

Between Ideologies and a Hard Place:  
Hans Magnus Enzensberger's  
Utopian Pragmatist Poetics

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. . . internal differences, where the  
meanings are . . .

—Emily Dickinson  
“There’s a Certain Slant of Light”

. . . there is no such thing as inward  
generation, monologically understood.

—Charles Taylor  
“The Politics of Recognition” (32)

A wall of time [“Zeitmauer”] has fallen,  
and we are all of us standing as it were  
overnight in a place of unknown  
dimensions, like a blind man who stands  
at an intersection and suddenly discovers  
that his guide-dog can no longer see. . .

—Heiner Müller  
*Jenseits der Nation* (61)

Hegel said that the moment of victory of a  
political force is the very moment of its  
splitting: the triumphant liberal-democratic  
“new world order” is more and more  
marked by a frontier separating its  
“inside” from its “outside”—a frontier  
between those who manage to remain  
“within” . . . and others, the excluded. . .  
This opposition, not the one between the

capitalist and the socialist "bloc," is what defines the contemporary constellation: the "socialist" bloc was the true "third way," a desperate attempt at modernization outside the constraints of capitalism. At stake in the present crisis of postsocialist states is precisely the struggle for one's place, now that the illusion of the "third way" has evaporated: who will be admitted "inside," integrated into the developed capitalist order, and who will remain excluded from it?

—Slavoj Zizek  
*Tarrying with the Negative* (222)

#### Incorporations (Tongue at Work)

In part as a consequence of what has recently been called the "marginalization of poetry" in North American culture, it is difficult to appreciate fully on this side of the Atlantic the importance of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's contributions over the past four decades, not only to German poetry, but to German cultural life more generally.<sup>1</sup> That his work remains less well known in the United States than it deserves to be is all the more regrettable in light of the fact that Enzensberger's work has demonstrated from the very beginning a truly international character that has always extended well beyond the confines of more narrowly German concerns.<sup>2</sup> Polyglot translator and anthologist, Enzensberger has also served as founding editor of two important journals, *Kursbuch* and *Transatlantik*, which have succeeded in acquiring a broad readership and European influence beyond the reach of the comparably most influential literary journals in the United States. Enzensberger remains deservedly best known, however, for his own substantial and remarkably diverse body of work. Over the course of an exceptionally sustained and brilliant career, this *corpus* has established him as the very exemplar of a species of writer that has become increasingly rare in the English-speaking world since World War II—Adrienne Rich and Kamau Brathwaite come to mind as noteworthy exceptions—a figure of major cultural importance who moves with equal fluency and commitment between poetry and critical prose.<sup>3</sup>

Within the context of post-1945 European cultural history, it is instructive to read Enzensberger's contributions in this regard in light of Jean-Paul Sartre's advocacy of a "littérature engagée." Ignoring the pivotal example of Bertolt Brecht, as well as the surrealist project of placing poetry, in André Breton's well-known phrase, "au service de la révolution," Sartre famously argued in the opening pages of *What Is Literature?* that "outside of language" poetry and prose had "nothing in common . . . except the movement of the hands which traces the letters. . . ." Where prose could be thought of as "in essence, utilitarian," the self-referentially "external" quality of poetry placed it at odds in Sartre's view with political uses of language (6-11). Although Sartre later modified this stark reduction considerably in response to the powerful verse and prose poetry of the Martiniquan poet, Aimé Césaire, its presence in *What Is Literature?* figured a set of received expectations about poetry that have continued to delimit its role in the public sphere. Working against such familiar and tenacious cultural encodings (including those that continue to hold sway in the United States), aligning poetry with the private or "personal" and prose with the public or "political," Enzensberger's commitment to both forms speaks powerfully against the constricting artificiality of any such conceptual division. Where philosophy and the novel functioned for Sartre as interlocking arenas for exploring the relation between the personal and the political, so, in Enzensberger's work, do poetry and critical prose. Honoring the full potentialities of both modes in an age characterized (particularly within the American academy), by increasing genre specialization, his example argues for an understanding of poetry and prose as vitally complementary and interdependent rather than mutually exclusive activities.

"Anyone who intervenes in the political discourses of German public life does so," Enzensberger has written recently, "at his own risk":

It is not so much the moral accusations usual in this sphere, which are a deterrent . . . more serious are the intellectual risks taken by someone who participates in a media debate. . . . Years ago, word got round the party headquarters that the occupation of ideas is strategically just as important as control of the apparatus of power. One has to admire the skill with which the political class, for which nothing is less congenial than an idea, has made this theory its own. One consequence is that political debate is become more and more of a media phantom; it evaporates on television. . . . (*Civil Wars* 139)

In such a climate, as Heinz Müller has argued, “the function of the public sphere must be called radically into question” (91). Given a reality “more multi-layered than enlightened thinking can bear” (92), the question of the relation between poetry and critical prose needs to be reconfigured, not ontologically, but historically, and not in relation to a monolithic Public Sphere, but with a view to a variety of sometimes interlocking, sometimes mutually exclusive public spheres. At a time when “the presumption of the universal provision of culture as a public good has been all but abandoned, a moment of utter disillusionment over the power and knowledge of the intellectual classes” (Geyer 112), dichotomized representations of the kind Sartre once sought to impose on poetry and prose appear less than helpful, if not beside the point. Faced with the contempt for reflection that has come to pervade culture and politics, not only in Germany, but in Western culture more generally, the larger question is whether, in Müller’s words, “reflection” itself (and with it “art”) is “at an end and dying . . . irrelevant . . . a hobby” (91).

As Enzensberger’s *œuvre* demonstrates, engaging this question effectively calls upon all one’s resources. In an increasingly atomized culture where the violence of the unthought (the unthought *as* violence) threatens to displace reflection altogether, a particular value attaches to what we might call the amphibious thinker, the writer who, like Enzensberger, is able to move fluidly between and among genres and so negotiate the borders and protocols of a variety of reading/writing communities or public spheres. The scope and effectiveness of Enzensberger’s continued commitment to such negotiations is nowhere more in evidence than in the dialogue that asks to be engaged between his 1991 collection of poems, *Zukunftsmusik* (*Future Music*) and the collection of three essays published in 1993 in English translation bearing the title *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia*. Focusing primarily on the poems of *Zukunftsmusik*, I will attend in what follows to a cluster of interrelated concerns in Enzensberger’s recent poetic practice that resonate strongly as well in the critical prose of *Civil Wars*. Where *Civil Wars* tends to function as the site of a comparably more systematic and programmatic exposition, in this respect perhaps lending itself to larger scale public consumption, the poetry of *Zukunftsmusik* suggests that the necessary counterpart of any such gesture for Enzensberger is an equally sustained probing of “internal difference.” The relation between these two gestures should itself be understood, however, not as one of simple

contradiction or opposition between a “public” and a “private” language (all language being “public”), but rather as one involving two potentially interrelated “language games” or “speech genres”—as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Mikhail Bakhtin would have it—addressing different public spheres. Though the conventions, expectations, and audiences of each may overlap in some respects, they remain largely distinctive, increasingly so in a culture such as ours in which the tendency toward ever-greater specialization and the “end of reflection” tend to go hand in hand. Understanding that the issue of internal difference applies equally well to questions of language, public policy, and private reflection, Enzensberger’s work suggests that, for reasons at once “personal” and “political,” maintaining connections across genres and their constituencies is a matter of some urgency.

