Schaubühne in Berlin. Now, his characters are semi-permanent guests at a bankrupt little hotel on the Rhine--superficial, bored, vaguely miserable individuals who seem to have been extracted directly from contemporary German middle-class society. Strauss also no longer makes

it difficult to keep track of the plot--the greatest difficulty lies in remembering who is currently married or involved with whom in this "Museum der Leidenschaften."²⁷ The dialogues, too, though still cliché-ridden, are now more cohesive and immediately accessible. It soon becomes apparent, however, that much of what is being said is either not meant in the first place or not correctly understood or responded to. Virtually all the conversations, moreover, are either about or in spite of the confused inner lives and less-than-satisfying, ever-revolving "relationships" between the individuals involved in the play's action. As a grotesque substitute for the genuine, spontaneous emotional lives they lack, Strauss's characters try to attain an artificially precise, force-trained harmony in the practice of professional ballroom dancing. This theme of Strauss, the "turning off" of one's true personality and the replacement of it with a widely-acceptable, smoothly-functioning "mechanism" for the sake of a highly-automated society--as well as the related theme of "the media" today as threats to individuality, in general--can be traced throughout the author's works.²⁸

Besides the inherent subject matter, other common denominators of Strauss's first and second plays include the fragmentary, somewhat calculatedly haphazard dialogues of his characters and the inclusion of irrational, dream-like, and bluntly symbolic elements--although the latter are used

in Bekannte Gesichter much more sparingly.

The stories "Marlenes Schwester" and "Theorie der Drohung" were published in one volume in 1975 and met with a generally favorable critical response. "Marlenes Schwester" is the story of a thirty-eight-year-old former German teacher, now unemployed, who has no complete identity--she is never even given a name--who is afflicted with an unexplainable blood disease and who tries to live with and through her younger sister, Marlene. Marlene wants to live her own life, however, and her sister is devastated by their abrupt separation--she isolates herself from her previous existence completely and suffers serious depression, feeling that she is dying and considering suicide the best option. She is paralyzed in a jumble of her own memories, as the story's broken and unchronological form--which is occasionally "punctuated" by a recurring sentence or phrase--mirrors quite successfully. Marlene reflects about her own state: "Die Tatenlosigkeit, die ich nicht beende, das ist meine Arbeit. Auch die in sich gekrümmte Enge ist ein unermesslicher Ort."²⁹ Although she seems to try again and again to begin achieving a semblance of a "good life," Marlene's sister sees no way out of her dilemma--all that she experiences seems only to threaten her identity more.

Again, a number of literary influences become apparent within the work: The parable-like story-within-a-story about the utopian lifestyle of a mutually interde-

pendent community of vampires³⁰--which later is revealed to parallel the reality of a phase in Marlene's and her sister's lives--seems to reflect Strauss's fondness for the authors of the Romantic era,³¹ especially of the so-called "schwarze Romantik," and for the writings of Jorge Luis Borges,³² which had a considerable influence on all the author's early works.

In "Theorie der Drohung," a translation of which follows this introduction, Strauss perhaps comes closer than in any of his other early works to writing about himself--or, at any rate, about the general situation of the author in the twentieth century, who is threatened by the sense that it is impossible to say anything "new"; who suffers from the feeling that anything he writes will be merely a restatement of what he has read somewhere before. The narrator of the story is an isolated young writer struggling with this very problem--who, at the same time, is trying to come to terms with the sudden and also threatening appearance in his life of a woman named Lea, who claims to be his former girl friend--but of whom he has not the slightest recollection. From the moment she enters the story, the reader is made suspicious about the reality of Lea, who appears under unlikely circumstances and is shrouded in an air of mystery. The author within the story believes that he was living with a different woman during the years in question, but he has obviously forgotten so much about that

relationship since its painful end that the reader begins to think Lea actually is his former girl friend, whom he refers to as "S."--although further twists in the plot make this explanation also seem impossible. Eventually, the writer/narrator realizes that he is in love with Lea, who has been living with him, and therefore promptly begins to write about her. This action, however, results in Lea's "decay" and gradual disappearance--finally, the author can no longer see her at all. At this point, to his surprise, he feels as if Lea is only that much closer to him, and he is suddenly filled with a tormenting desire to see his old girl friend, S. Even more surprisingly, he discovers while underway that he now looks just like Lea--that he has become her--and though this is a frightening realization, he is very relieved after he has accepted the truth of it.

This game of hide and seek with Lea and S., as Gerhard vom Hofe and Peter Pfaff point out--including the author's metamorphosis at the end of the story--is reminiscent of stories by E.T.A. Hoffmann, Borges, and Edgar Allen Poe, among others. Further, along with other interpretational possibilities that the authors outline, Lea can be seen as the narrator's "literary replica" of S., with which he brings her back into his conscious mind.³³

Faced with the uncertainties of identity within the story, the reader, also feeling a sense of "threat," holds to the narrator's writing and reading habits as his

only central, stable point of reference, as certainly the narrator does within his life. Perhaps this story of the threatened author, the "theory" of which is also not new, as Strauss pointed out,³⁴ is an attempt on the author's part to show once and for all that writing and reading genuinely are central points of his life: that he is not just "playing" when he alludes to and borrows from the works of so many other authors and that he is well aware that he is quoting when he writes--as critics of his early works were fond of pointing out. He may even, as does the narrator within the story, be poking fun at some of his previous writings, as the inclusion in the story of passages written in a seemingly tongue-in-cheek, pseudo-academic tone would suggest.

With Trilogie des Wiedersehens, published in 1976 and premiered in the following year, Strauss achieved his "breakthrough" as a playwright: Critics and public alike responded generally positively. The premise of the play is quite simple: The primary characters within it are "Mitglieder und Freunde des Kunstvereins" who are previewing an art exhibit entitled "Kapitalistischer Realismus" in the summer of 1975. As in his first two plays the figures interact within an enclosed space, a "fishbowl," and the play seems to be a cross-section out of their daily lives, a small study or even an "experiment"³⁵--with Strauss as the experimenting scientist and the theater audience "on

the other side of the glass." The action consists almost solely of the characters' movements toward and away from each other again, in a series of miniature arrivals, departures, and reunions, and, interestingly, a parallel representation of this movement can be found in the opening lines of a poem Strauss wrote in 1975:

Ausgang ins Museum, Treffpunkt zur Trennung
Seite an Seite, unüberwindliche Nähe
Das Zimmer ihres Sehens, jeder Blick
ein gerade noch vermiedener Anblick(...) ³⁶

From the conversations that result during the artificially-induced groupings and regroupings in Trilogie, it is gradually possible for the viewer or reader to create a picture of the individuals represented here--in all their vagueness, ambivalence, and indecision. Wolfram Buddecke and Helmut Fuhrmann, noting the probable allusion of the title to Goethe's "Trilogie der Leidenschaft," suggest that a better title for this play might be Trilogie der Ambivalenz or Trilogie der "Zwergleidenschaften," to use a word from within the play, and that the characters, unable to win clear self-identities, are waiting for a vague "change" that never occurs.³⁷ Katrin Kazubko, on the other hand, sees this as waiting for the

...Moment der ewigen Wiederholungen, in dem...
(diese)...Personen gefangen sind. Sie bewegen sich
zwischen Abschied und Ankunft, Vergangenheit und
Zukunft, nicht aber in der Gegenwart, die "ewig
unentschieden" ist und als "träge Qual" empfunden
wird...³⁸

It is clear, at any rate, that these are people whose abil-

ity to communicate is suffering: who are waiting because they are unable spontaneously to form genuine relationships in the present.

The structural links of the Trilogie are very short scenes, similar to film clips, that are not joined in a continuous flow, and it would seem that Strauss was influenced in this structural choice by methods developed during the writing of his much acclaimed stage and film versions of Gorki's Sommergäste for the Schaubühne (1974-75). Compared with his other plays, Trilogie is lacking in blatantly "insane" moments: Here, the monologues and dialogues of Strauss's characters outline the "private insanities" of their daily lives.

Die Widmung (1977, Devotion, 1979), Strauss's next and perhaps most-read prose work, tells the story of Richard Schroubek, a thirty-one-year-old resident of Berlin whose girl friend, Hannah, leaves him permanently. Schroubek, up until now a bookstore employee, is crushed, takes off from work indefinitely and closes himself up in his apartment, where he sets about writing the "biography of his empty hours"³⁹ with the intention of presenting it to Hannah, upon her return, as proof of his loving devotion. This "celebration of sorrow," however, this "kühne und festliche Trauer" eventually comes to an end, and Richard is left with only a "kleinbürgerliche Schrumpfmelancholie"⁴⁰: Hannah has not come back.

Again, the subject of Strauss's work is separation: Richard is abandoned, a "Sozialfall der Liebe,"⁴¹ and this fact, along with his non-author status, accounts for and "justifies" the broken nature of the text's structure. Die Widmung consists primarily of observations by the narrator about himself, his surroundings, his reading, separation and loss in general, and about how he sees separation reflected in and dealt with by society as a whole. Schroubek--like Strauss, it would seem--connects the discontinuous, the separated and tries to put it together again, as he wishes he could do with his broken relationship and fractured existence. These notes by Richard are, additionally, put into perspective by several narrative and dramatic passages (including the memorably vivid visit by Fritz), which are written from an omniscient point of view.

