Inventing the Baroque

A Critical History of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Debates

In 1935, just seven years after Benjamin’s book on the German tragic drama appeared, the Paris publishing house Gallimard released a slim volume entitled Du baroque (On the Baroque) by the Spanish philosopher and man of letters Eugenio d’Ors. Midway through the book, d’Ors indicates, in an idiosyncratic chart entitled “Genre: Barocchus” (161), that the Baroque is far more than an “oddly shaped pearl” or “the fourth mode of the second figure in the scholastic nomenclature of syllogisms” that René Wellek would famously cite, but then reject, as possible definitions some ten years later in his “The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship” (1946). Rather, d’Ors’s Baroque spills out over the borders of the categories discussed by Wellek and repeated more recently by Walter Moser (578–79), appearing as the “Barocchus macedonicus” and the “Barocchus romanus,” the “Barocchus buddhicus” and the “Barocchus tridentius, sive romanus, sive jesuiticus” in turn. According to d’Ors’s chart, there have been no fewer than twenty-two “species” of the Baroque since the “prehistoric” “Barocchus pristinus” “among the savages” (162). The historically most recent Baroque is version 20, the “Barocchus posteabellicus” of d’Ors’s—and Benjamin’s—own immediate wartime and post–World War I past.

The Baroque that d’Ors finds, or invents (from invenio, “to find”), in the early twentieth century appears to be less a specific moment in time than a “constant of culture” (99). The description is reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche’s identification
of “Baroque style” as a “timeless phenomenon that periodically recurs,” in his Menschliches, Allzumenschliches (Human, All Too Human) of 1879 (see Barner, “Nietzsche’s literarischer Barockbegriff” 569). Both versions are typical of one of the ways the Baroque is said to have been defined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a strictly stylistic category; often offered as the most prominent example of this kind of deracinated metaphysics of the aesthetic is Heinrich Wölfflin’s definition of the Baroque in his famous Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe (Principles of Art History) (1915); there the art historian is said to have distinguished the Baroque from the Renaissance in primarily formal terms. Even though both Wellek and Ernst Robert Curtius, for example, rebelled against this account early on and in firm ways, the subsequent historiography of the period has been consistent. According to this narrative, formalist periodization theory developed in the early twentieth century in explicit counterpoint to—and thus as an alternative to—the heavily ideological mid- to late nineteenth-century linear and historicist versions of individual national cultural histories, the task of which had been to describe the gradual emergence of art and literature from the unified “spirit” of any given Volk. D’Ors’s chart would seem to reflect at least one part of this nonlinear and implicitly antinationalizing story when it celebrates the self-forming and self-(re)generating power of style.

Upon closer examination, however, it is difficult to see how d’Ors’s chart uncouples theorizations of period from place. In fact, the table problematizes the claim that situatedness and style are distinct from one another, and thus also the assertion that an interest in matters of form challenged cultural-historical—what we today might call ideological and identitarian—approaches to period study at the time. Its wit is lodged, for example, in its production of the Baroque not only as an insistently recurring style, but also as a combination of style with historical specificity and site. The best example is the cascade of adjectives—Jesuit, Roman, and Tridentine—that d’Ors associates with the sixteenth-century moment often singled out as the historical Baroque of record; here, local theological and political histories collaborate to anchor the period type in a place in a completely overdetermined way. D’Ors’s chart thus suggests that the task of inventing the Baroque was much more than a question of sheer form in the early twentieth century. Rather, many arguments about the period—and about its allegedly antithetical twin, the Renaissance—rooted questions of style in specific cultural sites and in nations above all. In this chapter, I argue that such period definitions emerged with particular complexity in Germany during the time d’Ors refers to as the “Barocchus postebellicus,” the post–World War I Baroque, which was the time of Benjamin’s Baroque too.

1. For Curtius’s suggestion in 1948 in his Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter (European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages) to dispense with the concept of the Baroque in favor of the category Mannerism, see Link-Heer, “Zur Kanonisierung antiklassischer Stile” 160–61. Although dated, Wellek’s 1946 article is still useful in giving a detailed account of the explosion of work on the literary Baroque in particular, beginning, Wellek claims, in 1921–22 (79). The dates are slightly misleading, as this upsurge was based on work that began at the end of the nineteenth century. See also Moser.
The conventional claim—that, in the contest between theories of culture that pitted aesthetic autonomy and formal criticism against the historical functionalization and interpretation of art, it was the former that “won,” because they resisted ideological instrumentalization—obscures the ease with which the stylistic argument was itself pressed into the service of a widespread set of narratives about how the history of national modernities and of the modern German Kultur nation in particular could be told. It is in conversation with this aspect of debates about periodization that it is important to understand a further aspect of the context of Benjamin’s argument about the German Baroque—that is, as different as the methodological assumptions were in the work of the various scholars that he cites in his Tragic Drama book, all contributed to a constellation of discourses that celebrated the Baroque, finding in it not an “obscure” or degenerate period and style, not the marginal and heterodox “border region” of academic concern that many students of Benjamin—and sometimes Benjamin himself—would have had it be. Rather, for Benjamin, as for others, the Baroque was a privileged, and even “fashionable,” object of study in a field that was in the midst of its “heroic” phase (Voßkamp 684) and “golden years” (Alewyn, Vorwort 9) at the time. As often as not, this Baroque was also claimed by many to be firmly rooted in a specific place, namely the German “north,” as I show below. While Benjamin admits in a letter to Florens Christian Rang that he was not always “gripped” by his work on his thesis and occasionally had to “force” himself to work on it (Briefe 1: 326), the “dégout” that he appears sometimes to have felt for his project (327) may have resulted from a combination of the pressures on him to complete it quickly, on the one hand, and the real existential anxieties by which he was beset at the time, on the other—rather than from an aversion to the period and its peculiar texts. In the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” of the Tragic Drama book, Benjamin identifies the celebration of the Baroque with the “if not also mostly sentimental, then certainly positive obsession” with the period (G: 1.1: 234; E: 54) common at the time. This observation sheds light on how it was possible for him to have considered it a legitimate object of study in the first place.4

2. Benjamin’s interest in the “border regions,” or marginal areas, of art history is articulated in his “Strenge Kunstwissenschaft” essay, which I discuss below; the status of his claim to see examples of “times of decay” in both the Baroque and Expressionism is also addressed. For an early and more clear-eyed assessment of the “heroic” age of Baroque studies as something of a desperate fad among younger scholars in a crisis-ridden time, see Milch’s 1940 article (131), published, interestingly, in the U.S. Germans Journal German Quarterly, rather than in Germany.

3. Walzel, “Shakespeares dramatische Baukunst” 317. Walzel is referring to the application of the “fashionable term” (M odewort) Baroque to the work of Shakespeare; he had of course himself used the term in this way in 1916 in his famous essay “Shakespeares dramatische Baukunst”; a revised version of the essay was published in 1926. See chapter 2.

4. Voßkamp (688-89) sees a critical stance toward this “metaphysicalization of the concept of the Baroque” emerging already in the 1920s, and suggests that sociological methods were proposed as a corrective to it by scholars such as Erika Voigt and Arnold Hirsch. Voigt’s and Hirsch’s books were published in 1932 and 1933, respectively, however, only after Benjamin had completed work on the Tragic Drama book.
Scholarship by Wilhelm Voßkamp and Petra Boden ("Stamm—Geist—Gesellschaft") on the history of literary and cultural studies in Germany in the post-1871 era has linked the spike in interest in the Baroque to the more general methodological debates that came to a head around 1890 in the new and antipositivist approach of Geistesgeschichte. Trends in the sociological study of literature, on the one hand, and the struggle to align the so-called humanistic disciplines with "scientific" (naturwissenschaftlich) approaches via reference to various systematic models, on the other, may also have played a role in crafting a science of periodization that would celebrate all epochs of the new nation's cultural achievement in equal measure. Such debates informed literary and art historical studies alike, as they struggled to understand the relation of the Renaissance and the Baroque as two periods that were often caught in the sometimes confusing crossfire of disputes about the relationship between the formal differences that scholars and critics saw in the heterogeneous styles of the two eras and a literary-historical narrative of cultural continuity organized as a celebration of their common origins in a specific cultural and spiritual collectivity, nation, and race. It is this second aspect of the argument about period that is of particular interest in connection with Benjamin's Tragic Drama book.

Wilfried Barner ("Das europäische 17. Jahrhundert") has noted that beginning already in the eighteenth century the Baroque had been celebrated as much for its commitment to a kind of linguistic nationalism, in the form of massive translation projects and the production of vernacular dictionaries, for example, as for the eccentricities of style also associated with it. This "patriotic" conservation of an ancient "German (Teutonic) inheritance" (405) trespassed on yet also trumped and replaced the reputation of an Italianate Renaissance famous for the glorious rediscovery of a Romance antiquity with the equally as significant achievements of a specifically northern Baroque twin. To identify a German national Baroque as the rival to a Pan-European Renaissance, yet also as a fellow traveler in supersessionary efforts to reanimate the nation's modernity by calling forth "ancient" forms, thus did not necessarily distinguish the periods cleanly from one another, at least in terms of their ideological thrust. As noted above, Jacob Burckhardt's discussion of the Renaissance provided one of the most salient examples of the figurative logic subtending this kind of modernization talk. His well-known claim that the Italian Renaissance was the birth moment and "mother" of "our" "civilization" (Burckhardt 1), the Renaissance man of Italy the high-achieving "first-born [son] among the sons of Europe today" (87), still hung in the air in the 1910s and 1920s as the unanswered question about the exact relation of those beginnings to the here and now. Indeed, as Lionel Gossman and others have shown, the scary legacy for modernity of Burckhardt's more or less ruthlessly individualistic Renaissance man, as well as of the irresponsibly extravagant and politically opportunistic secularized culture that produced him, was still very much a topic. At stake was what exactly it was that had been "reborn" in the Renaissance and was now coming to fruition
In the European nations of more modern times. Was the story of the period that of a model age of glorious achievement endlessly indebted to an ancient past, or a horrific cautionary tale of a thoroughly integrated historical culture within which no one escaped the clutches of a brutally “progressive” age?⁵ Such questions in turn generated the dilemma of how to understand the alleged successor culture of the Renaissance, namely the Baroque. Did it continue or alter, prolong or replace, this potentially problematic Renaissance with a compensatory or alternative origin of the “modern” sensibility that was more appropriate—and potentially also more beneficial—to the here and now?⁶ Moreover, how was the Baroque to be understood as the afterlife of the end of the (Italian) Renaissance in the (rest of the European) modern world, and especially in the recently created German nation? Theorizations of the German Baroque during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may well have seen the period as an alternative to the Renaissance. But they understood the Baroque as doing essentially the same ideological work as the Renaissance.

This chapter examines, first, the ways in which contemporary debates about the relationship between period, modernity, and place are audible in the sections of the notoriously difficult “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” of the Tragic Drama book that deal explicitly with questions about whether or not, and, if so, how, the German Baroque should be understood as part of a “Renaissance” of the nation. Benjamin’s citation and rejection of arguments made to this effect by Paul Stachel and Herbert Cysarz, two well-known scholars of the German Baroque, are placed in conversation with arguments he derives from the medievalist Konrad Burdach, arguments about German literary-historical periodization that Benjamin then substitutes for Stachel’s and Cysarz’s claims. In the second section, I turn to exemplary articulations of contemporary discussions of the Baroque in the field most often aligned with it, namely art history; noting their centrality in Benjamin’s essay “Strenge Kunstwissenschaft” (On the Rigorous Study of Art) (1933), I discuss art historians and art theorists Heinrich Wölfflin and Alois Riegl, whose legacies are crucial to understanding the claims that were being made about the Renaissance-to-Baroque

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⁵ The best example of this second kind of critical examination of the Renaissance is Alfred von Martin’s Soziologie der Renaissance (Sociology of the Renaissance) (1932). In the Tragic Drama book Benjamin cites an earlier von Martin work on Coluccio Salutati in which essentially the same points are made.

⁶ Art historians, including Hauser, Gombrich, and Ackerman, have suggested that the debate about the Renaissance and the Baroque in art history in the early twentieth century was part of an “evolutionary” “Hegelian art history” that valued periods that promoted “change” (Ackerman 319). Honold suggests within the context of his discussion of questions of literary-historical continuity and periodization during these years that the understanding of the German Baroque as rooted in the chaos of the Thirty Years’ War, for example, helped make it attractive to scholars during World War I and the interwar years who saw themselves and their own period mirrored in the chaos of the earlier period (102–3). Such parallels would also have made it difficult to see the differences between the periods only as a matter of style.
relation at the time. Observing the much underestimated importance of place in their theories helps us see how Benjamin's citation of their work creates the basis of a new argument about the Baroque as a moment of national cultural rebirth. In the final section, I examine the work of two of the literary scholars whom Benjamin cites over and over again in the Tragic Drama book, Arthur Hübscher and Fritz Strich. Traditionally, both of these men's work about the Baroque has been read (when it is read at all) as contributing only to stylistic debates. Returning to them to see what they say about the national collectivity and the power of place in connection with periodization theory sheds light on Benjamin's definition of the "origin" of the Baroque German tragic drama in his book. Understanding how contemporary debates about the Baroque can be witnessed in his project to redeem the period and its texts makes clear that his project was neither idiosyncratic nor eccentric. Rather, The Origin of the German Tragic Drama was caught in a reeling network of arguments that used the Renaissance-Baroque dyad to pose questions about period and style, modernity and progress, and the cultural identity of the German nation.

The Renaissance of the German Baroque in the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue"

As opaque as the first twenty pages of the Tragic Drama book are—Benjamin himself was in all likelihood referring to them when he wrote to Gershom Scholem on 19 February 1925 that parts of the "Prologue" were "an outrageous Chutzpah" (Briefe 1: 372)—they were not the reason university officials in Frankfurt recommended that Benjamin withdraw the work from consideration as his Habilitation. In fact, like the fictional foreword that Benjamin wrote after the withdrawal, the pages that we now read as the opening salvo of his theoretical argument were not handed in with the rest of the study; rather, they appeared only later in the version of the book published in 1928. Without them, Benjamin's "Baroque book" actually begins, in the section identified by the running head "The Dismissal and Misunderstanding of Baroque Tragedy" (Gesammelte Schriften 1.1: 229–31), with an overview of existing criticism, entitled "History of the Study of the German Literary Baroque" (G: 1.1: 228–37; E: 48–56); such overviews were a common way of opening a German academic exercise, both at the time and since. The strategic (mis)use

7. See Briefe 1: 372. This is not to say that Benjamin was not concerned with the "epistemological" aspects of his thesis before this date. He writes to Scholem from Capri on 13 June 1924 (Briefe 1: 346–47), for example, of the difficulties he is having clarifying these aspects of his work for himself, and refers on 16 September 1924 (Briefe 1: 353–54) to some part of the "epistemological introduction to the work" as complete. By 22 December 1924, he has decided, however, to "hold back" those parts, including the introduction, that have to do with methodology, so that he might finally finish the thesis (Briefe 1: 365). In the February letter (372), he indicates that a "large part" of the introduction, which he identifies as the "theory of ideas" (Ideenlehre), had not yet been written.
of the term “tragedy” in the head to explain existing misinterpretations of what Benjamin insists is not “tragedy,” but rather the Baroque “tragic drama” (Trauerspiel), or mourning play, in fact points to one of his main complaints in this section about the prior scholarship, namely its failure to distinguish the imitative culture of the Renaissance, with its relationship of indebtedness to ancient tragedy, from the new and modern forms of the Baroque Trauerspiel.8 While Benjamin may have sought later to differentiate himself from the tribe of academics who chose not to accept him, the periodization debates in which he engages in these more traditional, or “profane,” parts of the “Prologue” suggest that this most complex of texts may profitably be read in dialogue with work about the Baroque being published at the time.9

Benjamin’s more or less workmanly overview of recent scholarship begins by noting the considerable barriers erected in the grand narratives of nineteenth-century German literary history to an objective assessment of the period (G: 1.1: 228–30; E: 48–49). Without going into detail, he notes the suspicion on the part of the proto-Romantic and nationalist “philologists of the Grimm and Lachmannian schools” vis-à-vis the dramatic texts authored by the “learned civil-servant class,” to which the Silesian authors Martin Opitz, Andreas Gryphius, and Daniel Casper von Lohenstein, among others, belonged (229; 48); these texts, Benjamin explains, were deemed by mid- to late nineteenth-century scholarship not to have been sufficiently devoted to excavating the achievements of the German Volk to serve as models for a coming German nation. Because “Baroque drama” was interested in neither “German legend” nor “German history” (229; 48), it was considered an affront to this kind of “pious and piety-provoking” work (Jaumann, Die deutsche Barockliteratur 226). The names and titles that Benjamin does not supply here would nevertheless have been so well known as not to require listing; they included Wilhelm Wackernagel’s Geschichteder deutschen Litteratur: Ein Handbuch (History of German Literature: A Handbook) (1848), Carl Lemcke’s Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung neuerer Zeit (History of German Poetry of Modern Times) (1871), and, most famously, Wilhelm Scherer’s Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur (History of German Literature) (1880–83) (see Voßkamp), all tomes that belonged

8. The fullest outline of Benjamin’s thesis that survives (the Frankfurt editors date it to sometime after November 1923) is just as traditional; it lays out an organizational scheme that calls for sections that treat literary history, the tradition of historical aesthetics and the history of styles, and cultural history of the period (here, especially the role of Protestantism) (Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 915–18); the separate steps suggest the various disciplinary locations where the Baroque was under debate at the time. Both Hofmannsthal’s (Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 903) and others’ claims and Benjamin’s subsequent self-representation as an outsider within the “halls of academe,” as he wrote in an unpublished foreword to the Tragic Drama book (902), notwithstanding, it may have been the more mundane existential concerns that Benjamin had at the time (Briefe 1: 339) that motivated his fairly conventional approach to this academic task. See his sadly mistaken comment to Scholem in 1923 that in its present form the Habilitation should be acceptable to the authorities at Frankfurt (Briefe 1: 319).

9. On the “profane” parts of the “Prologue,” see Hanssen 45.
to the standard equipment of students of German literary history in the early years of the twentieth century, when Benjamin wrote.

The work of one of the major figures in the academic study of German literature at the time, Erich Schmidt, was a direct legacy of this literary-historical school and still dominated university circles in Benjamin’s Berlin. Schmidt had only recently died (1913) when Benjamin read his first Baroque tragic drama in 1917 (see Briefe 1: 140); the search for a successor to Schmidt at Berlin lasted the length of World War I and suggests the contentious nature of debates about the relation of literary-historical methodology to the nation during these years (Höppner, “Eine Institution wehrt sich”). Julius Petersen was finally named to take over Schmidt’s university chair in 1920, just a few years before Benjamin began his research, practically next door, in the Prussian State Library. While more diplomatic than Schmidt in his tolerance of a wide range of approaches, as Boden (“Zur Entwicklung”) and Alexander Honold have shown, Petersen, whose work Benjamin knew and cites in the Tragic Drama book, was still more or less respectful of the older traditions and offered his famous seminar on Baroque literature in Berlin in the winter semester of 1927–28, just as Benjamin’s Habilitation was finally going to press. The work of seminar participants—much of which touched on many of the same issues in which Benjamin was interested, including Baroque language theory and the analysis of style—set the agenda for German Baroque studies up through and even after the next war.

