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NOTES TO LITERATURE

Volume One

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York

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salvation, is free of apology, of any attempt to justify anything that exists, to promise any permanence. On the principle of non confundar he places his hopes on unreserved surrender to the natural context; for him once again, the rest, in all its hidden meaning, is silence. Hence time, the power of transience itself, becomes the highest being that Proust's work, it too a roman philosophique like those of Voltaire and France in its thousand refractions, acknowledges. Proust keeps a greater distance from any kind of positiveness, and the substance of his work is proportionately closer to the theological than Bergson's doctrine. The idea of immortality is tolerated only in what is itself, as Proust well knew, transient—in works of art as the last metaphors for revelation in the authentic language. Thus in a later passage, on the night after his first feuilleton has appeared in Le Figaro, Proust dreams of Bergotte as though he were still alive—as though the printed word were lodging a protest against death, until the writer, awakening, realizes the vanity of even this comfort. No interpretation is adequate to this passage, not, as the cliché would have it, because it is above thought in its artistic dignity, but because it has made its home on the border where thought too finds its limit.

After the radio broadcast of "Short Commentaries on Proust," I received letters of protest about my allegedly excessive use of foreign words for the first time since my youth. I looked through the text of the talk and found no unusual number of foreign words in it, although people may have held some French expressions that arose in connection with the French subject matter against me. Thus I can hardly explain the outraged correspondence except through the contrast between literary texts and their interpretation. With great narrative prose, interpretation easily takes on the coloration of the foreign word. The syntax may sound more foreign than the vocabulary. Attempts at formulation that swim against the stream of the usual linguistic splashing in order to capture the intended matter precisely, and that take pains to fit complex conceptual relationships into the framework of syntax, arouse rage because they require effort. The person who is naive about language will ascribe the strangeness of such writing to the foreign words, which he holds responsible for everything he doesn't understand even when he is quite familiar with the words. Ultimately, what is going on is largely a defense against ideas, which are imputed to the words; the blame is misdirected. I once tested this in America when I gave a disconcerting lecture to an emigré association to which I belonged, a lecture from which I had carefully eliminated every foreign word. Nevertheless, the lecture met with precisely the same opposition I am now encountering in Germany. I have had this kind of experience since my childhood, when old Dreibus, a neighbor who lived on my street, attacked me in a rage as I was conversing harmlessly with a comrade in the streetcar on my way to...
school: "You goddamned little devil! Shut up with your High German and learn to speak German right." I had scarcely recovered from the fright Herr Dreibus gave me when he was brought home in a pushcart not long afterwards, completely intoxicated, and it was probably not much later that he died. He was the first to teach me what *rancune* [from the French, meaning rancor or spite] was, a word that has no proper native equivalent in German, unless one were to confuse it with the word *Ressentiment* [resentment], a word currently enjoying an unfortunate popularity in Germany but which was likewise imported rather than invented by Nietzsche. In short, it is a case of sour grapes: outrage over foreign words is to be explained in terms of the psychic state of the one who is angry, for whom some grapes are hanging too high up.

