Introduction

> It is characteristic of philosophical writing that it must continually confront the question of representation.
> —Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*

> My grandfather used to say: "Life is astoundingly short. As I look back over it, life seems so foreshortened to me that I can hardly understand, for instance, how a young man can decide to ride over to the next village without being afraid that, quite apart from accidents, even the span of a normal life that passes happily may be totally insufficient for such a ride."
> —Franz Kafka, "The Next Village"

This study examines the interactions between the two discursive practices of philosophy and theatre / performance. I could have set out by raising general issues, on a wide-ranging theoretical level, concerning the multifaceted and extremely complex relationships, sometimes even competition and confrontation, between these discursive practices. Instead I have made a "dramaturgical" decision to focus on four direct encounters between individual representatives of these two fields. These exchanges involve some form of direct contact between the philosophers and individuals engaged in theatrical activities, the "thespians" of my title. The encounters consist of meetings, correspondences, cooperations—even parties—or any other form of direct exchange and dialogue between representatives of these two disciplines, and in one case an interior "dialogue" within a dramatic character. The first section of this book presents the four "Encounters," which besides being examined in the greatest possible detail are also contextualized with the aim of raising more general issues concerning the relations between the two discursive practices as represented by these individuals. The second section, "Constellations," widens the theoretical perspectives at the same time as it focuses more directly on a specific historical context, the years leading up to the Second World War and its beginning. During these years of a gradually intensi-

fied crisis, conflict, and destruction, the interactions between philosophy and performance were reformulated in terms that I believe need to be carefully examined so that we might grasp more fully what the stakes are, also today, in the interaction between philosophical and thespian discourses.

In general terms philosophers are concerned with questions of how one should live to achieve happiness. They also ask what sorts of things exist and what their essential nature is, in particular which things are beautiful, what counts as genuine knowledge, and what are the correct principles of reasoning. Thespians—or people working toward the creation of stage performances, for want of a generally accepted, inclusive term—come from a number of different fields and professions, such as playwrights and stage directors; scenographers and designers of costumes; light and sound technicians; as well as the actors who actually "do" the performing by appearing onstage in front of a live audience. The term "thespian" derives from Thespis, the sixth century B.C. poet often credited with inventing Greek tragedy by introducing actors performing the roles of individual characters and spoken dialogue into the traditional choral structure, also legendarily claimed to be the first to appear as an actor. In most cases the thespians I focus on, however, are playwrights and directors, sometimes even both, though some were also involved in other aspects of creative work for the theatre. Discussion of these thespians however would not be complete without touching upon the theories of acting and how they relate to the philosophical ideas developed just before the Second World War.

Encounters between philosophers and thespians have been profoundly informed by different kinds of competition and even outright struggles between their respective modes of discourse. The four examples examined here are no exception. Both partners in these dialogues frequently give vent to a general interest, even a direct desire, to include central aspects of the other's discursive practices within the creative and intellectual endeavors of his own field. Therefore, one of the central aims of this book is to explore how philosophers have tried to embrace thespian modes of expression, appropriating theatrical practices, within their own discursive fields. The book also seeks to explore how the philosophers' thespian partners have frequently applied philosophical tools and modes of thinking in their own work.

The wide range of possibilities for the mobility of and even oscillation between the discursive practices of philosophy and theatre / performance—in both directions—reveals an interesting border landscape, a liminal discursive space situated somewhere "between" the discursive practices of both philosophers and thespians. But as in all fields, any vacuum is always filled by either side of the discursive divide. Therefore this book tries to map this liminal, sometimes even ludic, space in which each partner in the dialogical encounter desires to take over the other's practices. Such encounters are frequently transformed into a competition, even an outright struggle. Some of the examples examined are quite well known and have long and complex histories of reception. Nevertheless this liminal space—as well as the repeated desire of each of the partners to transgress and even invade the more strictly defined borderlines between the philosophical and thespian discursive practices—has remained an almost totally unexplored field of research.[1] My own aim is to shed new light on what has traditionally been perceived as an arena for competition and strife—or for what Plato on several occasions referred to as "the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry"[2]—that has been a site not just for expressions of envy and jealousy but for mutual inspiration and productive cross-fertilization as well. This radical ambivalence concerning the communication between the discursive practices of these two fields and their representatives is the first of many reasons that this topic is both abundant and complex.