In Groß und Klein (1978, Big and Little, 1979), Strauss for the first time puts at the center of his play a single character--Lotte, a woman in her mid-thirties. Also new is the variety of settings involved--rather than occurring within a single enclosed building, each of the ten scenes takes place in a separate location, as in a "Stationendrama."⁴² Although Lotte seems more naive, more open, "friendlier," and more outgoing and optimistic than many of Strauss's other figures, she, too, feels a lack of understanding from the people around her. Though she tries actively in every way she can think of to gain confirmation

and support for her identity, she is disappointed at every stage of her journey and suffers more and more severe symptoms as a result of her isolation. This play, which deals perhaps even more directly with "real life" in middle-class West Germany than Strauss's previous ones, was well-received by the theater public even in provincial theaters throughout the country.

Rumor--a prose work of Strauss's written in 1980 and sometimes incorrectly labeled a novel⁴³--is, on the surface, an account of the decline of Bekker, a man in his early forties who no longer seems able to live either within or without the "Institut für Nachrichten," whose employee he has been, off and on, for twelve years. Within the Institute he is disgusted by the power games going on around him and the falsity of the entire organization. Outside, on the other hand, he finds nothing to hold onto: He begins to drink more and more heavily, to behave irrationally, and generally to "let himself go." Bekker moves in with his daughter, temporarily, but he quickly becomes overly dependent on her, and his behavior towards her, including sexual advances, eventually becomes unbearable for her: She forces him to leave.

Strauss seems to have written this text, which met with mixed critiques, from an even more distanced perspective than usual. Implanted within Bekker's personality and situation and reflected in the scenes of contemporary

Germany that surround him in the work are a good bit of German history: the characteristics of "a situation; a mood in Germany...(of) not being young anymore."⁴⁴

Strauss has compared Kalldewey, Farce, first published in 1981, to a "Satyrspiel"--a grotesque and comical play performed after a trilogy of tragedies in classical Greece.⁴⁵ Though thematically Kalldewey is similar to Strauss's previous plays--it begins and ends with representations of farewell scenes, deals with problems between couples, including power struggles to the point of torture, and returns to the difficulties of the identity-seeking individual in contemporary Germany--this time the tone ranges from serious to parodistical to absurd: Parodied, among other things, are the "Szene Sprache" in Berlin, the consumer mentality, psychoanalytical therapy, television and other media, technology, and "Gegenwartsnarren" of all kinds.

Kalldewey is a scaled-down play, compared to Trilogie and Groß und Klein--except for the mystery character, Kalldewey, only two couples, shown in various phases of their adult lives, predominate on stage. Kalldewey, a grotesque character who does little but spout dirty jokes but becomes a legend within the play, has been called by critics, variously, a "Pied Piper," a "Hitler," and a "Dionysus" figure. This work, influenced "by television and perhaps somewhat by Ionesco,"⁴⁶ has been popular, some-

what surprisingly, even in some smaller German theaters.⁴⁷

In Paare, Passanten, also published in 1981, Strauss abandons the idea of plot entirely and turns the fragment into the structural principle of his writing. Sometimes mistakenly called a journal, it is composed of a series of "études," the form and perhaps the tone of which were influenced by Strauss's reading of Ernst Jünger's Tagebücher.⁴⁸ Some critics have found Strauss's voice in this work too "moralistic"--some of the questions raised and observations made by Richard Schroubek have here been turned into statements of an occasionally Olympian nature. Thematically related material in the book is grouped into sections entitled: "Paare," "Verkehrsfluß," "Schrieb," "Dämmer," "Einzelne," and "Der Gegenwartsnarr." These "collected fragments," represented in a highly polished form, seem to be an attempt to fight back against a constant overabundance of bits of information that the media in contemporary society present, and with them Strauss has created something static in a world that "doesn't know how to stand still"--a "Physiognomie der Zeit"⁴⁹--a kind of a "cultural history for a 'history-less' generation."

Increasingly in Strauss's later works, classical motifs of various kinds can be found, and this is also true in Der Park, a play published in 1983. It is based to a certain extent on Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream: As the introduction to the play phrases it, it is

"erhoben und genarrt durch den Geist...(des Stückes)."50

Into this context, Strauss weaves his own thematic: interpersonal difficulties--especially sexual ones--and the idiosyncy of much of what is generally termed civilization--particularly, the trendy, fashionable nature of the art world.

Interesting within this text are the varying levels of speech of the characters. In general, as the introduction indicates, it is a more elevated language than in Strauss's other plays: a neo-classical tone which even allows the inclusion of rhymed passages. This language, however, is also interspersed with passages of slang, English sentences, and Strauss's customary invented word formations--especially, paradoxical word combinations and newly created abusive expressions.

Consistently, Botho Strauss's writings have concerned themselves simultaneously with the subjective--problems of individuals--and, though sometimes less directly, with problems of society. The author is plainly skeptical about the course the western world presently seems to be taking. His sense, in short, is that the individual in today's world is abandoned--that virtually nothing about society enables him to affirm his identity. Technology and the media, moreover, encourage the production of generations of lazy, cultural and historical ignorants. In a one-man campaign against this trend, Strauss writes books that require active reading, encourage learning in a wide

variety of fields, call attention to some of the most difficult and taboo issues of our times, and attempt to tie together the broken "nets" of society to form a kind of "personal support system" for his readers and the viewers of his plays.

As the following quotes indicate, the positive effects of Strauss's generally pessimistic message and his sometimes challenging writing techniques have also been noted by a number of critics:

Die Werke von Botho Strauß verweigern sich in der Vielschichtigkeit ihrer Metaphorik, ihren Anspielungen und Doppeldeutigkeiten einem raschen Konsum; sie verlangen die Mühe der Auflösung ihrer Zeichensprache und vermögen gerade dadurch zur Bewußtseins-schärfung beizutragen.⁵¹

...in ihrer Widersprüchlichkeit und ihrer Hintergrundigkeit regt die Straußsche Prosa wie kaum ein anderes Gegenwarts-Werk zum aktiven, kritischen Lesen an. Sie fordert durch ihren Dauer-Flirt mit dem Nihilismus jenen Leser auf, der trotz aller Fortschrittsskepsis doch an der weiterbestehenden Möglichkeit einer Aufklärung und eines Fortschritts festhalten möchte, und zwingt ihn, seine Position zu durchdenken, zu verteidigen, zu qualifizieren.⁵²

Or, as François Bondy put it quite succinctly: "Man wird mit Botho Strauß nicht 'fertig,' er geht einem nach. Hier entsteht ein 'offenes Werk,' das uns trifft."⁵³

Notes

¹ Gerhard vom Hofe and Peter Pfaff, Das Elend des Polyphem (Königstein/Ts.: Athenäum, 1980), p. 1.

² Botho Strauss, Trilogie des Wiedersehens. Theaterstück (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1976), p. 16.

³ Helmut Schödel, "Ästhetik des Verlustes," Theater heute, Jahressonderheft (1976), 104.

⁴ Botho Strauss, "Versuch, ästhetische und politische Ereignisse zusammenzudenken: Neues Theater 1967-70," Theater heute, (October, 1970), 68.

⁵ Botho Strauss, Die Hypochonder/Bekannte Gesichter, gemischte Gefühle. Zwei Theaterstücke (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1979), p. 19.

⁶ Reinhard Baumgart, "Das Theater des Botho Strauß," in Text und Kritik. Zeitschrift für Literatur, 81, Botho Strauß, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1984), p. 8.

⁷ Strauss, "Versuch....," p. 68.

⁸ Strauss, Hypochonder, p. 10.

⁹ Strauss, Hypochonder, p. 22-3.

¹⁰ Strauss, Hypochonder, p. 75.

¹¹ Strauss, Hypochonder, p. 104.

¹² Strauss, Hypochonder, p. 125.

- 13 Botho Strauss, Marlenes Schwester. Zwei Erzählungen (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1975), pp. 45 ff.; 98-105.
- 14 Botho Strauss, Kalldewey, Farce (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1981), pp. 38-41.
- 15 Helmut Schödel, "Kapitalistischer Realismus," Theater heute, (July 1977), 34.
- 16 Botho Strauss, Die Widmung (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1977), pp. 71-2.
- 17 Strauss, Widmung, pp. 73-5.
- 18 Strauss, Widmung, pp. 110-12.
- 19 Personal interview with Botho Strauss, 2 August 1983.
- 20 Schödel, "Ästhetik...", p. 105.
- 21 Strauss, Personal interview.
- 22 Strauss, Personal interview.
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II. "The Threat Theory"

1

Awakened out of deep reading, provoked to speak by the restless rhythm of the lines, my mouth still half in darkness, my newly resumed monologue turns to the first official day of winter. It begins with the dense whitening of my daily landscape, after a heavy snowfall, punctually by chance, already in the early morning hours. My only path out and my indispensable forest horizon, without which I don't know where I am here--everything has disappeared without a trace, and in its place an open, white, dull nothingness has been poured out, as if one of my ever-empty pages had fluttered away from my desk and spread itself boundlessly over the area, mocking me. What I have not written and the immeasurable facelessness of nature reflected each other indivisibly and rose up to one and the same superhuman task for the exhausted author.

Not a sound from outside makes its way through the snow to your unprotected ears. Now all that is audible is you yourself. You hear your own eyes close. In order to hear a single sound from the distance you'll probably have

to go to bed and hope for some noise in a dream.