Benjamin claims in the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” that the literary histories whose legacies surrounded him in Berlin blocked an “objective” understanding of the Baroque (G: 1.1: 232; E: 51), since they saw it as the primary duty of the “German Poet” to “administer” the nation’s indigenous “cultural capital” on behalf of the Volk (Fohrmann, “Das Bild des 17. Jahrhunderts” 586). Benjamin correctly captures the centrality of such sentiments when he points out Scherer et al.’s allergies to the highly complex and learned texts of the Baroque and to their non-“völkisch”

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10. For a detailed and evenhanded discussion of the “völkisch” elements of Schmidt’s work, also as the head of German literary studies in Berlin during Benjamin’s own student years, which he spent in Berlin as well in other German university towns, see Höppner, “Die Gründung des Germanischen Seminars.”

11. Benjamin cites (albeit dismissively) Petersen’s well-known essay “Der Aufbau der Literaturgeschichte” (The Structure of Literary History) (1914) in the “Prologue,” On the work of the participants in Petersen’s famous “Barock-Seminar,” see Boden (“Julius Petersen”) and Honold as well as Trunz’s memoirs of the seminar (“Erinnerungen an Julius Petersens Seminar”). Much of this work, including Wolfgang Kayser’s seminar report on Baroque language theory, for example, which became his 1932 book, Die Klangmalerei bei Harsdörffer: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Literatur, Poetik, und Sprachtheorie der Barockzeit (Onomatopoeia in Harsdörffer: A Study of the History of Literature, Poetics, and Language Theory in the Baroque) dealt with topics in which Benjamin was also interested. In his book, Kayser cites the same work on Baroque language theory that Benjamin cites, suggesting the parallels of the Tragic Drama book with scholarship contemporary with it.
and cosmopolitan authors. Benjamin goes on to argue, however, that both the Ger-
man Romantics and these more recent exponents of nationalist philology incor-
correctly dismissed Baroque drama as irrelevant to the literary-historical politics of
“renewal” (Erneuerung) and to the celebration of “folk” tradition that this kind of
work had so famously undertaken in its studies of Shakespeare, for example (G: 1.1: 229; E: 48). The actual “services” (229; 48) performed by the German Baroque
authors on behalf of both the nation and the national language must be noted, he
claims. The irony of this last point is important enough to Benjamin for him to
circle back to it again at the end of the chapter, where he argues—in defense of
the “men of letters” (Opitz, Gryphius, and Lohenstein in particular)—that, unlike
their modern counterparts, they were in fact successful servants of the state (236; 56). According to Benjamin, “literature . . . in Germany of the seventeenth century”
was central to the more or less patriotic “rebirth” (Neugeburt) of “the nation”—
even if no such nation existed at the time (236; 56). The rhetoric that emerges in
Benjamin’s rather unadventurous review of the scholarship here thus characterizes
the Baroque as a kind of substitute Renaissance, especially in the field of vernacular
language theory. The indirect effect is to begin a kind of counterattack on the prej-
udices of a tradition of nationalist philology that would exclude the Baroque, doing
so by means of an argument that highlights, rather, the period’s proto-patriotic
achievements. Both here and later in the second part of the second chapter, Benja-
mint in fact writes of the “blossoming” and “vital energy” of the German dialects as
evidenced in the texts of the period (379; 204).

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estimation can be undertaken only if it recognizes the contemporary “relevance” of
the Baroque (235; 55).12 Benjamin’s project is thus to enable an “afterlife” (Nachle
ben) for the Baroque as a way of challenging existing literary-historical periodiza-
tion practices. It does so, however, in a traditional academic way that serves the very
same kind of supersessional narrative in which the idea of the Renaissance itself
had classically been embedded, a narrative that claims that the Baroque actually
does the Renaissance one better because it provides an authentically new founda-
tion on which a future national modernity can be built.

In this section of the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue,” Benjamin goes on to name
names, taking aim at scholars who defend the German Baroque only ineptly
when they make it an extension of the Renaissance. Representative of this literary-
historical and literary-critical trend is the well-known Seneca und das deutsche Re-
naissance-drama (Seneca and German Renaissance Drama) (1907) by the Germanist
Paul Stachel (1880–1919), which had been one of the first close studies of the texts
of the Silesian playwrights to have been published in the modern period. Benjamin
submits Stachel’s work to a searing critique (G: 1.1: 231; E: 50) here and does the
same for the much more recent Deutsche Barockdichtung: Renaissance, Barock, Ro-
coko (German Baroque Poetry: Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo) (1924) by Herbert
Cysarz (1896–1985) (G: 1.1: 233; E: 52).13 These two books bracket the decades dur-
ing which Baroque studies was in its prime. Even though Benjamin dismisses them
together here, Stachel’s and Cysarz’s approaches were as methodologically differ-
ent from one another as were their authors. Parts of Stachel’s book had been writ-
ten in 1904 as his doctoral dissertation in Berlin under Erich Schmidt (1853–1913),
the student of Scherer’s mentioned above and master of the old-style philology that

12. Arguments for the “timeliness” of the Baroque were all the rage in Germany in both scholarly
and more popular work of the early twentieth century for a number of reasons, including parallels that
were claimed to exist between the chaos of the Thirty Years’ War and the Great War, as well as between
the early modern and modern forms of grandiose cultural projects associated with absolutism and the
national state. See H.-H. Müller, “Die Übertragung des Barockbegriffs” 95–96; Warnke, “Die Entste-
hung des Barockbegriffs.” Benjamin’s claims sometimes contradict one another in this respect. Here, for
example, the argument against the identification of the Baroque with the Renaissance explains his later
approval of Manheimer’s 1904 claim that the “Baroque literature of the seventeenth century” shows par-
allels with “artistic sensibility of our own time,” which precedes the claim for the importance of its con-
temporary “relevance.” Just before the Manheimer quote, however, Benjamin had argued against this
kind of identificatory logic based on “empathy” and “substitution,” which fails to consider the historical

13. Benjamin appears to have owned a copy of Cysarz’s book, which had only just appeared, and
to have either taken it with him to Capri or asked someone to send it to him there. See Benjamin’s let-
ter to Scholem of 16 September 1924 (Briefe 1: 353–59; on Cysarz, 354). As much as he critiques both
Stachel and Cysarz, it is important to note that Benjamin cites their work throughout the Tragic Drama
book in both acknowledged and unacknowledged ways. As suggested above, it may have been in Sta-
chel’s appendix, “Belagel I” (Stachel 351–53), for example, where German plays in which ghosts appear
are listed, that Benjamin was able to witness the prominence of such features, to which he then calls at-
tention in turn (G: 1.1: 313–14 and 370; E: 134–35, 193). Benjamin also actively relies on Stachel in his
description of the martyrdom scenes of the Baroque plays (392; 218). In the case of Cysarz, we can also
see a broad common interest in the allegory-symbol distinction (“Vom Geist” 261) as well as in the role
of Cartesianism (260).
Benjamin and others condemned. By contrast, twenty years later, Cysarz had just completed his doctoral work in Vienna under the guidance of Walter Brecht. (Ironically, Brecht later served as the liaison between Benjamin and Hugo von Hofmannsthal in arranging for the publication of the third section of the second chapter of the Tragic Drama book in Hofmannsthal’s Neue deutsche Beiträge in 1927.) That Cysarz’s 1924 book, on which Benjamin comments dismissively here, was the former’s own successfully completed Habilitation is a poignant reminder that the soon-to-be goose-stepping Cysarz had a successful academic career under the National Socialist regime that led to Benjamin’s death. As different as they were, however, what Stachel and Cysarz shared is clear from the titles of the books that Benjamin cites, namely a belief that the best defense of the texts of the German Baroque was a good offense—that is, the alignment of the period with several versions of the Renaissance—which was precisely the stance that Benjamin rejects.

Stachel’s Seneca and German Renaissance Drama defends the Baroque by yoking its texts to the lineage of Senecan tragedy that extends from the plays of the Roman master through the French and Dutch humanist school drama of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Stachel includes in this “Renaissance” tradition plays by the “father of German poetry,” Martin Opitz (Garber, Martin Opitz), and by the later playwrights Gryphius and Lohenstein, of the Second Silesian school, on the one hand, and texts of the mid- to late seventeenth-century Nuremberg poets Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, Sigmund von Birken, and Johann Klaj and the Silesian “epigones” Johann Christian Hallmann and August Adolph von Haugwitz, on the other. This genealogical scenario is a familiar one that animates the fundamentally counterytopological narratives of the vernacular Renaissances in general, finding legitimacy in the work of the moderns only insofar as they looked back to the ancients. Stachel apologizes that it is the “unnatural monster” (2) of the ancient, Seneca, whose work is the decisive factor in linking the Germans to this lofty past. His opening statement nevertheless claims that, in their dependency, the Germans achieved a kind of modern legitimacy in the same way that prior critics had shown

15. Cf. Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 903–4. Hofmannsthal saw his own time and work as contemporary successors to the Baroque (see Schoolfield). Benjamin’s review of Hofmannsthal’s play Der Turm, which was based on a work by the Spanish Baroque playwright Calderón, was published in the same year as the Tragic Drama book; compare Benjamin’s description of the “Baroqueness” of Hofmannsthal’s play (3: 98–101).
16. Cysarz’s improbably deep erudition and his breathless pronouncements on the Baroque were already known, although not universally praised, even before his thesis was complete, because of the appearance of his essay “Vom Geist des deutschen Literatur-Barocks” in the inaugural volume of the reputable journal Deutsche Vierteljahreschrift, vol. 1.2 (1923), the year before the publication of Deutsche Barockdichtung. In his review of Cysarz’s 1924 book, Körner (459) implies that it is highly unlikely that Cysarz actually read all the texts to which he refers. Cysarz’s subsequent career can and should be read as a perverse twin of Benjamin’s own. See the conclusion.
the Elizabethan as well as the French and Dutch playwrights of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to have done, namely by demonstrating their imitative side. Indeed, the more the German tragic dramas can be said to resemble not just the plays of Seneca and Sophocles, but those of Shakespeare, Vondel, Corneille, and de Mairet as well, the more legitimately they testify to a German “rebirth.” In Stachel’s argument, although latecomers, the Germans thus attain the stature due a “modern” culture not merely by mimicking the ancients, but also by joining the ranks of prior inheritor cultures. The argument of course not only fails to identify what is actually modern about the German plays, but also collaborates in the production of a lineage for them that falls far short of identifying what it is about them that, for Benjamin, is “specifically German” (G: 1.1: 260; E: 81). Correcting both of these errors was Benjamin’s task.

The literary-historical (mis)application of Renaissance categories to Baroque plays in Stachel’s book bleeds into stylistic arguments that are equally problematic and that Benjamin also rejects. As the author of the first vernacular poetics in German (1624), Martin Opitz is said to have brought “the classicistic Renaissance” (180) to Germany with his translation of Seneca’s Trojan Women into German in 1636, for example: All that is “Roman” is thereby “teutonified” (germanisiert), “the ancient world view replaced by the modern” national one (Stachel 187). As upbeat as the analogy may sound, Stachel’s depiction of Opitz, a member of the so-called First Silesian school, as both “modern” and “classicistic” here reveals the conceptual error of his Baroque-as-Renaissance claim. As much as Stachel would praise Opitz’s ability to initiate a German Renaissance, in other words, it is clear not only that the ancients remain the ultimate measuring stick, but also that the Baroque literature that succeeds this German Renaissance can be only a pale predecessor of what Cysarz will go on to claim is the “true” German Renaissance in eighteenth-century Weimar Classicism (Klassik). This is why, even as a “modern,” Opitz can never be more than an “imitator poet” (Nachdichter) of the ancients (199), to use Stachel’s words. The identification of the “first” German poet as a “classicizing” imitator in bondage to the past suggests that precisely the achievements that should integrate the Germans into the “modern” European community of literate Renaissance nations also keep them, in Stachel’s rendering, in a permanent state of stylistic nonage. Measured by such logic, the German Baroque tragic drama of the seventeenth century can only appear, in Benjamin’s dismissive words, as the ugly stepchild of “Renaissance drama . . . laden down with abundant stylistic incongruities” (G: 1.1: 231; E: 50).17

17. Claims of stylistic dissonance and generational weakness permeate Stachel’s “defense” of the German Baroque in Seneca und German Renaissance Drama, a book that Benjamin indicates he had read “for the most part” (Gesammelte Schriften 7: 454). Gryphius comes “closer” to Seneca than the earlier Opitz, according to Stachel, but is still Seneca’s “heir and descendant” (Stachel 202), for example. Indeed, in spite of Gryphius’s famous dismissal of the ancients—“Why inquire after the Greeks? / They must retreat, when the German Muse arrives,” which Stachel quotes (206)—his work is superior to Opitz’s only in a reversed kind of way, only, that is, because in it one can see more clearly the “living influence of the original” (204).
Stachel goes on to identify the relationship of the later Silesian playwright Gryphius with the literary tradition writ large as “centripetal” (253), with the center occupied by either the ancients (Sophocles, 248) or the non-German “Renaissance” poets on whose work Gryphius depends, such as the Dutch playwright Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) (238). Lohenstein’s achievements are equally dependent on his relationship to either the foreign or the past. Stachel makes the obvious comparisons of Lohenstein’s plays with Seneca’s, for example, noting the former’s use of outrageous scenes of seduction, sacrifices, and ghosts (295–96, 300), and with the plays of Lohenstein’s French contemporary Jean de Miret (1604–86) (293, 297). Such analyses explain why, in the cases of both of these major German Baroque playwrights, whose texts represent two of Benjamin’s prime examples of the tragic drama, Stachel more often than not quite logically applies the term “tragedy” (Tragödie) to their works. Stachel’s closing arguments describe Gryphius’s creation of a specifically German “tragic form” (274); Lohenstein’s contribution to the tradition is also referred to as his work on the “German tragedy of the seventeenth century” (324). Collapsing the Baroque “tragic drama” into the category of “tragedy” in this way is the very critical narrative in which Benjamin seeks to intervene. His critique of Stachel’s work in the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” can thus be read in two ways: as an interruption of the Baroque-as-Renaissance construction and as a supersessional narrative of its own, which christens the Baroque tragic drama as a new “origin” of what Benjamin calls the “un-Renaissance-like” (renaissancefremd) tradition of “modern German drama” (G: 1.1: 240; E: 59).

Herbert Cysarz’s engagement with the Baroque foregrounds the national character of this tale more explicitly. Like Stachel, he aims to redeem the period in the face of its earlier detractors, calling Scherer’s famously dismissive rendering of the Baroque no more than a “caricature” (Cysarz, “Vom Geist” 243) and “perfidious distortion” (Deutsche Barockdichtung 20 n. 3) of the period and its texts. Nevertheless, even though Cysarz is more explicitly committed than Stachel to defining the Baroque as its own period, as an “organic unity” (20) of a German hue, he does so by deploying tropes about the Renaissance similar to the earlier scholar’s and thus likewise earns Benjamin’s disdain. “The Baroque is our modern literature’s first struggle with antiquity,” Cysarz writes (“Vom Geist” 245); elsewhere, however, it is “nothing other than an imitation of antiquity” (247), “a systematic imitation of the linguistic art of the Ancients” (Deutsche Barockdichtung 40), and a “chain of receptions” (29). Paradoxically, such claims are overtly figural and antiprogressivist at one and the same time. Like all other “Renaissance literatures,” German Baroque texts seek only the “imitation and trumping of the forms of antiquity” (95), Cysarz

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18. Lohenstein’s massive annotations to his texts, which often ran to three times the length of the plays, confirm, Stachel explains, the claim that the Baroque playwright was self-consciously the direct heir of the Roman playwright, a “German Seneca” (326). It was conventional, even in the seventeenth century, to call Lohenstein the “German Seneca,” and Stachel notes Birken’s (281) and Männling’s (282–83) praise of Lohenstein to this effect.
argues. Yet, when described in these terms, they can only ever fail to get beyond an “antiquifying” (50, 75, 129, 153, 165) “powerlessness” (296). It would be difficult to characterize this version of a redemption of the German Baroque as anything other than the singularly “negative valorization” of a failed “pseudo-Renaissance” that Cysarz in fact admits his analysis to be (292).

Ironically, it may well have been Cysarz’s interest in defining the properties of the Baroque in the “sphere of German linguistic art” (Deutsche Barockdichtung 14)—properties that he claims derived from a German “religious, national, and literary foundation” (51) and that Benjamin himself goes on to privilege later in the Tragic Drama book—that led Cysarz to introduce into his argument the literary-historical category to which Benjamin takes greatest exception at the end of the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue.” According to Benjamin, Cysarz sees the works of the Baroque as no more than the “preliminary stages” (G: 1.1: 233; E: 52) of the developing narrative of a German literary tradition. For Benjamin, Cysarz’s attempt to define the role of the Baroque as only “preparatory” (Deutsche Barockdichtung 6) and transitional to the true Renaissance of a German tradition in Weimar Classicism reveals that Cysarz’s Baroque is no more than a way station on the road from the “humanism” of the historical Italian Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to the “real” German Renaissance, namely the “idealism” of eighteenth-century German Classicism (35, 235). Such lines of continuity as there were thus passed, according to the Viennese scholar, from a nearly Burckhardtian celebration of the individual in the Italian Renaissance (5 n. 1) directly to the “Germanic individualism” of the Classical era of Schiller and Goethe (35 and 209). As convincing as this argument might be regarding the continuity of the German tradition, its logical result is that the seventeenth-century Baroque cannot in fact be a German Renaissance at all. Rather, it remains only a “proto”- and “pseudo”-form thereof (19, 21, 40, 274), with the final successful “wedding” of the German tradition with antiquity occurring, according to Cysarz, only later, “toward the end of the eighteenth century” (291), in the works of the period that he goes on to call the German “High Renaissance,” works that are, moreover, conceptually dependent on Italian forms. Although his Baroque is clearly caught up in the same progressivist logic as the Renaissance proper, Cysarz’s version thus cannot really have the genuinely reanimating function with which Benjamin hopes to endow it. Nor is the Baroque, not surprisingly, actually German in spirit at all. Benjamin had commented at length and somewhat condescendingly to Scholem that as useful as he found some parts of the book by Cysarz as a “rising Viennese academic,” its confused logic revealed that its author had succumbed to “the vertiginous attraction” of the antithetical period of the Baroque itself (Briefe 1: 354). Cysarz’s indecisiveness about which “Renaissance” to measure the Baroque against—the historical Italian or the Weimar Classical one—may well be a case in point.