I don't want to make myself sound better than I was. When my friend Erich and I took some delight in using foreign words at the Gymnasium, we were acting as though we were already the privileged possessors of the grapes. It would be difficult to determine now whether this behavior preceded the *rancune* or not; certainly the two went together very well. Using *Zelotentum* [zealotry] or *Paraenesis* [paraenesis] was so enjoyable because we sensed that some of the gentlemen to whom we were entrusted for our education during World War I were not quite sure what those words meant. Of course they could warn us with red marks to avoid unnecessary foreign words, but otherwise they could do nothing more to us than they did when Erich chose "Dear Habakuk" as the salutation for his essay "My Summer Vacation: Letter to a Friend," while I, more cautious and more staid but equally unwilling to divulge the name of my real friend to the head teacher, used the precocious phrase "Dear friend" in my essay. I will not deny that I sometimes followed the bad example of an elderly great-aunt. As a child, according to the family history, she had looked up the French word for "kneading trough" in her French dictionary and then asked her poor tutor for it; when he had no answer she responded scornfully, "Tsk tsk! *La huche.*** Despite this sinister legacy, however, we considered ourselves the avengers of Hanno Budendenbrooks, and felt that with our esoteric foreign words we were shooting arrows at our indispensable patriots [in the classroom on the home front] from our secret kingdom which could neither be reached from the Wester Forest [i.e., Westerwald's German dictionary] nor "einge-deutsch," "Germanized," as they liked to say, in any other way. And our instincts were not so wrong. Foreign words constituted little cells of resistance to the nationalism of World War I. The pressure to think along prescribed lines forced resistance into deviant and harmless paths, but in times of crisis gestures that are in themselves irrelevant often acquire disproportionate symbolic significance. But the fact that we happened upon foreign words in particular was hardly due to political considerations. Rather, since language is erotically charged in its words, at least for the kind of person who is capable of expression, love drives us to foreign words. In reality, it is that love that sets off the indignation over their use. The early craving for foreign words is like the craving for foreign and if possible exotic girls; what lures us is a kind of exogamy of language, which would like to escape from the sphere of what is always the same, the spell of what one is and knows anyway. At that time foreign words made us blush, like saying the name of a secret love. National groups who want one-dish meals even in language find this response hateful. It is from this stratum that the affective tension that gives foreign words their fecund and dangerous quality arises, the quality that their friends are seduced by and their enemies sense more readily than do people who are indifferent to them.

This tension, however, seems peculiar to the Germans, just as one of the stereotypical, although hardly sincerely intended accusations directed by German nationalism against the German spirit is that it lets itself be impressed in too servile a way by things from abroad. Language too bears witness to the fact that civilization as Latinization only half succeeded in Germany. In the French language, where the Gallic and the Roman elements interpenetrated so early and so thoroughly, there seems to be no consciousness of foreign borrowings at all; in England, where the Saxon and the Norman linguistic layers were superimposed on one another, there may be a tendency to linguistic doubling, in which the Saxon elements represent the archaic or concrete aspect and the Latin represent the civilizatory or modern aspect, but the latter are too widespread and too much the marks of a historical victory to be experienced as foreign by anyone but an intransigent romantic. In Germany, however, where the Latinate civilizatory components did not fuse with the older popular language but instead were set off from it through the formation of educated elites and by courtly custom, the foreign words stick out, unassimilated, and are available to the writer who chooses them with care; Benjamin spoke of the author inserting the silver rib of the foreign word into the body of language. What seems inorganic here is in actuality only historical evidence, evidence of the failure of that unification. Such disparateness means not only suffering in language, and what
Hebbel called the "schism of creation," but suffering in reality as well. From this perspective Nazism may be regarded as a violent, belated, and therefore deadly attempt to force a bourgeois integration of Germany that had not taken place. No language, not even the old vernacular language, is organic and natural—something restorationist doctrines would like to make it; but every victory of the advanced, civilizatory linguistic element contains as a precipitate something of the injustice done to the older and weaker element. Karl Kraus sensed this when he wrote an elegy for a sound that had been eliminated in the process of rationalization. The Western languages have tempered that injustice in something like the way British imperialism dealt politically with its subject peoples. Compensation as consideration for those who have been subjugated may well be the general definition of culture in the emphatic sense; in Germany, however, this equilibrium was never achieved, precisely because the Roman, rational principle never achieved uncontested dominance. The foreign words in the German language call attention to that: to the fact that no pax romana was concluded, that what was untamed survived, and to the fact that when Humanism took the reins it was experienced not as the substance of human beings, as intended, but as something unreconciled, something imposed upon them. To this extent German is both less and more than the Western languages; it is less by virtue of the brittle and unfinished quality that provides the individual writer with so little that is firm, a quality that stands out crassly in the older New High German texts and is still evident in the relationship of foreign words to their context; and it is more because the language is not completely trapped within the net of socialization and communication. It can be used for expression because it does not guarantee expression in advance. It is consistent with this state of affairs that in the more culturally encapsulated domains of the German language like Viennese, where prebourgeois courtly and elite features were mediated with the popular language by the Church and the Enlightenment, the foreign words (with which the Viennese dialect teems) lose the extraterritorial and aggressive quality that characterizes them elsewhere in the German language. One need only hear a Viennese Portier [doorman] talk about a "rekmendierter Brief" [registered letter] to become aware of the difference, a linguistic atmosphere in which what is foreign is foreign and familiar at the same time, as in the conversation the two counts in Hoffmannsthal's Der Schloßiere have about the lead character, the "difficult man"; the one complains that "he has us saying too many words that end in -ieren,"* to which the other responds, "Yes, he could have restrained himself [sich menagieren] a bit."