I can imagine that never before has anyone sat for so many hours with his total attention, everything in him that is alert, focused to the exclusion of all else on the expectation of a phone call--from anybody, from outside, from anywhere--the way I did on this first day of winter in my little gardener's house, surrounded by snow, far outside the city. Although there wasn't the slightest chance that I would actually be called, I was nevertheless incapable, the entire morning, of perceiving anything other than this quaking expectation which sensed a telephonic stimulus hidden in even the most unlikely objects in my surroundings. At any second a shrill ring might sound from the back of this book, which could signal a soft human voice; from this book of matches, from this dust rag might come a ring, a sound, a call, an enticement. The telephone itself, however, the squatting, ready-to-spring animal in its black box, remained ceaselessly quiet and at the same time threatened just as ceaselessly to break its lurking silence. Finally I lifted the receiver to make sure the connection was still working. And punctually by chance, like the terrible snow on the first day of winter--just as punctually by chance is the voice in the receiver now greeting me. It is Dr. W., a school friend of mine, who now has his own psychiatric clinic in F., a person whose existence has always oppressed and overshadowed my own--because he's like me but

at the same time far superior to me in everything--always has been--and especially today, when he lets me know that only his therapy could succeed in opening my eyes about myself. He must have dialed my number in the same moment, to the second, in which I arbitrarily lifted the receiver. There's a young woman here in the clinic with me who's screaming. She's screaming incredibly loudly, and I can't do anything to calm her down. And I did actually hear bursts of screamed words, which were obviously making their way to Dr. W.'s telephone mouthpiece from an adjoining room. I don't know if I was still capable of reacting to these long desired "noises from the distance" without fantastical imagining--but I believed, at any rate, that I recognized the tonal outlines of my name. Yes, I heard this injured woman roar my name, as if she had to get my attention over the sound of a raging waterfall. The reason I'm calling you, said Dr. W., is that I think she's screaming for you.

Really? I asked abruptly and almost joyfully. Instead of being afraid, I immediately thought of the ecstatic girl who suddenly appeared in my former "Notes on Wish-Anxiety," and who there left behind the fleeting fragment of a really hopeful encounter. I've looked up the section in which she's discussed: "Today, shortly before falling to sleep in the late afternoon, I heard a woman's voice from the street below calling my name out, loud and clear. I immediately think that this belongs in the story of a girl

who, suspected of a political crime, was in custody for months for questioning and who now, freed unexpectedly, travels "head over heels" to visit her boy friend in another part of the country, and who, while still standing at the open train window, calls his name out loudly into the night. As if there were no telephone, as if her saintly arrogance would carry the sound of her voice to him over cities and towns. The boy friend, at this moment, notices nothing and is playing a game of chess against himself. And she arrives in the city where he lives and calls his name out underneath his window. But when he looks out in confusion, she has disappeared. Because she wants to delay the moment of their reunion until she can't stand it anymore. In the morning, she follows him when he goes into town to go shopping and calls to him again, loudly and cheerfully, from out of the middle of a crowd. He turns around, but again she has disappeared. She is truly happy in a supernatural way, and she balances on the highest pinnacle of freedom..."

I don't know where she's from, says Dr. W., and I don't know her name. I've never seen her with you before, but she claims that you two lived together between 1968 and 1970. That's all she can manage to say, except for your name.

But didn't you tell her I was involved with S. then? She's still around; she can prove it, if necessary.

Now I felt really threatened, and I spoke more passionately, as if I needed to deny a suspicion of murder.

No, answered my friend, I didn't say anything about S. I think it's better if you talk to her yourself. In my opinion we must be dealing with some earlier relationship of yours--some good-hearted girl you drove crazy...Come on over here as fast as you can.

So I left my little house that day, made the first track in the snow, and finally walked along the road toward F. after waiting in vain a quarter of an hour for the bus.

2

Here, where I'm writing, you can't see me. And yet, what I write stands here "like Robinson's flag on the highest point of the island"...

A dim light at the other end of the trip: your your white gloves, teary eyes, the spots of which you sniff at...Today I'm plagued for the first time by the suspicion that the few things that happen here, the ordinary experiences, are actually far beyond my understanding; no--that they could even reach far beyond my ability to imagine. Don't I always comprehend just exactly as much of them as I can stand, and no more? Maybe, some day, it will happen: a simple greeting, a nod of the head, a stranger who says yes to my face,

really opens his eyes, in a second-long utopia, upsetting my monotonous observations, so I can then see everything temporal in an organic relationship untouched until now...oh, these shining thoughts!--after two seconds, at the latest, I'd certainly fall unconscious. The same thing would happen to me, Lea, as happens to the governor's pretty daughter on the evening of her first ball--when, due to her excitement and haste, she can't seem to succeed at getting herself together to her best advantage. Her haste increases with the panicked certainty that she won't, not even with help, get any further, and the blind and faltering motions of her hands reach that pinnacle of senseless turbulence that can only be redeemed by unconsciousness. And so she sinks into her mother's arms. Her mother, who up till now has been unable to help, lifts the unconscious head of her daughter onto her lap and draws, calmly and carefully, the thin lines on the still mouth and the patiently closed lids. An unconscious woman is made up.

The things that happen "make me up," too, Lea, an unconscious person in their arms, and color my unmoving mouth, my closed stare. And when I come to again, I'll be wearing their mask, without knowing it...

No, I really didn't know Lea. I had never met her--she was a stranger. When I saw her for the first time, through a peephole in Dr. W.'s office, I saw a very tall, approximate-

ly thirty-year-old woman, obviously sunken into the most horrible possible state of her being, crouching on a hard office stool that didn't offer enough room for the unpacked disarray of her limbs. She was stuffing strands of her shoulder-length blonde hair into her mouth. She had stopped screaming, and Dr. W. was of the opinion that probably she could already sense that I was near. And, in point of fact, her face now began to move, and seemed to multiply itself into a film of faces with the most varied facial expressions, and I realized from the poorly controlled, impractical movements of her head and arms that she was falling into a state of strong catatonic excitement. The lonely theatrical performance of Dr. W.'s patient attracted me as much as it hurt me; I tried to watch her the way a disinterested reviewer would, and forgot completely, in the process, that it was I, supposedly, who in some incomprehensible way had been responsible for this situation; who had assigned Lea this risky part. I reflected about how wrongly one maintains that such a person is alienating or misrepresenting himself, or some such. On the contrary, didn't it look much more as if these overly specific gestures, which overstepped and destroyed the rule and the typicalness of a moderate co-language of our body in attempts at social communication, were trying to approach a total perfection and identity of their own expression? An identity that spoken language cannot possibly communicate. No one can claim to call a

unique, distinct word his own. Such a private word would be in any case a senseless, useless word. It is, on the other hand, possible for a person to individualize himself with an unmistakable gesture, without its being necessarily meaningless; he may even assume, with some degree of certainty, that the particular gesture, in the peculiarity of its appearance, is unique and can be found nowhere else in the world but with him. I assumed that it was this fundamental difference upon which the radical ambition of Lea's silent presentation of herself was based. In any case, in this way I formed my various theoretical opinions about the wild performance--in order not to be delivered over fully unprotected to its direct sensory effects. In all truthfulness, I got worried that the very sight of hysteria could result simultaneously in an infectious transmission to me. (What scares us, I then told myself conscientiously, cannot possibly be the completely different or the so-called "abnormal," but always what is essentially related, appearing in its most extreme form. Undoubtedly I immediately read into Lea's mania the frightening mirror image of my own torturous attempts to express myself in writing.)

Well? asked Dr. W., do you recognize her? Do you remember now?

No. I don't know her. I swear to you, I've never seen her before.

I want you to go in to her. I have to know, after

all, whether it's you, whom she was calling for, or whether we're dealing with someone of the same name.

As I joined her in the room and closed the door behind me, the patient did not change her behavior. She hadn't yet noticed me--the border of her perceptive capabilities seemed to run only a small distance from her body. I walked to within a meter of her and asked her loudly, more loudly than I had intended to, if it was I whom she had called. She interrupted her activity at once, threw her hair out of her face with a thoroughly controlled, practiced toss of her neck, and looked at me openly, with a simultaneously receiving and penetrating look in her eyes. Yes, she said without hesitation, and her worked up facial features relaxed into an opaque smile that could just as well have expressed the shy cheerfulness of a new friendship as the tired pleasure of a late reunion. I didn't succeed, at any rate, in determining the clear biographical point in time of this smile. And so I experienced the first of many moments to come in which Lea crept her way into my memories, popped up in them like an evasion kissed awake in a far-distant, fleeting encounter--a girl for whom one once was, perhaps for 10 minutes, the only protection--at night, in the last commuter train, as it pulls into the main train station. Moments in which Lea in all seriousness made me doubt that my past could really have occurred completely without her.

She stood up and stroked from my forehead some hairs that had fallen out of place--as if I were now the problem child, I the stubborn and obstinate patient who was letting himself go--and she the concerned confidante who cared for me patiently and saw to it skillfully that I was well-groomed.

I looked around for the stool on which Lea had just been sitting--cramped, caught up in herself, unrecognizable--and looked for the mask of insanity out of which this tall, cheerful girl had slid, and which must, after all, still be lying here somewhere. But the ugly stool was empty and stood unmarked in its place, an indifferent location, in the middle of nothing-happenedness.

Lea took my hand and pulled me out of the room over to Dr. W. I was disappointed that he didn't seem to be surprised at all--my miracle cure didn't seem to impress him. He just laughed at us, fairly loudly--almost frivolously. Lea locked arms with him and me and suggested that we go to a Chinese restaurant. I suddenly felt as if I'd wandered off into the stupidest low points of a comedy--we actually were standing there grinning at each other as happy-go-lucky as the Three Stooges. Dr. W. had appointments and couldn't go with us to eat, but he laughed loudly again and, in parting, told us to have a good day. He ran after us a few steps and returned a pair of soft leather gloves to Lea which had obviously been taken from her before she was set

down on the stool. Other than these white gloves, which also didn't help against the cold, Lea owned only a knit shoulder bag, which she took from the clothes' rack in the hall, and otherwise nothing--neither a coat nor a cape nor a scarf.