I turn first to two five-line stanzas from a poem which, in its syntax, punctuation, intimacy of address, sensual precision, and intellectual condensation, recalls much that is characteristic of one of the most famous of American poets to have her work go without significant recognition during her lifetime:

Dein seltsamer, stockender Singsang,  
jahrzehntelang fortgesetzt,  
und der Singsang des Andern —  
Flüstern, Summen, Keuchen, Stammeln —  
wirre Wirbelstürme im Luftmeer:

Der gewandteste unter den Muskeln,  
die Zunge allein — denke dir  
eine einsame Zunge,  
die sich vor dir auf dem Teller windet —,  
die Zunge allein tut es nicht. . . .  
 (“Zungenwerk” 36-37)

Your strange, halting sing song,  
prolonged for decades,  
and the sing song of the other —  
whispering, humming, gasping, stammering —  
garbled twisters in the sea of air:

Most agile of muscles,  
the tongue alone — imagine  
one lonely tongue,

writhing before you on the plate —,  
 the tongue alone doesn't do it. . . .  
 ("Tongue-Work")

With the first line's complex emphasis on eccentricity ("seltsamer" 'strange'), difficulty ("stockender" 'halting'), and conformity of speech ("Singsang" 'sing song'), Enzensberger signals a set of concerns that implicitly informs all past and present, as well as "future music." The informal second person's range of possible addressees—Dickinson, Enzensberger himself reflecting on his own career, the reader included as co-participant—similarly brings into play a complex conjunction that raises a series of questions: How are we to conceive of the relationship between poetry and "common" language, between the language of the self and the language of the other? What allows the tongue to speak and what inhibits speech? What is the tongue, with its incredible, unlimited potential for speech, actually capable of saying, and to whom, and to what effects (Sartre's questions, in *What Is Literature?*, of both poetry and prose). Agile as it is, what should turn its attention to all the possible subjects circulating in the sea of air that figures our common capacity for language(s), the personal, intersubjective, cultural, linguistic atmosphere in which "we" move and breathe? Detached from its body yet exercising its muscle, its unspeakably painful power of speech, the tongue speaks in languages of a wide provenance. By itself it does nothing, but it does continue. It has no choice but to take in what it might not want to hear, what brings it pain and sets it writ(h)ing. It has to incorporate what it hears into the very body from which it has been cut off, its surviving corpus, to move as fluently as possible, as the next stanza suggests, among many languages, many life-worlds—linguistic, cultural, economic, political, religious, theological, metaphysical—that come into conflicts with each other which may not be easily dissolved or lead to stable solutions or resolutions:

'Qui la sua voce soave,' 'Zu Befehl,'  
 London Interbank Offered Rate,  
 oder Verwickelteres  
 wie Koran oder Kosmologie. . . .

'Qui la sua voce soave,' 'At your service,'  
 London Interbank Offered Rate,

or more complicated,  
like Koran or cosmology. . . .

Confronted with this series of heterogeneous codes and contexts, the tongue speaks its truth as best it can, becomes, in the telling phrase of the final stanza, “ein chaotischer Oszillator” ‘a chaotic oscillator,’ carrying on its activity “bis ihr versteht, /oder bis euch die Luft ausgeht” ‘until you understand, /or until the air goes out of you.’

### Implosions (Cold War Identities)

In a culture that appears to detach itself more and more from writing of any kind that might effectively disturb the anaesthetizing comfort of all but the most consoling self-identifications, what is the future of poetry? The answer to this question is bound up inextricably for Enzensberger, as the critical prose of *Civil Wars* makes clear, with the future of that privileged Western mode of understanding known as the dialectic. Organized by means of a series of eleven binary oppositions (e.g. “Scheußliche Ausnahme, scheußliche Regel” ‘Ghastly Exception, Ghastly Rule’; “Alte Rechnungen, neuer Mob” ‘Old Scores, New Mob’), the original German essay on which the title essay of *Civil Wars* is based, “Aussichten auf den Bürgerkrieg” (“Outlooks on the Civil War”), carries traces in both its formal and its thematic development of a dialectic that is at best frozen or suspended. With one crucial exception: Section XII, the last in the series, suggests a way out of the gridlock of binaries, breaking the pattern (at once structural and historical) by virtue of its singular/plural title, “Vorläufige Wunder” (“Temporary Miracles”). The trajectory of the German edition thus points towards a post-1989 stance that is already prefigured at the height of the Cold War, as we shall see, in *Der Untergang der Titanic* (1978), *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1980), a pivotal collection in the development of a writing practice compelled to situate itself for forty years within the framework of Cold War divisions.

While the structural organization of the title essay of *Civil Wars* remains true to the original German text of *Aussichten*, the context of the essay’s reception is altered significantly by the expanded frame within which it appears. As a consequence of the two additional essays included in *Civil Wars*, “Europe in Ruins” and

“The Great Migration,” the minimalist hope figured at the end of *Aussichten* for a way out of the Cold War’s frozen habits of thought and action gives way in the English edition to a more sustained reflection on the relationship between frozen binaries and dialectical movement. Where *Aussichten* offers a series of binaries counterpoised in the end by a single (modestly) redemptive gesture, *Civil Wars* stages a panoramic dialectical three-part tour extending from 1) the captioned, segmented speculations of the title section figuring the fragmented global landscape of the post-Cold War period, to 2) the second section’s collage of remembrances of a desolate post-World War II landscape seen as in some respects analogous to the transitional historical period that has emerged since 1989, to 3) a numbered sequence of reflections concerning the personal, cultural, economic, and political implications of past and present migrations around the globe.

From a position at once historical and anthropological—a position poised uncomfortably between these two perspectives—the collection’s title essay acknowledges the impasse that the end of the Cold War has come to represent for a specifically Marxist understanding of the dialectic:

In today’s civil wars there is no longer any need to legitimize your actions. Violence has freed itself from ideology. (20)

Only an idiot would argue that just because Marxist analysis is out of fashion, it is no longer useful. Few dispute that the world market, now that it is no longer a vision of the future but a global reality, produces fewer winners and more losers as each year passes. This is not confined to the Second and Third worlds, but applies equally in the core capitalist countries. Where, there, whole countries, or even whole continents, drop out of the international exchange system, here, increasing sections of the population can no longer keep up in the competition for advantage that gets more brutal by the day.