No such reconciliation has been achieved in German, nor can any be brought about by the writer's individual will. He can, however, take advantage of the tension between the foreign word and the language by incorporating that tension into his own reflections and his own technique. With the foreign word he can effect a beneficial interruption of the conformist moment of language, the muddy stream in which the specific expressive intention drowns. The hard, contoured quality of the foreign word, the very thing that makes it stand out from the continuum of the language, can be used to bring out what is intended but obscured by the bad generality of language use. Further, the discrepancy between the foreign word and the language can be made to serve the expression of truth. Language participates in reification, the separation of subject matter and thought. The customary ring of naturalness deceives us about that. It creates the illusion that what is said is immediately equivalent to what is meant. By acknowledging itself as a token, the foreign word reminds us bluntly that all real language has something of the token in it. It makes itself language's scapegoat, the bearer of the dissonance that language has to give form to and not merely prettify. Not the least of what we resist in the foreign word is that it illuminates something true of all words: that language imprisons those who speak it, that as a medium of their own it has essentially failed. This can be demonstrated with certain neologisms, German expressions invented to replace foreign words for the sake of the illusory ideal of indigenousness. They always sound more foreign and more forced than the genuine foreign words themselves. In comparison with the latter, they take on a deceitful quality, a claim to an equivalence of speech and object that is refuted by the conceptual nature of all speech. Foreign words demonstrate the impossibility of an ontology of language: they confront even concepts that try to pass themselves off as origin itself with their mediatedness, their moment of being subjectively constructed, their arbitrariness. Terminology, the quintessence of foreign words in the individual disciplines, and especially in philosophy, is not only thing-like rigidification but also its opposite: critique of concepts' claim to exist in themselves when in fact language has inscribed in them something posited, something that could be other-

*In German, -ieren is the suffix used to create new infinitives from foreign roots. — Translator's note.
wise. Terminology destroys the illusion of naturalness in language, which is historical, and because of that, restorationist ontological philosophy, which would like to impute absolute Being to its words, is particularly inclined to eliminate foreign words. Every foreign word contains the explosive material of enlightenment, contains in its controlled use the knowledge that what is immediate cannot be said in unmediated form but only expressed in and through reflection and mediation. Nowhere do foreign words in German prove their worth more than in contrast to the jargon of authenticity, terms like Auftrag, Begegnung, Aussage, Anliegen [mission, encounter, message, concern], and the like. They all want to conceal the fact that they are terminology. They have a human sound, like the Wurlitzer organs in which the vibrato of the voice is inserted technologically. But foreign words unmask these terms: only what is translated back into foreign words from the jargon of authenticity means what it means. Foreign words teach us that language can no longer cure us of specialization by imitating nature; it can do so only by assuming the burden of specialization. Among German writers Gottfried Benn was probably the first to use this element of foreign words, the scientific element, as a literary technique.