So I walked by the side of this summer fog of a woman, who had turned to me--without, however, having given up even the slightest bit of her absence--through the snowed-in streets of F., and bought her, first off, something warm to put on.

3

I write about Lea and am pursued mercilessly, sentence by sentence, by the final dissolution of everything that I've written about Lea up until this point. It's as if this story is running a head-to-head race with its own evanescence. At any rate, I'm prepared--at the end, after I've drawn the last stroke on the very last letter--to leave behind a thoroughly bleached-out story that has disappeared without a trace.

It's strange enough that I can't with any reliability pinpoint the time at which I'm writing. When am I writing here? And when will or did what I'm writing about happen? I can't say; I don't know. All that's certain is

that the time with Lea created its own chronology, and maybe it was then that I lost all sense for temporal discrepancies. And the fact that Lea's no longer with me, in the meantime, also doesn't change anything; for how can I tell the difference between the missing Lea and the visible Lea, as long as I can't find my way in these horrible tides of appearing and vanishing writing that make everything the same? Up until now I've never experienced anything like this...

At the time when S. left me, shrouded by ceaseless reading, I spent a good year and a half occupied with cumbersome forgetting. With my feeling of honor numbed, too, I even kept on living in our little gardener's house, although I'd found out, in the meantime, that it had been bought with money from her benevolent lover--that Danish dentist with whom S. had been carrying on almost since the beginning of our relationship and to whom she deserted, in the end, after I discovered the life-corrupting swindle one day. In my biography a malicious tumor of ludicrousness and shame had grown up around S. And I didn't do anything to counteract it but waited, instead, with unscrupulous curiosity for the metastases that arrived every month; by that I mean the generous drafts of money that come to me from a bank account in Copenhagen--upon which S. always writes the heroic-sounding greeting: "For our work, my dearest!" This dedication, called across a great distance, disturbs me time and time again. Our work...what kind of work? Which work can

she possibly mean? Had something else been planned? Had we even agreed to write something together? I can't remember anything of the sort. All the same, it's possible that she surrendered one of her brilliant theories to me or willed me one of her fruitful beginnings of a theory, which I, with her financial support, was now supposed to develop--perhaps the basic idea for a literary study about...about...? No idea, no idea. I can no longer remember specific details that have to do with S. and me. To my mind, our actual joint work--the inexhaustible production of conversation, which was always conversation about what was still to be discussed--was completed in the moment in which we were no longer in earshot of one another. Before that, actually, the open exchange of ideas that assailed the boundaries and oppositions of our adjacent bodies had led us into a dangerously glowing closeness to each other--which in the end made the abrupt separation that much more inconceivable for me, that much more painful.

My inviting habit of half-knowing threw S. for a loop, at first. She, who had just gotten her diploma as a food chemist, got to know the approximate, the speculative, and the paradoxical like an undiscovered continent of her consciousness.

What is indispensable for me in order to live--the mild therapy of reading--soon became for her a strange and precious temptation. And, after all, literature is all the

more seductive when the idea is to look in the thousands of pages for someone whom one has just begun to love--and whose whole being one must complete by collecting the countless similarities that appear everywhere in his beloved books. Yes, S. gathered me up with unbelievable diligence; not, however, by reading an incredible amount, but by causing me to talk about her constantly--to sketch out a portrait, a loving treatise about S., in which all the essential characteristics of my thinking, the sum of my knowledge and reading emerged in a brilliant physical form that she could study and take up with ease. I noticed from her probing questions, which she formulated with increasing skill, that she understood how to use everything she learned in the most varied of contexts and to recombine it in the most amazing ways. It turned out that literature, with which I'd hoped to advertise for myself, cut me out in the end and became, itself, the sole object of her passion. S. loved literature--without ever having worked her way through a single important work thoroughly from front to back. I'd say she became obsessed by methodology, incapable of criticizing the content of a text in the least. She found countless ideas for theories as if in her sleep--extravagant ones and some with great promise--she organized the most casual remarks into themes and statements of problems of higher significance, and her fantasy was so inundated with plans and projects, her constant "somebody ought to investigate

how..." was so decidedly latent that it was impossible for her to even once start work on one of these plans. Her unique talent of skimming books--only half-way turned to the text--and latching onto the heart of the text--might eventually have resulted in a theory of literature whereby one would judge texts according to whether they license the inexact reader, sovereign misunderstanding, and inspired oversight or not.

When I once again found myself bent over a receipt from the Copenhagen Commerce Bank and wracking my brains about the meaning of "For our work, my dearest!," I decided to ask Lea for advice. She was still, after all, like before, giving the impression that she'd lived with me during the questionable years of 68 through 70--which I, in my opinion, had spent with S. She hadn't left my side since our first encounter in F., had followed me home as if it were perfectly natural, had found her way around from the first time she stepped into the rooms--correcting the set-up a little bit here and there, because she supposedly found it changed--all in all, the unimpeachable illusion of the lost lover experiencing the happy homecoming.

No matter how strange and inexplicable this unknown intimate friend of mine first appeared--she reminded me, by the way, in no way of S., and I don't believe I ever fell in love with her, that is to say, our love was completely lack-

ing a beginning: everything initial had evidently never happened--I hardly felt the need to "unmask" her, to fault her for any cheap tricks or false intentions. Whatever she brought to light by way of deception, I liked her fixed, enclosed system of observing, which didn't admit the intervention of any further education and which remained totally uninfluenced by me and my vacillating self-assertions.

And if I then did ask her which goddammed work we might have planned at the end of 1969, anyway, then it was only because I was curious as to how she would extract herself from the situation in the face of such a special check-up. And, in point of fact, my inquiry didn't seem to embarrass her in the least. She merely admitted, after a short moment of reflection, that she didn't know the answer exactly, right off the top of her head. At the same time she pulled together the inner ends of her eyebrows, and two extremely vertical worry lines appeared on her forehead in a way I'd never before observed in the face of a woman. She pulled a dark blue notebook out of her shoulder bag, leafed through it, and apparently found what she needed fairly quickly.

The work you're asking about, Lea confirmed with inscrutable certainty, we gave the working title "Teatrauma-- A Contribution to the History of Emotional Culture in Pre-Goethean Weimar." "Teatrauma"? What? What was that supposed to mean? Teatrauma...I asked about this dark concep-

tual meteor quite uncomprehendingly, yet somewhere in my memory, far, far away, was the extinguished constellation of a manner of expression that I had made use of with S., and from which an artificial foreign word such as "Teatrauma" might have stemmed. Translated from the Greek, I supposed it to mean something like: being injured while watching theater performances...

Lea helped me over my perplexity about the concept immediately: Teatrauma is what we called an as yet unresearched confusion of the senses which, in 1774, caught hold of the small circle of influential people at the court of Duchess Anna Amalia and passed from one to the other like a contagious disease. Whether from exhaustion or from over-anxious expectation--suddenly these people were terrified by their own forms of social intercourse. This public, probably arranged according to the feudal system but nevertheless extremely limited, was made up of a few dozen officials and military men, and within it they took care of their--fairly meaningless--business and their--fairly meaningless--exercise of power. This somewhat fantastical public one day triggered a serious crisis in the only moderately enlightened heads of its representatives. They were, more exactly, plagued by the grotesque, frightening illusion that nothing, not even the most private and intimate of their transactions, was protected from the eyes of the others, from the view of a public become total and bound-

less within itself. They felt themselves to be acting, always and everywhere, as in a theater, watched ceaselessly not only by their own kind but by an immense mass of unknown spectators as well, whom they themselves couldn't recognize, but whose evil laughter resounded in their ears when they reached for the candy dish or picked up their quill pen. They despised themselves most of all as they performed these simplest of activities--which were nevertheless mocked constantly from out of the darkness--and soon were no longer able to perform undisturbed a greeting or a stroke of the pen.

We two know about this late feudalistic compulsive neurosis--in a sense a baroque regression shortly before the beginning of the bourgeois age--due only to a lucky coincidence, for in Weimar this emotional catastrophe was placed under a ban of silent tolerance. Very likely this authentic source, known to us both, is the only one that exists; the memorable letter of Madame de Lanctôt, who was visiting her lover--a young field marshal of the duke's army--and who reported to her spouse in Paris about the "angoisse incompréhensible," which she couldn't ignore in her German friends and which, as she writes: "fait du plaisir le plus délicieux du monde une pitrerie tant amère qu'épouvantable. Tremblant et s'agrippant à moi comme à un récif, mon amant, imaginez-vous, au suprême instant de la jouissance s'abandonna et emplît de sa pisse mon con!"

Through a hardly traceable series of misplacements, this unique document fell into the hands of the Flemish shipowner Jan Hendrik Mykebusch, to whom his son Conrad dedicated a two-volume life story, published in Antwerp in 1857. In the appendix to this work is found, as a frivolous curiosity, as it were, a reproduction of the letter of Madame de Lanctôt, which Conrad Mykebusch had discovered in the estate of his father. The all too out of the way place of publication is perhaps to blame for the fact that this document, so important for the history of German emotional culture, hasn't to this day become known to any of the appropriate areas of scientific specialization...It's likely, by the way, added Lea, that the appearance of Goethe in Weimar made an instantaneous end to the uproar. One can imagine that the young bourgeois poet represented a transferred authority, so to speak, and relieved the little courtly society of the trauma of bourgeois threats--of this peculiar Teatrauma, as we called it...