. . . And yet the political consequences the Marxist theoreticians predicted have not come about. So far, their theories have been proved wrong. International class war has not broken out. . . . The losers, far from regrouping under a common banner, are hard at work on their own self-destruction, and capital is retreating from the battlefields wherever possible. (34)

With the at least provisional reprieve the end of the Cold War seems to have granted from the threat of global nuclear destruction, the current transitional moment reopens the question of what constitutes “progress” in a way that has implications for the construction of narrative, for historical and philosophical thinking, and for writing generally:

It is difficult to know where in this train of thought the search for meaning stops and contempt for human life begins. The threshold is crossed once we reason that humanity is unselfconsciously following a biological imperative, designed, as it were, to reduce the population of the planet to a level it can support. (40)

It is impossible to have a linear discussion on this theme. Merely stating your own position fans the flames of conflict. There is no Archimedean point. I have stepped into an intellectual and moral minefield. . . . But I know that although I might, if I’m lucky, find my way through, I’ll never be able to clear the field. I don’t see eye to eye with anybody, not even with myself. (49)

Following the focus in “Civil War” on the unthinking violence of alienated “others” unleashed since 1989 by the post-Cold War “end of ideology,” “Europe in Ruins” takes up the task of contextualizing this violence historically by reaching back to recall the devastating effects of the calculated mass violence of fascist ideology which Enzensberger was present to experience and witness first-hand at the end of World War II. Where the first essay exhibits a certain nostalgia for ideology as evidence at least of the presence of ideas, the second emphasizes the value of the ideologically resistant, empirical perspective of the outsider that allowed foreign journalists to offer what Enzensberger considers the most enduring accounts of the post-World War II period: “It is the stranger’s gaze which is able to make us comprehend what was happening in Europe then; for it does not rely on restrictive ideological analysis but on the telling physical detail”(85). As Enzensberger recognizes, such well-intentioned, nonrestrictively ideological analyses have themselves proven only partially helpful: “Fifty years after the catastrophe Europe understands itself more than ever as a common project, yet it is far from achieving a

comprehensive analysis of its beginnings in the years immediately following the Second World War" (89). Modulating Enzensberger's concerns and perspectives between violence and reflection, other and self, present and past, ideological and empirical, outsider and insider, the first two essays set the stage for a classical dialectical progression in the book's third and final section. Structured in accordance with its christologically charged subtitle, "Thirty-Three Signposts," "The Great Migration" gives us to understand that in the context of current historical circumstances such a progression would be less than honest. Reconfiguring the period from the end of World War II to the present within an expansively anthropological, expressly biblical context, the most it can do is point the way (but which way?) toward a historical redemption (in a manner resembling Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" fifty years earlier) even as it registers humanity's ever-increasing distance from any such possibility:

III. The conflict between nomadic and settled tribes is made manifest in the myth of Cain and Abel . . .

The history of humanity can be read as the unfolding of this parable. Stationary populations form again and again over the millennia. On the whole, however, they remain the exception. The rule is: conquest and pillage, expulsion and exile, slavery and abduction, colonization and captivity. A considerable proportion of humanity has always been in motion, migrating or in flight for the most diverse reasons, in a violent or peaceful manner—a circulation which must lead to perpetual turbulence. It is a chaotic process which frustrates every attempt at planning, every long-term forecast. (104)

Effectively challenging the notion that the Cold War's end should be construed as an unambiguous "sign-post" of "progress," *Civil Wars* remains haunted in the end by the ghost of a dialectical promise, a promise inscribed both in its binary and triadic structures of organization and in its divided biblical frame of reference.

Arranged in four parts of fifteen, eighteen, eleven, and twelve poems respectively, the structure of *Zukunftsmusik* suggests stasis rather than movement, fixity rather than transformation, the dialectic at a standstill. Skepticism toward the idea of progress qua dialectical movement is underscored by the heavily ironic borrowings from popular idioms that make up the titles of the

collection's four sections: "Das Leere Blatt" ("The Empty Page") "Alles Gute" ("All the Best"), "Zum Ewigen Frieden" ("Toward Eternal Peace"), and "Abtrift" ("Settling of Accounts" or "Final Payment"). To begin to inquire into the historical conditions that underlie such an insistently ironized, self-ironizing structure, I turn first to the sixth poem from the second section:

#### Alte Revolution

Ein Käfer, der auf dem Rücken liegt.  
Die alten Blutflecken sind noch da, im Museum.  
Jahrzehnte, die sich totstellen.  
Ein saurer Mundgeruch dringt aus dreißig Ministerien.  
Im Hotel Nacional spielen vier verstorbene Musikanten  
den Tango von 1959, Abend für Abend:  
Quizás, quizás, quizás.

Im Gemurmel der tropischen Maiandacht  
fallen der Geschichte die Augen zu.  
Nur die Sehnsucht nach Zahnpasta,  
Glühbirnen und Spaghetti  
liegt schlaflos da zwischen feuchten Laken.

Ein Somnambule vor zehn Mikrofonen,  
der kein Ende findet, schärft seiner müden Insel ein:  
Nach mir kommt nichts mehr.  
Es ist erreicht.  
An den Maschinenpistolen glänzt Öl.  
Der Zucker klebt in den Hemden.  
Die Prostata tut es nicht mehr.

Sehnsüchtig sucht der greise Krieger  
den Horizont ab nach einem Angreifer.  
Aber die Kimm ist leer. Auch der Feind  
hat ihn vergessen. (49-50)

#### Old Revolution

A beetle that lies on its back.  
The old bloodspots are still there, in the museum.  
Decades, that kill themselves off.  
A sour breath escapes from thirty ministries.  
In the National Hotel four dead musicians are playing

the tango from 1959, evening after evening:  
Quizás, quizás, quizás.

In the murmur of tropical May prayers  
the eyes of history close.  
Only the longing for toothpaste,  
light bulbs and spaghetti  
lies sleepless there between wet sheets.

A sleepwalker faced with ten microphones,  
who finds no way to end, proclaims to his weary island:  
After me comes nothing.  
It is finished.  
The machine gun glistens with oil.  
Sugar sticks to the shirts.  
The prostate doesn't do it anymore.

Longingly the old gray warrior  
searches the horizon for an attacker.  
But the storeroom is empty. Even the enemy  
has forgotten him.

“Nothing remains,” Enzensberger writes in “Civil War,” “of the guerrilla’s heroic halo” (17). With its repetition of the triadically structured refrain of the popular Spanish-American song, “Quizás, quizás, quizás”—words frozen in time as figures of repetition and a stalled dialectic—“Old Revolution” recalls the hopeful naivete and lost possibilities of the now “old revolution” Enzensberger himself participated in when he left a fellowship at Wesleyan in the late 1960s to join in the Cuban revolution, the pivotal experience that subsequently came to inform the whole of *The Sinking of the Titanic*. Remarking sound as well as sense, we (English as well as German-speaking readers) might just as well register in this phrase, poised as it is between whimsical nostalgia and bitter sarcasm, an echo of the homophonically similar “Kitsch, kitsch, kitsch,” as well as the semantically literal “Maybe, maybe, maybe.” Recollecting Enzensberger’s own participation in the stalled Cuban revolution with an ironic distance not unlike that of Baudelaire looking back on his own (much less sustained) role in the revolution of 1848, the poem figures the passage of the old revolution from its past to its present—by way of the pivotal year (1959), when the United States was on the verge of turning against Castro for good—as, ironically,

an exemplary instance of the very “homogeneous, empty time” (Benjamin 261) that the revolution was supposed to bring to an end. As the first line’s depiction of inertia and desolation suggests—Gregor Samsa (the beetle on its back) displaced to the tropics?—the fate of the old revolution figures a fundamental equivalence between the stalled dialectic within so-called communist countries prior to 1989 and the time of capitalist expansion. The future promise of the revolution that was presumed to follow the logic of the dialectic has thus grown so dim that, as the final lines have it, “even the enemy has forgotten [it].”

