**Bibliographical Musings**

For Rudolf Hirsch

During a visit to a book fair, I was seized by a strange feeling of apprehensiveness. When I tried to understand what it was trying to tell me, I realized that books no longer look like books. Adaptation to what—correctly or incorrectly—is considered the needs of consumers has changed their appearance. Around the world, covers have become advertisements for their books. The dignity that characterizes something self-contained, lasting, hermetic—something that absorbs the reader and closes the lid over him, as it were, the way the cover of the book closes on the text—has been set aside as inappropriate to the times. The book sidles up to the reader; it no longer presents itself as existing in itself but rather as existing for something other, and for this very reason the reader feels cheated of what is best in it. Of course there are still exceptions at literary publishing houses with strict standards, and there are also some houses that are uneasy with the situation and publish the same book in two different formats, one proudly unpretentious and the other assaulting the reader with stick figures and little pictures. The latter are not even always necessary. Often all that is needed are exaggerated formats, grandiose like disproportionately wide cars, or excessively intense, loud colors like those on posters, or whatever: an indefinable element, something that evades conceptualization, a gestalt quality through which books, by presenting themselves as up-to-date, ready to serve the customer, try to shake off their bookness as though it were something regressive and old-fashioned. The advertising effect does not have to be pursued crassly, and taste does not have to be violated: for those not well acquainted with book technology, the look of a commodity, no matter
what creates it, sets the book in contradiction to the book form as a form simultaneously material and spiritual—a contradiction difficult to formulate but enervating precisely because it is so profound. And sometimes the liquidation of the book even has aesthetic justice on its side, as a distaste for ornaments, allegories, and dilapidated nineteenth-century decor. All that certainly has to go, but sometimes it does seem as though sheet music, which eradicated the angels, muses, and lyres that once adorned the title pages of the Peters or Universal editions had also eradicated some of the happiness such kitsch once promised: the kitsch was transfigured when the music for which the lyre served as prelude was not kitsch. Altogether, we are forced to acknowledge that books are ashamed of still being books and not cartoons or neon-lighted display windows, that they want to erase the traces of craftsmanship in their production in the hope of not looking anachronistic, of keeping up with an age which they secretly fear no longer has time for them.

This damages books as intellectual entities as well. The book form signifies detachment, concentration, continuity: anthropological characteristics that are dying out. The composition of a book as a volume is incompatible with its transformation into momentary presentations of stimuli. When, through its appearance, the book casts off the last reminder of the idea of a text in which truth manifests itself, and instead yields to the primacy of ephemeral responses, the appearance turns against the book's essence, that which it announces prior to any specific content. Through "streamlining," the newest books become questionable, as though they have already passed away. They no longer have any self-confidence. They do not wish themselves well; they act as though no good could come of them. Anyone who still writes books is seized unawares by a fear with which he is otherwise only too familiar through his critical self-reflection: the fear that his activity is useless. The ground sways beneath his feet while he continues to behave as though he had a firm place to stand or sit. The autonomy of the work, to which the writer must devote all his energies, is disavowed by the physical form of the work. If the book no longer has the courage of its own form, then the power that could justify that form is attacked within the book itself.

That the external form of a printed work is a force in itself is indicated by the fact that experienced authors like Balzac and Karl Kraus felt com-
pelled to make changes on galleys and even on page proofs, perhaps completely rewriting what had already been set. Neither hastiness in the earlier writing nor a fussy perfectionism is to blame for that. Rather, only when printed do texts take on, really or apparently, that objectivity in which they definitively detach themselves from their authors and in which they watch at them with a stranger's eyes, discovering flaws that were hidden while they were still involved with the texts and felt that they had control over them instead of recognizing how much the quality of a text emerges from its having control of the author. Thus, for instance, the proportions among individual pieces, or between a preface and what follows it, cannot really be monitored before the type has been set. Typewritten manuscripts, which take up more pages than printed texts, deceive the author by creating an illusion of great distance between things that are so close to one another that they repeat themselves crassly; they tend in general to shift the proportions in favor of the author's comfort. For a writer capable of self-reflection, print becomes a critique of his writing: it creates a path from the external to the internal. For this reason publishers should be advised to be tolerant of authors' corrections.