In Cysarz’s discussions of the Baroque in 1923–24, the narrative of an all-encompassing “continuity of the German Renaissance movement” (Deutsche Barock-
dichtung 292) into which all great epochs, authors, and texts of the German tradition may dip— but only when they are “classical, classicistic, and Renaissance-like” enough (132 and 292)— thus actually effaces any possibility of a distinct or positive “origin” of a German tradition in the Baroque. It is this reading of the period to which Benjamin takes exception. The benchmark of Weimar as the norm produces Cysarz’s odd claim that it is only because Baroque poetic theory “is based first and foremost upon a Horatian and Aristotelian foundation” that the period can be said to belong to the “unshaken” German tradition (106) at all. Cysarz’s appeal to a tradition of normative German-language poetic theory that reached its high point with Johann Christoph Gottsched suggests the context of Benjamin’s famous rejection in the Tragic Drama book of any scholarship—and of Cysarz’s claims in particular—that considers the tradition of Baroque poetic treatises beholden to Aristotle. When Cysarz and others attempt to “redeem the tragic drama by appealing to Aristotle,” Benjamin writes (G: 1.1: 232; E: 52), they mistakenly rely on a tradition of “classicizing poetics” (233; 53) as an essentially foreign-identified and backward-looking critical tool with which to evaluate “modern” drama and thus fail to generate categories for understanding the period out of the texts of the period itself. Here Benjamin seems to identify the texts of the Baroque as themselves nearly synonymous with the ancient “relics” that it had traditionally been the charge of the Renaissance to renew. In his argument, these are the texts that should be received as the sources of a national rebirth.

Cysarz’s classicizing logic is Benjamin’s explicit target both here in the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” and in the second chapter of the Tragic Drama book, where he dismisses all attempts to redeem the Baroque by apologizing for it as “a necessary transitional stage” (G: 1.1: 240; E: 60). As “contemporary” as his diction may really have been, Cysarz’s defense of the Baroque was thus, like Stachel’s, both profoundly traditional and fundamentally antitypological. Like Stachel, Cysarz looks only backward, not merely to eighteenth-century Weimar Classicism, but also to disciplinary hierarchies set by the nineteenth-century tradition of what Wilhelm Voßkamp calls positivistic “Classicism-centrism” (Klassizentrierung, 686) that prevented German literature from modernizing at all. In the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” it is Cysarz’s logic of “necessity”—the Baroque must “blossom” and then, grown “tired” (Deutsche Barockdichtung 273), “wilt” (274) and fail (265) so that German Classicism, the “authentic” (6) “German High Renaissance” (280,

19. The outrage of some early readers of Benjamin’s dismissal of the role of Aristotle is surprising, not only because it is clearly polemical in relation to Cysarz, but also because other prominent critics, including Arthur Hübscher, whose important 1922 article on the Baroque I discuss below, also proposed that Aristotle's categories were not central in an understanding of Baroque literary texts. See Hübscher 535 and below.

20. Körner suggests that Cysarz’s pronouncements were inspired by the oracular tone of the George Circle, perhaps via Friedrich Gundolf, and thus includes the overly precocious Cysarz among the “Gundolf epigones” (455), whose work was flooding the literary journals at the time.
can replace it—that is the object of Benjamin’s explicit distrust (G: 1.1: 233; E: 53). Benjamin goes on to write in the second chapter of the Tragic Drama book of the need for criticism of the Baroque to “free” itself from approaches that see the period only as a “necessary but inessential transitional phenomenon” (278; 100). Cysarz is clearly still the target here. Hopelessly “entangled” (233; 53), according to Benjamin, in a logic that condemns both the Baroque and innovation of any sort to extinction, Cysarz’s argument epitomizes the kind of scholarship Benjamin rejects in favor of an approach that would celebrate the Baroque as capable of giving birth to more modern German literary forms on its own.

Benjamin’s discussion of the Baroque tragic drama and its “origin” (Ursprung) not as growing out of the past, but rather as indicating a future “development of emergence and fading” (G: 1.1: 226; E: 45) is thus conducted in explicit dialogue with, but also as a deliberate revision of, the terms of Stachel’s and Cysarz’s “defenses” of the texts of the Baroque as Renaissance clones. Throughout the Tragic Drama book, he rejects arguments about the Baroque that assess the genre of the modern tragic drama only as a “distortion” and “clumsy Renaissance . . . of ancient tragedy” (230–31; 50), and repeatedly emphasizes, instead, those “baroque characteristics” of the texts that are specifically “foreign to the Renaissance” (240; 59). “Almost nothing of the German dramatic tradition of the Renaissance survives [in the Baroque],” Benjamin claims (259; 80). Later he explicitly states that the use of

21. Although Benjamin also often cites numerous individual details and arguments derived from Cysarz’s 1924 study in a positive way, he was not alone in critiquing Cysarz. See, again, the searing review of German Baroque Poetry by Körner. Vöskamp takes Körner’s review as a signal that a “self-criticism” had already set in within Baroque studies.

22. Benjamin’s critique of the terms of “necessity” is also aimed at the work of Julius Petersen, whom he likewise cites and critiques in the Tragic Drama book; Petersen’s concept of “necessity” in literary-historical analysis is related to but not exactly the same as Cysarz’s and speaks more to the “necessity” of the text’s relation to what Benjamin calls the “subjective disposition of the author” (G: 1.1: 233; E: 52), and to any particular author’s “necessary” containment within the synchronic “total picture” of his times, than to Cysarz’s diachronically organized “necessity” of literary history.

23. There were other scholars of the German literary Baroque who, although unnamed in the Tragic Drama book, deployed much the same set of tropes about a Baroque that resembled a “classi-

izing” Renaissance more than itself. One particularly significant voice was that of the young Richard Alewyn, whose Vorbarocker Klassizismus und griechische Tragödie: Analyse der ‘Antigone’-Übersetzung des Martin Opitz (Pre-Baroque Classicism and Greek Tragedy: An Analysis of Martin Opitz’s Antigone Translation) (1926) had been accepted as his doctoral dissertation in Heidelberg in the very year, 1925, that Benjamin withdrew his “Baroque book” from consideration at Frankfurt. Benjamin appears to have respected Alewyn’s work enough to have been happy to report to Scholem in 1928 that he had heard Alewyn was to review the Tragic Drama book (Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 908–9). The review never materialized. Perhaps this was a good thing, because in 1926 Alewyn, like Stachel and Cysarz before him, defines Opitz first and foremost as a “Renaissance poet” (Vorbarocker Klassizismus 19), thrusting him into a relation of dependency on the ancients in ways similar to theirs. “The tragic drama of the German Baroque” proper, such as the plays of Lohenstein and Gryphius, constitute, according to Alewyn, no more than a mildly “disruptive” “Intermezzo” between a brace of classicizing periods (53) against which they fail to measure up.
affect by Baroque playwrights, of props on the Baroque stage, and of the highly or-
nate Alexandrine rhyme scheme that so clearly mark the Silesian plays are nothing
at all like these features, as they characterize the texts of either their Renaissance or
ancient predecessors (277, 312, 380–81; 99, 133, 205–6). Even though Baroque poet-
ological handbooks have a “Renaissance-like facade” (239; 59), finally, and thus ap-
pear “classicist,” the Baroque tragic drama itself is specifically not to be assessed,
Benjamin asserts, via the terminology of “Renaissance tragedy,” and certainly not
in terms of imitating the ancients, who could not have had “any less influence” at
the time (240; 60). For Benjamin, the only way to begin to understand the German
Baroque at all is thus to see it not as an antiquity-loving Renaissance influenced by
foreign norms, but rather as a period and canon whose “works” are to be assessed
by attention to their own standards, “in the context,” as he describes it, “of their
own concise logic” (255; 76).

Benjamin’s review and rejection in the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” of existing
scholarly positions on the German Baroque by Stachel and Cysarz fulfill the tradi-
tional function of the German academic introduction, namely to clear the ground
for a new set of claims via indictment of the work of previous scholars. But Benja-
min’s own position on the Baroque—his crafting of a positive, or productive, argu-
ment for an independent “idea” of the Baroque and of the genre of a specifically
German tragic drama—has still to be established. Beatrice Hanssen suggests that
the earlier and less conventional pages of the “Prologue” (which precede Benja-
min’s dismissal of Stachel and Cysarz and were, again, not included in the thesis
when Benjamin first turned it in for review at Frankfurt) should be read as part
of a dialogue with the theoretical assumptions of historicism and neo-Kantianism,
on the one hand, and the psychologism that was part of contemporary aesthet-
ics and art history, on the other (24, 41). While this is certainly correct, Hanssen
overlooks that these very same additional pages can also be read as providing the
art philosophical logic behind an alternative periodization scheme, one that Ben-
jamin develops to take the place of the approaches to the Baroque, like Stachel’s
and Cysarz’s, that he critiques. Benjamin’s complex discussion of the relationship
between the facticity of individual texts and works of art and the abstractness of
“ideas” in the opening pages of the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” as it was pub-
ished in 1928 addresses, I would argue, the very same issues of periodization as the
more conventional “academic” section with which it concludes, offering a defense
of the Baroque that argues for its existence precisely as an independent “idea” of
rebirth. For support of this claim, Benjamin draws on the work of another contem-
porary scholar, Konrad Burdach.

In the opening pages of the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” as it appeared in print
in 1928, a tense dialectic emerges between methods that privilege the particular-
ity of single works of art and a set of more or less abstract or idealist methods
that posit a prior category—historical-contextual, period- or genre-specific, or
aesthetic-subjective—as a way of identifying individual works. Given his critique
(in the original “Prologue”) of scholarship that posited an “idea” of “Renaissance” tragedy, or of a “classicism” of form that failed to account for the empirical existence of the idiosyncrasies of the tragic dramas of the German Baroque, it makes sense that Benjamin devotes additional attention in the complex pages he added to what has come to be known as his “theory of ideas” (Ideenlehre), arguing there against any system of analysis that would “measure” objects against foreign standards or abstract norms even as he also argues for the preservation of a doctrine of independent “ideas” like the Baroque. Thus, as much as the theory-of-ideas section may represent a dialogue with the work of neo-Kantians R. M. Meyer (1901) (G: 1:1: 222; E: 42) and Hermann Cohen (1914) (226; 46), for example, or represent an attempt to push Benedetto Croce even further in his rejection of the “judgment” of individual works of art against a preexisting grid of ideal forms (223–24; 43–45), the notoriously difficult section of the “Prologue” in which these philosophers and art theorists are named may also be read as an integral part of the attempt to develop more apt methods than Stachel’s and Cysarz’s for dealing with the German Baroque. It is thus not by chance that in this first section of the “Prologue,” even before he takes aim at Meyer, Croce, Cohen, et al., Benjamin turns to a text of considerable notoriety at the time, namely Konrad Burdach’s Reformation, Renaissance, Humanismus (1918), and to Burdach’s critique there of any and all period concepts such as “humanism” and “the Renaissance,” the “Gothic,” and the “Baroque man” (G: 1:1: 220–21; E: 40). In the “theory of ideas” section, it is in fact via several lengthy quotes from Burdach that Benjamin tries to clarify how to respect the realm of the “object,” the “phenomenon,” and the empirical while also preserving the realm of “truth” and of ideas (209–15; 29–35). It is, in other words, Benjamin’s adaptation of Burdach’s explanation of the epistemology of periodization that allows Benjamin to articulate an “idea” of a German Baroque independent of the “idea” of the Renaissance and thus to distinguish “tragic drama” from ancient tragedy by attending to its peculiar, phenomenal details. Benjamin nevertheless also— and, I would argue, not by chance— uses Burdach’s wartime discussion of a much-needed alternative moment of national “rebirth” to perform this task, thereby interpellating the work of a specifically German Renaissance into his definition of the origin of the Baroque appropriate to the times.

Konrad Burdach (1859–1936) was a well-established but exceedingly controversial medievalist, and the editor of numerous Italian and New High German source texts, whose career was at its relative high point in the early 1920s. His essentially anti-Burckhardtian theses about the fundamentally spiritual— rather than political— origins of the Renaissance, and thus its continuities with the “religious upheavals” (Borchardt 427) of the High Middle Ages, on the one hand, and his claims about the impact of the radical movements in Italy on the court culture of Prague and other parts north, on the other, had tested both the disciplinary and geographical, the ideological and chronological limits of what could be said about the secular Italian “origins” of the Renaissance at the time and had caused an immense
amount of scholarly debate.24 Benjamin’s discussion of Burdach’s claims occurs at what is virtually the center of the most difficult part of the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue,” on the pages under the running head “Burdach’s Nominalism” (G: 1.1: 220–22). Here he touches less on Burdach’s thematic and historical period argument and more on the methodological issue at the center of Burdach’s essay “Über den Ursprung des Humanismus” (On the Origin of Humanism), which makes up one chapter of Burdach’s 1918 book. In that essay, Burdach discusses the relation of any movement or period label, such as humanism, to the manifold movements, events, and texts it describes. The coincidence of Burdach’s problematization of the term “origin” (Ursprung) in this essay with Benjamin’s famous definition of the term just a few pages later in the Tragic Drama book is too obvious to be ignored. The implication in Benjamin’s “idea” of the “origin” of the Baroque of Burdach’s telic narrative of the fruition of an “other” Renaissance in an epoch-spanning tradition of specifically German humanism is equally hard to miss.

Originally published in the fateful year of 1914, and then reissued in the equally momentous year of 1918, Burdach’s “On the Origin of Humanism” has the specific task, as Benjamin’s lengthy quote from it reveals (G: 1.1: 220; E: 40), of defeating a tradition of universalizing claims about the secular nature of the Italian Renaissance derived from Burckhardt in order to provide a more inspiring model of spiritual “rebirth” for a wartime and postwar Germany under duress. Burckhardtian claims discard the actual complexity of the period, Burdach argues, with its “endless series of multiple spiritual phenomena and quite different personalities” (Burdach 101), substituting for it (in what Benjamin describes as a “hypostasizing fashion,” G: 221; E: 40) an “arbitrary” (Burdach 102) moment of origin and label. The specific position against which Burdach tilts here—identified in the original essay directly following the claims of arbitrariness, but which Benjamin does not cite—is associated with the image of Renaissance man so commonly associated with Burckhardt, namely a “free, genius-like personality, audaciously frivolous in corrupt sinfulness, a type of aesthetic immorality” (Burdach 102). Benjamin confirms that Burdach is correct in this critique (G: 1.1: 221; E: 40). Burdach is also right, Benjamin goes on to note, to reject falsifying abstractions produced by those who would, like the Scholastic realists of the Middle Ages, subordinate the complexity of realia to words (cf. Burdach 101). Suggesting that perhaps Burdach was also himself “shy,” or wary, about such “constitutive ideas” (G: 1.1: 220; E: 40), Benjamin nevertheless goes on to offer, by way of supplementing the earlier scholar’s claims, a defense of the “necessity” of certain kinds of abstractions in any “epistemological theory” that, like Benjamin’s own, is concerned with “essences” and “ideas” and their relationship to the “matter” of specific “historical periods” (221; 41). Just as Burdach openly contests the critical hegemony of Burckhardt’s claims about the Renaissance, Benjamin’s

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24. Benjamin was aware of Burdach’s anti-Burckhardtian position; see the notes Benjamin made on “Burdach’s polemic against Burckhardt” (Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 918).
discussion of the Baroque will provide an alternative to conventional definitions of the period as the poor cousin of a classicizing “Renaissance.”

In the essay that Benjamin cites, Burdach undercuts the prevailing “idea” of a ruthless and destructive Burckhardtian Renaissance by advocating instead a picture of the period characterized by a countervailing, yet ultimately equally as abstract “idea” of a religiously inflected and spiritual “rebirth” (107) of “an ideal humanity” (103) that is, Burdach claims, at the core of the trio of periods indicated in the title of his book: Reformation, Renaissance, Humanismus. This rebirth had emerged with particular salience in Germany, he writes. The “constitutive” power of this version of the Renaissance for a demoralized wartime Germany was considerable. Indeed, even as Burdach tries to stay close to the historical “matter” in his systematic review of “multiple spiritual phenomena,” his real agenda is to develop the “idea” of a spiritually driven Renaissance out of an elaborate “constellation” of sources from a number of traditions that is capable of moving ever forward in time. The terms are of course Benjamin’s (G: 1.1: 214–15; E: 34–35), but they are useful for understanding what he finds significant in Burdach, namely the “parcel[ing] out and redeem[ing]” (215; 34) into a new “representation” of a period of versions of that period that were previously undervalued or ignored because they did not fit the pattern of conventional claims, on the one hand, and then unleashing that period into its own posthistory, on the other.

The Renaissance was a period not of Burckhardtian individualism or the return of antiquity, Burdach argues, but rather one that celebrated the “idea” of the spiritual rebirth of mankind. No longer just (although also) an intellectualized “spiritual revolution” (Burdach 10), the actual rebirth that was at the center of the historical Renaissance is best exemplified, he claims, by the contentious career of the Italian visionary Cola di Rienzo (1313–54). According to Burdach, this rebirth was, moreover, not restricted to Italy. It was also at the core of the “German humanism” of the eighteenth century visible in the work of Winckelmann and Goethe (200–202; a trajectory not unlike Cysarz’s is reflected here) as well as in the “third flowering of humanism” said to be occurring in the Germany of his own time (202). Given the upbeat tenor of this argument as it was originally developed at the moment war was declared, it is easy to see why Benjamin—in the postwar period of Germany’s defeat—might have hesitated to endorse the wisdom of proposing the “idea” of

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25. Although Burdach’s argument about the purely spiritual “origin” of the Renaissance was at odds with the dominant historiographic positions at the time, which argued the greater importance of sociological and political factors in the emergence of the “new” age, it was widely received and debated, especially among German scholars, at the time as a way of linking developments during the Renaissance in Italy with developments in the North, and thus seeing the possibility of a Renaissance in the land of the Reformation. See Fubini; Ferguson.

26. The claim is reiterated in the new “foreword” to Burdach’s 1918 book, where he asserts that the ideas he originally developed in the essay, some four years earlier, are “now” (e.g., in 1918) “after the events of the past four years” of even greater relevance for a post-World War I population in desperate need of finding “lofty . . . goals for humanity.” On the politically problematic phenomenon of the “third” wave of humanism in pre-1933 Germany, see Malignani.
such a period and its eternal return, and he deftly sidesteps its overtly patriotic fervor by claiming that such projects are often determined by “contemporary interests and not by historiographic ideas” (G: 1.1: 221; E: 41). Yet Benjamin does go on to attempt to recuperate—in these dense pages of the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue”—Burdach’s original discussion of pro- and antinominalist period designations via a close reading of the essay, closing with the claim that although “as far as historical types and epochs in particular are concerned,” ideas such as “the Renaissance” and “the Baroque” can never really account for their “subject matter” in full, they are nevertheless necessary to the critic precisely “as ideas” (221; 41). In secret accord with Burdach, then, Benjamin argues that period names are in fact indispensable, even if they do not provide an absolute “methodological guarantee” (221; 41) in the face of the famous “eddy” (226; 45) of historical detail. The “idea” of a Burdachian “rebirth” of the spirit in present-day Germany is thus retained.