The consequences of this fading of the promise of the old revolution are of course to be located, as Enzensberger is so adept at showing, not merely at the level of large-scale conceptualizations of culture, economics, and politics, but at an intensely personal level as well. Perhaps more than anything else, the prose collected in *Civil Wars* offers a sober reflection on the dark side of the transitional period that has followed in the wake of the Cold War. The post-Cold War era brings with it a host of questions, as Slavoj Žižek has also pointed out in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and *Tarrying with the Negative*, about the kinds of self-knowledge such a transition might or might not make available and the ideological issues that play themselves out in the daily lives of individuals as well as on a more global scale. The movement between these micro- and macro-perspectives characterizes Enzensberger’s work as a whole, ranging for example in *Zukunftsmusik* from the simultaneously personalizing/depersonalizing aim of a poem such as “Kalte Erleuchtung” (“Cold Illumination”):

Der Mann, der sich auskennt, ich,  
der keine Ahnung hat,  
ahnt, hier geht es nicht weiter . . . (82)

The man, who knows himself inside out, I,  
who doesn’t have a clue, suspects,  
this is the end . . .

to the more explicitly cosmological, implicitly historical focus of a poem such as “Seltsamer Attraktor” (“Strange Attractor”):

Minuten-, stunden-, tagelang  
gebeugt über das Gelände,  
über Millionen

von unlösbaren Gleichungen,  
seh ich ins Aug des Zyklons,  
der mir ins Auge sieht;

. . .

und obenauf . . .  
. . . etwas Nasses,  
Braunes, das tanzt,  
aber nicht untergeht,  
taumelt ein Teddybär. (112)

Minutes-, hours-, whole days  
bending over the railings,  
over millions  
of unsolvable equations,  
I look into the eye of the cyclone,  
that looks me in the eye;

. . .

and on top . . .  
. . . something wet,  
a brown thing, that dances,  
but doesn't go under,  
reeling, a teddy-bear.

What is left when the Soviet Union does go under—reduced from major nuclear threat to “teddy-bear” status by the transforming events of the late 1980s—is a time of “millions / of irresolvable resemblances” which the speaker of the poem confronts as if looking “into the eye of the cyclone, / that looks me in the eye. . . .” It is a time, as Enzensberger puts it in “Civil Wars,” when “the longing for recognition” begins to appear as “a fundamental anthropological fact . . . something that the overwhelming majority of those alive today can only dream about” (38).

#### Involutions (From History to Anthropology?)

Where the second and third sections of *Zukunftsmusik* may be said to focus predominantly on the consequences at all levels of personal and social life of the failed promise of the dialectical path toward utopia promised by the “old revolution”—the stranded, falsified *promesse de bonheur* exemplified by the phrase “All the

Best" opening on to the posthumous "cold illuminations" of the section entitled "Toward Eternal Peace"—the first section offers in somewhat preemptive fashion a series of poems focusing more intensely on what might rather be thought of as *involutions*, centripetal movements of language, self, and intersubjective relations that suggest an anthropological rather than progressivist (whether evolutionary or revolutionary) perspective. Emerging in the first of the collection's four sections, this involutory, anthropological perspective precedes the more historicizing, sociological, political orientation of the two sections following. In turning to this chronologically prior section at this point, we may wonder whether it ought to be considered as conceptually prior as well, both within the structure of *Zukunftsmusik*, and within the context of Enzensberger's long career.

While the first and fourth sections' somewhat greater investments in anthropological, linguistic, cosmological perspectives may be read retrospectively as a response to the failed dialectical promise and stalled revolutionary energies figured in a poem such as "Old Revolution," their framing position suggests that the second and third sections' predominant concerns—at once historical, sociological, political, and personal—may or should be read as conceptually subsumed by the former. At issue in all this, of course, is the issue of progress, mobility, "future music," the far limit of which would be the socialist dream of utopia, a dream which the "cold illumination" of 1989 may be said to open up anew ("The Empty Page") even as it declares that dream to be at an end ("Settling of Accounts"). Never one to ignore complication, Enzensberger has consistently displayed in his work from the very beginning a (quintessentially Baudelairean) ambivalence and skepticism toward the promise of socialism, a complex position already clearly in evidence, for example, in "Utopia," the poem chosen to appear first in his selected poems (*Gedichte: 1950-1995*):

Der Tag steigt auf mit großer Kraft  
schlägt durch die Wolken seine Klauen  
Der Milchmann trommelt auf seinen Kannen  
Sonaten . . .  
Die Bienen streiken. . . .  
Ergriffenheit herrscht und Spott  
und Jubel. . . . (7)

The day rises up with great power  
 strikes through the clouds with its claws  
 The milkman drums out sonatas  
 on his cans . . .  
 The bees go on strike. . . .  
 Emotion rules and scorn  
 and rejoicing. . . .

In this sense, a poem such as "Old Revolution" demonstrates a continuity of perspective across Enzensberger's career that has remained in force throughout the entire Cold War period, right up to and beyond the "celebration of the caesura of 1989" (Habermas 147) that both does and does not close the book on revolutionary promises, does and does not offer an "empty page" to write on.

"Deep down," Jean Baudrillard has written, "neither time nor history has ever been accepted. Everyone remains aware of the arbitrariness, the artificial character of time and history. And we are never fooled by those who call on us to hope" (8). Developing a vision of what he subsequently calls, in a gesture similar to Enzensberger's, "anthropological deregulation" (97), he continues:

These societies, these generations which no longer expect anything from some future 'coming,' and have less and less confidence in history, which dig in behind their futuristic technologies, behind their stores of information and inside the beehive networks of communication where time is at last wiped out by pure circulation, will perhaps never reawaken. But they do not know that. (The year 2000 will not perhaps take place). But they do not know that. (97)

. . . there is no end any longer, there will no longer be any end . . . history itself has become interminable. Thus, when we speak of the 'end of history,' the 'end of the political,' 'the end of the social,' the 'end of ideologies,' none of this is true. The worst of it all is precisely that there will be no end to anything, and all these things will continue to unfold slowly, tediously, recurrently, in that hysteresis of everything which, like nails and hair, continues to grow after death. Because, at bottom, all these things are already dead and, rather than have a happy or tragic resolution, a destiny, we shall have a thwarted end, a homeopathic end, an end distilled into all the various metastases of the refusal of death. (116)

The generation that aspired to what has since become the “old revolution,” the Cold War generation to which not only Enzensberger and Baudrillard but also Fidel Castro belong, enters the world that follows 1989, as all three are acutely aware, as a generation in declining health, a generation for whom questions of personal mortality must begin to rival increasingly the aesthetic, cultural, political concerns that have shaped their public careers. As is suggested by another poem from the opening section, entitled “Zusammenfassung” (“Summary”), totalizing projects, whether of the large-scale political kind at issue in “Old Revolution” or more narrowly autobiographical, as in “Summary,” may well tend as much toward entropy as toward fruition, as much toward a process of involution as of revolution (both linguistic to the core), a process which knows itself to be incapable of completion and willingly confronts its own futility—impossibility/inevitability/undesirability—even as it confounds, by virtue of its syntactical and semantic reconfigurations, the very boundaries between radical change and repetition, rupture and continuity, life and death, which the terms revolution and involution may be taken to imply.