The discursive practices of each of these professions cannot always be clearly defined or sharply delineated. Alexander Nehamas has claimed that "the boundaries of philosophy have never been absolutely clear: just as at one end, philosophy comes close to mathematics, psychology, and even physics, it slides into literature at the other. But differences still remain."[3] I would also include theatre and performance in Nehamas's notion of "literature." In any case because of their respective and distinct modes of expression, in particular in the case of theatre, which as a rule can be easily and even intuitively apprehended, we are able to make some basic, even ad hoc, distinctions between philosophers and thespians. But at the same time, exactly how (and where) the boundary between their respective discursive practices is situated and how the strife becomes a source of inspiration vary widely in the four cases I examine.

Furthermore some philosophers, having embraced thespian prac-

tices within their own discursive regimes, have also confronted—also in the sense of directly challenging—the thespian practices and forms of expression of the professional thespians. Thus while "theatricalizing" their own modes of expression, some philosophers have at the same time argued that the theatre, and its representational practices, is not as inclusive or as "true" as the philosophical modes of discourse. And according to the worst-case scenario, for the thespians as well as for other artists, some philosophers have censored or even banned the theatre and other forms of art, as Plato did, from the ideal society. Yet there are philosophers like Nietzsche for whom classical tragedy represented the most perfect and ideal form of expression, from which, after the demise of this "perfect" form of expression, philosophical thinking was born. In short, because there are many extreme positions, it is impossible to make any sweeping generalizations about the respective positions of philosophical and thespian discourses in their complex relationship to each other. And that is, of course, what finally makes each of the four encounters completely unique but at the same time part of a mosaic of discursive encounters and interactions. The total picture is more complex than the simple sum of the individual encounters.

From the thespian perspective, more conventional forms of theatre, as well as the many other forms of the scripted and embodied practices we generally term "performance art," have made philosophical claims. Thus the thespians in principle also frequently move beyond their own, supposedly more strictly defined, discursive boundaries. Scripted embodiments, in which actors or performers present some form of preconceived or set script for an audience, are a necessary constituent feature of theatre and performance. In certain cases, however, the thespians have attempted to present alternatives to the traditional forms of philosophical discourses. *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Hamlet*, scripts composed with the intention of performative embodiments on a stage, are my primary examples of thespian discourses that in different ways have critiqued and even "invaded" the discursive space traditionally assigned to philosophical thinking. These dramatic texts have in turn been appropriated and even "used" by generations of philosophers and theoreticians to make claims that go far beyond their "original" status as thespian discourses.

Plato wanted to ban theatrical activities from his ideal state and with them the thespians, who he claimed were not searching for truth because

they lacked the tools for such an endeavor. But I do not think there has ever been a thespian who has tried to restrict any form of discourse, including philosophy. On the contrary the theatre has relied on philosophical arguments to alleviate the restrictions and bans that it has suffered from by using philosophical argumentation. An interesting example of this strategy can even be found in some of Plato's own dialogues, which, while they radically critique the theatre, are also theatrical in the deepest sense of this term. Plato's *Symposium* is one of the prime examples of this paradoxical form of discourse, and my first chapter is devoted to a detailed examination of this fascinating text as well as some of its hitherto unrecognized intertexts.