Benjamin’s concern in the early sections of the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” with the relationship of the particular to the general, the empirical to the theoretical, thus engages a number of epistemological, philosophical, and historiographic debates about period labels that were being conducted at the time and intervenes in them via his engagement with projects like Stachel’s, Cysarz’s, and Burdach’s. No absolute idealist, Benjamin goes on to critique “polemical discussions” that would propose clean standoffs between “ideas” of distinct opposing sides, as if “the epochs confronted one another openly [mit offenem Visier] and in completely above board ways at the great turning points of history” (G: 1.1: 221; E: 41). The “knightly” epochs engaged in “open helm”–combat here are, I would argue, the periods of the Renaissance and the Baroque; at stake is the status of a German rebirth. Burdach had developed a similar critique of the periodization debates in his book, maintaining—in a formulation so close to Benjamin’s discussion of origin (Ursprung) that it is hard to miss—that because “humanism never existed as a sealed totality” (100–101), it was the job of the historian (Burdach cites Eduard Meyer here) to understand “that which has become as something becoming . . . to place himself in the moment, when what history confronts us with as ‘fact’ is not yet, but is only in the process of becoming” (97–98). In spite of such qualifications, both Burdach and Benjamin nevertheless ultimately do have recourse to integral period “ideas” in their respective work, since such categories are the only way, as Benjamin states and Burdach’s work shows, that “extremes” of evidence can be accommodated as a “synthesis” (G: 1.1: 221; E: 41) of claims.27 That both Benjamin and Burdach cannot help but

27. The genres of tragedy and tragic drama are similarly useful, according to Benjamin, in dealing with manifold dramatic phenomena; “tragic drama . . . is an idea” (G: 1.1: 218; E: 38) that prevents one from dealing with evidence as a matter of mere inventory taking, an approach that is also unacceptably unphilosophical. That his more abstruse formulations in the Ideenlehre section of the “Prologue” were always conceived of as a way of expressing his ideas about both period and genre is evident in Benjamin’s schematic note (Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 918) to the effect that “the cultural historical period concepts, concepts of style and of genre are ideas.”
refer to what are clearly defined as preexisting “ideas,” such as humanism and the Baroque, even as they seek to derive their properties only from the “irreducible multiplicity” (223; 43) of their phenomenal “details,” may be what Benjamin means when he claims that any scholarship that “protests against the language of its own investigations” is absurd (222; 42). It is as much of an absurdity to write about the Baroque only in the conceptual and critical vocabulary of the Renaissance, in other words, as it is not to assume the existence of an autonomous Baroque, however defined, when turning to its texts. Questions about what exactly the Baroque was that was being assumed to exist, where it resided, and where its “phenomena” could best be observed were at the center of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art historical and art theoretical debates about the Baroque to which I now turn.

**Locating Baroque Style**

Benjamin claims in a letter to Florens Christian Rang that he wrote as he was working on his Habilitation that the issue of “how works of art relate to historical life” was the question that lay at the center of his thinking about the tragic drama (Briefe 1: 322). Michael Jennings argues that the overall project Benjamin describes here was designed as a way of “isolat[ing] within individual works those fragments that are inscribed with the structure and proper experience of an epoch, and only then to move back from the specific observation to cultural and societal generalizations” (“Walter Benjamin” 78–79). As much of the letter to Rang reads as if it were inserted word for word into the parts of the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” just discussed, the possibility that it might be necessary to posit the “idea” of the historical Baroque first, and then turn to the works said to embody it, suggests that Jennings’s sequence may need to be revisited, if not reversed. Nevertheless, he is correct in his understanding of Benjamin’s concerns in the letter, especially if, on the one hand, we understand the “works of art” (Briefe 1: 322) to which Benjamin refers to be the actual “phenomenal” texts of the tragic dramas themselves, and, on the other, see the question of their relation to “cultural . . . generalizations” as a matter of “epoch,” or period, designations like “the Baroque.” In the work of two of the art historians most often associated with the “formalist” method of close readings of works of art and with discussions of how to define the Baroque as an independent period and style, namely Heinrich Wölfflin and Alois Riegl, we see attempts to solve the question of how the relationship between the work of art and the “structure and proper experience” of a new, non-Renaissance Baroque epoch could be both described and explained. Benjamin’s discussion of the “origin” of the German tragic drama bears witness to and evolves in conversation with Wölfflin’s and Riegl’s attempts to define the origins of the Baroque in similar ways, which unlink it from the Renaissance by (re)locating it and its artifacts in a place that is both literally and discursively new.

It is not by chance that Benjamin claims in his Tragic Drama book that the only methodologically sound alternative to either the earlier nationalist literary
histories that dismissed the Baroque as “un-German,” or readings that cast its
plays as sterile “Renaissance dramas,” lies in what he calls a “serious criticism of
style” (G: 1.1: 240; E: 59). He writes that he intends to open a window onto the
“form world” (257; 78) of the Baroque tragic drama “far away from the preserve
of Hamburg dramaturgy, not to speak of post-classical dramaturgy too” (257; 78).
Formal questions have long been claimed to underlie many of the contemporary
accounts of what distinguished the style of the historical period of the Baroque
from that of the Renaissance, as noted at the outset of this chapter, even as they also
provided the terms in which the two periods and their works could be compared.
The question of how location, or place, and specific cultural or national traditions,
such as the one indicated in Benjamin’s reference to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s
Hamburgische Dramaturgie (Hamburg Dramaturgy) here, helped define the role of
stylistics in periodization theory has received less attention to date.

Discussions of the Baroque were carried on so widely in German-speaking
Europe during the early twentieth century that, by 1926, Josef Körner could quip
that the issue had already been the talk of the town in “all lanes and squares” (456)
for over a decade. The period was nowhere so prominently an object of debate as in
the history and theory of art.28 That the parameters of such discussions were often
associated with the work of two of the most visible scholars in these fields, namely
Wölfflin and Riegl, emerges in the short review essay “Strenge Kunstwissenschaft”
(The Rigorous Study of Art) (1933) that Benjamin began planning in 1931 and
finally published five years after the tragic drama study appeared in print. In some
ways, the essay can be read as part of Benjamin’s apparent preparations for a second
edition of the Tragic Drama book: a résumé probably dating from the year in which
the book originally appeared suggests that Benjamin was interested in making a
clearer statement about how to understand a “stylistically” marked work of art also
as an “integrated expression, restricted in no area- or discipline-specific way, of the
religious, metaphysical, political, and economic trends of an epoch” (Gesammelte
Schriften 1.3: 886).29 The terms resonate with those used in the essay. Benjamin’s

28. It has long been assumed, at least since Hermann’s 1965 Literaturwissenschaft und Kunstwissen-
schaft (Literary Studies and the Study of Art), if not before, that it was the art historical debates that
determined the literary-historical and critical ones. See Kiesant (79) and Hans-Harald Müller (“Die
Übertragung des Barockbegriffs” 97) for a reconsideration of the “astonishing self-evidence” of the as-
sumption that it was in art history that the Renaissance-Baroque debates found their origin. Alpers also
discusses the interpretive problems created by this logic.

29. Benjamin obviously began making notes for a new edition of the Tragic Drama book some-
time after 1928, as the sheet of paper with the title “Addenda to the Tragic Drama,” with its reference
to a 1928 number of the Deutsche Literaturzeitung, shows (Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 952–54, here 953);
that these notes focus primarily on enhancing his understanding of the historical specificity of the phe-
nomenon of the tragic drama as part of early modern political and social history may not have been at
odds with his interest in the art theoretical debates he comments on in his essay “The Rigorous Study
of Art.” I will not be dealing here with the often heated debate about the relationship between the Ba-
roque and the styles and canon of what came to be known as Mannerist art, on which Benjamin’s book
sheds less light. On the relation of the Baroque and Mannerism, also in terms of discussions about clas-
sicism, see Link-Herr.
discussion there of Wölfflin and Riegl shines light on the debates in art history and art theory about the origins of the Baroque as a new and modern alternative to the Renaissance, debates that, like Benjamin’s argument in his adaptation of them, offered alternatives to the approaches represented by Stachel’s and Cysarz’s work.

In “The Rigorous Study of Art,” Benjamin claims to see a difference between Wölfflin and Riegl. As Sigrid Weigel, among others, has pointed out (117), Benjamin seems to distance himself from Wölfflin here by claiming that the author of Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe (Principles of Art History) (1915) was both the victim and a continuing perpetrator of the distinction between an “old-fashioned” and “conventional” paradigm of “universal history” and an “academic aesthetics” (Gesammelte Schriften 3: 373, 370). A gainst what he identifies as Wölfflin’s “formalist” method of “analysis” (370), Benjamin would thus appear to side with Riegl and with his far more “sober” (372) theory of history, which recaptures the possibility of an apology for even the most unlikely periods of art as well as a combinatory, even interdisciplinary approach to cultural history writ large. Much has been made of Benjamin’s allegiance to and even radicalization of Riegl’s celebration of so-called decadent periods. His indebtedness to Riegl for methods of determining the relation of the individual works of art to “collectivities” of society and epochs, rather than to the “subjectivities” of individual artists, has also been noted. Nevertheless, the distinctions Benjamin makes between Riegl and Wölfflin in this essay do not undercut what he ultimately announces as their shared commitment to the “overcoming of conventional universal history, with its so-called ‘peaks’ and periods of decline,” or decay (373). What Benjamin perceives as the link between Wölfflin and Riegl is apparent in what Wölfflin’s Principles of Art History, and, just as importantly, his earlier book Renaissance und Barock (Renaissance and Baroque) (1888), do in fact have in common with Riegl’s Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom (The Emergence of Baroque Art in Rome) (1908), namely the need to develop a narrative of the Baroque that positioned it precisely not as the decline of the Renaissance, but, rather, as what Wölfflin in Principles calls a “change in style” (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 10), a change that emerged out of and in accordance with an integrated “new idea” (Anschauung) (131), with its own norms.

Identifying these norms and thus the Renaissance-Baroque relation as a matter of a “change in style” depends in both Wölfflin and Riegl on a logic of comparison between the two periods that was, if not sequential, then at least part of a different
narrative of development than the decay thesis. Scholars have suggested that both theorists rejected overly simplistic “materialist” and cognitive causalities (e.g., that stylistic change occurs because of changes in materials and technology, or simply because consumers of art became bored with the Renaissance and needed the stimulation associated with a new style). In the absence of such explanations, Wölfflin and Riegl had to account for what occasioned the difference of the Baroque from the Renaissance in some other way. I argue here that both offered explanations of stylistic difference and change by linking style to the “foundational sensibility” (Renaissance und Barock 56) of a period and to “the character of a nation (Volk)” (K unstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 9), in the case of Wölfflin, and to the famously murky concept of the “artistic will” (Kunstwollen) of both places and times, in the case of Riegl (see below). Benjamin’s own project to root the independent “artistic feeling” of the German Baroque in a specific national tradition resonates with both sets of ideas. Because a strange division of interpretive labor has made it common to associate Benjamin’s work with Riegl, but to exclude the matter of the Baroque, while associating the penetration of art historical debates about the Baroque into literary studies with Wölfflin, but excluding Benjamin’s intersection with this process, I deal first with Wölfflin’s evaluation of the claim that the Baroque represented “modernity,” paying special attention to his struggle to identify the causes of change in either period and national “ethnic” place (“Zeit-” and “Volkcharakter,” K unstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 9). I then show how these questions find different solutions in Riegl’s approach to the Baroque, which identifies it (and by extension, all styles) as the expression of a located, collective “artistic will.”

It difficult to avoid Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) in discussions of the Baroque. Indeed, he is— and was, even during his own lifetime— a “classic,” as Marshall Brown notes (379), not only because of the reputation indicated by his inheritance in 1893 of his teacher Burckhardt’s professorial chair in Basel, but also because he was soon named to positions in art history in Berlin and Munich as well. The Berlin position in particular was a mark of his prominence at the time; his Principles of Art History is, moreover, still read as one of the texts, if not as the text, that

32. Jennings asserts that many of the art historians whose work Benjamin endorsed were moving away from “developmental narratives” in the “history of the arts” to the “study” of the immanent characteristics of “single works” (“Walter Benjamin” 80–83). In “The Rigorous Study of Art,” Benjamin nevertheless makes it clear that what he appreciates in the “new” kind of art history that Riegl’s work represents is its ability to move “from the individual object” to its larger and somehow historically rooted “spiritual function.” See Pächt on Riegl, as cited in Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften 3: 372.

33. See, respectively, Riegl, Spätrömische Kunstindustrie 8–9; and Wölfflin, Renaissance und Barock 52–54.

34. Benjamin uses the term “artistic feeling” in the “Nachträge zum Trauerspielbuch” (Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 953) in connection with the need to return to the work on post-Reformation art by Helmuth Plessner in preparation for a second edition. Later associated with the Frankfurt School, Plessner became famous for his interdisciplinary philosophical anthropology.

35. On Wölfflin’s biography, see Warnke, “On Heinrich Wölfflin,” with additional bibliography there.
sets the terms of how to discuss stylistics and the Baroque. The exact details of these discussions and their relation to Wölfflin's earlier Renaissance and Baroque may nevertheless need to be reviewed. Benjamin claims in “The Rigorous Study of Art” that Wölfflin's method, predicated primarily on “formal analysis” (Gesammelte Schriften 3: 370), was different from Burckhardt's. This is the same “formal analysis” of the five famous elements—linear versus painterly, planar versus recessional, closed versus open forms, unity in diversity versus unity in singularity, and absolute versus relative clarity—that is still often said to define the two different styles of Renaissance and Baroque art. While his reading of Wölfflin is thus not unusual, Benjamin's accusation of formalism here may in fact be a somewhat “glib” reading of what were actually the far more complex ways in which Wölfflin presented his explanation of the “history” of art, ways that were not unlike Riegl’s—and also in some respects closer to Benjamin's own.

While Benjamin refers primarily to the Principles of Art History in his commentary on Wölfflin, it was in the much earlier Renaissance and Baroque that Wölfflin first dismissed the Baroque-as-decay-of-the-Renaissance thesis to which Benjamin also objects. Originally written as his own Habilitation, Wölfflin's book has three parts, the first concerned with defining the “essence” of the shift from Renaissance to Baroque, the second with the all-important “reasons” for this shift, and only in the third section with describing the period’s “typical” stylistic characteristics as evident in both the sacred and the secular architecture of Italy. This last section is the one that later came to be associated with Wölfflin's signature formalism. Its organization underscores the book's position at a crossroads for both its author and the discipline of art history. Even as the first and last sections are marked by an elaborate call-and-response relationship to existing scholarship, and especially to several of Wölfflin's teacher Burckhardt's books, the rhetorically and methodologically most striking moment of Renaissance and Baroque is nevertheless its central section. Entitled “Die Gründe der Stilwandlung” (The Reasons for the Change in Style), this is where Wölfflin issues an impassioned appeal to some of the ideas he had developed in his Munich dissertation of just a few years earlier, “Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur” (Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture) (1886), as a way of addressing the question of the origin of stylistic change.

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36. Principles of Art History went through two printings within three years of publication—and this during the height of World War I. Nevertheless, see Warnke, “On Heinrich Wölfflin” 172–73, on the tempered reaction by more conservative fellow art historians.

37. Holly ("Wölfflin and the Imagining of the Baroque" 350) calls some readings of Wölfflin (although not Benjamin's) "glib." Benjamin's rejection of Wölfflin's approach as still beholden to a "rigidly periodic" "universal history" actually puts Benjamin's reading on a collision course with the more recent approaches to Wölfflin of Holly and Brown, who are interested in a task for the Baroque that differs from Benjamin's.

38. It may be worth noting that Wölfflin also uses the category of "origin" (Ursprung) here in not un-Benjaminian ways to address the question of the afterlife of the Renaissance and of what "became" of it in the period of the Baroque (Renaissance und Barock).
Inventing the Baroque

(Renaissance und Barock 55 n. 2). T he “reasons” he gives here are not entirely satisfactory, however, and he moves to other explanations, including those of national ethnic place, in later work.

In Renaissance and Baroque, Wölfflin explains that earlier art historical treatments of the periods had been Vasari-like “lives of artists,” which favored implicit hierarchies of achievement and value; these hierarchies had generated many of the sorting categories adopted to organize and display the history of art writ large. His current attempt not merely to describe, but also to explain the “reasons for the shift in style” from Renaissance to Baroque in particular as the result of changes in the historical “foundational sensibility” (Renaissance und Barock 56) of specific times was in fact a novelty. It also went beyond the kinds of political and social history that Burckhardt had adduced in his book on the Renaissance in Italy as the explanation for period emergence, for example, to holistic arguments about changes in cultural sensibility as they became visible in works of art. Wölfflin’s restriction of his discussion in Renaissance and Baroque to “Italian art”—“the northern peoples,” he claims, “had not yet gone through this phase of development” (1)—calls attention to the fact that here, precisely by avoiding the question of the durability of his period-based claims across national borders, Wölfflin actually fails to address the issue that would have made his explanation a compelling alternative to the decay thesis, namely that the difference was a matter not of period change or stylistic “development,” but, rather, of place. The elision of comparative material in Renaissance and Baroque, to which Wölfflin himself calls attention here, suggests the reasons why he had to return to address these same first-principle questions about the relationship between style, period, and place in the later Principles of Art History, where he struggles more openly—and also in a deliberately comparative way—with the categories with which he intends not only to describe differences in style, but also in which he will find the “reasons” (Gründe) for them.

Already in the opening chapter, the “introduction” to Renaissance and Baroque, Wölfflin rejects an understanding of the Baroque as a period of “decadence,” and thus creates the same need to develop an alternative positive explanation for the difference between the Renaissance and the Baroque that Benjamin later confronts. Wölfflin indicates his—and the profession’s—more or less antithetical position to the association with the Baroque of terms such as “dissolution” and “decay,” as well as to the notion that the period was a “degenerated form” of the Renaissance; he explicitly refers to such dismissals of the Baroque as positions to which “we have become accustomed” (Renaissance und Barock 1), but that, along with the associations of the Baroque with the bizarre and the monstrous that abounded “in

39. On the dissertation and on Wölfflin’s preference for “psychological interpretation” rather than “formal analysis of style,” see Brown 389–91. Both Dittmann (64) and Podro (104) correctly see the question of the “reasons” for changes in period style as central for Wölfflin, although both find the issue more compellingly (if not always satisfactorily) addressed in the earlier rather than the later work.
vernacular usage,” are not useful, particularly for professionals, who in any case no longer entertain such associations with the period as it is specified under its “art historical name” (11). The need to move away from such stances on the Baroque is important enough to Wölfflin for him to return to it at the opening of the central methodological chapter, where he again cites and reports on, yet also rejects theories of the formal transition between the Renaissance and the Baroque that depend on organizing metaphors of flowers that necessarily “wilt” and lose their blooms. Such theories, he explains, contribute “little” to an explanation of Baroque style (53). Contra the claim that Wölfflin somehow “subscribed” to “organicist” or “morphological” views that saw the Baroque as emerging with a certain inevitability out of the falling-off of the Renaissance (Hauser 142–43; Brown 381), then, he in fact rejects them here as summarily as he rejected the popular renderings to which he refers earlier on.