Ich fasse zu, an, auf,  
 die Gelegenheit fasse ich  
 in Worte, ins Auge, in Verse, beim Schopf,  
 ich befasse mich, bin der Auffassung,  
 daß ich gefaßt bin, auf alles gefaßt.

Aber das ist nicht alles. . . .

I grab hold of, clamp down, grasp at,  
 seize the opportunity  
 in words, in the eye, in verses, by the roots,  
 take an interest in, am of the opinion,  
 that I'm composed, ready for all.

But that's not all. . . . (14)

Given the impossibility, undesirability, and essential groundlessness of such summary projects as “ein Faß ohne Boden” ‘a bottomless pit,’ the architectonics of the future music Enzensberger figures in his poetry rely fundamentally on an oscillating movement between revolution and involution in which neither gets to have a permanent upper hand and the boundaries defining any possible distinctions between the two remain essentially fluid, impossible to pin down.

As is clear from the third poem of the opening section, "Schöne Aussichten" ("Good Prospects"), this instability is at once a source of possibility and a source of unresolvable anxiety. Like Baudrillard, who sees in the post-1989 world a time in which the dialectic has been "frozen," where "defunct ideologies, bygone utopias, dead concepts and fossilized ideas . . . continue to pollute our mental space" and "(h)istorical and intellectual refuse poses an even more serious problem than industrial waste" (26), Enzensberger figures the movement of the present toward the future as one in which the triadic promise of the dialectic remains suspended, reduced to only parenthetical relevance ("die Reize der drei Bogengänge im Labyrinth heben sich gegenseitig auf" 'the charms of the three arcades in the labyrinth lift up/abolish each other'). It is a movement which cannot do without the services of an informing irony that is posited and deposited, ingested and invested, consumed and produced as much as an (intrinsically anthropological) effect of language as of any effects, whether particular or global, of autobiography, culture, economics, politics, history:

Ich sehe was was du nicht siehst.  
 Alle außer dir haben recht,  
 aber das siehst du nicht ein.  
 Und umgekehrt. Überall tote Winkel.  
 Die Welt ist das Undurchsichtige.  
 So bleibt dir manches erspart.  
 Siehst du den blinden Fleck?

. . .

Ferner verfügst du über ein Ubw,  
 das über dich verfügt. Wahrnehmungsverluste  
 infolge von Klassenlage, Geschlecht,  
 Kalenderjahr, Ausreden noch und noch.  
 Alles verbirgt sich. Offenbarungen  
 an jeder Straßenecke. Ich glaube was  
 was du nicht glaubst. Dann eben keine  
 Marienerscheinungen, Verzicht auf Karma,  
 Kommunismus, Lottogewinn. In Gottes Namen.  
 Ungewißheit, Balsam für die Migräne.

Rückseiten, die dir verborgen bleiben.  
 Gödel-Theorem. Mangel an Phantasie.  
 Beschränkungen deiner Hirnkapazität.

Die kurze Zeit, die dir auf Erden  
gegeben ist. Weil du dran glauben mußt.  
Bedingungen a priori aller Erfahrung.  
Oder vielleicht nur zuviel Wodka,  
Zerstreutheit, Trauer und Entropie.  
Auch auf den wahren Segen ist kein Verlaß.

I see something that you don't see.  
Everyone but you is right,  
but you don't get it.  
And vice-versa. Everywhere dead angles.  
The world is the impenetrable.  
Which spares you a lot.  
Do you see the blind spot?

...

Beyond that you have at your disposal an unconscious  
that has you at its disposal. Losses of perspective  
due to class position, gender,  
calendar year, over and over again excuses.  
Everything is concealed. Revelations  
on every street corner. I believe something  
that you don't believe. So not even one  
appearance of the Virgin Mary, denial of karma,  
communism, lotto prizes. For God's sake.  
Uncertainty, balm for migraines.

Other sides, that remain hidden to you.  
Gödel's theory. Lack of imagination.  
Shrinking of your mental capacity.  
The brief time  
that is given to you on earth. Because you have  
to believe it.  
A priori conditions of all experience.  
Or maybe only too much vodka,  
confusion, grief, and entropy.  
Even the true blessing can't console. (11-12)

Heir both to the surgical precision and skepticism of a Gottfried Benn (as evoked by the lines "Gödel's theory. Lack of imagination. /Shrinking of your mental capacity") and to the utopian appeal of a poem like Bertolt Brecht's "An die Nachgeborenen" ("To Those Who Come After"), Enzensberger retains an emphasis on the

political which Baudrillard's work tends to set aside.<sup>4</sup> Conjoining a wide range of speech genres, conceptual categories, and experiential domains in a way that ironizes each and every possibility of harmonizing them into an edifying or consoling gesture, "Good Prospects" enacts a procedure and trajectory in this respect which have been characteristic of Enzensberger's poetry throughout his career and which continue to define the poetry of *Zukunftsmusik*. Given this continuity, and considering Enzensberger's poetic practice as a provisional model which in certain respects though not in others recalls Marx's famous prediction about the revolution, we may say that while the music or poetry of the future in Enzensberger's view may draw its poetry from the past, it cannot afford to do so without turning a shrewd eye toward the present and its implications for the future.

As the opening poem of the collection's second section suggests, however much we may be drawn to the idea that it is possible to identify certain anthropological constants that transcend specific economic, cultural, political contexts, such needs are unknowable apart from these contexts, and can only be understood through them:

#### Zur Frage der Bedürfnisse

Unbemerkt ballt sich im Strandcafé  
 die Wut auf den Frieden  
 zur Faust in der Magengrube.  
 Es braucht wenig, und der Möbelhändler,  
 umzingelt von zentimeter genauen Raumteilern,  
 zündet seine Matratze an,  
 der Banker kotzt auf dem Klo,  
 und der Fadenglas-Sammler zertrümmert,  
 in einem letzten Aufbäumen,  
 seinen unersetzlichen Alptraum;

während der junge Türke, erschöpft  
 nach der Messerstecherei,  
 von einem schneeweißen Cabrio träumt,  
 der Nazi nach dem brüllenden Meeting  
 sein Hündchen zum Pudelsalon bringt  
 und der entkommene Terrorist  
 sich niederläßt, aufatmend,  
 in der Hollywood-Schaukel. (41)

## On the Question of Needs

Unnoticed in the beach cafe the fury  
at peace rolls itself up into a fist  
in the pit of the stomach.  
It doesn't take much, and the furniture dealer,  
surrounded by precision-cut room dividers  
sets fire to his mattress,  
the banker throws up in the toilet,  
and the blown glass [Fadenglas] collector smashes,  
in one last uprising,  
his irreplaceable nightmare;

while the young Turk, exhausted  
from the knife fight,  
dreams of a snow-white Cabrio,  
after the noisy meeting, the Nazi  
takes his puppy to the poodle salon  
and the escaped terrorist  
sits down, breathing a sigh of relief,  
in his Hollywood rocker.

"A criticism that has lost touch with its contemporary politics and context," Tobin Siebers has written recently, "is a failed criticism" (157). As the attention to contemporary cultural/political concerns in "On the Question of Needs" suggests, there is no reason—Sartre's compartmentalizing division of poetry and prose notwithstanding—for poetry to expect any less of itself. Having said this much, the question remains as to what if anything either poetry or critical prose may have to offer "us"—whoever that might turn out to be, in the 1990s and beyond—beyond endless ironizing and self-ironizing gestures, however shrewd, *witzig*, *sachlich*, and unarguably sophisticated these may be.