Although the four specific encounters between philosophers and thespians examined in detail set the stage for my central arguments, this book also has an implicit agenda, motivated by the recent debates within the humanities and the arts concerning interdisciplinary border crossings and multidisciplinary dialogues. The relationship between the academic disciplines that focus on the arts, on the one hand, and the forms of thinking and reflection produced by practicing artists, on the other, both within as well as outside of the universities, are of utmost importance. In the more institutional contexts, this issue is directly related to two questions: how can artistic practice be considered a form of research? and what kind of thinking is produced by such artistic and creative practices? These are some of the most urgent issues on the agenda of today's institutions of higher education, in particular in those where the humanities and the arts still play an important role. The institutions in which the arts are given a high priority however seem to be constantly diminishing as new ways to define these relationships are explored. This study therefore examines some of the ways in which performance and theatre "think," as well as how philosophy, in particular as practiced by Walter Benjamin, develops intricate performative strategies. But, as this book points out, it is possible to distinguish performative strategies in the writings of other philosophers as well.

From my own, more academic perspective, cultural studies and critical theory, with their many subdivisions within existing university departments or newly created academic programs, have as a rule been based on the notion that philosophy—in particular what in the United States has been termed "continental philosophy"—constitutes a necessary point

of departure for a deepened understanding of cultural processes as well as artistic creativity. But the academic disciplines based on this assumption, including the discipline that, with slightly different variations, calls itself "theatre and performance studies"—to which I am most closely affiliated myself—have not paid sufficient attention to their own disciplinary borders and specificities. Therefore the role of the theories informed by these philosophical systems and ideas often remains unclear.[4] I will however not engage directly in this debate of theories, even if they are an important part of my agenda.

And as I worked on the final version of this book, Harvard University published its *Report of the Task Force on the Arts*. It contains the following telling opening statements:

> To make the arts an integral part of the cognitive life of the university will mean finding new places for art-making—a term which includes performance as well as the fashioning of material and textual objects—within the undergraduate and graduate curricula. It will mean forging new, productive relations between artistic creativity and the creative work of the sciences and engineering. It will mean making contemporary art a subject of vital attention and intellectual interest. It will mean new adventurous spaces where art can be exhibited, made, and performed.[5]

In the context of this book, these issues serve as the backdrop; but they must not be neglected if we want our examination of the two fields of research and creativity to make a significant difference within broader academic and social contexts.

Thus, while also hoping to shed some indirect light on these quite urgent and perhaps more political as well as economic issues—which are also highly charged ideologically—this study examines the four specific encounters between philosophers and thespians from a broad historical perspective, beginning in classical times and ending with the beginning of the Second World War. No claim is made for completeness regarding either of these complex fields of study or the encounters between philosophers and thespians. The first encounter, among Socrates, Agathon, and Aristophanes, which takes place within the semifictional context of Plato's *Symposium*, is no doubt the first meeting among representatives of these two disciplines to have been recorded in detail. Plato's dialogue, depicting the celebration of Agathon's victory at the Lenaean theatre festival

in 416 B.C., during which the celebrants present their eulogies of Eros, is both a literary-dramatic masterpiece and an important philosophical tractate. Even though the dialogue relates to a historical event, its literary qualities, in combination with its sophisticated treatment of philosophical ideas, have been the subject of admiration—frequently, even awe—from generations of readers across a number of disciplines.

The reading of the *Symposium* will focus on the two moments in the text in which Plato has explicitly focused our attention on the potential and actual direct communication between Socrates and the two playwrights, and in particular on the different forms of competition between them. The first of these moments takes place immediately after Socrates' own speech eulogizing Eros, in which Socrates presents his intimate dialogues with Diotima about Eros. When Socrates is done, Aristophanes wants to protest against something that Socrates has just said. But because of the dramatic entry of Alcibiades, we never learn what Aristophanes wanted to say. The second exchange, between Socrates and the two playwrights, which I examine in detail, takes place at the very end of the dialogue, when the day is already breaking and Socrates is lecturing to the two exhausted playwrights, arguing that "authors should be able to write both comedy and tragedy: the skillful tragic dramatist should also be a comic poet" (505, 223d).[6]

In both these instances, Plato has excluded certain crucial details from his text concerning the communication between the philosopher and the two playwrights. In the first chapter I present an interpretative approach in which I attempt to explain why this is the case and why Plato, no doubt intentionally, has excluded some crucial information from his own text. To broaden the scope of the interdisciplinary discussion that is the core of this study, I also present a detailed intertextual reading of Plato's dialogue and Sophocles' play *Oedipus Tyrannus*. I emphasize the relationship between the riddle of the Sphinx and Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*, both of which are texts that present the number of legs as one of the defining characteristics of the most philosophical of all questions: What is a human? In this case, intertextuality is also a form of encounter.