With these last words, Lea seemed to have immediately broken off every connection with her discourse, and with her role as conscientious lecturer. She stared straight ahead, apathetically and sadly, and leaned, a little weakened, on my desk. For her the riddle of our abandoned work was thus solved and cleared in order to be forgotten. But I remained restlessly touched by her lecture, in which she had succeed-

ed in simulating, practically identically, a typical discussion between S. and me, and I wanted, without fail, to have her explain to me a question or two that had been left open (not least in order to emphasize my bona fide interest in her priceless story).

I'd just like to know, Lea: how did we two actually stumble upon this invaluable material, this Mykebusch biography?

A lucky break, an accident, a lucky break, she said in rapid succession, her shoulders moving up and down, at a book exhibit in Antwerp, in this what's-its-name house, this museum--the folio volume was there, and we leafed through it a little bit, and suddenly, at the very end, discovered the word "Weimar." Oh? So we were once in Antwerp together, were we?

Yes, yes, of course we were in Antwerp together.

The inadvertently ironic tone of my question had insulted Lea. She withdrew from me by acting offended; in fact, with the customary expression of a lover to whom one makes clear that one has forgotten completely a trip once made together. I therefore returned unassumingly to myself and remonstrated with myself about my greatly reduced ability to remember, which, after the separation from S., I had tried to destroy violently, and which in the meantime had not, by far, recovered to the extent I would now have wished.

In this moment the picture of an old man reading appeared to me, to whom, on his deathbed, his own, long-since vanished memory returns in the form of a beautiful young woman--who, to be sure, is completely unknown to him and never existed in his memory.

Nevertheless, once given the choice between going under in a swift whirlpool of self-denial or defying the incomprehensible fairy of my forgetting, even though it be a very confused defiance, I chose the latter and decided to consider Lea a liar.

Never with final certainty have I been able to find out from where Lea came to me or what circumstances led to her one day crying for me and seeking my proximity so desperately--sometimes I thought: Maybe Dr. W. "put her on" you...but to what end? In order to finally drive me into his arms, so that I, as his patient, would be defeated by him completely?...Or did S. perhaps have a finger in the pie--had she personally chosen Lea as her successor and sent her home with me? No, that was no reasonable suspicion, either. Only the uncertain itself held sway over enough suspect signs: The time when I was together with S. and we did nothing, nothing at all except talk and keep on talking, now presented itself to the searching memory as emptiness and everything imaginable at the same time; as the white paper and the mass of everything not yet written hovering above it, in which even the author keeps himself

hidden. But now Lea had arrived, an unknown, a stranger, and had taken over, with her energetic and accurate inventions (and with the help of her little blue notebook full of "memory aids"), the authorship of my time with S. and written herself unerringly into the part of my lost girl friend, who had left no trace behind--or, perhaps, many too many traces--such that they could never be consolidated into a uniform text. How was I to defend myself against that? Lea's lies and fantastical stories always respected the range of the probable; she never let herself be caught making a provably false or impossible statement. If she nevertheless, while lying, hit upon an inhibiting fact or found herself close to a contradiction, she helped herself out by continuing to lie, consistently, and by setting the points of fracture back in place with new, additional inventions. This harmonious system of endlessly self-reproducing lies, in which everything was cleared up and joined together to form an unbroken chain of proof, couldn't be shaken up by anything or thrown into question; it was quite simply the "Lea System," which held its ground, with completely equal rights, among other testimonial systems.

I showed Lea the record of transfer from the Copenhagen bank and asked her who, in her opinion, gave us these thousand Danish crowns every month. Why, she answered without hesitation, that comes for sure from our Danish Maecenas, who

supports our work.

Is that so? And how is it that this gentleman calls me "my dearest"?

Because his German isn't that good; he expressed himself a little too tenderly, didn't he?

No, I yelled, he did not express himself too tenderly, this gentleman didn't express himself at all! In fact, the money comes from S.! From my girl friend S.!

S....S....! Always this S.! Who is that supposed to be, anyway?

She was treating me as if I was suffering from a stubborn delusion, as far as S. was concerned, although I had told her often enough about this friendship. Who is S.? she called as if trying to shake me awake and tried again to turn me into her patient. But I had already given up and was busy being stupidly silent.

And so the "Lea System" won one victory after the other over me...

4

Oh Lea, my dimwittedness and what I have read!

The text I had written now despised me...

Rocked from a wordless slumber into the greatest excitation of fear: I don't see you anymore! the feeling,

upon waking up, between my legs under the blanket...viscous cold cream. Steeping hot air, in which things of wood and things of flesh dissolve and mix with each other. We came closer to each other than skin allows. My soft lips, shaped in the form of your mouth, make a strange motion in my face, now, when I speak...

This text has pity on me, but the other one despises me--I don't want to read it.

Once we've read something, Lea says, it's no longer in the books. And so she tears every read-through page out of the binding and throws it away. Rip, rap.

I began writing, quite frankly, with the intention of protecting myself from Lea's discourse of lies. I wanted to build up around myself something well-defined and personally signed, which couldn't one day be talked out of me again and thrown into question. I had always thought: maybe you'll start to write some day out of the weakness of old age, when you'll get your jollies from it--forming your sentences with a grin and a giggle. But now it was starting much earlier and was not serving to distract me.

I dug out my old "Notes on Wish-Anxiety," which I had collected prior to my time with S. It was probably the word "wish-anxiety," more than anything, that gave me the courage to seek out these long-neglected notes. Somehow I had the feeling that this concept was very premature; that

it had waited vacuously for a long time for its significance, which only the experiences with Lea could actually confer on it.

But what could I have imagined by the term the first time I used it?

When I read the first notes I cried out in dismay: Who wrote this in my book, for heaven's sake?! There were nothing but pointed observations and paradoxes, cutting and full of tricks, as are found by the ton in the cultural pages of our daily newspapers; their writers, scorning the perils of all-consuming writing, donate their jokes in order to keep themselves and their colleagues in good spirits. I've always been afraid of one day being attacked and thrown to the ground by a stupidity that's been waiting secretly inside me. And now I saw that this stupidity had already opened up its terrible blabbermouth back then in order to send out contemporary flashes of thought like the following, for example, which was obviously ignited by the distribution crisis in the Ruhr coal mines (!)... "The heaps of coal, the sick giants, are already pushing up to the doors of the miners!.... A sentence as if written on emery paper... the sick giants in front of the house doors of the miners"... tsss! What a drab, cheap trick! (It does me good when I can make fun of what I wrote back then. I will surely have lost face permanently as soon as I finish the last page of what I'll write now--I don't know when. And

then I'll no longer be able to take care of my own mockery...)

Annoyed, I leafed further in the warped notebook; many of the pages had bent up under the pressure of my pencil, which doubtless had pushed to engrave, as was only fitting for these lonely, heart-of-the-matter sentences. But then, suddenly, I came across a page that had remained flat, that had been touched uniformly by a calm, expansive handwriting. And out of the secluded waters of this writing, standing and flowing all at once, there appeared, like my second face, a fragment of a theoretical supposition, tempting and warning, hard to understand and revelatory, the birthed beginning of a research paper that would take years. The entry that disturbed me stood completely disjointed in the little book between crumpled desperation on the previous and thoughtless arrogance on the following page. It seemed completely independent, written with patience, and then broke off; provided itself with a strangely premature silence. It read as follows: "No matter what I write, it writes about me. I incessantly write the stranger who threatens me. What I write knows who I am, also knows exactly how I will end up, and anybody can read about me in what I write, like old women do in coffee grounds--only I can't. I can't; I can't read it; the meaning sealed up, the warnings overlooked in every line. In every word, in the course of every sentence there

is something about me, and I can't recognize what it is. Only at the very end, when the catastrophe has already begun, might I perhaps be able to say: here and there the first signs appeared, this and that was already pointing to it. But then, at the end, everything gets mixed up anyway: the recognition and what has happened become one and the same sound of rain-soaked paper in the summer wind...Nowhere in the world have I ever met anything stranger than a statement created by me."

Now a head-over-heels planning and speculating began. The study before me--so much was already certain--would deal with those dangerous borderline cases of writing, in which a desire-increasing fear and a fear-producing desire lead to the greatest threat to the writing author--researched in central texts and self-documentations of my favorite authors. Fear and excitement, yes indeed, that was what it should be about, the feelings of the author pursuing each other shortly before his disappearance, shortly before the writing. As if it were a seed-vessel from which everything to follow would develop in a completely natural way, I tested the title of my paper on my lips already: "The Threat Theory"... All later statements would be given wings by the demands of this strong heading, although I wasn't imagining that at the end I would have been successful at accomplishing more than several diverse beginnings of such a theory.

Nevertheless, in the first storm of countless ideas and arguments there was neither a direction to my future study nor a depth or vertical connection that I couldn't have "measured the circumference of" and in a certain way already explained the problematics of in a matter of a few seconds. I was soon forced, however, to admit to myself that for a serious treatment of this topic my knowledge of psychoanalysis was either not recent enough and/or not sufficiently present in the first place. After all, it was about nothing more and nothing less than proving writing to be an event of primary desire (in contrast to the conception of the detoured, sublimated nature of cultural work)--to give it an autonomous ranking between loving and killing. Such a theory, inspired by private experiences and some I had read, always runs the risk, when examined closely and scientifically, of turning out to be coarse nonsense and not a bold revolutionary realization. In order not to get lost in fatal false judgments, I first had to willingly open myself to all available information that touched on my topic and to keep my own new discoveries under wraps. Therefore, my first active step in the matter was to take up the reading of several of Freud's early works. But immediately, when I read the wonderful case history about Dora with tussis nervosa and fluor albus, I began to be much more interested in the writing style of the storyteller Freud than in the scientific practice. The sedate manner of the representation of adventurous percep-

tions and of original thoughts read like a reflection of unsurpassable, innermost thought--to which the history of the bourgeois educational novel had now advanced. And, as if the author had said to himself: what is being revealed to me here is doubtless so revolutionary that I can present it to the public using only a style of greatest possible reserve and ceremonious care--I must keep out of my writing all of my own fears--which I have to thank, after all, for the results of my research; I can't want to prove anything by storm or carry on any brusque polemics; if I don't control the course of my sentences very precisely, I will with one fell swoop make a joke of every effect that would benefit the matter. It was certain to me that Freud belonged to my topic as an author and that the first chapter of "The Threat Theory" would be about him; especially since that gave me the opportunity to try out my methodology in the beginning on Freud himself, the author.