The strict oppositions that many scholars have seen in Wölfflin’s work between “two distinct styles of art, that of the Renaissance and that of the Baroque,” are thus not invoked in Renaissance and Baroque to describe the Baroque as a lesser, or failed period.40 This is not to say that he does not compare and contrast Renaissance and Baroque art in terms of harmonious “Being” versus a more tumultuous “Becoming” (Renaissance und Barock 23), for example. The Renaissance is characterized as the age of the famously balanced “golden section” (49) and reveals a certain “graceful ease” (28) and “calm” (41). The Baroque, by contrast, is distinguished by all that is “heavy” (28, 58), massive (34), and “uneasy” (45). These are the adjectives and descriptions of style that, in their association with the two periods in Wölfflin’s formulations both here and in the later Principles of Art History, rapidly became orthodoxy in stylistic theory; it is thus not surprising that those identified as Baroque resonate with Benjamin’s (later) claims about the heaviness of the Baroque prince’s “creatureliness,” for example, and the “restless” changeability of the Baroque sovereign (G: 1.1: 249–53 and 264; E: 70–72 and 85). Benjamin’s use of these Wölfflinian categories to see Baroque traits in the German tragic dramas is nevertheless precisely what allowed him to understand the period and its style in positive terms, since, as often as Wölfflin adopts what Martin Warnke (“Die Entstehung des Barockbegriffs”) sees as a negatively inflected rhetoric in association with the Baroque, just as often an even stronger and more celebratory evaluative vocabulary condenses around it as well, particularly insofar as the Baroque is said to represent a new period “spirit” and “way of seeing” that are specifically its own, not evidence of a “belated Renaissance,” as Wölfflin explicitly writes, but, rather, of a new epoch and way of seeing and style (Renaissance und Barock 60–61). He describes “painterly” elements, such as “layering,” for example, that prevent Baroque painting from becoming “boring” (19); its nearly “pathological” (36) and

even “violent” (41) devotion to “movement” is likewise “passionate” and “engaged” (36, 41; 36, 59). According to Wölfflin, it is, finally, the Baroque’s signature “movement” that guarantees both “tension” (45) and even a kind of exciting “stimulation” (Reiz), both of which are then said to testify to the “resounding and intoxicating richness that is proper to the Baroque” (46). When measured against the excitement of such Baroque “dissonances” and their resolutions (51), which are in any case to be enjoyed by only the sophisticated as opposed to the “untrained eye” (50), the balanced harmonies of the Renaissance begin to appear “trivial” (50), Wölfflin suggests. His “sympathies” would thus indeed appear to lie “with the [B]aroque,” as Brown claims (394). 41

Wölfflin’s argument here does not yet offer any fully articulated alternative to the “developmental” thesis about the history of art that Arnold Hauser, for example, already some years ago famously claimed was central to both Wölfflin’s and Riegl’s “Hegelian” approaches (131, 143, 147–50). Indeed, even though Wölfflin explicitly rejects the thesis that the Baroque either “emerged” out of the failure of the Renaissance or was “in a Hegelian manner . . . a necessary reaction” (Renaissance und Barock 54 n. 2), he can—in somewhat anti-, or, perhaps better, not-yet-typological fashion—still claim little more than that it is a period best associated with formal impulses that were more or less exclusively and essentially new, both etymologically (as he shows in his discussion of the term “new style,” 10) and in the rhetoric of his book. “The Baroque is nevertheless something essentially new that cannot be deduced from that which came before” (54), he writes. 42 The refrain concerning the novelty of the Baroque—specifically in contrast with the Renaissance (22)—is constant; the period exemplifies “the new formal feeling” (4, 42), “the new art” (6, 47), “the new forms” (9), and “the new style” (62). 43 But even this insistence cannot yet accomplish what Wölfflin seems to hope it will, namely “explain” (58, emphasis in original) the origin of the formal changes between the

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41. Brown is nevertheless referring to the later Principles of Art History here. Again, see Warnke (“Die Entstehung des Barockbegriffs” 1218–19) for a different reading of Wölfflin’s “condemnation” of the Baroque as a critique of the loss of “bourgeois individualism” in the modern (e.g., late nineteenth-century, neo-Absolutist) age in Renaissance and Baroque. Warnke also cites Jakob von Falke’s celebration of Baroque “individualism” in the latter’s Geschichte des Geschmackes im Mittelalter (1892) to the effect that, in breaking all the rules of the Renaissance, the “genial artists” of the Baroque were celebrating “the rights of individuality” (qtd. in Warnke, “Die Entstehung des Barockbegriffs” 1222), and claims that the later Wölfflin of Principles found his way to a similarly positive evaluation of the period precisely in conjunction with more “modern” developments (1222).

42. Hauser mysteriously argues for reading Wölfflin as representing the position that “every step of development is determined by the one that came before and that is aimed in a clear direction” (134).

43. Wölfflin goes on to argue that the Baroque was the style that first developed “without models” and was “consciously aware” of the need to get beyond “what had been inherited from Antiquity” (Renaissance und Barock 10). “A ny sense that there is something divine to be adored in even the smallest trace of antiquity is gone” (12). Even at the time, the “epithet” of the “new” was a sign of high praise (10) for a period marked by its “self-confidence” and sense of superiority to things of the past (12). The several freedoms that Wölfflin associates with this unantique Baroque are uncannily similar to Benjamin’s regarding the difference between the tragic drama and ancient tragedy.
periods in any compelling way. It is here that he famously admits that defining “architectural style” as an “expression of its time” (55) is as difficult as explaining “which bridge leads from the Jesuits to Baroque style.” “Which one is the path that leads from the cell of the Scholastic philosopher to the hut of the architect?” (56), he inquires. The real challenge to confront is thus, as Wölflin informs us, precisely how to link the newness of Baroque style with the “foundational sensibility of the time” that “produces” the changed historical “products” (56).

In the early Renaissance and Baroque, Wölflin cites his own earlier work on the psychology of art to support his claim that “that which determines” the “formal imagination” of the artist is a “foundational sensibility” (56), which he also describes as the “life-feeling of an era” (57). This “feeling” is in turn captured in and based on the relationship to Baroque architectural forms of Man’s “physical being” (56). The explanation is presciently Panofskyan and suggests another origin of the term habitus. Architecture is, Wölflin writes, “the expression of a time to the extent that it [architecture] allows the physical being of Man, the way he carries himself and moves, his manner [Haltung] as playfully graceful or as seriously weighted down, his excited or peaceful way of being, to become visible in the relations of the body to monuments” (56–57). The shift from one epochal “manner” of “holding oneself” to another thus explains change; the argument is based on what Michael Podro sees as a flawed “empathy theory” that projects “a sense of the inward feeling of our bodily state onto the inanimate object” (100) but does little to explain how such a feeling is linked “with the surrounding culture” (103) in any way that justifies the claim that style is an “expression of its time.” Wölflin’s “rehabilitation” of the Baroque in Renaissance and Baroque via claims for its newness may well serve, then, as a demonstration of his famous motto, “Not everything is possible at all times.” But it fails to identify the “reasons” for difference that he seeks. It does, however, shed light on why, if he wants to defend the Baroque, Wölflin must move away from the mere formal description of differing styles most often associated with his work toward an interrogation of other causalities of difference in artistic forms that go beyond the notion of an epochal “sensibility” to arguments from place. This is precisely what Wölflin does in the better-known Principles of Art History, which Benjamin refers to alongside Riegl in “The Rigorous Study of Art.” Benjamin’s association in the essay of Riegl with the preferred method of looking for the “relationship” between the “historical process” and “the curiosity of the work of art” (Gesammelte Schriften 3: 372) notwithstanding, then, there is also a very Wölfllinian set of issues subtending the claim for the autonomy of the historical Baroque and his interest, as Benjamin writes there, in trying to get to the bottom of “the laws and problems of the development of art” (372).

Wölflin was aware that he had not solved the important questions in his Renaissance and Baroque. Indeed, he even corrects his earlier claims at one point in a footnote in the later Principles of Art History, calling the 1888 book a piece of “juvenalia” (251 n. 1). Nevertheless, the very continuities between the version of
the Baroque he had offered in the earlier study and its subsequent theorization in 1915, which soon became the most cited definition of the period bar none, indicate that many of the same issues were still being addressed. Wölfflin’s Principles of Art History continues to be firm in its rejection of the decay thesis as a description of Baroque art. Equally as prominent is the ongoing association of “newness” with Baroque style. As in the earlier work, Wölfflin also asserts here, for example, that “the metaphorical analogy, bud—bloom—decay,” has played only “a misleading role” in the project of understanding how “periods” relate to one another (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 14). Moreover, his claims that the Baroque does not necessarily mean “progress” (31) do not mask his continuing belief in the essentially upbeat novelty of its forms in their “awakening of a new feeling for beauty” (31). The age also displays “a new emotional realm” and “a new ideal of life” (10–11). The Baroque tendency to “unity,” which is also evidence of “something that is overall new” (168), in fact conjures up precisely a sense of progress, or, if not progress, then a sense of stimulating excitement; Reiz is again the word Wölfflin most often associates with the Baroque here (126–27, 132, 163, 166, 211, 222). Against the liveliness (165) of the Baroque, Renaissance “classicism,” in its “obedience” to the “rules” (161), can in turn represent only a kind of stylistic stasis (165) and death (140). Wölfflin states his main point in clear terms: “The Baroque is neither the decline nor the increase of the classical, but rather, in general, an entirely different art” (15).

Wölfflin’s refusal to rank the Renaissance over the Baroque is probably the origin of the claim of relativism that critics like Ernst Gombrich have associated with the Principles of Art History. But it also explains the elaborate balancing act that is the most prominent feature of Wölfflin’s lengthy elaboration of his famous five categories in the book. His detailed exemplification of the categories makes clear why it has been difficult for critics to see anything other than the description of these dyads in Principles; Wölfflin’s dichotomizing evaluative grids structure the book in its entirety and have thus long been seen as best defining the differences between the art of the Renaissance and that of the Baroque.

44. Neither the “classical” Renaissance nor the “painterly” Baroque is a superior style or age in these descriptions: “The painterly mode is the later mode and is not imaginable without the first [the linear]. But it is also not the absolutely superior one” (Wölfflin, Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 20); likewise, “the older [linear] art . . . was able to represent all that it wanted to” and thus did not feel “restricted” by not yet being “painterly” (32). The desire to be what Lepsy calls “value free” (199) may have been what suggested to Wölfflin that he should fill his book with balancing dyads, from the linear “art of being” versus the painterly “art of appearance” (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 23) to Dürrer versus Rembrandt (25), Sansovino versus Puget (64–65), “Koordination” versus “Subordination” (171), and so on, with facing illustrations always asserting a standoff yet also a truce between the periods and styles.

45. It may well be true, as Holly (“Wölfflin and the Imagining of the Baroque”) suggests, that the structure of Wölfflin’s book mirrors the Renaissance’s “classic” principle of balance and proportionality, but it is difficult to claim that the point of the book is to privilege its art.
and not the substance of his claims, that has had the effect of masking, or at least
drawing attention away from, the larger, perhaps even deeper struggle going on
in its pages, a struggle not just to describe the two styles, but also to identify the
“origins” and “reasons” for their differences. This is a task Wölfflin carried forth
with him from the earlier Renaissance and Baroque, and which was the conundrum
at the heart of both Riegl’s and Benjamin’s confrontations with the period as well.

In Principles of Art History, the identification of the Baroque with the new is no
longer part of the more general description of all postancient art, including the
Renaissance, as “modern” (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 234). Rather, accord-
ing to Wölfflin, the transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque is explicitly
“a perfect example of how a new spirit of the times forces the creation of a new
form” (10), a representative case, in other words, of how—telically—modernity is
expressed in style. 46 The proposal here that there is a relation between “the spirit
of the times” and its expression in form suggests the aspect of Wölfflin’s version of
the Baroque that, while the object of a sustained critique for its latent Hegelianism,
in fact brings it even closer to what Benjamin claims he values in Riegl, namely an
increasing methodological commitment to understanding how period style could
be seen as an organically integrated expression of a particular located “spirit.” In-
deed, in this passage from the introduction to Principles of Art History, Wölfflin
again, as in Renaissance and Baroque, makes the argument about the origin of art in
“the spirit of the times” and “style of the times” only within the context of a single
national tradition; it can be seen “best in Italy,” he writes, “where that which per-
sists in the Italian character remains highly visible in [spite of] change” (Kunstge-
schichtliche Grundbegriffe 10). Introducing another tradition of “national sensibility,”
however, Wölfflin warns, and one might be “misled” to think the innovation is a
matter of the differences between “Teutonic” and “Romance” types rather than
of epoch styles (9). In mentioning the possibility, he of course betrays that he has
himself already considered precisely this “misleading” thought. Latent in Renais-
sance and Baroque, where any given “system of forms” is said also to be dependent
on “race” (Renaissance und Barock 57), and the impact of the “heartbeat of the soul
of the nation” (57–58) on changes in style has to be weighed, Wölfflin’s suggestion
in the introduction to Principles of Art History is that, even though “the mark of
history” and “national style” weigh differently in different artists, the question of
a “national psychology of form” is the one that art history needs to address head-
on. By 1915, there is thus no doubt that the way in which “historical character

46. If we miss the relationship to modernity of the “new” Baroque characteristic of “depth” in a
picture by Vermeer, for example, the first question posed in Wölfflin’s mind and then to the reader
is “What is modern here?” (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 90). Wölfflin goes on to explain exactly
where “modernity” is in Baroque art, whose “new style” (222) marks it as different from what is here
nearly universally referred to as “the classical art of the Renaissance.” For Wölfflin, the “modern” is
what reminds him of contemporary movements in art, such as Impressionism (24–25), which, echoing
his description of the Baroque, he calls an art of “victory of appearances over being” (24).
intersects with national character” is one of the main “reasons” for differences in style (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 9).

That Wölfflin entertained such ideas is not surprising, given the context. While Warnke claims that in 1915 Wölfflin “severed all ties binding forms to historical life” as a rejection of the “instrumentalization of the arts” (Warnke, “On Heinrich Wölfflin” 176–77) and the nationalistic slogans of Germany in World War I, he overlooks that the art historian continued all the same to use his “doctrine of the forms of seeing” of periods to lament, for example, that, in “a developmental history of occidental ways of seeing, the differences between the individual and national characters are no longer of great significance” (Wölfflin, Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 13), on the one hand, and thus to argue for taking into account the possibility that a more powerful national or ethnos-based origin of style could account for the differences that set cultures apart, on the other. It has long been assumed that Wölfflin privileged period-related categories in order to make the “developmental” claims that, according to Lorenz Dittmann, became the basis of a theory of the “periodicity” of circularly recurring styles (53). Such readings overlook Wölfflin’s repeated reference to place not only in the introduction to Principles, where he refers to the intersection of “school, nation, and race” (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 6) with period styles, but throughout the book, as when he states near its end: “It is now time that the historical presentation of European architecture no longer be organized merely by period—Gothic, Renaissance, and so on—but, rather, that it carve out national physiognomies” (254). As problematic as we might find their political implications, Wölfflin’s claims here show that at the time a thesis that the origin of stylistic change might lie in nation may well have been considered a way not only to escape the problematic proximity to the decay thesis of the argument solely from period, but also to establish the difference between a Renaissance that was predominantly Italianate-Romance and indebted to antiquity, on the one hand, and a new northern—if not also Germanic—Baroque, on the other. In this context, it is interesting to note the contrastive rhetoric that characterizes Benjamin’s invocation of Calderón in his discussions of the German tragic drama,

47. Warnke’s reading supports the interpretation that Wölfflin’s assertion of the predominance of period style, which would guarantee a kind of European internationalism, could be understood as a poignant denial of the jingoistic German nationalism around him. Yet the resignation that Dilly says marked Wölfflin in his later years (278) may likewise be linked to his earlier experience of the hysterical patriotism of wartime, which may have already found expression in his depressing recognition in 1915 that “national character” often played an equally important role in determining artistic agendas and style.

48. It should be noted that Wölfflin explicitly refuses the notion that the Renaissance-Baroque pattern merely repeats itself in eternal fashion and does so by introducing the figure of the “spiral” (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 253). Nothing ever repeats itself exactly; there is always enough of a difference in what appears to be a repetition that something new emerges. The question is where this difference occurs. It may not be by chance that Wölfflin turns immediately to the force of “national character” here (254).
for example, a dyadic logic that is surely indebted to Wölfflin. Even as he wants to make claims about understanding all drama of the seventeenth century in period terms, “in terms of the era” (G: 1:1: 270; E: 91), he writes, it is clear that for Benjamin, “German theater” tends in one direction in terms of staging, “the Spanish stage” in another (271–72; 93). In turn, what the “ideal courtier of the Spanish author” (e.g., Gracian) could achieve is impossible for “German dramatists” to represent (276–77; 97–98). Like Wölfflin, Benjamin constructs oppositions and then relies on a culturalist-nationalist argument to explain why difference occurs.

In the introduction to Principles of Art History, the nation emerges as a crucial factor in the history of style. Wölfflin asserts that, in principle, the “differences in individual and national character” should be subordinated to the homogeneity of a “developmental history” of “types” across all of Europe (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 13). However, such a claim for transnational period styles can be made, he admits, only by looking away from the “persistent national differences” that characterize art (194). Later, although the “history” of “linearity” can be said to be “approximately the same in the south and the north,” “certain oppositions of national sensibility” (35) cannot be denied; “the linearity of the Latin races seemed somewhat cold for the German sensibility” (61). Indeed, because it is “undeniable that the nations differ from one another from the very beginning” (114), it is not surprising to discover that national and “ethnic” differences are captured in the allegedly permanent formal stylistic properties for which the book is best known. Thus “a painterly essence is lodged in the blood of the German race from the very beginning,” Wölfflin writes (73), and “Teutonic art” and an essentialized “North” (159) favor “open form.” “In Italy,” however, “the most closed of forms” is preferred (157). Wölfflin’s strong desire for a kind of transnational stylistic uniformity in any given period as an allegory for European unity may well inform the book that he wrote in the first years of World War I. In the conclusion to the Principles of Art History, it is precisely the task of describing a unifying “general path” of ways of seeing (244) that Wölfflin proposes: “As different as national characters may be, the universal-humanistic element that binds them together is stronger than that which separates them” (256). The vision is an appealing one. But as much as Wölfflin may want to argue that “the construction of a national type” is no more than a “rough diagram” for the historian (254) that will and must be superseded, it is clearly a robust enough explanatory principle to ultimately challenge any unifying and universalizing claims the book may want to make about the “development of style” across nations. Wölfflin lets slip often enough that the “newness” of Baroque style in particular may be more permanently anchored in place, or national difference, than the notion of “development” might suggest. “Wherever one goes, one confronts persistent differences in national imaginative forms” (208), he observes.