I have often observed that anyone who has read something in a periodical or even in manuscript form looks down on it when meeting it again in a book. "I've already seen that"—what value can it have? One projects a slight lack of self-respect onto what one has already read, and authors are taught to be stingy with their products. But this response is the reverse side of the authority of anything printed. The person who is inclined to view a printed text as an autonomous entity, as something objectively true—and without this illusion the respectful attitude toward literary works is the precondition of criticism, and thus of the works' survival, would hardly be developed—takes revenge for the coercion exercised by print as such by becoming belligerent when he sees how precarious that objectivity is and notices the residues of the production process or of private communication clinging to it. This ambivalence extends to the irritation of critics who take an author to task for repeating himself when he incorporates into a book something he has already published in a less cogent version, something that may well have been conceived with the book in mind from the beginning. Authors who are idiosyncratic enough to guard against repetition seem especially likely to evoke this resentment.
The change that has taken place in the form of the book is not some superficial process that could be stopped if, for instance, books kept their true nature in mind and seized on a form that would correspond to it. Attempts to resist this external development from within through a loosening of literary structure have some of the impotence of attempts to conform without giving anything up. At present, the objective presuppositions are lacking for such forms as the leaflet or the manifesto, which might serve as models for such a loosening. Those who imitate them are only acting as secret worshippers of power, parading their own impotence. Publishers are irrefutable when they point out to refractory authors, who after all must live too, that their books have less chance of success on the market the less they fit in with that tendency. Furthermore, the rescue attempts clearly amount to the same thing they did in the theories of Ruskin and Morris, who wanted to oppose the disfiguring of the world through industrialism by presenting mass-produced articles as though they were handmade. Books that refuse to play by the rules of mass communication suffer the curse of becoming arts and crafts. What happens is intimidating by virtue of its ineluctable logic; there are a thousand arguments to prove to the resister that it has to be this way and no other and that he is hopelessly reactionary. Is the idea of the book itself reactionary? Yet we have no other representation of spirit in language that might exist without betraying truth.

One may accuse the collector's attitude of making it more important to possess books than to read them. Certainly the collector demonstrates that books say something without being read, and that sometimes it is not the least important thing. Hence private libraries made up predominantly of editions of collected works easily acquire a philistine aspect. The need for completeness, which is truly legitimate when it comes to editions in which a philologist presumes to decide which parts of an author's oeuvre will survive and which will not, all too easily allies itself with the possessive instinct, the drive to hoard books, a drive that alienates them from the experience that impresses individual volumes upon itself precisely by destroying them. Not only do these rows of collected works put on airs, but their slick harmony also inappropriately denies the fate the Latin saying ascribes to books, a fate they alone of all the dead share with the living. Those unitary and usually too carefully pre-
served blocks of books give the impression of having come into being all at once, or, as the trusty German word puts it, 

_schlagartig_, with a bang. They are a little like that Potemkinian library I found in the house of an old American family on the grounds of a hotel in Maine. That library displayed every conceivable title to me; when I succumbed to the temptation and reached for one, the whole splendid mass fell apart with a slight clatter—it was all fake. Damaged books, books that have been knocked about and have had to suffer, are the real books. Hopefully vandals will not discover this and treat their brand new stocks the way crafty restaurateurs do, putting an artificial layer of dust on bottles of adulterated red wine from Algeria. Books that have been lifelong companions resist the order imposed by assigned places and insist on finding their own; the person who grants them disorder is not being unloving to them but rather obeying their whims. He is often punished for it, for these are the books that are most likely to run off.