But it is against precisely this that the most telling objection to foreign words is directed. Privilege entrenches itself in science as a specialization, a separate branch, a division of labor; the privilege of education continues to entrench itself in foreign words. But the less substance the concept of education or culture comes to have, the more foreign words—many of which once belonged to modernism and were its linguistic advocates—take on an archaic, at times helpless quality, as though they were spoken into the void. Brecht, who aimed at the moment in language through which it, as something general, resists the privilege of the particular, clearly tended to avoid foreign words; not without, however, a secret affection of the archaic, the desire to write High German like a dialect. Benjamin sometimes adopted this implicit hostility to foreign words when he called philosophical terminology a pimp language. And in fact the official philosophical language, which treats any and all terminological inventions and definitions as if they were pure descriptions of states of affairs, is no better than the puristic neologisms of a metaphysically consecrated New German, which, incidentally, is derived directly from that scholastic abuse. Foreign words can still be accused of excluding those who did not have the opportunity to learn them early in life. As components of a language of initiates they have a rasping tone to them, for all their enlightened quality; it is precisely the combination of that rasping tone with the note of enlightenment that constitutes their nature. The Nazis also tolerated foreign words, whether with the military in mind or in order to present themselves as genteel folk. There is virtually no convincing argument against the social critique of foreign words other than its own implications. For if language is subjected to the criterion of intelligibility “for everyone,” then foreign words, which are usually only blamed for what people resent in the ideas, are certainly not the only guilty parties and hardly the most important. Purges in the style of the people’s democracies could not rest content with foreign words but would have to do away with the better part of language itself. Consistently, Brecht once provoked me in conversation by asserting that the literature of the future should be composed in pidgin English. At this point in the discussion Benjamin refused to follow him and went over to my side. The barbaric futurism of such proclamations—which Brecht himself probably did not intend very seriously, by the way—is an alarming confirmation in the domain of language of the positivist enlightenment’s tendency to regress when left to its own devices. Truth, which is only a truth for something else when it becomes a mere means to an end, shrivels up like pidgin or Basic English and then becomes truly fit for giving commands—which is what the impulse behind the new type of antagonism to foreign words was initially directed against. Similarly, derisively gave Europeans once orders to their colored servants in the same debased speech they wished their servants would use. A critique of foreign words that mistakenly considers itself progressive serves a communicative ideal that is in actuality an ideal of manipulation; today the word that is designed to be understood becomes, precisely through this process of calculation, a means to degrade those to whom it is addressed to mere objects of manipulation and to harness them for purposes that are not their own, not objectively binding. In the meantime, what was once called agitation can no longer be distinguished from propaganda, and the word aims squarely at transfiguring advertising by appealing to higher ends independent of individual interests. The universal system of communication, which on the face of it brings human beings together and which allegedly exists for their sake, is forced upon them. Only the word that takes pains to name its object precisely, without having an eye to its effect, has an opportunity to champion the cause of human beings by doing so, something they are cheated of as long as every cause is presented as being theirs here and now. Foreign words no longer have the
function of protesting nationalism, which in the era of the great power blocs no longer coincides with the individual languages of individual nations. But foreign words are the twice-alienated remnants of a culture that disintegrated along with classical liberal society but once had as its aim humanness or humaneness [das Humane], to be demonstrated in the unselfish expression of the matter at hand rather than in the service of human beings as potential customers. As such, they can help a form of cognition that is unyielding and penetrating to survive, a cognition that threatens to disappear with the regression of consciousness and the decline of education. Certainly foreign words should not become naive in the process; they should not present themselves as still confident that they will be heard. Rather, they should express the solitude of intransigent consciousness in their reserve and shock with their obstinacy: in any-case shock may now be the only way to reach human beings through language. Like Greeks in Imperial Rome, foreign words, used correctly and responsibly, should lend support to the lost cause of a flexibility, elegance, and refinement of formulation that has been lost and that people do not want to be reminded of. Foreign words should confront people with something that would be possible only if educational privilege ceased to exist, even in its most recent incarnation, the leveling of all people to a schooled half-culture. In this way foreign words could preserve something of the utopia of language, a language without earth, without subjection to the spell of historical existence, a utopia that lives on unwarely in the childlike use of language. Hopelessly, like death's-heads, foreign words await their resurrection in a better order of things.

But arbitrary and unconsidered use will not make them fit for this; what they once seemed to promise in unmediated form is gone forever. Their legitimacy vis-à-vis the positivism of a colloquial language that is generally intelligible and thereby alienated from its own substance can be demonstrated only where they are superior to linguistic positivism by its own criterion, that of precision. Only the foreign word that renders the meaning better, more faithfully, more uncompromisingly than the available German synonyms will allow a spark to flow in the constellation into which it is introduced. The efforts of the writer who freely ponders motives and objective events, and the cluster of foreign words is as a trial about happiness that goes through innumerable courts of appeal—an aspect that none of the German alternatives would capture.