Unfortunately, I didn't succeed in reaching a comparable reining of my own excitement. My interest in the paper gushed out in every direction, indulged in the most distant details so that I was afraid that if a small practical beginning were not made immediately, my entire enthusiasm might become paralyzed again without anything having first been brought about. (The experience-structure of the eternally unsuccessful conversations with S. was obviously still having an effect here and had to be overcome here and

now, once and for all.) I therefore forced myself to put together a reading list, pondering already, however, at the same time, the number of copies in the first printing and at which publishing house my study might soon appear.

I didn't bother about Lea during this time at all. She took note of my restless reflection and my little explosions of delight in silent awe--and very likely knew what was getting underway inside me. Already at this point she was as good as non-existent. Once, as she walked toward me from the window, I turned her away with the words: "Turn around, Lea, and look out again. Now all paths lead away from you." She cursed quietly as if a long period of mourning stood ahead for her: "I hope the very last chapter of your work will deal strictly with being rejected. How you'll be rejected by what you write. Imagine that the door, through which you've gone in and out daily, becomes gigantic in the end, a gate to the desert, and you're hurled out with a kick, and you run away with the insane fear that you're Tom Thumb and will be eaten up by a desert mouse..."

I didn't reply to that but packed up my reading list and left the house. I took the bus to F. and disappeared into the university library. From then ^{on} I sat in the reading room there for seven or eight hours every day, and in the evening I even checked out a half dozen volumes that I took home with me. I made extensive excerpts, caused thousands of already printed lines to appear anew in my

handwriting, and it soon became such a voluminous collection of copies and quotes that I had to make an index for it in order to make it usable. After several months I began to write. Yes, yes, I called out to Lea, I, too, must express myself somehow! (Lea, by the way, put herself to bed on that very day with a feverish illness. Now she wants to distract me this way, I thought, and I didn't bother myself about her. But I observed, incidentally, how lovingly she knew how to take care of herself...)

My work came along so energetically and smoothly that I wanted to sing as I wrote. The plan and concept of my paper were obviously set up so adeptly and grippingly that the prospect of its completion became more liberating and exciting from sentence to sentence. The language I was writing emerged from the intimate umbilical cord of my passive, self-satisfied sensitivities--dependably and sonorously it reported about facts far removed from me and about occurrences that I would never have dared to speak about before. I said to myself: now you've finally achieved the breakthrough, the long-desired breakthrough, the birth of an authorial nature after the difficult labor pains of forgetting and being lied to. (Whereby the feeling for the word "breakthrough," in keeping with my topic, was doubly-charged: by the desire to climb out of one's own head, as flowers break through the earth's surface; and by the fear, on the other hand, of an organic tear, of the penetrating

swelling of a ruptured stomach...) In the course of my writing I had freed myself more and more from the excerpts and avoided, as much as was possible, using quotes: in the lovely, even flow of my text, the bothersome quotations would have intruded like crags and reefs. I intended, at the end, to gather up the most vital sources into a set of annotations. I was furthermore convinced that I'd found a diction so unique that "foreign voices" shouldn't be allowed to interrupt.

After ten almost sleepless days and nights I had ended the Freud chapter and was in the process of introducing the next section of my study, the middle-point of which was to be an analysis of the Klingsohr fairy tale in Novalis' Ofterdingen. Suddenly, a comment I'd just written down gave me a powerful jolt of a shock; it read: "The sharp broken pieces of a shattered system of desire pushed against each other with a muffled din like the ice floes in Caspar David Friedrich's painting 'The Wrecked Hope'..." This sentence wasn't original! I knew it from another context. Agitatedly, I looked under "system of desire" in my file box and found, with the author reference "Artaud," the same sentence, almost to the word, noted in my writing, so similar to what I'd just written that one might confuse the two--only the embellishment "with a muffled din" had been added by me, that was my only personal role in this formulation, which, by the way, was taken from a note of

commentary to a reprint of Artaud's "Letter to the Bishop of Rodez" in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung...

How could such a thing happen to me? Unconsciously, unconsciously, I babbled to myself, shaking my head. But a worrying suspicion had now gotten hold of me, and I leafed anxiously back through what I'd written and read the first chapter again. I must say that after the shocking mistake I'd just proved myself to have made, I could no longer uphold the boundless respect I'd felt for my text up till then; all at once none of that about which I'd prided myself was visible: its proud and euphonious flowing along could no longer be found. It read, on the contrary, closer to imbalanced, to avoid saying: clumsy and pieced together. As engagingly as the individual sentences may have been formed, in and of themselves, they choked up in their succession and, read aloud, sank in awkward gulping.

Shortly thereafter I again hit upon a formulation the originality of which I immediately doubted. Here the talk was of the authorial role of the analyst, who foretells his patient's case history in the form of an encoded story: "And what if he (the analyst) now brought such a painful twist into the story that Judith (his patient) ran screaming through the room?"

Yes, in point of fact, what a painful twist in the story of my "Threat Theory" when I found out that this Judith, along with all of the polished technical story-

telling formulations that surrounded her, first appeared in the twenties in a German erotic trivial novel and once again--unconsciously, unconsciously!--had been taken over by me with only slight alterations. I really did want to run through every room screaming, and I did scream, in the end, as it became obvious after several further samplings that I'd taken whole sections, indeed, whole pages in the first chapter from foreign authors in flowing, almost exact-to-the-word reproductions. Plagiarisms, I cried, plagiarisms, these are nothing but plagiarisms. Lea! I didn't produce a single independent sentence. I'm the most bungling author of all times, an unsuspecting plagiarist, a copyist! What an insidious, cruel memory has control over me! Erases things, whispers things to me--whatever it feels like. What an evil, evil apparatus! And I, I, this zero-person, this through station of all imaginable literature, I'm simply not vital enough to storm this devilish machine and smash it to pieces. Lea, please come and help me...Lea, who was shivering all over from a high fever, was standing in front of the dressing mirror and attempting to make up her face. She had covered her pale skin to the collarbone with a subdued blooming pink, had painted dark-green shadows under her eyes, and applied a greasy green-black to her lips--a face full of death and life. She'd pulled her hair back from her forehead and put it up with silver clips at the temples. She got dressed: her tattered chiffon dress, also

green, soft green, which she'd been wearing every single day since she had followed me home from Dr. W.'s clinic...And in this moment I knew that I, as an author, had only a single chance: I had to write about Lea. Any other topic would unavoidably lead again and again to stolen writing.

There, she said, and turned to face me, that writing and I, that was a knife fight in the dark, now wasn't it? But now why don't we go to Cornwall...

To Cornwall? But that's not here, Lea--

No, it's over in England.

And your fever?

I'm sure it'll disappear on the way, if we take a plane, come on!

Post disaster utopia, I thought, and I wanted to start writing about it immediately.

5

In London I for the first time met people who knew Lea. And so many, right off, that I was forced to assume that Lea was a celebrity here, known city-wide. It was, in any case, a continual putting-of-arms-around-one-another as we walked through Kensington, and I, too, the strange zero-person on vacation, was greeted and welcomed by these friendly, inat-

tentive people, all a little over thirty, who linked arms sometimes with Lea, sometimes with me, accompanied us for a while, sighed and smiled, eventually spoke about some piece of music or other they just had to hear right away, and then broke off from us again. A strangely comforting coming and going of unknown friends, a movement as in someone's last memory of life. Although any of these people could have served as informants to provide me with enlightenment about Lea's former life, it seemed unacceptable to me to tear them from this slumber of self-evident greetings by asking them, for example: "Can't you tell me who this girl is with whom I'm crossing the Portobello Market?" It wasn't important to me, at this moment, to find that out. From out of a betting office a tall, thin fellow came running after us, wearing a black, smooth corduroy suit spattered with egg yolk, an American who put seventy pounds into Lea's hand because he supposedly still owed her money. Lea took it without a word while the American turned to me and said that they had all become a little quiet lately, it was something like a transitional phase, now almost all anyone did was listen to music, and it would be better if someone like Don were there to blow a few fresh thoughts into one's brain; for after all, if a person began to reflect all by himself, all that would come out would be a spleen, and today almost everybody's running around with an individual spleen like that. Then he asked Lea if she'd heard anything from old Don lately. No,

answered Lea, I haven't heard anything from Donald. I'm living in West Germany now. At that, the American looked at me with idiotic respect, he was apparently embarrassed about his careless American small talk and inquired of me, in all seriousness and in German, about the condition of Ernst Bloch's health. Before I could say anything to that, Lea had asked him if he could lend us his little Austin for a few days. For that she wanted to give him the seventy pounds back. Lea apparently had no idea what seventy pounds were actually worth, she simply considered the bills to be arbitrary objects to trade among friends. It could also be, of course, that this absurd circulation of money between the two was arranged for me, just for appearance's sake, for whatever reason...