Emigration, the damaged life, disfigured my books, which had accompanied me, or, if you like, been dragged, to London, New York, Los Angeles, and then back to Germany, beyond measure. Routed out of their peaceful bookcases, shaken up, locked up in crates, put into temporary housing, many of them fell apart. The bindings came loose, often taking chunks of text along with them. They had been badly manufactured in the first place; high-quality German workmanship has long been as questionable as the world market began to think it was in the era of prosperity. The disintegration of German liberalism lurked in it emblematically: one push and it fell to pieces. But I can’t get rid of the ruined books; they keep getting repaired. Many of those tattered volumes are finding their second childhood as paperbacks. Less threatens them: they are not real property in the same sense. Now the fragile ones are documents of the unity of life that clings to them and of its discontinuities as well, with all the fortuitousness of this rescue as well as the marks of an intangible Providence embodied in the fact that one was preserved while another was never seen again. None of the Kafka published during his lifetime returned with me to Germany in good condition.

The life of the book is not coterminous with the person who imagines it to be at his command. What gets lost in a book that is loaned out and emotionally charged is its status as a document of the unity of life. In the spontaneous mode of production, the work of a writer might be one of spontaneity, accommodation to what the possessor of the book’s disposition or social relations wants, instead of only an arbitrary constraint. Every book of value is one that figured out the proper accommodations to them without their knowing it. What gets lost when a book is loaned out is the life of the book also starts to what the possessor is capable of. The book mocks him in his text are seldom accurate. The private life of books is likely to be one that figured out the proper accommodations to them without their knowing it. An aloofness toward fact a defining characteristic of a writer whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—an author whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—through they were seeking them looking for individual wishes. An aloofness toward fact a defining characteristic of a writer whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—an author whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—through they were seeking them looking for individual wishes. An aloofness toward fact a defining characteristic of a writer whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—an author whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—through they were seeking them looking for individual wishes. An aloofness toward fact a defining characteristic of a writer whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—an author whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—through they were seeking them looking for individual wishes. An aloofness toward fact a defining characteristic of a writer whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—an author whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—through they were seeking them looking for individual wishes. An aloofness toward fact a defining characteristic of a writer whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—an author whose whole system of surplus value this becomes in neat and tidy fashion—through they were seeking them looking for individual wishes.
what settles into a book that is sheltered are drastic proof of that. But
the life of a book also stands in oblique relationship to its internalization,
to what the possessor imagines he possesses in his knowledge of the
book's dispositio or so-called train of thought. Time and again the life of
books mocks him in his errors. Quotations that are not checked in the
text are seldom accurate. Hence the proper relationship to books would
be one of spontaneity, acquiescing in what the second and apocryphal life
of books wants, instead of insisting on that first life, which is usually
only an arbitrary construction on the reader's part. The person who is
capable of such spontaneity in his relationship to books is often unex­
pectedly granted what he has been looking for. The most successful ci­
tations tend to be those that elude the quest and offer themselves out of
charity. Every book of value plays with its reader. A good reading would
be one that figured out the rules of the game being played and accom­
modated to them without violence.