It is one thing to refuse to align oneself, as Enzensberger has refused to do throughout his career, with the false ideological choices made available during the Cold War. It is entirely another, following the crumbling of the global structure that sustained these choices, to offer a poetic and/or critical practice that would point the way towards something beyond skepticism and irony. What is now missing, as Zizek has pointed out, is the promise of a third way that disappeared in part as a result of the revolutionary calcification represented by Enzensberger in a poem such as "Old Revolution." In the post-1989 context, there is a danger of carrying forward

uncritically a residual skepticism rooted in the limited choices of the Cold War itself, a danger, as Siebers has written, "in seeing skepticism as a sufficient explanation for either literary works or politics. We come to prefer the purity of our skepticism to the chaos of the political world, and no form of politics can ever measure up to our fantasy" (33). There is a danger, in other words, as David Gross has put it even more pointedly in a recent forum in *Telos* commemorating the journal's first one hundred issues, that the critical intellectual "does not know how *not* to be critical" (115).

Given this context, what claims if any might we want to make for poetry, on the example of Enzensberger's work, beyond the capacity we have been documenting there for a self-consciously critical engagement with past and present that maintains as well a skeptical eye toward the future? What ideology of poetry itself is implicit or explicit in Enzensberger's work, and how might this ideology be said to play itself out (or sustain itself) in relation to the larger ideological, cultural, and political concerns it often takes as its explicit themes? Does Enzensberger's poetry lay claim to a position "beyond ideology," or does it knowingly participate in a larger project, and if it no longer is, to the extent that it might once have been, "in the service of the revolution," then what (or whom) might it serve, by what means and to what end(s)? What relevance do these Sartrean questions still have for us, in any case, in the aftermath of 1989? One answer to these questions may be derived from a single stylistic observation, that is, the presence in *Zukunftsmusik* of nine poems that end, strictly speaking, without ending, without a period:

Aber das siehst du nicht ein  
 Du sagst:  
 Ich mache die Augen auf und sehe was da ist  
*usw. ad infinitum* ("Der Augenschein" 10)

Der Stuhl steht hölzern da  
 und Vishnu schweigt ("Nämlich" 23)

vergißt die Angst ihren Hunger  
 und die Lust ihre Angst  
 ("Chinesische Akrobaten" 31)

und nicht weiter  
 nennenswert ("Fetisch" 71)  
 Dann sehen wir weiter ("Gedankenflucht" 81)

Gute Nacht                    (“Das einzig Wahre im Falschen” 84)

bis tief in den schrillen Tag                    (“Schlaftablette” 85)

trostlos schön

wie ein verlassener Bahndamm—                    (“Abseits” 100)

Schon zählt das 21. Jahrhundert nicht mehr

Schon wird es dir schwarz vor den Augen

und du bringst es nicht fertig

diese Zeile zu Ende zu lesen                    (“Grenzwert” 101)

But you don't really see that

You say:

I open my eyes and see what's there

*etc. ad infinitum (Appearances)*

The stool stands there woodenly

and Vishnu falls silent                    (“Namely”)

fear forgets its hunger

and pleasure its fear                    (“Chinese Acrobats”)

and nothing more

worth mentioning                    (“Fetish”)

Then we'll see

(“Fleeting Thoughts”)

Good Night

(“The Only Truth in Falsehood”)

deep into the shrill day

(“Sleeping Pills”)

hopelessly beautiful

like a deserted railway embankment—                    (“Aside”)

Already the 21st century doesn't count any more

Already it's getting dark before your eyes

and you don't manage to make it

to the end of this line you're reading                    (“Limit Term”)

More than merely a formal gesture, this repeated device carries within it a certain ideological investment in open-endedness, a value not to be aligned too quickly with either of the dichotomized options the Cold War offered. Beyond the constraints of such choices, then, and beyond a certain ambiguous open-endedness that

gestures beyond the frame of the Cold War context, what values does Enzensberger's writing tend to incorporate into itself?

#### Interpellations (After the Wall: Programs and/as Symptoms)

However uneasy their co-existence, however mutual the suspicion, poetry and critical reflection share a double identity in Western societies, in North America no less than in Germany, representing at one and the same time both a privileged and a marginalized position within the larger culture. In the second poem of the third section of *Zukunftsmusik*, "In höheren Lagen gewittrige Störungen" ("Stormy Disturbances at High Elevations" 78-79), Enzensberger addresses directly the dilemma confronting both modes of writing. Moving between empirical and theoretical, sensual and philosophical perspectives ("Mikro und Makro, von der Darmflora /bis zu den Galaxien, so weit / das Auge reicht und noch viel weiter" 'Micro und Macro, from the flora of the intestines / to the galaxies, as far / as the eye can reach and still much further'), from the "Abakadabra der Physiker" ("Abracadabra of the Physicists") to the "Irrereden der Philosophen" ("Mad Talk of the Philosophers"), the speaker of the poem declares himself bathing "in einem Gewitter / von Unwissenheit" 'in a storm / of uncertainty.' Willing to play the traditional intellectual's role of lightning rod but knowing himself to be dispensable even in this function ("Für den Blitz bin ich entbehrlich" 'For the lightning I'm dispensable'), the speaker concludes by taking satisfaction in the very act of facing up to it: "Er ist mir gegeben. / Das genügt" 'It's given to me. / That's enough.' Looking down from the at once isolated and privileged position of his mountain-top view, not called upon to provide a program or plan of action of any sort, the non-specialist poet/intellectual may still be able to find some provisional satisfaction and self-recognition, however minimal, in his/her oppositional status. Beyond this, however, as is clear from the seventh poem of the final section, "Das Gift" ('Poison' 108), one crucial element of the poet/intellectual's role continues to lie in articulating and thus exposing to view the toxic effects of pressure toward any kind of rigid ideological foreclosure, not only of the "communist" variety but also including all the "normal," normally and normatively overlooked pressures of Western individualism: "Privat, minimal, / heimlich wie eine fixe Idee . . . in der Brust, verschlossen / wie eine fixe Idee" 'private, minimal, as secret as a fixed idea . . . in the heart, locked, / like a fixed idea.'

Beyond the somewhat meager rewards of opposition for opposition's sake, the central poem of the second section tends to align Enzensberger at least provisionally and to some degree, though not uncritically, with that ideological or philosophical position which may be said to come closest to wanting to adhere to no "fixed idea" at all, i.e. a position "outside ideology":

Pragmatismus

für Cesare Cases

Alles, bloß keine Ahnungen! Wir  
wissen doch längst, was langgeht:  
Überschußanteile, Deko-Fronten,  
Mediendeckung, schließlich  
das höchste der Gefühle:  
Vorstand oder Politbüro,  
und mit sechzig die Abfindung  
'im gegenseitigen Einvernehmen.'  
Ja, wenn nur der kleine Mann im Ohr  
nicht wäre: Panik, zirpt er,  
Alzheimer, Jubel, Aufruhr.  
Alles kommt anders, ganz anders.  
Die blaue Vene tickt,  
ein rotes Wunder geht auf,  
das wir nicht erleben. Die Wunde  
des Möglichen blutet noch.