My second example, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is even more emphatically fictional than the *Symposium*. This play has led to a mass of philosophical readings. My own reading argues that, instead of presenting a

competition between individual representatives of the two fields as Plato did in the *Symposium*, Shakespeare's play presents an internal strife within the character of Hamlet himself, who aspires to be both a philosopher and a thespian. "Who's There?"—the title of my chapter on *Hamlet*—quotes the first line of the play and serves as the point of departure for my thesis, specifically, that the protagonist of this play is both a philosopher and a thespian, in one person. This desire to be "both" constitutes an integral aspect of Hamlet's individual tragedy, although the play's "authorial" voices (intentionally in the plural, because the ghost is also such a voice) repeat, reinforce, and frequently even subvert the encounters between the philosophical and thespian discourses that the protagonist of this play attempts to create and develop. Hamlet, I argue, becomes a victim of this desire.

No other play, except perhaps *Oedipus Tyrannus*, has been so frequently discussed by a broad range of thinkers who have philosophized about the theatre and its representational apparatus as has *Hamlet*. The paradoxical situation I examine in this study is that the protagonists of these plays, Oedipus and Hamlet, are heroes who philosophize, although in quite different ways, and yet the two plays they appear in can simultaneously be interpreted as a serious critique and as a sophisticated appropriation of philosophical discourses. In the chapter on the *Symposium*, I treat Oedipus as an aspiring philosopher who fails in knowing himself. And in the chapter on *Hamlet*, I examine the philosophical tradition that has appropriated this play for its own purposes. I then present a brief critical examination of the ghost of Hamlet's father as prefiguring a Utopian state of affairs.

After presenting the two "authored" encounters between philosophers and thespians that take place in the *Symposium* and in *Hamlet*, as well as in some of their intertexts, the next two chapters closely examine two encounters that actually took place and have been documented, of Nietzsche and Strindberg, and of Benjamin and Brecht. The short but extremely intense correspondence between Friedrich Nietzsche and August Strindberg began in the fall of 1888 and ended with the onset of Nietzsche's final illness in January 1889. This correspondence can be read as part of a complex performance-dialogue in which both correspondents, in diverse ways, dramatize the elusive borderlines between sanity and madness in their epistolary "stagings" of themselves for the other. The

theme of insanity in relation to the communication between the discursive practices of philosophers and thespians can also be seen in both of my previous examples: in particular, in Hamlet's supposedly feigned madness (while Ophelia actually becomes insane) and also in Oedipus's hubris, as well as in the catastrophic consequences of the discovery of his own identity. In the Nietzsche / Strindberg chapter, I connect their respective "stagings" of themselves to other aspects of their oeuvre; in Strindberg's case, to a letter he wrote to Siri von Essen, the actress who was to become his first wife. This letter can be seen as an early blueprint for *A Dream Play*, which Strindberg wrote for his third wife, Harriet Bosse, also an actress. My reading of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* as a self-dramatization distills from this formative text a counter-narrative, which I argue has not been sufficiently recognized and which could be characterized as "the birth of the philosopher from the ruins of tragedy."

The last encounter I examine presents certain aspects of the long and multifaceted friendship between Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht. I focus on a particular day in August 1934, during Benjamin's first visit to Skovsbostrand, the small village on the southern shore of the small Danish island of Fyn, where Brecht was living in exile for several years. On this particular day they discussed the short text by Kafka called "The Next Village," or "*Das Nächste Dorf*" (which I quote in this introduction's second epigraph), about the rider who most probably will never reach "the next village." Their respective interpretations, as penned by Benjamin in his diary, present in a remarkably concentrated form the respective positions of Benjamin and Brecht as philosopher and thespian in relation to their perceptions of the state of exile that they were subjected to at the time. Their respective interpretations of Kafka's short text also each serves as a key to Benjamin's philosophy of history as well as to Brecht's theory and practice of the theatre.