On p. 176 I speak of the "Disparatheit" [disparity] between subjective motives and objective events, and the cluster of foreign words is admittedly not pretty. I tried to avoid the most unfamiliar of them, "Disparatheit," which is patched together out of Latin and German and hence particularly objectionable. But the only alternative available was "vollige Auseinanderweisen" [complete separation from one another], and not only did making a substantive out of a verbal expression seem uglier to me than the expression that would have been directly appropriate, but the "Auseinanderweisen" also failed to render the idea accurately. For the phenomenon in Proust's novel that I wanted to call attention to was conceived as something given, a condition, not some-thing active. What finally led me to the choice of the word was reflection on my text as a whole, where compound words ending in -weisen were more frequent than I would have liked. I had to sacrifice the ones that least corresponded to what was intended.

Further: it is said that Proust's novel bears witness to the experience that the people who are decisive in our lives appear in them as though "designiert" [appointed, designated] by an unknown author (p. 176).
The literal translation of “designiert” would be “bezeichnet” [indicated, represented]. But that would miss the meaning. It would assert only that the people in question were characterized as by an unknown author, but not that they were selected for us, put in relation to our lives as if by plan. The illusion of a hidden intent behind the chance that leads people who become important to us to cross our paths would not emerge at all, and the passage would become truly unintelligible. But if one said “geplant” [planned] instead of “designiert,” a moment of rationality and definitiveness would enter the description of the phenomenon and would give a crude specificity to the vague and obscure quality inherent in the matter. In addition, today the jurisdiction of the word “geplant” falls within a conceptual domain that would introduce a completely false note, that of the administered world, into Proust’s liberal sphere.

A sentence on p. 177 asserts that in Proust death ultimately “ratifiziert” [ratifies] the frailty of what is stable and solid in a person. “Bestätigen” [confirm] would be too weak for that; it would remain within the sphere of mere cognition, of the verification of a hypothesis. What I wanted to express, however, was that death, like a verdict, appropriates the decay that is life itself. At the same time, the moment of definitiveness that lends weight to Proust’s romanticism of disillusionment is much clearer in “ratifiziert” than in the blander word “bestätigen.”

The case of “imagines” [the plural of the Latin image; images] (p. 177) is instructive. “Bilder” [pictures, images] is much too general an expression to capture the transposition from the world of experience to the intelligible world effected by Proust’s way of regarding human beings. “Urbilder” [primordial images or archetypes], however, would call to mind the Platonic notion of ideas identical with themselves, whereas the very substance of Proust’s world of images lies in what is most transitory. The strangeness of this subject matter—perhaps Proust’s innermost secret—could be evoked only by the alien quality of a term that is derived from psychoanalysis but is given a new function by its context.

The choice of the word “Soirée” in place of “Abendgesellschaft” [literally, society people] (p. 178) brings up a matter that is important in all translation but has not received adequate attention, at least not theoretical attention. The issue concerns the weight of words in different languages, their status in their context, which varies independently of the meaning of the individual words. The equivalent in English of the German word “schon” is “already.” But “already” is much heavier; it carries a greater load than “schon.” If there is no special emphasis on an unexpectedly early point in time, “hier bin ich schon” will generally be translated not “I am already here” but “Here I am”; in Anglo-Saxon countries Germans can easily recognize one another by the too frequent use of “already.” Such distinctions should not be ignored in less formal expressions either, in nouns with concrete content. “Abendgesellschaft” is heavier than “Soirée.” It lacks the self-evident quality that the French word has in French, just as social forms in general are not so self-evident in German, not so much second nature as they are in France. There is something forced and artificial about the word “Abendgesellschaft,” as though it were an imitation of a soirée and not the real thing; this is why the foreign word is to be preferred. If one said simply “Gesellschaft” [social gathering], the weight relationships would be approximately correct, but something essential to the content of the French word, its reference to evening, would be lost, as would the reference to the somewhat official nature of the event.