Most readings of Principles of Art History have concerned themselves only with the five interior chapters on the various stylistic pairs. They thus miss the way that Wölfflin’s argument about the national character of style, launched in
the introduction, careens toward a confusing end in the section ironically entitled “Conclusion”—ironically, because the argument does not really settle the question at all. Wölfflin asserts there that although “the development of modern occidental art” is “unified,” “within this unity, we must accept an underlying difference in national type” (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe 54). His ambivalence about whether or not the argument from nation, or place, might not in fact be more effective than an inter- or transnational developmental logic in accounting for stylistic difference thus seems to run deep. His desire to resist the decay thesis, to not play “epoch against epoch” (255), Renaissance against Baroque, must have in any case made the possibility of keeping them eternally apart via the claim of national styles extremely attractive in spite of its problematic resonances at the time. Or the argument from nation may have been palatable precisely because it accorded with Wölfflin’s underlying belief that “every epoch carries its own measuring stick within itself” (77). If this is the case, however, then so too does “every people,” every nation, have in its own “history of art” an epoch and style that can be identified as the one that contains “the actual revelation of its own national virtues” (255). “For the Teutonic North,” Wölfflin writes, “that era is the Baroque” (256). Principles was not the last time that Wölfflin made this argument. The anchoring of a Baroque style in national identity emerges with even greater clarity in his essay “Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Eine Revision” (Principles of Art History: A Revision), published in Logos in 1933. There, Wölfflin explains that some “nations” or “peoples” are simply “more imagistically endowed” than others; the relation of style to “race” is thus “unchangingly determined.” His famously controversial “history of seeing” does not insist on an “autonomous and separate process” for the development of form, he insists; rather, since style is “tied to the material,” it is “always regulated by the demands of history and race” (216). In an essay published in 1933, the resonances of the terms used are chilling.

By drawing attention to the place of nation and race in Wölfflin’s 1933 thought, I am not suggesting a Party-identified position. Rather, the argument suggests that there was room in the debate about the Baroque for an explanation of stylistic difference via reference to “national” ways of seeing. It is not surprising that more explicitly essentializing and celebratory claims about the relation of styles to what Wölfflin in Principles of Art History calls “the foundations of the entire world view of a nation (Volk)” (256) emerge in future elaborations on this same argument by others, including Benjamin, about specifically German Baroque forms. One of Wölfflin’s most famous “imitators,” the Germanist Fritz Strich, wrote an essay in 1916 on the “lyric style” of the Baroque, for example, in which he uses Wölfflin’s vocabulary to identify this style not only as the epoch-specific expression of an explicitly German spirit, but also as one in a spiral-like series of such epochs, which, taken together, constitute the German tradition writ large. Benjamin knew Strich and cites this ground-breaking essay, as well as a 1922 essay by Arthur Hübischer that makes much the same argument, multiple times in the Tragic Drama
Before turning to Strich and Hübscher, however, I address another set of arguments used to explain the difference that was the Baroque in the work of Alois Riegl (1858–1905). While most scholars focus on Benjamin’s rather more loosely formulated references to Riegl’s theory of “decadent periods” (G: 1.1: 235; E: 55) and the “artistic will” of epigonal art in association with his Spätrömische Kunstindustrie (Late Roman Art Industry) (1901), it is not this book, but, rather, Riegl’s own “Baroque book,” Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom (The Emergence of Baroque Art in Rome) (1908) that Benjamin explicitly cites in the first part of the second chapter of the Tragic Drama book (G: 1.1: 239, 277; E: 59, 99). The contexts in which Benjamin cites Riegl, namely as part of an argument about how to read the poetological treatises of the Baroque as sources rather than as normative statements about the period’s style, on the one hand, and as a way of understanding the distinction between Renaissance and Baroque theories of affect, on the other, draw attention to the methodological points he inherits from Riegl, points the Viennese art historian and theorist made in The Emergence of Baroque Art. While different from Wölfflin’s, Riegl’s theses served the same urgent project to locate the “reasons” for the emergence of an autonomous period style in a particular time and place.

The messy questions about the relation between period and nation as guarantors of Baroque style that Wölfflin’s work raises, but does not answer in any unambiguous way receive a preliminary solution in Riegl’s book on Baroque art, originally published posthumously in 1908. Riegl’s influence on the “democratization” of art history in terms of the media it considers has been referred to time and again by Lorenz Dittmann, Henri Zerner, and Michael Podro; his influence on Benjamin’s thought about “marginal” epochs and genres has been explored by Burkhardt Lindner (“Linkshatten noch alles sich zu enträtseln”) and Michael Jennings (“Walter Benjamin”). As a specialist on textiles and professionally interested in the history of the decorative arts, Riegl did in fact focus in some of his work on artifacts and genres traditionally considered marginal to what he labels “so-called higher art” (Stilfragen v). Yet he was also a dedicated historian of “high” Baroque culture and lectured on the subject over the course of the final decade of the nineteenth century in Vienna; these were the lectures that became Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom (The Emergence of Baroque Art in Rome), the book that Benjamin cites in its second edition of 1923. A damantly opposed to designating any periods or genres as “decadent” (cf. Zerner 178), Riegl, like Wölfflin, assesses the Baroque not as marginal, but rather as a privileged period and set of artifacts, as part of a project to defeat the negative judgments, based on Renaissance standards, of “the reprehensibility of Baroque style” (Die Entstehung der Barockkunst 9). Throughout The Emergence of Baroque Art Riegl in fact sounds very much like Wölfflin in this
respect, not only when he states that it is “now” considered “dilettantish” to see in the Baroque nothing but the “decay” of the Renaissance (11), but also in terms of his assumptions that there is an “Italian” versus a “Teutonic” art, if not also a “northern” and “Teutonic artistic will” (1–4). It is no wonder that Benjamin thought to discuss the work of the two men together in “The Rigorous Study of Art.”

Nevertheless, even though in The Emergence of Baroque Art, Riegl praises the recent turn to the period on the part of professional art historians, including Wölfl in in his Renaissance and Baroque, which Riegl calls “the best” that has been written “about the Baroque style of the Italians” (14), he also critiques Wölfl in (accurately, as it turns out) for not addressing adequately “why it had to be this way” (14), that is, why the “new” art of the Baroque emerged not only when but also where it did. It could have been via such commentary that Benjamin became familiar with the arguments of Wölfl in’s earlier book to begin with. It is Riegl’s deployment in The Emergence of Baroque Art of his (in)famous concept of “artistic will” (Kunstwollen) as that which “explains” the integrity and autonomy of any given style that in fact attempts to solve the conundrum that characterizes both of Wölfl in’s books. It does so by offering not only a theoretical defense of, but also a concrete method for, the evaluation of the factors that produced the newness of a situated Baroque in integrative ways. It is thus Riegl’s method, in addition to his thematic claims about the period of the Baroque, that Benjamin so appreciates in “The Rigorous Study of Art” and imitates in his own “Baroque book” of 1928.

The exact meaning and significance of Riegl’s concept of “artistic will” has long been discussed—most famously by Erwin Panofsky—indeed independently of the ambiguous way in which it appears in Benjamin’s Tragic Drama book.\(^{50}\) One attempt to establish the exact meaning of Riegl’s term by his student Hans Sedlmayr has been especially influential in the term’s reception. In his “Quintessenz der Lehren Riegls” (Quintessence of Riegl’s Theories) (1927), which appeared as the introduction to Riegl’s Gesammelte Aufsätze (Collected Essays) (1929), Sedlmayr defines “artistic will” as that “behind which” “empirical art history” cannot go in its search for the cause, or “reason,” for changes in style (xvii). Neither the “will,” or intention, of the individual artist nor the “meaning” of any individual work of art, nor, finally, even the “abstraction” of a claim about style based on the analysis of many individual works, the “artistic will” resides both elsewhere and, following Sedlmayr, everywhere, emerging from all art that is produced at a given time and place. The definition seems an almost direct solution to Wölfl in’s double claims about the impact of both “history” and “nation” on style.

Sedlmayr asserts that race is not, however, the final anchor for Riegl’s concept of “artistic will.” The “representatives of the artistic will” are not to be understood “in a racially identified way,” but rather as “a specific group of individuals” whose

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50. In addition to Panofsky, see Sedlmayr xxxiii; Holly, Panofsky.
“will” is “of a more-than-individual sort” (xvii-xix). Sedlmayr’s definitions might seem more properly associated with Wölflin than Riegl, for he neglects—and perhaps even seeks to distract readers from—the assumptions that Riegl does in fact make about the identifiability of the collective traits that he associates with what he calls the “artistic nations” in The Emergence of Baroque Art (5). Riegl also attributes explicit racial or ethnic identities to various “consumers” of Baroque art, claiming, for example, that “viewers of the Teutonic race” and “the northern viewer” (153) prefer the “Baroque” Michelangelo to other artists. Riegl’s descriptions here of models for how to observe the relation of “groups” and their “will” to what he early on in the lectures calls the “artistic tendency” of a specific and “determinative time and place” (17) could have provided Sedlmayr and subsequent scholars with additional evidence for glosses on the “artistic will” as a national trait.

In Riegl’s “Baroque book” itself, the “artistic will” is nevertheless a moving target. He celebrates the Baroque not at all as a “marginal field,” but rather as a moment when the greatness of major artists, particularly Michelangelo, emerged. Here, for Riegl, it is the “Baroque artistic will” (Die Entstehung der Barockkunst 43) of the individual master artist ("his specific artistic will," 32, 46, 123) that is a category of concern. Riegl tracks the “emergence of Baroque style” (31–78) in Italy by following a number of specific artists, including Correggio (46–54) and Bramante (58, 63–66), whose “artistic will” can be seen in various monuments in St. Peter’s (64). Not only individual artists, but also individual Renaissance popes, such as Sixtus V, also have a defining “artistic will” (98). Riegl’s is thus clearly not an “art history without names,” in Wölflin’s famous phrase. Counterbalancing his readings of architectural monuments, sculpture, and painting organized either explicitly or implicitly by “auteur,” he nevertheless also goes beyond cases of “artistic will” visible in individual artists or works to posit a version of this “will” that seems to preexist and precede them. Even the greatest artist does no more than capture the preexisting “artistic will” “of his entire time” (43), Riegl explains; thus, in the case of Michelangelo, who is famously identifi ed as the “father of Baroque style” (30), the “artistic will” of the epoch is something of which even he (Michelangelo) must

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51. In his earlier Stilfragen (1893), Riegl argues against the “enthusiasm for the spontaneous-autochthonous beginnings of the various national arts” (xvi). Some of his assumptions in The Emergence of Baroque Art nevertheless contradict this position. For example, in his description of the "movement" (Die Entstehung der Barockkunst 35) and unity (33) of the Medici graves (32–39) in terms that could be Wölflin’s, Riegl identifies a style that is contrary to “the satisfied being” of Renaissance sculpture, a tumultuous “sensibility” that he claims is not only “new” vis-à-vis both antiquity and the Renaissance (36), but also somehow typical of how “the Italians” show the intersection of “sensibility” and “will” in their Baroque sculpture; for Riegl, “the Dutch,” by contrast, show only “sensibility” (39). Correggio likewise shows his difference from the “Northemers” in allowing “sensibility” to contest reason (46), an intersection that, again, the “Northemers” ban from their art (51). At stake here is always whether or not the Italian artists have adopted a style that is “attractive to the Northemers” (47, 49).

52. It may be worth noting that Benjamin too focuses on individual “masters,” and in particular on Shakespeare and Calderón, as the bearers of the Kunstwollen of their own periods, nations, and ideological-theological moments.
first become “aware” (31) and then express in his art. Given the plethora of ways in which the term is used, the questions that Sedlmayr asks in general of Riegl can thus also easily be asked of The Emergence of Baroque Art book itself, namely “What is that thing called the ‘artistic will’?” (xvii). Is it in people or objects or somewhere else? Moreover, what help does the term provide in answering the question of the origin of style? “How does this concept emerge?” (xiv).

How Riegl construes the concept of the “artistic will” of a period can be seen in part in the way The Emergence of Baroque Art refuses the methodological label that Dittmann, for example, applies to Riegl’s work in general, namely that it is “transhistorical” (Dittmann 35) and “unhistorical” (41) because it is too concerned with assessing the more or less strictly cognitive impact of works of art on the individual observer. Indeed, before Riegl actually begins to discuss either artists or monuments and works of art and how they are perceived, he reviews not just earlier scholarship on the material (in the section entitled “Literatur,” Die Entstehung der Barockkunst 9–16; it is here that he mentions Wölffl in’s work), but also the additional “sources” (17–30), which, under-“exploited” to date, are actually where the “artistic tendency of the period [of the Baroque]” and its “determination by place and time” can be observed (17). What he is referring to here, Riegl explains, are both print and manuscript sources, books as well as the hugely rich resources of the “Roman archives of families related to and favored by the popes.” Other sources include Vasari’s Lives, the biographical works of Giovanni Baglione (1644), and the Vite of Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1672). Riegl describes each of these texts in great detail; what he finds in them is the kind of material that gives access to the “artistic sensibility” of the period (Die Entstehung der Barockkunst 22), including information about the relation of the trends in architecture and art to papal history (19) and curia rivalries (28), documentation of the place of philosophical debates about the role of the (neo)Platonic “idea” (24), and contemporary discussions of the concept of style itself (25). These kinds of sources allow the art historian or critic to “locate himself” in the highly overdetermined context of the specific period of art being observed (28); they thus function as a kind of model for how to undertake an “authentically modern art historical task” (29) of the kind that he himself practices in The Emergence of Baroque Art and that Benjamin valued as well. 53 In such materials and in a calibration of their intersection not only with other “local” (29) sources and knowledges, but also and crucially, with what he observes in the monuments and artifacts themselves, the collective “artistic will” of the Roman Baroque—indeed, of any period and place—can be observed.

In Riegl’s The Emergence of Baroque Art, the actual relation of such sources to the artworks themselves, and thus the status and location of the conduits along which the “artistic will” must travel between the two, is nevertheless left somewhat

53. See Benjamin, “Rigorous Study of Art” 372, on Riegl as the “progenitor” of a “new kind . . . of science of studying art.”
imprecise. “Artworks” are described somewhat vaguely as “representatives of the spirit of the Counter Reformation” (Die Entstehung der Barockkunst 119), for example. That there is a “relationship between the Counter Reformation and Baroque art” and that both are “determined by some third higher force” (93) is, again, somewhat loosely declared. Riegl admits that exactly how both “the ethical and the aesthetic” are the “expression of a common third higher force” cannot be “determined” quite yet (93). Such hesitations aside, it is nevertheless this “higher” third moment that is the place of the local, epochal “will,” which then finds universal “expression” in papal preferences and the internal politics of monastic orders, in the stylistic details of churches and suburban villas, and in decorative fountains in these and urban settings alike. Riegl famously claims at the end of his Art Industry book that “at any one time” there is “in general only one direction of the artistic will,” and it is visible in “religion, philosophy, economics, and in the state and the law,” as well as in the style of the “fine arts” (Spätrömische Kunstindustrie 400). All realms of expression are bound together by an otherwise unspecified “internal coherence” (401). 54 Riegl’s Art Industry book was first published in 1901. What we can observe in his lectures on the Baroque are thus the results of a decade-long attempt to model for his students exactly how this “relationship” was to be understood. In The Emergence of Baroque Art, Riegl provides what we might now call an interdisciplinary approach to the period, whereby the Baroque is “redeemed” not by attention just to style or to the cognitive operations involved in observing period artifacts, but rather by means of an emphasis on their complex historical embeddedness in time and place. It is thus no wonder that, when Benjamin writes in a résumé probably penned in the same year that the Tragic Drama book appeared that his project there was to see the work of art as an “integral expression, not restricted in terms of field or discipline, of the religious, metaphysical, political, and economic tendencies of an era” (Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 886), it is Riegl’s work that he cites.

Benjamin’s interest in Riegl’s concept of Kunstwollen did not remain at the level of mere citation, however. Indeed, Benjamin’s injunction, in the third chapter of the Tragic Drama book, to readers and scholars to “engage with the source documents in an open way” (G: 1.1: 376; E: 201) would appear to echo Riegl’s methodology in his “Baroque book” quite closely and thus goes far beyond relying only on Riegl’s nearly “formalist” approach as an “interpreter of cultural objects” (Jennings, “Walter Benjamin” 86). Benjamin’s indebtedness to Riegl’s interdisciplinary approach is particularly visible in the first section of Benjamin’s second chapter, “Trauerspiel und Tragödie” (Tragic Drama and Tragedy) (238–78; 57–100), where, at the beginning of the section in which he first cites Riegl, Benjamin turns to the very same kinds of sources to which Riegl refers in The Emergence of Baroque Art,

54. Kemp, following Endre Kiss in a reading of Art Industry, finds that Riegl does not go far enough here in the direction of what he (Kemp) calls the implicit “history of structures” for which such a method calls (Nachwort 10–11).
that is, to the “poetological treatises and handbooks” of the Baroque as “indispensable sources for analysis” (239; 58). He also reads deeply in other “historical sources” (244; 64), including those analyzed by Bernhard Erdmannsdörffer in his Deutsche Geschichte vom Westfälischen Frieden bis zum Regierungsantritt Friedrich's des Großen, 1648–1740 (German History from the Peace of Westphalia up through the Beginning of the Reign of Friedrich the Great, 1648–1740) (1892), as well as texts by legal theorists and historians, such as Carl Schmitt's Politische Theologie (Political Theology) (1922), Hans George Schmidt's Die Lehre vom Tyrannenmord: Ein Kapitel aus der Rechtsphilosophie (The Doctrine of Tyrannicide: A Chapter in the Philosophy of Law) (1901), and the fifth edition of August Koberstein's Geschichte der deutschen Nationalliteratur vom Anfang des siebzehnten bis zum zweiten Viertel des achttzehnten Jahrhunderts (History of German National Literature from the Beginning through the Second Quarter of the Eighteenth Century) (1872), all of which give Benjamin the terms with which to characterize the Baroque (G: 1.1: 245–48; E: 65–68). Following Riegl’s logic that all layers of culture at a specific time will reflect the common concerns of the period, Benjamin’s references to these texts and to the complex array of historical, institutional, and ideological contexts they describe thus join his argument about the visibility of an epoch’s “artistic will” in its painting and sculpture via citations of the equally synthetic art historian and journalist Wilhelm Hausenstein’s immensely popular Vom Geist des Barock (On the Spirit of the Baroque) (1919). Benjamin cites Hausenstein on El Greco (250–51; 71) and comments on Baroque mathematical theory (271; 92) and conceptions of time (275; 97); in so doing, he follows Riegl in interrogating a cross-section of a period’s sources as a way of locating its integrated “artistic will.”