The close examination of the Benjamin-Brecht discussion of Kafka's text leads to the second section of the book and its two final chapters, where the discursive border crossings in the work of Brecht and Benjamin are explored in further detail. Brecht's unfinished *Messingkauf Dialogues* were an attempt to cross the border between the two discursive practices by theatricalizing philosophical thinking. Benjamin's likewise unfinished *Arcades Project* (*Das Passagen-Werk*) contains a similar desire, but was

conceived from the opposite direction, exploring the performative dimensions of philosophical thinking. The aspects of these monumental projects I examine in detail are Brecht's notion of the "Street Scene," which he developed in an essay of the same name, subtitled, "A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre," as well as his poem "On Everyday Theatre" that was planned to be included in the larger *Messingkauf Dialogues*. These texts focus on the street accident as a primal scene (even in the Freudian sense) for Brecht's model of the theatre. To understand the larger cultural implications of this option, I take a closer look at different aspects of the street accident as it was perceived by writers and thinkers during this time, and in particular how it was appropriated in theories of acting. I also present some quite extraordinary materials connected to a car accident in May 1929, in which Brecht himself was involved.

The second section of this chapter explores Benjamin's notion of the "constellation" in connection with the man-made catastrophes leading up to the Second World War. In particular, I examine the bombings of Guernica and the performative strategies employed to represent them by aesthetic means, through, for example, Picasso's well-known mural *Guernica* as well as through Benjamin's meditation on the Klee painting *Angelus Novus*.

Finally, the last chapter discusses the rhetorical strategies developed by Benjamin in his short prose writings published in various contexts called *Denkbilder*, a genre of writing usually bringing out an abstract, philosophical idea through a short narrative or description. In many of his *Denkbilder* Benjamin created a performativity in a philosophical mode—"performances of the mind" that are "staged" in collaboration with the reader through the interpretation of these texts. This was a time when the world was drawing closer to the catastrophe we now call the Second World War. Benjamin himself was fleeing from place to place until he committed suicide in Port Bou on the Franco-Spanish border in September 1940. In this context, the *Denkbilder* became a form of experimentation, in which the competition between the discursive practices of philosophy and theatre were transformed into a form of expression through which the philosopher becomes a thespian, while at the same time keeping his initial philosophical identity. My study ends at this moment of crisis, recognizing that even if the "performative" as well as "performativity" constituted an important aspect of Benjamin's philosophical

practice, he did not have an opportunity to elaborate these ideas more systematically.

The postwar developments in the understanding of the relationship between the discursive practices of philosophy and performance are quite a different story and are not examined in detail. Rather my aim is to present some of the prehistories of these more current debates. However, it is important to draw attention to the fact that when, in the 1950s, the notions of the "performative" and "performativity" enter the philosophical discourses, fictional practices were not embraced. The group of philosophers of language who began to examine the idea that speech (language) is in itself a form of action, speech acts, at least initially rejected fictional discourses, just as Plato had done. J. L. Austin's groundbreaking study *How to Do Things with Words*, which originated as the William James Lectures at Harvard University in 1955, thus expresses a strong suspicion, even animosity, toward the theatre. In this lecture series Austin examined how certain modes of speech "do" things under certain conditions, performing certain actions in and by themselves. But because of the parameters of sincerity that he introduced, the performative usage of speech was restricted to nonfictional discourses. Austin even went so far as to claim that "a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy"[7] (italics added).