The foreign word is better whenever its literal translation is not literal, for whatever reason. “Sexus” [sex], at a somewhat later point (p. 180) means “Geschlecht” [sex, race, genus]. But the German word, Geschlecht, covers a substantially greater range of meaning than the Latin word, Sexus; it includes what is called the “gens” in Latin, the clan or tribe. And above all, it has much more pathos than the foreign word, less sensual, one might say. Geschlechtliche love is not the same as sexuelle love; it provides room for a certain erotic element to which the expression sexuell presents a certain contrast. In attempting to clarify the concept of the sexual and to distinguish it from the more general and less offensive concept of love, Freud calls attention to its “indecent,” prohibited aspect. One does not necessarily think of that aspect in connection with the German word Geschlecht, but one does with the foreign word. It is precisely this illicit quality, however, that is crucial in the passage in question.

There is a paradoxical problem behind the expression “society-Leute” [literally, society people], which I chose for an influential group of figures in Proust’s novel (p. 181). For the word “society” has a double meaning in German as well as in English: it means both society as a whole, the object of sociology, for example, and “high society,” as it is called, those who are accepted, the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie. The cumbersome “Leute aus der Gesellschaft” [people from the society]
would at best not have been completely clear; it would have suggested
people from a group that had just assembled. “Gesellschaftsleute” would
have been completely impossible. Moreover, in comparison with “soci­
ety,” the German word “Gesellschaft” has the same artificial quality that
the name of a column in a women’s magazine, “Aus der Gesellschaft”
(“From Society”), reads like an imitation over which one
has foolishly taken great pains. To emphasize the nuance I was concerned
with, I had to use “society,” following colloquial German. Although
the English expression is in itself just as ambiguous as the German, in
German the word “society” takes on a specificity lacking in the native
word; to say nothing of an aura perceptible to anyone who understands
the kind of chattering Proust has his Odette do.

The expression “kontingent” [contingent] (p. 181), which without a
doubt is not naturalized in German and is incomprehensible to many
people in the radio audience, is derived from philosophy. Its use brings
up the problem of terminology. “Kontingent” means “accidental”; it
refers, however, not to an individual chance event or even the general
contingency abstracted from it but rather to chance as an essential feature
of life. The expression is used this way in my text as well: “Proust shares
with the great tradition in the novel the category of the contingent.” To
say instead “the category of the accidental” would be imprecise; one
might think that there was something accidental about the novel as a
whole, or its manner of presentation. But by virtue of the philosophical
tradition inherent in it the word “kontingent” means something I added
as clarification in the next sentence: “a life bereft of meaning, a life the
subject can no longer shape into a cosmos.” No literal translation is
adequate to that. One can debate whether philosophical terms have any
legitimacy outside what goes by the abominable name of “Fachphiloso­
phe,” technical philosophy, a name that contradicts the thing itself. But
if one rejects this notion of technical philosophy and conceives of philos­
ophy as a mode of consciousness that does not let the boundaries of a
specific discipline be forced upon it, one gains the freedom to use words
originating in the domain of philosophy in places where—conventional
usage does not expect philosophy. Here, certainly, the use of the foreign
word, which is truly scarcely understood any more due to its foreign
derivation, takes on a desperate and provocative quality, a quality that
must be freely chosen if one does not want to be a naïve victim of his
own academic discipline.

The word “Spontaneität” [spontaneity] (p. 212) is also derived from
the philosophical tradition, the Kantian tradition in particular. There is
so much compressed into it that no translation could accomplish what
that word does without extensive paraphrase; often, however, a literary
text requires a single word and precludes explication because it would
disturb the distribution of emphasis in the text. This was what deter­
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Weh we 1,  an and first of all,
“Spontaneität” means the capacity for action, production, generation. On
the other hand, however, it means that this capacity is involuntary, not
identical to the conscious will of the individual. It is immediately evident
that this duality in the concept of “spontaneity” does not appear in any
German word. The subject of the passage in question is jealousy, which
turns love into a relationship of possession and thereby makes the beloved
a thing. For this reason, it is said, jealousy violates the “spontaneity” of
love. To say instead that it violates the “Unwillkürlichkeit” [involuntar­
iness] of love would be nonsensical, and even “Unmittelbarkeit” [im­
mediacy], which in itself is closer to what is meant, would not be
adequate, because, as no one knew better than Proust, all love contains
mediated elements. So it had to be “Spontaneität.” If someone is praised
for behaving spontaneously in a situation, that describes his behavior
more graphically than any of the circumlocutions I looked for.