In the section of the Tragic Drama book in which Benjamin cites Riegl, his argument about a common period “spirit” is tempered by a series of claims to the effect that the texts of the Baroque with which he is concerned were not yet as accomplished as what Benjamin calls “the Romantic drama from Calderon up through Tieck” (G: 1.1: 262; E: 83). Yet they were “specifically German” (260; 81) and, written by “German Protestants,” specifically Lutheran as well (263, 267, 276; 84, 88, 98). This cascade of claims about the German-Protestant identity of his data is striking, given that many theorizations of the Baroque, including Wölfflin’s and Riegl’s, occurred in tandem with an examination of a specifically Catholic and often Counter-Reformation and Romance world. It is perhaps not by chance, then, that

55. Benjamin famously cites Carl Schmitt alongside Riegl in the 1928 curriculum vitae as an influence on his (Benjamin’s) attempts to argue for a method that relies on the “integration of multiple phenomena” (Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 886). See Garber (Rezeption und Rettung 91–96) on Benjamin’s use of Schmitt as a historical source.

56. Hausenstein’s book was enormously popular, and Benjamin cites it often. In a review in 1922, Hermann Bahr underscores that Hausenstein’s book demonstrates that “the Baroque is indeed our problem . . . just as the Renaissance was the problem of Burckhardt’s and Nietzsche’s time” (qtd. in Migge 64).
here Benjamin mentions the Spanish example and Calderón in particular (260–67; 81–88) in clear contrast to what “German drama” and “the German playwrights” do not and “could not dare do” (261, 263, 277; 83, 84, 98). The combined effect is to place additional emphasis precisely on the “seriousness of the German tragic drama as nationally determined” (265; 86). The rhetorical choreography of these pages is not coincidentally reminiscent of Wölfflin’s elaborate balancing act of Renaissance versus Baroque, as noted above, as well as, and just as important, of northern “Germanic” versus southern “Romance” styles. Benjamin claims, for example, that “Spanish drama discovered in the essence of honor a creaturely spirituality adequate to its creaturely embodiment and, in so doing, found a profane realm that remained off limits not only to the German poets of the Baroque, but even to later theorists as well” (266; 87). Later, he continues to emphasize differences between “German theater” and “the Spanish stage” by returning to his claims about the differences between a “Protestant” theater and the theater of Catholic Spain (276; 98). My point here is this: interdisciplinary Rieglian concerns to embed the “artistic will” of the Baroque in a thickly described location intersect in the Tragic Drama book with Wölfflinian ways of displaying different “national”—and confessionally identified—styles in dyadic ways. While the result is something of a methodological hybrid, the presence of the mix is not all that strange, given that it was a combination of Riegl’s and Wölfflin’s ideas that had set the terms of debates about the Baroque in the first place. The penetration of their art historical approaches into literary-critical studies of the Baroque more generally at the time was quite common and is visible in work by scholars like Fritz Strich and Arthur Hübischer, on whose ideas from the 1910s and early 1920s Benjamin also draws heavily in the Tragic Drama book.

**Origin and the “Heroic” Age of the German Literary Baroque**

Benjamin refers repeatedly in the Tragic Drama book to a number of literary-historical treatments of the Baroque that are heavily indebted to a mix of Wölfflinian and Rieglian paradigms. In addition to introducing the art theoretical debates into a new disciplinary home, this work, by scholars Fritz Strich and Arthur Hübischer, had the uncanny effect of collaborating with the methodologically distinct, but ideologically consistent celebratory narratives of German cultural and literary history by the well-known scholars Karl Lamprecht (1856–1915) and Josef Nadler (1884–1963), both of whom Benjamin also cites. Lamprecht’s and Nadler’s work laid both the literal and the conceptual groundwork for the “heroic” age

57. It is clear that Benjamin values Calderón and the Spanish over the Germans; “Germany has nothing that can compete with” the “tragic drama of the Spaniard” (G: 1.1: 263; E: 84). My point here, however, is that Benjamin must nevertheless set the two kinds of drama and nations side by side to illuminate the “typical,” situated characteristics of each.
of the study of Baroque literature in general and of the plays of the Second Sile-
sian school in particular, by including it and them in the canon of German litera-
ture from which both had been emphatically excluded by earlier theorists such as
Gottsched. Lamprecht’s controversial cultural history and Nadler’s monumental
linguistic geographies were based on a kind of encyclopedic inclusionism that per-
mitted, even demanded, that all epochs and linguistic monuments, regardless of
style, find a place in the grand narrative of national culture.58 The specifically Ger-
man stylistic elements of Baroque texts and the correspondingly all-inclusive Ger-
man “spirit” of the Baroque identified by Strich in his famous article “Der lyrische
Stil des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts” (The Lyric Style of the Seventeenth Century)
(1916) and by Hübscher in his “Barock als Gestaltung antithetischen Lebensge-
fühls” (Baroque as the Formation of an Antithetical Sense of Life) (1922) made the
Baroque eligible for a place at the German literary- and cultural-historical table
as it was defined in such texts. Strich’s and Hübscher’s celebrations of the period
and its style were indebted both indirectly and explicitly to the defenses of the Ba-
roque mounted by the art historian-theorists discussed above, defenses whose logic
they embraced as a way of offering alternatives to approaches like Stachel’s and
Cysarz’s, to which Strich, for example, like Benjamin, refers when he complains
about the “misleading” designation of the seventeenth century as related to the Re-
naissance in any essential way (“Der lyrische Stil” 21).59

The famous 1916 “Lyric Style” article by Fritz Strich (1882–1963) is often iden-
tified as one of the earliest, if not also the most important, translation of Wölflinian
art-historical stylistic analysis into the specific domain of literary studies.60 Strich’s
essay plays this inaugural role in Benjamin’s Tragic Drama book too, where it is cited
for the first time as part of the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue”’s argument for an art
philosophical logic with which to defend the use of the category and term Baroque.
For Benjamin, Strich’s work—here, his “idea” of “the literary Baroque” (G: 1.1:
221; E: 41)—provides an example of a position within the period-style debate that
is positively invested in the legitimacy of developing an autonomous period “idea.”

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58. Benjamin cites Lamprecht in G: 1.1: 231; E: 51 (albeit critically) and 240; 59, and Nadler at 379;
204. Nadler’s work is particularly interesting in connection with Benjamin, not only for its specific focus
on the issue of language, so important to Benjamin, but also because of Nadler’s tremendous influence
on Hugo von Hofmannsthal, whom Nadler saw as recreating a “southern” German/Viennese Baroque
in the here and now. On Nadler, Hofmannsthal, and Benjamin, see Schoolfield; König.

59. Voßkamp (691–92), relying on Hans-Harald Müller (Barockforschung), also argues for the im-
portance of the art historians Wilhelm Worringer and Georg Dehio for Strich in particular. Worringer
famously wrote of “the northern Baroque” in his 1911 Formprobleme der Gotik (Formal Problems of
the Gothic) (qtd. in Voßkamp 692). On Worringer’s importance for Benjamin, see the conclusion.

60. Strich may himself have helped encourage this understanding of his foundational role; some
forty years after the publication of the original article, he claims that it was he who was responsible for
the “translation” of the concept of the Baroque from the arts to literature (see Strich, “Die Übertragung
des Barockbegriffs” 307). Hans-Harald Müller (Barockforschung 118–33) notes that a number of con-
temporaries dismissed Strich’s collapsing of the Baroque into “Teutonicism,” while also admitting that
his theses in the article had become somewhat of an orthodoxy.
In his discussion of Burdach, Benjamin dismisses, we may remember, the “uncritically inductive” methods of a literary history that would look at masses of “heterogeneous sources” without the aid of “concepts,” such as genre (tragic drama) and period (Baroque). According to Benjamin, Strich offers instead “synthetic” claims about the consistency and integrity of the “formative principles” of the seventeenth century, claims that Benjamin then goes on to associate with Rieglian “views of a higher type” (221–22; 41), which must be assumed before turning to the works themselves. Strich was also the first to give Baroque literary studies “an orientation within stylistic history” (231; 50) of the Wölfflinian sort, which understood the period explicitly as non- or other-than-the Renaissance, according to Benjamin; the possibility of turning away from a tradition of work such as Stachel’s could thus in fact be said to have had its origins for Benjamin in Strich’s importation of art historical categories into the literary-historical and critical world.

In his essay, Strich’s celebration of the “idea” of the Baroque tout court relies on claims about the stylistics of German Baroque poetry in particular. Published two years into World War I, the piece renders Wölfflin’s emerging thesis about the national “origins” of the coherence of style even more visible. The argument for the integrity of period style is based on what Strich later identifies as Wölfflin’s greatest achievement, which was to have assembled “the individual cases [of works of art] into styles of a period and a nation” (“D er lyrische Stil” 43). The grammatical collapsing of “period” and “nation” into a single category here is Strich’s addition, or, perhaps better, his completion of the argument that Wölfflin had not yet made explicit in 1915. The plural (“styles”) suggests, moreover, the concept of periodicity, the recurrence of Baroque moments throughout history, proposed by Wölfflin; it is this kind of periodicity that goes on to become a central part of an argument from nation by Strich. Rather than arguing in favor of deracinated typological thinking,

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61. Indeed, Dilly (278) cites a 1924 letter from Wölfflin to Strich, thanking him for the copy of one of his books he had sent to the man Strich elsewhere calls “my sole teacher” (Strich, “Zu Heinrich Wölfflins Gedächtnis” 222), in which Wölfflin indicates that he is himself now becoming more convinced of the “decisive power of national character.” Dilly’s claim about the apparent standoffishness of the senior scholar vis-à-vis Strich notwithstanding, then, there may also have also been influence in the other direction, with Wölfflin learning from Strich’s work. Hans-Harald Müller (“Die Übertragung des Barockbegriffs” 102) claims, however, that there are only “marginal similarities” between Wölfflin and Strich.

62. Strich was of course neither the first nor the only one to invoke the (German) “nation” as a culturally unifying category at the time, and it is important to note the similarity between his arguments and those of Oskar Walzel, for example, whose work Benjamin knew but does not cite in the Tragic Drama book. Also important was Worringer, whom Jennings claims Benjamin has to thank for his “complex theory of culture” (“Walter Benjamin” 90). Hans-Harald Müller (“Die Übertragung des Barockbegriffs” 107–9) in fact argues that most of Strich’s ideas came directly from Worringer’s Formalprobleme der Gotik (Formal Problems of the Gothic) (1911). In a more pointed way than Walzel and Worringer (who was the former’s student), although in much the same terms, Strich celebrates in the Baroque the integrity of German tradition and culture based on the expression of “the Teutonic spirit” in lyric forms (“D er lyrische Stil” 37). On Walzel’s and Strich’s common endorsement of a kind of “Teutonic artistic will,” both throughout German literary history and in the Baroque in particular, see H.-H. Müller, “Die Übertragung des Barockbegriffs” 96 and passim.
his claims for the regular reemergence of a Baroque style in the German literary tradition become, rather, part of a defense of the cultural integrity and autonomy of a no-longer-belated German spirit also no longer indebted to external norms. In the 1916 article that Benjamin cites, Strich characterizes “the new style” of the Baroque as “more national” than commonly assumed (“Der lyrische Stil” 22); it makes sense that the terms in which he makes this argument resurface in Benjamin’s logic about a specifically German tradition of tragic drama as well.

In his 1916 article, Strich calls attention, first, to the “natural” attributes—rhythms, rhymes, and tonal emphases—of “the German language” that enable the innovations of German Baroque lyric (21), especially vis-à-vis ancient and foreign models, which for Strich, as for Wölfflin, were of a completely “different kind” (50). The characteristic move in German translations, for example, was to take “ancient” (i.e., classical) simplicity and “complicate,” “expand,” and “heighten” it (24), thus creating the “new style” (25). For Strich, as for Wölfflin, it was “Germanness,” here the German language in particular, that endowed Baroque lyric with the novelty of a “greater freedom” (24) of both form and content, a freedom that did not allow itself to be “bound” (25). That the poetry of the period had “a character of becoming rather than being” (33) and was “painterly” rather than linear (42), on the one hand, and consistently revealed a “stimulus of movement” (26), on the other, confirms that it was Wölfflin’s principles of the Baroque that Strich was seeing in the literary texts he treats. Indeed, he sometimes even proves the superiority of the anti-Renaissance innovations of the Baroque vis-à-vis ancient and foreign traditions by means of Wölfflinian pairings of older and “classical” texts with Baroque ones, side by side on the page (22–23, 24, 27, 43). Yet Strich’s main point is not to remain at the level of description or exemplification, but rather to pursue the Wölfflinian question of the “origins” of the specificity of the new style. He answers this question in a far less conflicted way than his master by collapsing into a single claim two of Wölfflin’s suggestions about the recurrence of style as part of an argument from place.

The attribution to Baroque style of a specifically German “origin” that is eternally present in its periodic recurrence in the national tradition (Benjamin signals this periodicity in his discussion of the concept of “origin” in the terms of its “pre- and post-history,” G : 1.1: 226; E : 46) occurs in Strich’s essay, first, in the assertion that there are already preforms of the Baroque to be discerned in earlier German literature. Unfortunately, but symptomatically in 1916, he simply declares rather than describes these prehistories in his essay. For example, the more animated, interiorized, and characterized by the “piling up” of words Baroque lyric becomes, the more it begins to resemble, Strich announces, the “character of old Teutonic poetry” (“Der lyrische Stil” 29) and the “primal German usage” (39) of a “primal German poetry” (45), which are in turn taken to be expressions of some equally as primal “Teutonic spirit” (37). Baroque attention to rhyme, specifically described as antithetical to “ancient rhythms” (48), is likewise identified as an “expression of the
German spirit” (48), which is then “reborn” in the Baroque via poets who attended to the natural properties of the German tongue. Strich’s relatively imprecise argument about how Baroque lyric occasions a Renaissance (Wiedergeburt, 21) of an ancient and primal (Ur) German spirit here nevertheless provides a clear alternative to Stachel’s by finding the “restoration” (Restauration— Benjamin’s term, G: 1.1: 226; E: 45) of this early “primal law of all Teutonic poetry” (“Der lyrische Stil” 21) in the Baroque. Much more specifically and in clear counterpoint to an argument such as the one made by Cysarz, moreover, who claims that only classicizing styles could guarantee the rebirth of the German tradition, Strich argues—with a nod in the direction of Wölfflin’s claims about the periodic return of a national style—that the “new rhythm” of Baroque lyric extended this “primal” German poetic practice well beyond its own time into the rhythms of later German poetry, including Classicism and Storm and Stress, but most prominently, into Romantic lyric (25, 29, 43) as well. The Baroque tendency to mix genres and forms (prose and lyric, music and text), to mutually reinforce combinations of rhythm and rhyme, and to create antithetical combinations of spiritualism and sensualism (30) recalls poetic practice in “Romantic times” (45) in general, he argues. “Romanticism,” with whose lyric the Baroque has “an extensive similarity” (39), specifically possesses “a spirit linked to the Baroque” (53).

Against the background of his reliance on a Wölfflinian logic of periodicity in the German tradition, it is not surprising that Strich uses the art historian’s model of pairing to reveal differences between the Baroque and “classical” forms in a Wölfflinian manner and to show the afterlives of Baroque in German Romantic poetry (“Der lyrische Stil” 46–48); a seventeenth-century Nuremberg poem is juxtaposed with poems by Clemens Brentano, Ewald von Kleist, and Ludwig Tieck, for example, all of which are characterized by rhythmic patterns that likewise “oppose” “ancient” and foreign forms (48). The Baroque recalls poetic practice not visible since the “days of primal Teutonic poetry,” on the one hand, and anticipatory of “Romanticism” (48–49), on the other. As much as Strich would claim that the “animated” lyric style of the Baroque was unique to its time (it had a “movement that existed neither before nor since,” 33), then, his actual practice in the article is to collapse his descriptions of historical Baroque texts into a typological claim about the expression of a single style that begins in a pre-Baroque “primal German” moment and moves ever forward into its post-Baroque fulfillment in the Romantic Age.

Wölfflin’s uncertainty about what can be identified as the “reasons,” or “causes,”
of the change from a Renaissance to a Baroque style thus dissipates almost entirely in Strich’s “Teutonifying understanding of the Baroque” (Kiesant 84), in which a national “spirit” emerges as the “origin” of both a past and a future of specifically German poetic forms.

Strich’s argument found echoes in contemporary literary-historical and critical circles and in the work of Arthur Hübischer (1897–1985) in particular, whose 1922 article, “Barock als Gestaltung antithetischen Lebensgefühls” (Baroque as the Formation of an Antithetical Sense of Life) is often cited alongside Strich’s as exemplary of “heroic age” Baroque studies. As much as Hübischer claims in his lengthy two-part article, which appeared in the by-then establishment journal, Euphorion, that he would nuance Strich, indeed, as far reaching as his article is, Hübischer creates a Baroque that for all intents and purposes is quite similar to Strich’s in its identity, which is informed by a specifically German “sense of life” with the power to bequeath its forms to the future. Benjamin cites Hübischer’s essay repeatedly in the Tragic Drama book, and not surprisingly. Published more recently than Strich’s, Hübischer’s article is designed to combat the “incorrect extension of the designation, Renaissance, to include the seventeenth century” (518). While Stachel is not named as the prime culprit here, he certainly could have been. Hübischer also targets for critique assessments of the Baroque that dismiss it as no more than a “preparatory era” (518). Ćysarz’s 1924 book, in which precisely this argument appears, had of course not yet appeared, and it is actually another member of the George Circle, the maverick Friedrich Gundolf, whose arguments are singled out by Hübischer as the culprits here. Contra such tendencies, Hübischer’s main project is to identify what is “proper” to, and thus the property of, the Baroque as a “sense of life” (519). Baroque poetry is associated with a nearly Burckhardtian “modern essence” (527) and “new energies” (546) as well. To this end, he repeatedly notes in now familiar ways how Renaissance concerns and styles, indeed, the “spirit of the Renaissance” (550) writ large, differ from that which is specifically Baroque, that is, from its “antithetical sense of life” (535, 546, 777). Hübischer dips not only into Strich’s, but also into Wölfflin’s and Riegl’s rhetorical and methodological arsenals as he explains what it

64. Unlike Strich, who became known for his work on canonical literary figures and periods in the German tradition, such as Goethe and Weimar Classicism, Hübischer went on to work in more journalistic venues. This may be why the work of the former is sometimes given more weight in discussions of early twentieth-century Baroque studies.