This means that the theatre was excluded from being "performative." This line of thinking basically reiterates Plato's critique of the theatre, but from a nonessentialist, pragmatic perspective. In this study I argue that the forms of performativity Austin illuminates and examines by focusing on linguistic expressions, the so-called speech acts, are limiting and in some cases even misleading. My own aim is to reexamine performativity in a broader historical context. I argue that the four encounters between philosophers and thespians presented reveal aspects of the performative and performativity that Austin, as well as his followers, because of their exclusive linguistic interests, obviously did not include in their discussions. It is actually only with the connections between performativity and embodiment made by Judith Butler, in particular in *Antigone's Claim*, that this impasse has been at least partly resolved. In this book Butler has made a great effort to bridge the paradoxical gap between saying and doing within the legal contexts on which Sophocles' play is based, focusing

on the question of what it means to make a "claim" both in language as well as in action. Words, Butler argues, are not a substitute for action but "become indissociable from deeds."[8]

In my own study I try to take an additional step toward understanding the interaction and juxtaposition of language and action by examining Benjamin's storytelling practices, and in particular how he relates to the performativity of wishes, promises, and threats. In Benjamin's *Denkbilder* the philosophical and the thespian discourses are not clashing or competing with each other but serve a common purpose, incorporating the reader in a performative scenario that navigates between the constantly recurring catastrophes of history and an imagined Utopia.

In the opening paragraphs of this introduction I defined performance as a form of "scripted embodiment." This means that verbal discourses "activate" the human body in different ways, creating a broad range of activities of "doing," which in classical Greek is the original meaning of the word *drama*: "to do, to act, and to perform." This study attempts to qualify this general claim by drawing attention to additional aspects of performativity and performance, which as a rule have not received attention in discussions of these notions. Besides the Benjaminian wishes, promises, and threats, the competition (the *agon*) also serves as a source for the performative and performativity.[9] Plato's *Symposium* emphasizes the interaction between the human body and a broad range of "scripts" activated by many different forms of competition. Finally, Plato's dialogue "performs" a competition between philosophy—literally embodied by Socrates—and the theatre as represented by the two playwrights, Agathon and Aristophanes. The many layers of competition that come into being and are activated in the discursive border landscapes between philosophy and performance are an expression of the heightened performativity the exchanges between them give rise to. The performativity of the *agon* can even be compared to a play within a play, embedded in a discursive interaction between the philosophical and the performative fields. This in turn draws attention both to the boundaries as well as to the frequent transgressions of these discursive practices.

The idea of positioning theatre and philosophy in relation to each other, creating different forms of competition between them, originated in the classical period. On several occasions Plato referred to "the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry." Plato's basic approach is based

on a dichotomy that is examined at length in the first chapter of this book. Aristotle on the other hand developed a model of relationships between philosophy and poetry that also included history and historiography. In a well-known passage in Chapter 9 of his *Poetics*, Aristotle argued that the difference between the poet and the historian is not whether one or the other is writing in verse or in prose, but rather that "one relates what has happened, the other what may happen." From this Aristotle draws the following conclusion: "Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular."[10] Because they are more closely aligned, this makes the competition between poetry and philosophy much fiercer than the competition between poetry and history. Aristotle presents a broader discursive field because poetry is situated on a spectrum with philosophy and historiography on either side, whereas Plato sets up a direct clash between poetry and philosophy.

Aristotle goes on arguing that the particulars of history are "what Alcibiades did or suffered." In the passage immediately following this mention of Alcibiades, Aristotle makes a detailed comparison between comedy and tragedy with regard to the relationship between the particular and the universal, arguing that in comedy,

> the poet first constructs the plot on the lines of probability, and then inserts characteristic names—unlike the lampooners who write about particular individuals. But tragedians still keep to real names, the reason being that what is possible is credible: what has not happened we do not at once feel sure to be possible; but what has happened is manifestly possible: otherwise it would not have happened. Still there are even some tragedies in which there are only one or two well-known names, the rest being fictitious. In others, none are well known—as in Agathon's Antheus, where incidents and names alike are fictitious, and yet they give none the less pleasure. We must not, therefore, at all costs keep to the received legends, which are the usual subjects of Tragedy.[11]