It is generally the need for conciseness that prompts the choice of
foreign words. Compactness and conciseness as the ideal of presentation,
the omission of things that are self-evident, silence about what is already
logically contained in the thought and should therefore not be repeated
verbally—all that is incompatible with circumlocutions or extensive
paraphrases of words, which would often be necessary if one wanted to
avoid foreign words and yet not sacrifice any of their meaning. I have
spoken of “Authentizität” [authenticity] (p. 183) in connection with
Proust and at other times as well. Not only is the word an uncommon
one in German; the meaning it takes on in the context in which I set it is
not at all assured. It is supposed to be the characteristic of works that
gives them an objectively binding quality, a quality that extends beyond
the contingency of mere subjective expression, the quality of being
NOTES TO LITERATURE II

socially grounded. If I had said simply “Autorität” [authority], using a foreign word that has at least been adopted into German, I would have indicated the force such works exercise but not the justification of that force by a truth that ultimately refers back to the social process. I would have missed the distinction I was concerned with, the distinction between what is grounded through its content and what has usurped its place through violence. Of course a word that is currently very popular in Germany was available: “Gültigkeit” [validity]. Here, however, we must bear in mind that words have not only a contextual but also a historical status. The word “gültig” has currently been thoroughly compromised by expressions like “gültige Aussage” [valid statement]. A certain kind of robustness is evident in it, an unctuous-slick affirmative quality that plays a pernicious role in contemporary ideology. I could not have let myself get involved with that at any cost. One cannot attack the jargon of authenticity and then speak of “valid works,” a concept in which notions of old and invariable truth, and ultimately of public recognition as well, resonate. Certainly one cannot expect all these complex considerations and critical reflections—to communicate which would completely disrupt the equilibrium of a text directed toward its subject matter—to be condensed into the “Authentizität.” But in the hesitation the word gives rise to, all the concepts it calls to mind and nevertheless avoids flash by. This delay may convey more than a more colloquial expression that is thereby less appropriate to what is intended. It is not too far-fetched to hope that the intention will be carried out, because the word “Authentizität,” a word I am not comfortable with and yet cannot do without, holds for the use of foreign words in general. It is not a linguistic Weltanschauung, not an abstract pro or con, that decides on that use but a process of countless interwoven impulses, promptings, and reflections. The limited consciousness of the individual writer has little control over the extent to which this process is successful. But the process cannot be avoided: it repeats, if inadequately, the social process undergone by foreign words, and in fact by language itself, a process in which the writer can intervene to make changes only by recognizing it as an objective one.

In my attempt to vindicate foreign words, I could not suppress the criticisms they are currently vulnerable to; nor could I take a standpoint as rigid as that of their opponents tends to be. Even the writer who imagines that he is going right to the subject matter itself and not to the way it is communicated cannot willfully ignore the historical changes language undergoes in the process of its communicative use. He has to do his formulating from the inside and the outside at the same time, as it were. This contradiction affects his relationship to foreign words as well. Even when they sound objectively right to him, he has to sense what is happening to them in contemporary society. Often they turn into empty shells, like the word “Authentizität” when looked at purely in itself. What language is in itself is not independent of what it is for others. But blindness to that dependency, which the writer who is serious about language needs, can turn into the stupidity of the person who imagines himself safely in possession of pure means when precisely because of their purity those means are no longer good for anything. The problem of foreign words is truly a problem, and that is not merely a manner of speaking. What I tried to show in my discussion of the word “Authentizität,” a word I am not comfortable with and yet cannot do without, holds for the use of foreign words in general. It is not a linguistic Weltanschauung, not an abstract pro or con, that decides on that use but a process of countless interwoven impulses, promptings, and reflections. The limited consciousness of the individual writer has little control over the extent to which this process is successful. But the process cannot be avoided: it repeats, if inadequately, the social process undergone by foreign words, and in fact by language itself, a process in which the writer can intervene to make changes only by recognizing it as an objective one.