The private life of books can be compared to the life that a widespread
and emotionally charged belief, common among women, ascribes to cats.
They are undomesticated domestic animals. Exhibited as property, vis­
ible and at one's disposal, they like to withdraw. If their master refuses
to organize his books into a library—and anyone who has proper contact
with books is unlikely to feel comfortable in libraries, even his own—
those he most needs will repudiate his sovereignty time and time again,
will hide and return only by chance. Some will vanish like spirits, usu­
ally at moments when they have special meaning. Still worse is the re­
sistance books put up the moment one looks for something in them: as
though they were seeking revenge for the lexical gaze that paws through
them looking for individual passages and thereby doing violence to their
own autonomous course, which does not want to adjust to anyone's
wishes. An aloofness toward anyone who wants to quote from them is in
fact a defining characteristic of certain authors, especially Marx, in
whom one need only rummage around for a passage that has made a
special impression to be reminded of the proverbial needle in the hay­
stack. At many points Marx' texts read as though they had been written
hastily on the margins of the texts he was studying, and in his theories
of surplus value this becomes almost a literary form. Clearly his highly
spontaneous mode of production resisted putting ideas where they belong
in neat and tidy fashion—an expression of the anti­systematic tendency in
an author whose whole system is a critique of the existing one; ultimately,
Marx was thereby practicing a conspiratorial technique unrecognized as such even by itself. The fact that for all the canonization of Marx there is no Marx lexicon available is thus fitting; the author, a number of whose statements are quoted like quotations from the Bible, defends himself against what is done to him by hiding anything that does not fall into that stock of quotations. But some authors for whom there are diligently prepared lexica, such as Rudolf Eisler’s Kant lexicon or Hermann Glockner’s Hegel lexicon, are not much more cooperative; the relief the lexica afford is invaluable, but often the most important formulations fall through the cracks because they do not fit under any keyword or because the appropriate word occurs so infrequently that lexical logic would not consider it worth including. “Progress” does not appear in the Hegel lexicon. Books worth quoting have lodged a permanent protest against quotation; no one who writes about books, however, can avoid it. For every such book is inherently paradoxical, an objectification of something that simply is not objective and that is impaled by the act of quotation. The same paradox is expressed in the fact that even the worst author can justly accuse his critics of having torn the literary corpora delicti from their context, whereas in fact without such acts of violence polemic is simply not possible. Even the stupidest counter-argument successfully insists on the context, that Hegelian totality which, it claims, is the truth, as though its individual elements were bad jokes. If one attacked him without citing evidence, of course, the same author would explain with the same zeal that he never said anything like that. Philology is in league with myth; it blocks the exit.

Presumably the technique of the bookbinder is responsible for the fact that some books always open to the same place. Anatole France, whose metaphysical genius has been overshadowed by his Voltairean manners, which have not been forgiven him, used this with special effect in his *Histoire contemporaine*. In his provincial town Monsieur Bergerot finds refuge in the bookshop of Monsieur Paillot. On each visit to the shop he picks up, without having any interest in it, the *History of the Voyages of Discovery*. The volume stubbornly presents him again and again with these sentences: “... a Northern passage. It is precisely this misfortune, he says, to which he owes the fact that we were able to return to the Sandwich Islands, and our voyage was thereby enriched by a discovery which, although the last, nevertheless seems in many respects to be the most important one that Ocean...” This is in the *intérieur* of the gentle anecdote, in reading this in relationship to the novel, one only knows how to interpret. In the midst of the desk-book’s cheap insistence on eroded meaning that now or the incommunicable is it, this is what really becomes obscure: bookbinderly repetition in conjunction it occasions is so closely fact that books open again constitutes their refusal to the book of life itself, stone allegory on nine monuments properly we from the *History of the Voyages* thing said about the Holy Foot.

An old aversion to bookbacks. A decent title should be almost covered by the title is printed lengthwise, printing on the spine gives solidity to their feet, and throws away; even that they are not designed to printing on something appears it is no longer print only some of the books I I had nothing definitive re
most important one that Europeans have hitherto made in the Pacific Ocean . . . . " This is interwoven with associations from the *monologue intérieur* of the gentle anti-humanist. Because of the compositional principle, in reading this irrelevant passage, which on the surface has no relationship to the novel, one cannot rid oneself of the feeling that if one only knew how to interpret it, it would be the key to the whole thing. In the midst of the desolation and godforsakenness of provincial life, the book's cheap insistence on the passage seems to be the last remnant of an eroded meaning that now gives out only impotent hints, like the weather or the incommunicable feeling one has one day in childhood that this is it, this is what really matters, and then what was just revealed suddenly becomes obscure again. The melancholy impact of this kind of bookbinderly repetition is so profound because the permanent renunciation it occasions is so close to the fulfillment of something promised. The fact that books open of their own accord to the same place again and again constitutes their rudimentary similarity to the Sibylline books and to the book of life itself, a book that is now open only in the form of sad stone allegory on nineteenth-century graves. Someone who read these monuments properly would probably decipher "a Northern passage" from the *History of the Voyages of Discovery*. Only in used copies is anything said about the Holderlinian colonies on which no one has yet set foot.