This complex passage has received numerous interpretations as readers have attempted to comprehend what Aristotle meant by claiming that tragedians stick to real names, while writers of comedy first construct their plots and only then insert the names. What interests me in this passage is Aristotle's own mention of names to exemplify his point about philosophy, poetry, and history. According to Gerald F. Else, in spite of seeming like a totally random choice, the mention of Alcibiades is in-

teresting for two reasons: first because according to Aristotle character determines action, but also because Alcibiades appeared as a character in two of Aristophanes' comedies.[12]

I also want to consider the possibility that the issues dealt with in this passage can be read intertextually as a discussion about, or even as Aristotle's polemic response to, Plato's *Symposium*. From his general claim that poetry is more philosophical than is history, Aristotle enters into a brief discussion of the complex relationship between comedy and tragedy with regard to the use of characteristic or real names. As I show in detail later, this double constellation—poetry/philosophy and tragedy/comedy—also figures prominently in the *Symposium*, in which Plato included two playwrights—Aristophanes, the writer of comedies, and Agathon, the writer of tragedies—as Socrates' thespian dialogue partners. But he also includes Alcibiades, the representative of historical action, who arrives after the speeches and in a gesture of deep disappointment and even fury "eulogizes" Socrates. Both in Plato's *Symposium* and in Aristotle's *Poetics*—two foundational texts—the dramatic genres of comedy and tragedy are played out against each other in a discussion that is directly related to the relationship between philosophy and poetry, and directly and indirectly related to exactly the same individuals, with Aristophanes (not mentioned directly by Aristotle) as the playwright who had included not only Alcibiades but also Socrates in his plays.

Whereas Plato focuses on the dichotomous "quarrel" between poetry and philosophy, Aristotle introduces a model for examining discursive practices that also includes history. This is also the crucial difference between Socrates' and Benjamin's appropriation of performative strategies in their philosophical thinking. Socrates tellingly rejects Alcibiades while Benjamin transformed Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* into the angel of history. And Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, with its own complex incorporations of philosophical thinking, marginalizes Fortinbras, the representative of history. These are crucial differences that are not immediately perceived as attention is focused on the interactions between the discursive practices of philosophy and performance. But they are part of my conclusions concerning Benjamin's *Denkbilder* in relation to the tradition to which he belongs, just as they are representative of the intertextualities situated at the crossroads between encounters and constellations, including both philosophy and history.

The journey is another expression of performance and performativity as scripted embodiment that is repeatedly activated in the encounters between philosophers and thespians. It is the journey from one place to another, and in some cases even the exilic, unending journey without a defined goal, except for the need to escape to somewhere else. In all of the four encounters presented, the travelers become inscribed by the road, at the same time as the road becomes an inscription, or a text, announcing both dangers and accidents on the uncertain journey to a desired or fortuitous goal. Benjamin and Brecht discussed Kafka's *The Next Village* ("*Das Nächste Dorf*"), about the rider setting out on a journey from one village to the next who will probably never arrive. Kafka's text reflects the exile they were forced to take on after Hitler's rise to power. And these journeys—the one in Kafka's story as well as those in the plays of Benjamin and Brecht—are then repeated in Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* as well as in Benjamin's *Denkbilder*.

There is a profound relationship between theatre and exile that deserves to be examined in depth. "Exile" is based on the Latin *exilium*, meaning "wanderer"; *diaspora*, with its Greek root for "dispersion," tends toward the idea of "scattering," as do the Hebrew terms *galut* and *gola*. The terms all convey the sense of forced separation of an individual or a collective from "home." Despite important historical and contextual differences among these concepts, they all raise questions about the effect of memories of home and the longing to return.