At any rate the American agreed, took the money back, and drove his Austin up for us.

After we'd found our way out of London, Lea, who was driving, said that she'd once left lying in this car the keys to a fisherman's cottage in Cornwall, in which we could stay quite comfortably. She had the feeling that the keys must still be here somewhere. She asked me to look for them. And I did find the keys, as a matter of fact--they were stuck between the back seat and the side wall. Why, Lea, are you trying to put this trip over as a trick of free improvisation when you've obviously planned it so carefully? I'm not trying to put anything over as anything, she

replied irritatedly, I haven't planned anything. Didn't you know that good luck rules the roost in London? It rules the roost for me and my friends there, anyway.

Maybe it had to do with the fact that I'd had nothing to do with Lea for some time, else I would never have thought of this stupid question. It was always the same thing: Lea tried to surprise me with her little miracles and to amaze me, and I could think of nothing better than to tell her right to her face that I'd figured her out. Obviously, I still hadn't comprehended the Lea System. A lucky break, she said happily, now we have the keys and don't need to stay at the hotel in Lizard. The cottage is actually a little house with sturdy stone walls. We fixed it up quite nicely. There's even running water. No electricity, though. Only gas in bottles. And petroleum lamps. At night you can hear the sea. But the cottage isn't right on the sea. And there's no beach there, either...

When had Lea been in England? With whom had she fixed up the house in Cornwall? I restrained myself from asking her. No doubt I would have gotten the usual oracle as an answer: "With you! Don't tell me you've forgotten it?" "I"--I was the eternal punchline of these unnatural jokes, I was the solution to all my riddles.

But not this time, this time everything happened quite differently.

When we reached the little village near Lizard it was pitch black, I couldn't recognize any sign of inhabitation, any street lights; there was no longer light in a house or bar. All the inhabitants were probably already in bed. Only in the cottage in which we wanted to stay, which was set apart somewhat, on the way up to the cliffs, could a lit window be seen. So the cottage was already occupied. And that, without a shadow of a doubt, was not in Lea's plan. She became very restless and put on the brake with a "dead man's foot," so that we made a little leap in the direction of the ditch. Then we ran up to within about a hundred meters of the cottage, the goal of our trip. From there we saw a young man in the window with a broad mane of curly hair, bent over a table and writing on paper, with a uniformity unknown to me, by the light of an oil lamp. Don, Lea said, and lost her voice. She pulled me back by the arm. My God, that's Don...Just look, Don has come home! Let's go, we can't stay here, let's go, do you understand?

She got angry with me as if I'd insisted on taking up quarters in the cottage under any circumstances. But I was much too tired to comprehend anything at all, much less to get my way about anything. Lea turned around, pulled me along, we ran to the car, and she drove back to Lizard, dissolved in sobs and laughter, and hit her forehead again and again, incomprehendingly, against the steering wheel. And so I experienced Lea's first severe upset that had nothing

to do with me. And I have to admit that I first felt it to be a welcome chance to catch my breath in our somewhat overly-strained relationship. At that point I guess I still didn't love Lea...

After we'd found a hotel room in Lizard and been able to stretch out on our beds, Lea calmed down a little bit and asked me to listen to her explanation.

Don, she began, is completely different, compared to you. When I broke up with you back then, in February of 1970 (translated into my system that meant: parting from S. in exactly that month...), it happened because I wanted to be with Don. Don was one of the leading radicals in the student movement in England, and while together with him I got to know political work. It was a time when I made many, many friendships and experienced very, very important things. We often stayed in this little house in Cornwall. Don prepared his speeches there and wrote organizational papers. And I helped him along, since I'd learned pretty quickly how to express myself appropriately for the cause and was soon even better at it than he. But one day the suspicion was raised against him that he'd taken part in a bank robbery in London. An absurd and cruel suspicion, as you can imagine. But the Home Office had given the official order to charge him criminally so that the police could take measures against him--and just to discredit the whole move-

ment. A huge search was begun for him, but they didn't catch him. He'd disappeared, had gone under cover somewhere.

I don't know why, but he didn't want a trial. But all the same they did catch and arrest me. For a whole week I was questioned and tortured. Yes, tortured; they didn't pull me by the legs or anything, no, they gave me a tea to drink with some substance mixed in it so that I got big fat warts all over my body! They wanted to attack my womanhood, they wanted to disfigure me! Naturally I didn't tell them anything. After all, I didn't know myself, unfortunately, where Don was keeping himself. When I was out again I looked and looked for him everywhere. But he hadn't left behind any traces at all. I supposed that he'd transplanted himself to Algeria and that I'd never see him again. I had a terrible breakdown, let myself go, and did all kinds of rash things. I don't want to talk about them now. Somehow I had the feeling that Don had disappeared from my life forever. And then, when I was completely, completely, pitifully alone, your name was constantly crossing my lips, as if by itself. I babbled your name to myself constantly, and I don't know why. And on the trip to F. I called to you out loud...

Lea's painful-sounding, whispered, hurried manner of speaking and her defenseless restlessness, which was immediately transferred to my stomach nerves, made me think that this

Don was without a doubt a date in her history. I found it incomprehensible, though, that this report, too, which introduced me to a far distant person, as if inevitably, as if magnetically attracted, flowed, in the end, into the sphere that surrounded me--a sphere that Lea, in the meantime, had darkened to opacity. She had to go now, she said after a while, she couldn't stand it anymore. She had to see Don.

But she remained lying on her bed, and only after she'd repeated several times the announcement that she was going did she actually go...

I sat for a whole night long bent over the lavatory in this damp, low-ceilinged hotel room and smoked, smoked continuously.

I thought about the "one completely different from me," about Don, whom Lea had introduced into my life with a few words and brought uncomfortably close to me. I'd always wanted to be the one completely different from me, myself, and now Lea knew such a one, had even loved him like me, and had in that way connected him with me insoluably. I felt jealousy attack me. What did I have to compete with a political leader? What did I have in place of a readiness to fight, the ability to suffer, exasperation, and reason? What could I place against his virtues other than the burnt remains of my unsuccessful writing?

A whole long night remained for me in which I pondered back and forth whether Lea would return to me or not; I counted everything around me by evens and odds; four hand towels, she'll come back, seven spots from squashed flies on the wall, she won't. The story could end one way or the other, there wasn't the least bit of "certainty of feeling" that one had heard about so often before.

I thought for a moment about the old Fontane, who's supposed to have said of his books that, after all, he could have written them completely differently...

It became day, or at least the impenetrable fog outside became visible, and Lea hadn't returned...

"Where are you, light, it's morning...The morning disappears darkly without the light of your eyes." I called out these two verses by Pavese resoundingly, like a drunken reciter of Shakespeare in an American western.

As soon as I heard the morning noises of the personnel in the hall, I got up, rinsed out my mouth, and went downstairs to pay for the overnight stay for two. Then I walked a little hesitantly back and forth on the street in front of the hotel and didn't quite know whether or not to go back to the reception desk to get the departure times for trains to London. Suddenly I was standing directly in front of our Austin and saw that Lea was sitting inside, leaning over the steering wheel, and sleeping. I knocked on the windshield, and she woke right up and opened the car

door for me.

I want to leave England again, Lea said, and yawned. You can only really know the written-down people, she added, those we read about in biographies. Even the most patient interest for a real person is paralyzed, in the long run. They're simply too large a field of knowledge. Don't you think so?

I thought, now she's starting to sound just like me. But why was she doing it? Now there was no longer any talk of the one completely different from me--Don was as if never experienced. I looked at her, from the side, when we were already underway again: she looked very tired, a little wrinkled up, but without any great impression in her face.

Now I was completely sure that I would write about Lea; and no longer, in fact, to protect myself from her lies, but rather because the feeling of loving Lea was nothing other than the feeling of starting a book.

On the day after our return home I rode to F. in order to carry all of the checked-out books that remained from my unsuccessful study to the university library. At the return desk a very young student stood in front of me, and from his stack of books a brochure slipped out which bore the title: "The Threat Theory." I can't say that this, after all the humiliations I'd had to deal with during my previous work, upset or embarrassed me especially. I asked the student to

let me take a look at the little volume. From the dust cover I learned that the author, an economist close to West German capitalism and a member of the Catholic Organization of Entrepreneurs, wanted to instruct his friends about the psychology and strategy of organized strikes by the masses. This piece of propaganda, of all things, bore my title! It was clear to me that I'd have to understand this mocking coincidence as an allusion to the unavoidable totalitariness of political meaning, which isn't in a position to be separated from even the most remote thought, the simplest nervous tension.

Not that I would ever have doubted it: I mean, by the way, even from the central thesis of my study: no text exists that doesn't write more about its author than he says about himself; no text that doesn't make clear more than the author himself was in the clear about--It follows, I believe, that this "more" of a text can be found above all in political readings.

Now in the meantime, you'd just as soon not know all of this; how can you worry about the readings and effects of the meaning of your own text, which is hardly writeable, as it is? I therefore determined, in spite of my disgusting discovery, to stick to the title "The Threat Theory" and to use it for my story about Lea, too.

There are still minutes, indeed, half hours, in which I babble as I write as if Lea were still near me. In truth, she hasn't been with me for a long time. Or at least I don't see her in my rooms anymore. I'd wished that our life together would never again lose the emotional status we'd finally reached: that it would always be between us as it was after a severe upset; that it would be as quietly understanding after every exchanged word as after a severe upset. But two people can't get along in peace when one decides to write about the other because in this, and only in this, is he able to recognize his love for the other. Actually, Lea and I didn't argue or have divided opinions or make other nonsensical noises. But a complete soundlessness, as every loving relationship knows at least for a few seconds, when faces lean against each other helplessly--that existed between Lea and me at no time. For everything, everything that happened with us was given sound by what I wrote, and Lea had to fear that even her glances were making noise...