Pragmatism

for Cesare Cases

Everything, but no clues!  
We've known for a long time what's up:  
Surplus parts, Art deco facades,  
media coverage, and finally  
the most elevated of feelings:  
the board of directors or the Politburo,  
and at sixty the golden handshake  
'with mutual regard.'  
Yes if only the little man in the ear  
weren't there: Panic, he chirps,

Alzheimer's, joy, uproar.  
 Everything turns out  
 other than you'd planned.  
 The blue vein ticks,  
 a red wonder rises,  
 that we don't experience. The wound  
 of the possible is still bleeding. (55)

Echoing the position of the speaker in "Stormy Disturbances . . ." the first two lines of "Pragmatism" place the speaker in a position of both knowing and not knowing what to make of the course of events. The poems's central claim, that human beings can assert only limited control over their future, whether this is perceived in personal ("Alzheimer") or political terms (the Politburo), functions implicitly as a warning against whatever nonpragmatist ideologies might want to lay claim to us, a warning more explicitly elaborated in "Civil War":

It's time to bid farewell to these fantasies of omnipotence. . . .  
 Where to begin? Where can I engage my efforts most  
 effectively?

. . . .

This is a difficult and unpleasant decision to have to take. It runs counter to our ideological traditions and presents us with bitter choices. To suggest that our scope for action should be both finite and relative is to risk being pilloried as an isolationist. But deep inside, we all know that our foremost concerns must be for our children, our neighbors, our immediate surroundings. Even Christianity spoke of loving our neighbors, not people miles away. (66-67)

. . . the fact is that all imaginable options end in the logic of triage, whether we admit it or not. Even the gradualist approach, the setting of priorities, the limiting of responsibilities, however plausible their justification, do not guarantee a way out of the minefield. At best they count as a stopgap. Against the promise held out by universalism, they can offer only their workability and lack of self-deception.

No one would dispute that universal solidarity is a solid goal. Those who are determined to achieve it are to be admired. But a look at our own country shows us how uneasily the desire to stand up for justice everywhere sits with the barbarity of the everyday. (68)

Such pragmatic caveats notwithstanding, the echo of Marx in the final two lines (“The wound / of the possible is still bleeding”), continues to place Enzensberger in close proximity to the socialist promise of future music that is both ironized and lamented, as we have seen, in the refrain “Quizàs, Quizàs, Quizàs.” Indeed, with all that has happened to the “old revolution” during the Cold War period and its dissolution, the fact that the socialist dream is still alive at all may be seen as “almost” miraculous.

The poem entitled “Alte Ehepaare” (“Old Couples”), which follows soon after both “Old Revolution” and “Pragmatism” in the third section of *Zukunftsmusik*, functions as an important companion piece to both of these two chronologically prior poems, as well as an important index of what Enzensberger’s poetry and prose tend to affirm with the least amount of skepticism. Applying as it were to the politics of intimacy the lessons of a “non-ideological” pragmatist coming-to-terms, “Old Couples” recalls the poem from *The Sinking of the Titanic* entitled “Der Aufschub” (“The Reprieve”) in celebrating the efforts of human beings under duress to endure acute difficulties and outlast uncertainties.

#### Alte Ehepaare

Wer so lange geblieben ist,  
macht sich wenig vor.

‘Ich weiß, daß ich nichts weiß’:  
Auch das ist noch übertrieben.

Alte Ehepaare  
haben nichts übrig  
für das Überflüssige,  
lassen das Unentscheidbare  
in der Schweben.

Merkwürdig distanziert,  
dieser luzide Blick.  
Kühne Rückzüge,  
geplant  
von langer Hand.

Andrerseits hartnäckig  
wie der Schachtelhalm.

Resignation —  
ein Fremdwort.

Improvisierte Krücken,  
 Selbsthilfe, Kartoffeln  
 im eigenen Garten  
 und im Zweifelsfall,  
 am Kreuzweg,  
 die Sauerstoffmaske zur Hand.

Man sieht manches,  
 wenn das Licht ausgeht.

### Old Couples

Whoever has lived this long,  
 has few illusions.

'I know that I know nothing':  
 Even that's exaggerated.

Old couples  
 have no patience  
 with the superfluous,  
 leave the undecidable  
 hanging.

Remarkably distanced,  
 this lucid gaze.  
 Shrewd retreats,  
 planned  
 long ago.

On the other hand stubborn  
 as the box-stem.

Resignation—  
 a foreign word.

Improvised crutches,  
 self-help, potatoes  
 in your own garden  
 and in case of doubt,  
 at the crossroads,  
 oxygen mask at hand.

One sees a lot,  
 when the light goes out. (62-63)

With its combined emphasis on resilience and endurance; personal honesty and integrity; an unexaggerated, calm acceptance of the limits of knowledge and self-knowledge; a coolly distanced, caring, yet thick-skinned way of seeing and being; and innovative, courageous, pragmatic responses to crisis, "Old Couples" is significant in formulating as clearly as any of Enzensberger's poems ever has a cluster of positive values, values that emerge as well in the "Little Miracles" section of *Civil Wars*:

. . . the real heroes of the civil war step forth. They are late to arrive. Their entrance is unheroic. They don't stand out. They won't be on television. . . . the persistence of these people is close to miraculous. They know they cannot put the world to rights. Only a corner of it. . . . They wanted to make Sisyphus an existential hero, an outsider and a rebel of tragic proportions, larger-than-life and crowned in diabolical glory. Perhaps that is wrong. Perhaps he was something much more important, an everyday figure. . . . He wasn't a philosopher, he was a trickster. . . . But Sisyphus overcame death . . . and managed to return to earth. They say he reached a ripe old age.

Later, as a punishment for his human understanding, he was condemned to push a heavy boulder up the side of a hill for the rest of time. The name of this stone is peace. (71)

#### Immigrations (Ex/positions: When Is an End Not an End)

Das Politbüro: ausgestorben.  
Nur im Keller der Dichter  
dichtet bei fünfzehn Watt  
nach wie vor vor sich hin,  
'um der Menschwerdung  
aufzuhelfen.' Gerührt  
schweift das nasse Aug  
über die frischen Sichtblenden.

The Politburo: Extinct.  
Only in the basement the poet  
by a fifteen-watt bulb,  
goes along composing,  
'to help along the process  
of becoming human.' Moved  
his moist eye ranges  
over the fresh blinds. (42-43)

With these lines from “Aufbruchsstimmung” (“Song of Departure”), the second poem of the second section of *Zukunftsmusik*, Enzensberger articulates a complex understanding of the situation of poetry since 1989. Admiring the resilience that has allowed poetry to continue to survive the end of state communism, the speaker of the poem nevertheless also recognizes the dim light the poet has to work in, the constraints on knowledge and self-knowledge imposed by the various “screens” that interpose themselves between the poet’s capacity to be moved to speech and his ability to reach beyond his own isolation to envision, articulate, and contribute to “the process / of becoming human.” As the poem “Episode” also indicates (from the collection’s third section), in Western societies the work of poetry needs to be figured in relation to a certain complacency among the general population:

Jammernd ausgestreckt in deinem Aeroplan,  
fällt dir nicht auf,  
wie unheimlich leicht du dahinfährst,  
kleine Wolke im Nadelstreifen?