65. Hübischer’s need to both praise and “correct” Strich (519–27), particularly in terms of his “cyclical idea” in light of its similarity to Spenglerian concepts, is curious, yet ultimately Rieglian. That is, for Hübischer, the most important point in these opening polemical pages is to assert that, while there may be recurring styles, “peculiarities” always characterize individual periods (522). Nevertheless, all “antithetical” oppositions in a period should ultimately be capable of “harmonized” synthesis (522). As I note below, Hübischer relies heavily on Strich’s Wölfflinian categories throughout, making clear the benchmark nature of Strich’s essay.

66. Cf., however, Hübischer 761, where in the context of discussing the (self-) underestimation of Baroque poets, Hübischer claims they thought of themselves as extensions of the Renaissance.
is that he is designating as this Baroque “sense.” Early on in the article he includes a complex chart of clearly distinct and opposing principles, for example, such as coordinating versus subordinating patterns, and a “tendency toward rest” versus a “tendency toward expression” (526); here we are clearly reminded of Wölfflin, whose linear and painterly principles are also explicitly invoked (770–71). Elsewhere, a nearly Rieglian “will to form” emerges out of the mass of “antithetical” texts and artifacts, contextual events and belief systems of the period he describes (540), explaining Hübischer’s appeal to a “synthetic science” that will show “the picture of a man of [the] era” in all of the “individual fields of human culture” (527).

While Hübischer claims repeatedly in the introductory pages of his article that it is a specifically Pan-European “occidental” and “epochal” rather than a narrowly national, or merely “German,” antithetical “sense of the world” of the Baroque in which he is interested (527), in the course of this sprawling article, it is nevertheless clear that it is Germany that emerges as the model for this allegedly universal “antithetical sense of life.” The “artistic will” Hübischer describes is, for example, visible in a literary world that is de facto exclusively German. At the level of thematics, he notes the topos of “transitoriness” only in the texts of individual German Baroque poets (Opitz, Gryphius, and Theobald Hock, 527–29). Additional expressive forms, paintings and sculpture, from the period are then adduced. Staging techniques associated with a specifically German dramatic tradition, such as the “transformative stage” (Verwandlungsbühne, 529), which also fascinate Benjamin in the Tragic Drama book, are likewise discussed as the primary indication of the universal ironic tensions between the antithetical principles of flesh and spirit, life and death. As the argument develops, evidence of the antithetical “sense of life” that marked the German seventeenth century in particular begins to dominate. The Baroque was an age of both reason and superstition (532), of the celebration of the individual combined with a tendency to form groups (548–49), of an ironic tendency toward cosmopolitanism and loyalty to “national” causes and duties (551–52), and of an awareness of pressing historical concerns versus a flight into dreamlike, utopian states (553–54). A accompanying such period trends were— in a return to specifically literary texts—a celebration of both reliance on foreign literary models and the cultivation of the “national” vernacular (533, 537), the combination of the “sensual” and the “immaterial” in Baroque metaphors (556), the antithetical relation of the main action of the plays in the “real world” and their “ideal” allegorical choral interludes (557), and the like. Hübischer absorbs so many aspects of German Baroque history and textuality into his claim about the period’s omnivorous,
antithetical “will to form” that it may well have functioned as a model for “origin” when understood in the Benjaminian sense. Benjamin writes: “Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis” (G: 1.1: 226; E: 45). Benjamin not only helps himself to many of Hübscher’s examples in his own examination of the “antitheses” (250; 70) of the period, then. He also adopts Hübscher’s whirlpool-like method of absorbing a whole host of period artifacts into his definition of the Baroque.

What allows Hübscher’s argument to resemble Strich’s perhaps even more than the former might have been ready to admit is that Hübscher goes on to insist on the common characteristics and parallel concerns of the historical Baroque with other specifically German “antithetical periods.” Although “the specific tendencies emerge with different emphasis in the various periods to be considered” (541), he explains, “all antithetical periods display an especially strong expression of the autobiographical moment” (546). Hübscher goes on—almost relentlessly—to find other analogies to the Baroque in the German movements and periods of Storm and Stress, Romanticism, and contemporary Expressionism. Sometimes these parallels reveal the “non-developed nature” of the Baroque in terms of real equality for women (544) or patriotic “political action” (552). But more often, they show persistent and common interests (531 on scenes of infanticide and 554–55 on pastoral poetry) and parallelisms (the term “correspondences” is also used, 787) between the seventeenth century and other high points in the German tradition. As an example, Hübscher points to the common interests in dialect poetry (538) and to the similarities between the collectivities of the seventeenth-century language societies (Sprachgesellschaften), on the one hand, and the Romantic groups and the so-called George Circle of the present day (549), on the other. Given this kind of evolutionary logic, it is not surprising that Hübscher takes particular interest in the parallel devotion during the different periods of the German “baroque spirit” to “an elevated national challenge” (537) and to all that was “ancient” about the German tradition: Albrecht Dürer, mysticism, Germanness (Deutschtum), and national folk tradition (Volkstum), all in one. The argument makes sense in the context of a deep commitment to the concept of a “national” spirit that becomes for Hübscher the basis for his invention of a new kind of literary history of “antithetical” periods and an “antithetical” canon. His celebration of German poets and writers who are indebted (rather than superior) to their Baroque masters offers a direct counterpoint to Cysarz; Johann Georg Hamann and the Romantics thus join (rather than replace) Jakob Böhme (538) in their belief in the power of the vernacular. Even today’s “study of German language and literature” (538) finds an ancestor in Opitz. What Hübscher depicts here is something very much like a Benjaminian “origin” for a Baroque “antithetical sense of life,” originally visible in the seventeenth century, on the one hand, and endlessly capable of infinite afterlives, on the other.

Benjamin’s arguments about the German Baroque in the Tragic Drama book are everywhere indebted to Strich and Hübscher in both substance and arrangement.
His initial citations of Strich's article occur in the context of his epistemological reflections in the “Prologue” on the necessity of assuming the “idea” of the Baroque as distinct from the Renaissance (G: 1.1: 221, 231; E: 41, 50); the quotes occur in both the challenging “theory of ideas” section and in the later, more conventional pages, suggesting the relevance of Strich's argument to both the more arcane and the more profane versions of Benjamin's theorization of a method for “redeeming” the period after its prior false assessment via Renaissance-bound categories and norms. Benjamin also praises Hübscher in the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” as one of the few contemporary critics whose work shows an authentic “revaluation” of the Baroque in terms of its own standards and works (234; 54). Hübscher's rejection of the relevance of a Renaissance-like adherence to Aristotelian norms is noted in this same spirit later on (278; 100). Both critics had argued for their more abstract notions of the national origins of style and form based on the evidence of the historical texts of the period, and then offered exemplary close readings of how to find evidence of Baroque style and “will to form” and “artistic will” in the literary documents of the period with which Benjamin was concerned. As often as not, Benjamin borrows both the actual texts and Strich's and Hübscher's readings of them and inserts them nearly verbatim into the Tragic Drama book, also in the later sections on Baroque emblematics, where he undertakes the construction of an alternative lineage for Baroque allegory as distinct from the more classical notion of the symbol. The intricate choreography that knits the “Epistemo-Critical Prologue” and the section on allegory together is thus another example of Benjamin's earlier narrative about the afterlives of the Baroque tragic dramas in the later German Romantic drama, and he mines Strich's and Hübscher's work for specific arguments and examples to buttress his reading of the specifically allegorical nature not only of German Baroque poetry and poetic forms (358–59, 369, 389; 183, 193, 215), but of the German language itself (380; 205). Their models have shown him how to arrange the historical evidence on which to base his claims about the afterlives of a national Baroque.69

Benjamin's citations of Strich's and Hübscher's work in the context of his discussion of allegory in the first and second parts of chapter 3 of the Tragic Drama book are especially significant in terms of the ways in which they reveal the pressure that arguments like theirs, indebted to Wölflin and Riegl, placed on constructing a longer-term presence, or afterlife, of specifically German Baroque forms. The overall shape and direction of the argument are initially clear when Benjamin argues—in terms for which heironically thanks Cysarz (G: 1.1: 339; E: 163)—that the allegorical imperative in the Baroque is the “speculative opposite” of, or a response to, the classical concept of the symbol (337; 161). In a completely different tone from that of the Viennese scholar, however, Benjamin sees in the Baroque's allegorical use

69. Benjamin's understanding of allegory is intimately involved with contemporary discussions about emblems. I discuss these alliances in greater detail in chapter 3.
of language an example of how “the Baroque” is a “sovereign opposite of Classicism” rather than a transitional form thereof. The Baroque is, in Benjamin’s words, the “correction of Classicism,” indeed, of “art itself,” that scholars had recognized only “in Romanticism” before (352; 176). The arc from theories of allegory in the Baroque to those in German Romanticism, with which the Baroque has an “elective affinity” (387–88; 213), bypasses Classicism, according to Benjamin, and reveals the “constants” (352; 176) between the two. The claim is supported through reference especially to the work of Friedrich Creuzer (1771–1858) (340–44; 163–67) and Franz von Baader (1765–1841) (360–61; 184). Both theorists were identified with German Romanticism; extracts from and citations of their work appear cheek by jowl with references to Strich and Hübischer, whose arguments about the afterlives of Baroque principles in the period of German literary Romanticism are confirmed by Benjamin’s invocation of their work.

Benjamin’s complex commentary on Baroque allegory in these sections is consistently interrupted, moreover, by sustained asides to and extended discussions of other Romantic figures, such as Johann Joseph von Görres (1776–1848) (G: 1.1: 342, 362; E: 165, 186–87), E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822) (347–48; 171), Novalis (1772–1801) (363, 367; 188, 191), and Jean Paul (364; 188), giving the appearance that German Romanticism and the authors and texts Benjamin had dealt with in his dissertation might nearly edge out the Baroque as his main object of concern in the Habilitation. Yet the parallels between Benjamin’s, Strich’s, and Hübischer’s arguments, which emerge in Benjamin’s claim that Creuzer’s understanding of myth and allegory can and should be understood as a more or less “modern” version of Baroque thoughts (343; 166), for example, and in his assertion that Novalis’s understanding of allegory was also based on a “Baroque practice” (363; 188), suggest that Benjamin’s method in these pages is not at all unlike theirs, namely the invention (in Wölflinian-Strichian fashion) of an afterlife for the Baroque in the other epoch of the German tradition, namely Romanticism, that he knew well. The cited texts merely make visible, in other words, that the former period is a “pre-history” that bears fruit in a later one; “the genius of Romanticism dialogues with the Baroque spirit precisely in the space of the allegorical” (363; 187), Benjamin claims. The Rieglian density of citation here, not only from eighteenth-century texts, but from the original “source texts” of the seventeenth century as well, is nearly unparalleled in the rest of the *Tragic Drama* book. It nevertheless yields in the pages that follow to a host of citations from the work of physicist and theorist Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776–1810), whose work was so influential for the German Romantics. Benjamin describes Ritter’s ideas as “an unmistakable tribute to the connection between the Baroque and Romanticism” (387–89, here 388; 213–15, here 214); citations from Ritter’s 1810 *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers* (Fragments from the Estate of a Young Physicist) complete the creation of an originary “eddy” (226; 45) of German allegorical thinking into which both the Baroque and Romanticism can be absorbed.
The "redemption" of Baroque allegory lies in its survival into German Romanticism, then. Benjamin had already made a similar argument earlier, in the second chapter of his book, about the Baroque form of the tragic drama itself, which as a generic "idea" emerges periodically in history, creating an alternative "lineage" (Sippe) for a specifically "German literary history" (G: 1.1; 307; E: 128). That chapter is of course choreographed to define this lineage in counterpoint to ancient and Renaissance tragedy, with the majority of the first part of the chapter devoted to a discussion of the properties specific to seventeenth-century German plays of the Silesians, with their devotion to history, to the sovereign as tyrant and martyr, to intrigue and the court, and to a complex, perhaps even incomplete process of secularization (242–78; 62–100; see Weidner). It is here that a recourse to historical sources roots the tragic drama in an "epochal feeling" (251; 72) all its own; Riegl can thus be cited (257; 99), as is Hübscher (278; 100) in turn. The second part of the chapter juxtaposes these very distinct forms of the tragic drama to those of ancient tragedy (279–99; 101–38), which, as if to confirm the historical specificity of the seventeenth-century dramas just presented, must be explained as equally rooted in its own age. Classicists Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (282, 284–85, 292; 104, 106, 113) and Kurt Latte (295; 116) are cited to ratify a reading that also sees tragedy as a "historical fact" (282; 103) rooted in a different place and time, with its preference for the matter of legend, for example, and related to ancient judicial procedure. Tragedy is thus precisely not the transhistorical witness that Johannes Volkelt's Ästhetik des Tragischen (Aesthetics of the Tragic) had defined it to be, not the articulation of transcendent ethical norms "with no relation to historical subject matter" (279; 101). Rather, in Wölfflinian fashion, Benjamin presses the Baroque tragic drama up against ancient tragedy in this way in order to show the specificity of each.

Benjamin's return, at the end of the second section of the second chapter of the Tragic Drama book, to the "idea" of Baroque tragic drama as it emerges in subsequent periods of German literature, most prominently, Storm and Stress and Romanticism, thus allows a narrative of national fulfillment to be written. "The effect of the Baroque world of forms" (G: 1.1; 300; E: 121) can be observed in the plays of Zacharias Werner (1768–1823) and Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg (1737–1823), for example, as well as in the distorted form of "the apocryphal afterlife of the tragic drama...in the classicizing attempts of historical drama" (301; 122) by Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805). The claim reminds us that earlier, Goethe's play Die natürliche Tochter (The Natural Daughter) (1804) had emerged, if somewhat apologetically, as a tragic drama for Benjamin (268; 89), as had Friedrich Schlegel's Alarcos (1802) as well (314; 136). It is probably not by chance that in addition to the playwrights of the clearly "anticlassical" periods of German literature, such as Storm and Stress and Romanticism, it is the great figures of Weimar Classicism, Goethe and Schiller, whose works must be "reinterpreted" here, not as a self-fulfilling Renaissance moment, however, but rather as the most potent proof
of the afterlife of a specifically German Baroque. The “drama of fate,” unancient and untragic, and yet nearly Renaissance-like as a “blossoming space of drama” (307; 128), proves, finally, the periodicity of the Baroque best. “The tragedy of fate is [already] anticipated in the tragic drama” (312; 133), Benjamin writes. The plays adduced here as evidence of the afterlife of the German Baroque are primarily those of Calderón and Shakespeare; that these non-German playwrights provide proof positive of the survival of the Baroque in the German Romantic tradition is explained when we look to the names of their translators, Johann Diederich Gries, Wilhelm Schlegel, and Ludwig Tieck, in whose editions Benjamin read their now German Baroque plays. 70

In addition to references to dramatic texts by post-Baroque and especially Romantic authors, Benjamin offers in these pages an even more prominent reprise of Strich's and Hübscher's theses about the German Baroque in his analyses of the peculiarly German dramatic genre of the “Haupt- und Staatsaktionen”—loosely translated, plays about “affairs of state”—based on the work of Romantic literary historian Franz Christoph Horn (1781–1837), in his Poesie und Beredsamkeit der Deutschen (German Poetry and Rhetoric) (1822–23). Horn’s volume and its importance for Benjamin’s access to a “Baroque” tradition are the subject of a more detailed discussion in chapter 2. Here it is interesting to note that it is not by chance that Benjamin quotes Horn in his assessment of these plays as “authentically German [in] origin and entirely appropriate for the character of the Germans” (G: 1.1: 302; E: 123). Throughout this section (299–307; 120–28), Benjamin places his own citations of Silesian dramas by Gryphius and Lohenstein alongside references to Horn’s commentary on the plays of Josef Anton Stranitzky (c. 1676–1726), for example, from the volume that Horn calls his “cultural history of the fatherland” (2–3), as well as alongside other less well-known dramatic texts collected in Franz Josef Mone’s Schauspiele des Mittelalters (Medieval Plays) (1846) and Karl Weiss’s Die Wiener Haupt- und Staatsaktionen (Viennese Plays about Affairs of State) (1854). I also discuss Mone and Weiss in more detail below. Alongside Horn’s collection, these anthologies belonged to a tradition of celebrating the cultural patrimony of the nation. In marshalling the evidence he finds in texts such as these as proof of a continuous German dramatic tradition, Benjamin follows Strich’s and Hübscher’s commitment to defining the longer history of German literature as the fruit of the Baroque. Benjamin had already alluded earlier in his study to the “pre-history” of the Baroque tragic drama in the “relation” of Baroque drama to “medieval religious” dramatic forms, such as the “Passion play” (254–55; 75–76) and medieval mystery plays, both of which display, he writes, “the world of forms of the Baroque

70. Benjamin was not the only one to argue that Calderón’s plays had an important afterlife in German Romanticism; see Berens’s 1926 article, “Calderons Schicksalstragödien,” 11 and 58, 60, 65–66, for example. Most of Benjamin’s arguments about the importance of stage props (e.g., G: 1.1: 311–12; E: 132–33) are derived from Berens.
tragic drama" (257; 78). Both these relatively indistinct prehistories (one is reminded of Strich’s “primal German poetry”) and their afterlives up through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries demonstrate the robustness of a specifically German “lineage of the German tragic drama,” as noted above (307; 128). Nontragic, and thus neither “classical” nor imitative in a Renaissance mode, as Stachel or Cysarz might have had it, this lineage testifies to the origin of a continuous and nationally rooted German dramatic tradition out of the spirit and style of the period of the Baroque. The story of debates about the Baroque indicated in this chapter demonstrates that, while certainly not unanimous, most of the scholars engaged in defending the period and its forms did so by pressing the Baroque into the service of a narrative about the power of a new kind of style to express an often complexly overdetermined, yet durable national-cultural sensibility. To anchor the (re)birth of a collective German modernity in a Baroque “will to art” and “feeling of life” appears to have done work not unlike the work done by related, Renaissance-based arguments about the (re)awakening of a nation’s vitality. Unlike those arguments, however, the case being made for the Baroque adduced indigenous rather than foreign cultural capital and texts as the origin of a national tradition gradually reaching its fulfillment. While it may seem odd to insert Benjamin’s argument about the Baroque into this critical tradition, given his rejection in the “Prologue” of a “nationalist philology” that had underestimated the achievements of the Baroque, it is clear that he was wrestling with exactly the same issues as the art and literary theorists and critics he cites when he addressed the question of the “origin” of a specifically German tragic drama in their terms. Like Wölfflin and Riegl, Strich and Hübischer, then, Benjamin saw the Baroque as a kind of canvas on which to image forth theories about a period and its cultural integrity as they emerged out of a close reading of the “phenomenal” details of works of art and texts. But his and their literary-critical and art theoretical texts were not the only ones to address the way that the “idea” of the Baroque “encounters the historical world again and again” (G: 1.1: 226; E: 45). The significantly more literal question of where to locate and how to find material versions of these many historical formations of the Baroque tragic drama—which, taken together in their “totality,” constitute the “origin of the German tragic drama” (226-27; 45-46)—was posed in and answered by the production of a variety of critical editions, anthologies of texts, and translations of “Baroque” dramas to which I now turn.