**BIB**

An old aversion to books whose titles are printed lengthwise along the backs. A decent title should be printed horizontally. To say that when a volume is stood upright one has to turn one's head to see what it is when the title is printed lengthwise is mere rationalization. Actually, crosswise printing on the spine gives books an expression of stability: they stand solidly on their feet, and the legible title above is their face. Those with the title lengthwise, however, exist only to lie around, to be swept up and thrown away; even their physical form is determined by the fact that they are not designed to last. One scarcely ever finds the horizontal printing on something paperbound. Where crosswise printing still appears it is no longer printed or even stamped; instead, a sticker is pasted on, a mere fiction.—My wish for crosswise printing was fulfilled on only some of the books I wrote; but when lengthwise printing prevailed I had nothing definitive to say against it. It is probably my own resistance to thick volumes that is responsible.
Recently the place and date of publication have been omitted on the title page and merely noted shamefacedly in the copyright. This is not the most harmless of the symptoms of the book's decline. Presumably it does not make it markedly more difficult to find books secondhand or in public libraries. But the *principium individuationis* of books is taken from them along with time and space. They remain mere exemplars of a species, already as interchangeable as best-sellers. What seems to relieve them of the ephemerality and contingency of their empirical origins does not help them to survive so much as condemn them to inessentiality. Only something that has been mortal can be resurrected. This abominable practice is motivated by a material interest which the very nature of the book prohibits: one who looks at the book should not be able to see when it came out, so that the reader, for whom only the freshest is good enough, will not suspect that he is dealing with something that is a drug on the market, that is, something that seeks the kind of permanence promised by the book's very form, as something printed and bound. If one laments the fact that the place of publication has also been left out—in exchange, the publisher's name is displayed all the more pretentiously—the expert will explain that the process of concentration in the publishing industry has made the provincial centers of book production less and less significant and that to call attention to them is itself provincial. What purpose does it serve to print under the title of a book "New York 1950"? It serves no purpose.

Photographic reproductions of original editions of Fichte or Schelling are like the new printings of old stamps from the pre-1870 era. Their physical intactness is a warning of falsification, but also a perceptible sign of something spiritually futile, the resuscitation of something past that could be preserved only as something past, through distance. Renaissances are stillbirths. In the meantime, as it becomes increasingly difficult to acquire the originals, one can hardly get by without the embarrassing duplicates, and one feels for them a Baudelairean love of the lie. Thus as a child I was happy filling the place in the stamp album reserved for the precious Dreissiger Orange von Thurn und Taxis with an all too brilliantly colored stamp, knowing that I was being hoodwinked.

What books say from the beginning to lose those faceternal aspects of books, he addresses the historical moment the book that would be exemplary, which it arrogantly presbeauty without suffering; Their undamaged quality cancels itself out. Anyone who reads so little of the virginal ones provides an unfair as the physiognomy of books has its basis in the omen of catastrophe: Looking at them, one can't pass. Hence their beauty, one can take on, those whose exec Remarkably:

Without the melancholy relationship to them would be out of a library. Anyone cupboard reads so little of the bibliophilic stance toward the book and acts as their transcendent literature, whose spotty, made for school use. Schelling white with a blue spine, is classical modernism.—In fairy tales the princes are when in fact the innocency leaflets and kinds overtaken by catastrophe: Looking at them, one can't pass. Hence their beauty, one can take on, those whose exec

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First editions of Kant support the priority of their contents; they will last through all of bourgeois eternity. In producing them, the bookbinder acted as their transcendental subject.—Books whose spines look like literature, whose spotted cardboard covers look as though they were made for school use. Schiller, fittingly.—An edition of Baudelaire, dirty white with a blue spine, like the Paris Métro before the war, first class, classical modernism.—In contemporary illustrations to Oscar Wilde's fairy tales the princes are made to look like the boys Wilde desired, when in fact the innocent fairy tales were written as an alibi.—Revolutionary leaflets and kindred things: they look as though they have been overtaken by catastrophes, even when they are no older than 1918. Looking at them, one can see that what they wanted did not come to pass. Hence their beauty, the same beauty the defendants in Kafka's *Triad* take on, those whose execution has been settled since the very first day.