And now, as I begin on the last section of my work, which undoubtedly will deal with being rejected, as Lea had sworn-- now I know that she couldn't resist the siren calls of her being-described; her body, collapsing, without strength,

dissolved into writing, gave itself over to my guardianship completely and now, united with me, she had made me into someone else, too--someone whose ceaseless writing tries to do nothing other than separate us again, to reestablish the old separation--so that we can see each other again! And that's the only reason why I'm still writing and why I'll keep on writing until my memory sighs its last sigh.

Sappho once addresses Charon with the words: "You are gentler than was thought," and I'm now incapable of reading this line correctly; I'm incapable of not misunderstanding it. Stubbornly, the concepts lose their way and represent the very softest tenderness, which could be surpassed only by its own dissolution: You are gentler than a thought, almost as gentle as nothing, but that's not possible to imagine, and therefore, such a comparison with a thought is the least conceivable one. Without the misunderstanding caused by Lea, the meaning of the line is, quite simply: you, death, take me with less force than I had feared. But to me it means, in fact: you, Lea, were gentle in such a way that it was enough for me to call you gentle in order to push you away from me...

And this isn't the only case in which Lea prescribes the meaning of things for me. If I look at a reproduction of the painting "Departure," for example, which is by the Canadian painter Alex Colville and is especially touching

to me since Lea disappeared, of course, I believe without a single reservational doubt that the woman standing there in the lonely telephone booth on the empty quay is talking on the phone with her lover on the ship that can be seen departing some distance away. I think to myself, in fact, that the two of them were unable to stop saying goodbye and will keep on talking to each other on the phone until the ship can no longer be seen or the connection breaks off due to too great a distance. I will allow only this interpretation--of an endlessly drawn-out farewell--although, for various reasons, it's plenty unlikely (the ship leaving is a freighter, for example, and it wouldn't be possible to dial its number from a phone booth, just like that...). But only this heartfelt error arouses my compassion--it allows Lea and me to appear in the painting. And the picture itself, because it isn't moving, promises the yearned for stop in the middle of a separation--a permanent moment between not-yet-abandoned and final departure...

While I slept next to Lea, I dreamt about her; I dreamt about no more than what was: namely, that she was watching over my sleep...What do my hands do when I'm sleeping, Lea? Do they ball up into fists? Then open them, please. Or do they even claw into the sheets? Then don't allow it, please. I want them to lie beside me, exhausted, during this lazy midday nap...Don't I swallow much too often? But why am I

asking, anyway, with my open mouth pressed into the pillow-- she can't understand it. My voice wraps itself around each word, so it sounds like nothing, when I talk.

The last time I saw Lea's entire figure, she was reaching into the refrigerator with a burning cigarette between her fingers and getting out a container of fruit yogurt. From that moment on, which impressed itself on me as if it were the violation of a law of nature, she became less and less visible from hour to hour. At that time, due to my ceaseless writing, I'd lost all strength to organize the unhealthy symptoms that I couldn't ignore in myself into a recognizable disease. I practically longed for a decisive injury that would transform the swarming vermin of symptoms into clinical orderliness. Lea's reach into the refrigerator: the seven hundred degree heat of the cigarette embers and the eighteen degree Celsius cold of the refrigerator--the two extreme temperatures next to each other, touching each other directly--were suddenly, in my imagination, no longer possible to bear. It was the appearance of a fear lost long ago, an incomprehensibility from the prehistory of civilized thinking, a wild sensation that upset and blinded me. And nevertheless, I'm firmly convinced that from then on the greatest change didn't occur with me but with Lea herself. Her continuously diminishing appearance didn't find its cause in me and in a disturbed or failing capacity to see.

For everything around me--the backs of the books in the bookcases as well as the silverware on the table in my apartment and the birches outside in the distance--I could still recognize all those things without diminished clarity. But not Lea: she became less and less recognizable, a crooked, dark fragment of a body with a fissured outline, as if millions and millions of shadow bacteria had attacked her and were gradually eating her out of my sight. And she herself appeared not to notice it at all. You could say she did nothing more than simply stay still, like a star that accepts its cooling off without moving from the spot.

She'd suggested to me that I behave especially quietly while writing about her so that new impressions and impulses about her wouldn't overtake me--which my slow and difficult writing wouldn't have been able to keep up with. And it may be that in the friction of these diametrically opposite contemporary histories--her paralysis in the present and my progressive remembering--a lethally-mixed fog resulted, in which Lea decayed and fell to pieces. The last of her that I saw were two fingertips that were spreading a pile of dead flies on a piece of buttered bread.

The slice of bread disappeared somewhere, into an invisible mouth, and it was horrible enough to have to imagine to oneself that Lea would eat something so disgusting! I think the loss of her visibility accompanied a process of degeneration and destruction of her self-control.

After I hadn't seen her anymore for several days, I found her excrement once or twice in the bathroom, because she'd obviously forgotten to pull the cord. Then, too--once, early in the morning, shortly before I woke up--I heard a fingernail glide along my face. On my thin-walled, dried-out skin I heard the scratching sound of writing--Lea's farewell words, I thought, and went back to sleep, troubled.

After that--not a sound, not a touch, not a sight of her, nothing. Nothing--other than the smell of an Italian quince perfume that she dabbed behind her earlobe every morning. This smell, fresh daily, remained the only and last indication of Lea's unceasing presence, and its source was so much closer than anything I'd ever felt before that I imagined to myself that maybe Lea had given up her bodily form only in order to overcome and get rid of this last distance, too--the one between our bodies.

And, nevertheless, I didn't feel very well with this new closeness, which was almost the same as a permeation--No, I very soon found it completely unbearable. She interfered with my work. She cut off the excursions of my memory, for the strong smell created an unyielding, numbing presence that eventually made any further writing impossible. I pleaded with Lea, speaking out loud, to distance herself from me a little again. Naturally I got no answer, nor was my plea fulfilled silently. Now I suffered from terrible headaches, dizzy spells, nausea, and--what was the worst--

from the torturous desire for a strange body, for body touches, body embraces, body fights. A desire that demanded so much from me that the thoughts in my head stormed around like the rain of sparks in freshly raked embers. I gathered my papers together--the written-on ones and the empty ones--stuck them into Lea's shoulder bag, and ran with it out of the house. I took the bus to F. and then the train out to the airport. Only there did I make the plan to fly to Copenhagen to meet with S. I could discuss "our work" with her...I suddenly had a great need to see her, to embrace her.

In the arrival hall I met my friend, Dr. W., who greeted me with a superficial friendliness as if we were only slightly acquainted. He asked me if everything was okay with me. And I was so shocked at his less-than-intimate manner that I could answer only with a weak "yes," although actually there were all kinds of things I should have talked to him about. And then, breaking away from me hurriedly, he said: "Say hello to good old -- for me!"...It was my name he named, my name!

As if I weren't standing in front of him in the flesh...Whom should I greet? Whom? Me myself?

I didn't have a chance to ask him for an explanation, he had to pick someone up and wasn't to be stopped. Either he had allowed himself a stupid psychiatrist's joke with me or I was (as a result of my overly-stressed and at

the same time still quince-perfume-fogged ability to comprehend) not in any condition to interpret the hurried scene correctly. Yes, now I was so upset that I longed--here, in the next instant, in the middle of a crowd of people who were moving much too hectickly--to collapse in exhaustion.

I'd like to see gestures of exhaustion--I can't stand this unscrupulous speed around me anymore. I wished that this hall would suddenly transform itself into a place of imprisonment, of forceful safekeeping, so that these rapid people would find themselves, after a short while, in bodily poses of hopeless time-passing. Gestures devoted to the dissolution of all active movement--the forehead bent over, unsteady, sinking down...

During the flight to Copenhagen I became very, very sick. The upset about Dr. W.'s puzzling behavior, the more and more painfully penetrating stench of quince--and on top of all that lots of deep air pockets--made my stomach quiver as if electrically charged. From all of my salivary glands my mouth watered--an expression that applies much better to the condition of nausea than to one of appetite. I had to swallow continuously, and regarded my swallowing as the last bastion against the vomiting that was ahead for me. I pulled my ticket out of my coat pocket and read the contract conditions of my transport in order to concentrate on something. In the process, my glance fell on the return ticket, and I saw that there, in front of my name, the classifica-

tion "Ms." had been written in.

Everything in me became paralyzed, so that the oncoming vomiting stopped for a few seconds, too...Something must have gone wrong with you, and you didn't even quite catch on to it...Somebody was laughing at me. I couldn't keep anything straight in my head. I jumped up from my seat, ran staggering to the restroom, and vomited.

When I straightened up again, I saw myself in the mirror with a clarity unknown to me and without any fear...

Yes, it was her hairstyle, her way of putting her hair up at the temples; it was also her make-up--the dark-green eyeshadow, the lips painted wide like a clown's--and I was wearing her tattered chiffon dress under my coat. What I'd always wished for, I no longer needed to look for. I was Lea. Or at any rate: I'd turned everything that remained of Lea into my own. It's impossible for me to say whether this was the result of a long-lasting admiration or whether it was a cruel robbery and murder.

I went back to my seat, fairly calmed down, and now very much looked forward to my reunion with S. in Copenhagen.

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