Thus, for example, the "affliction" called nostalgia—the uncontrollable desire to return home from which soldiers in the battlefield stationed far away from home suffered—was originally a pathological state that frequently led to sudden death. Today nostalgia has rather become a kind of indulgence over things past, but something of the pain, the *algos*, still remains active. Situations of longing for "home" (such as the longing for Moscow, despite the city's closeness to the small town in which Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* is set) create a powerful point of departure for dramatic situations and conflicts. Una Chaudhuri has even argued that in Chekhov's drama "the discourse of home is deconstructed to produce the image of a static exilic consciousness," where the characters, as she so pointedly has formulated it, "are not exiled from where they belong but exiled to where they belong."[13]

On the more abstract, spiritual side of the spectrum, the ascent of

the soul described by Socrates in the *Symposium* is a spiritual journey, in which the goal is reached by becoming a philosopher. In the intertextual reading presented, this spiritual ascent is shadowed by Oedipus's journey and his unsuccessful quest for his true identity on the roads between Corinth, Delphi, and Thebes, in particular in the quest that takes him to the place where the three roads meet, where he killed Laius, and to Mount Cithaeron, where he was left by his parents in order to be killed by the wild animals. Oedipus is the failed philosopher who does not know himself until it is already too late.

Eros is another recurring bodily inscription in these encounters. Plato's *Symposium* is of course the most obvious example, consisting of six eulogies in praise of Eros. But the encounters presented also contain other kinds of desire and sexual attraction, like the two intimate relationships in *Hamlet*, between Hamlet and Ophelia and between Claudius and Gertrude, which are only examined in passing. And the correspondence between Nietzsche and Strindberg raises a number of issues connected both to homoerotic and heterosexual relationships. In view of the fact that Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* literally begins with a homoerotic relationship between two gods—Dionysus and Apollo—from which a dramatic genre, tragedy, is born, Eros plays a central role in this text as well. Also we need to pay attention to the fact that in *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (the German title of his book), Nietzsche described an unprecedented birth (*Geburt*), while Benjamin, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*) depicts a story of origin (*Ursprung*) that is not based on a direct erotic union, but rather consists of a reconstruction of the distant past from which the first leap, or jump—in German the *Sprung*, the *Ur-Sprung*, literally "the first leap"—was made. The eroticism of that moment is melancholic, representing an initial abyssal distance and separation.

That moment is also when the search for what has been lost begins. This is what Aristophanes' story about the missing half in the *Symposium* depicts, reflecting the possibility that the philosopher and the thespian can reunite in one person, as an ideal conceptual construction of the mythical origins of the two discursive practices. Plato even tries to reproduce this construction by writing a text about such a reunification. And, argues Benjamin, we need the spiritual-intellectual instrument of memory to gain access to such a point of origin, where it supposedly began,

and to which we can hopefully find our way back again. Or as Benjamin formulated this process in one of the texts he wrote before his suicide, "by appropriating memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger."[14] The journey to the present from that past, and the memory that will make it possible to find the way back, is of course a narrative construction, just like Benjamin's own stories (and this book). But it is my hope that by making such a journey, it is possible to enhance the understanding of where we are now and what the dangers of our own moment in history are. Or as my own mother has repeatedly reminded me by using the proverb that—as I discovered much later—also appears in Benjamin's "The Storyteller," published in 1936: "Wenn jemand eine Reise tut, dann kann er was erzählen" (When someone makes a journey, he has a story to tell).

The inevitable caesura between making the journey and the moment of telling the story is the magnifying glass and the nexus through which the encounters between the philosophers and thespians are examined. These encounters enable us to raise the issues of if and in what sense the respective discursive practices are the lost half of each other, without any claims of hierarchy and primacy, just as Aristophanes' tale about Eros does, telling about the constant search for the missing half. And after discussing the four encounters, I make my own caesura, moving from the notion of the encounter to that of the constellation. This caesura is not based on a dichotomy between two discursive practices but on multileveled and intertextual juxtapositions of cultural practices and critical discourses. The cultural practices of the encounters gradually progress into the constellations of the critical discourses, reflecting the gradually accelerating sense of crisis and the violence leading up to the Second World War. This "state of emergency" or "exception" makes it necessary for Benjamin to reformulate and, even in a sense, reinvent the discursive practices of the philosopher and the performer by actually becoming a storyteller. And because Benjamin himself never told us the story from his own last journey, as the proverb he quotes proposes, what I finally wish to present is a firmer grasp of these changes. And only then can we go on to talk about the postwar era.