**BIB**

Without the melancholy experience of books from the outside no relationship to them would be possible, no collecting, not even the laying out of a library. Anyone who owns more than what can be put into a cupboard reads so little of what he cares about. The experience is physiognomic, as saturated with sympathy and antipathy and as shifting and unfair as the physiognomic experience of human beings. The fate of books has its basis in the fact that they have faces, and one's sadness about the books published today is grounded in the fact that they are beginning to lose those faces. The physiognomic attitude toward the external aspects of books, however, is the opposite of the bibliophilic. It addresses the historical moment. The bibliophilic ideal, in contrast, is a book that would be exempt from history, picked up on its very first day, which it arrogantly preserves. The bibliophile expects from books beauty without suffering; they are to be new even when they are old. Their undamaged quality is to guarantee their value; in this sense, the bibliophilic stance toward books is bourgeois in the extreme. The best eludes it. Suffering is the true beauty in books; without it, beauty is corrupt, a mere performance. Permanence, self-asserted immortality, cancels itself out. Anyone who senses that has an aversion to uncut books; the virginal ones provide no pleasure.

**BIB**

What books say from the outside, as a promise, is vague; in that lies their similarity with their contents. Music has realized this in one aspect
of its notation; notes are not only signs but also images of what is sounded, in their lines, their heads, the arcs of their phrases, and countless other graphic moments. They imprison on a surface something that occurs within time and hurries away with time—at the price, of course, of time itself, of a physical, bodily unfolding. The latter, however, is just as fundamental to language, and thus one expects the same thing from books. But in language, in accordance with the primacy of the conceptual-significative aspect, the mimetic moment is much more extensively suppressed by print in favor of the sign system than is the case in music. Because, however, the genius of language always insists on the mimetic moment while at the same time denying and dispersing it, the external aspect of books is disappointing, as with emblems, where the resemblance to the subject matter is ambiguous. The book has figured among the emblems of melancholy for centuries, appearing even at the beginning of Poe's "Raven" and in Baudelaire: there is something emblematic in the image of all books, waiting for the profound gaze into their external aspect that will awaken its language, a language other than the internal, printed one. Only in the eccentric features of what is to be read does that resemblance survive, as in Proust's stubborn and abyssal passion for writing without paragraphs. He was irritated by the demand for comfortable reading, which forces the graphic image to serve up small crumbs that the greedy customer can swallow more easily, at the cost of the continuity of the material itself. Through Proust's polemic against the reader, the mirror formed by the sentences comes to resemble that material; literary autonomy leads back to the mimetic mode of writing. It transforms Proust's books into the notes of the interior monologue that his prose simultaneously plays and accompanies. The eye, following the path of the lines of print, looks for such resemblances everywhere. While no one of them is conclusive, every graphic element, every characteristic of binding, paper, and print—anything, in other words, in which the reader stimulates the mimetic impulses in the book itself—can become the bearer of resemblance. At the same time, such resemblances are not mere subjective projections but find their objective legitimation in the irregularities, rips, holes, and footholds that history has made in the smooth walls of the graphic sign system, the book's material components, and its peripheral features. What is revealed in this history is the same as what is revealed in the history of the book's content: the appearance of the volume of Baudelaire that looks like a classicistic Métro converges with what has proved historically to be the...
content of the poetry within it. The power history wields both over the appearance of the binding and its fate and over what has been written is so much greater than any difference between what is inside and what is outside, between spirit and material, that it threatens to outstrip the work's spirituality. This is the ultimate secret of the sadness of older books, and it also indicates how one should relate to them and, following their model, to books in general. Someone in whom the mimetic and the musical senses have become deeply enough interpenetrated will in all seriousness be capable of judging a piece of music by the image formed by its notes, even before he has completely transposed it into an auditory idea. Books resist this. But the ideal reader, whom books do not tolerate, would know something of what is inside when he felt the cover in his hand and saw the layout of the title page and the overall quality of the pages, and would sense the book's value without needing to read it first.