Wasser aus Wasserhähnen,  
soviel du willst, Schuhe, nagelneu,  
mitten im Winter . . .

Stretched-out complaining in your airplane,  
doesn’t it strike you,  
the incredible ease with which you fly along,  
little cloud in the pin stripe?

Water from the faucets,  
as much as you want, shoes, brand new,  
in the middle of winter . . . (88-89)

In the context of the generalized—not universal—privilege of Western societies since 1989, what, then, is the function of poetry, and what might it aspire to be? As what Habermas has called a “European chauvinism of affluence” arms itself against new waves of immigration “from the impoverished regions of the East and the South,” it is worth remembering that in the period between 1800 and 1960, as Habermas points out, “Europeans were disproportionately represented in intercontinental migratory movements, making up 80 percent of those involved” (141, 145). In the context of the dramatic demographic displacements that have increasingly shaped

the cultural and political climates of all Western societies in recent years, "from L.A. to Bosnia," the closing lines of "Äolische Formen" ("Aeolian Forms"), the penultimate poem of *Zukunftsmusik*, offer an ironized response to the idea of a "poésie pure" that once figured in Sartre's consignment of poetry to the status of nonengaged art:

Reine Kunst, die keinen Künstler braucht,  
unaufhaltsam beweglich bewegt,  
neu und unfruchtbar,

reine Zeichnung, die niemand sieht,  
die sich einzeichnet  
in sich selber, schön,  
öde, Unterhaltung für Götter.

Pure art, that needs no artist,  
moving unceasingly moves,  
new and unfruitful,

pure sign, that no one sees,  
that inscribes itself  
in itself, pretty,  
desolate, entertainment for the Gods. (114)

In a very different register, the title poem, which closes the collection, functions as sign-post of an alternative vision:

#### Zukunftsmusik

Die wir nicht erwarten können,  
wirds lehren.

Sie glänzt, ist ungewiß, fern.

Die wir auf uns zukommen lassen,  
erwartet uns nicht,  
kommt nicht auf uns zu,  
nicht auf uns zurück,  
steht dahin.

Gehört uns nicht,  
fragt nicht nach uns,

will nichts von uns wissen,  
sagt uns nichts,  
kommt uns nicht zu.

War nicht,  
ist nicht für uns da,  
ist nie dagewesen,  
ist nie da,  
ist nie.

### Future Music

That we can't anticipate  
will teach it.

It shines, is uncertain, distant.

That one we let approach us,  
doesn't expect us,  
approach us,  
come back to us,  
remains to be seen.

Doesn't belong to us,  
ask how we are,  
want to know about us,  
says nothing to us,  
doesn't come to us.

Was nothing,  
isn't there for us,  
never was there,  
is never there,  
is never. (115)

Writing in the final section of *Civil Wars* of the "great migration's" continuous, eruptive mo(ve)ment, Enzensberger offers a sober vision of what any "future music" will have to take into account as we move into the next century:

Contemporary migrations differ from earlier movements of people in more than one respect . . . mobility has increased enormously in the past two centuries. . . . The free movement of capital tends to draw that of labor behind it, without regard for

race or nationality. With the globalization of the world market . . . human beings act as if they were subject to some incomprehensible compulsion. Their embarkations are like movements of flight, which it would be cynical to call voluntary. (110-11)

If the greatest hope for what has recently been called “a critical internationalism” is that “it might help transform cultural antagonisms into creative agonisms” (Lee 591), it will need to bear in mind that there is often no clear line, as Anthony Appiah has put it, between “the politics of recognition and the politics of compulsion” (163). In its shrewdly analytical, segmented attention to different syntactical possibilities—which may be read as anticipatory figures of the as yet unimaginable, untheorizable—“Future Music” carries forward a project that John Michael has recently identified as crucial for critical intellectuals and heirs of the Frankfurt School such as Enzensberger who continue to concern themselves with the relationship of culture to politics. Refusing to allow us to forget “the heterogenous construction of each community’s members,” such a project would attend to “our internal differences and the violence that attends our ‘enlightenment’ by questioning the delegitimizing force of any identity logic or constructions of axiological homogeneity which ask that we forget them or act as if they do not exist” (136).

With its collective frame of reference, insistent negativity, and minimalist structure—syntax and diction stripped to the bone—“Future Music” offers a spare model of what the post-Cold War “wound of the possible” might open onto in this regard. Responding to the exigencies and uncertainties of its moment—the moment of its writing, which is not anterior to but coincident with it—it is a rigorous poem, a virtual black hole of language that both invites and resists critical absorption. As the reverse side of the “empty white page” with which the collection begins, it reminds us through its thoroughgoing attention to internal differences within language that while the transitional historical moment we are in at present may yet be charged with utopian promise, that promise stands at risk of being drained away by the chaotic “outlook” and “prospects” (“Aussichten”) of an increasingly unreflective, identity-based culture.

As Rosmarie Waldrop has suggested recently in her mixed mode (alternating verse and prose) figurations of early American

colonization in *A Key Into the Language of America*, the path toward a less violent, more just future cannot dispense with the power of negation involved in critical reflection:

thinking develops  
 out of the negative

the vacuum abhorred  
 by nature  
 is fertile (variables  
 perspectives, paper money)

refinanced memory  
 washes white (62)

a hitch in time  
 then the world changed  
 then there was no memory

then life could not  
 be understood forward  
 or backward (66)

Interweaving critical reflections on the past, present, and future in ways that refuse to allow memory to fade to the “white” of the blank page—which is also the white of a certain “poésie pure,” the “language of the tribe” understood as the language of a universalizing, Eurocentric perspective—Enzensberger’s recent writing calls us to look carefully into who “we” are and want to be, who “we” includes and who the future of poetry will be of, by, and for, in the wake of 1989.

## Notes

1. Perelman’s poem, “The Marginalization of Poetry” appears in *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History* (1996) and earlier in *Virtual Reality* (1993). Perelman addresses poetry’s marginalized position as well in “Poetry in Theory,” a contribution to a special issue I have guest edited for *Diacritics* (forthcoming, fall/winter 1996) focusing on the cluster of terms “Poetry, Community, Movement.” I discuss related concerns in the same issue with specific reference to the current situation of poetry in the United States in my introductory essay, “Poetry, the University, and the Culture of Distraction.”

2. English translations of work by Enzensberger published in the original German prior to 1989 include the following: *Poems for People Who Don't Read Poems* (1968); *The Havana Inquiry* (1974); *Politics and Crime* (1974); *The Consciousness Industry* (1974) *Raids and Reconstructions* (1976); *Mausoleum* (1976); *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1980); *Europe, Europe* (1989); and *Mediocrity and Delusion* (1992). Despite the availability this list suggests, the broad recognition of Enzensberger's stature within the German context, and the notable efforts of such scholars and translators as Reinhold Grimm and Michael Hamburger to enhance Enzensberger's reception beyond German-language borders, his work has yet to receive the full attention it merits among English-language audiences.

3. Focusing on Rich's poem, "North American Time," I discuss Rich's role in this regard through the mid-eighties in "Mischling and Métis: Common and Uncommon Languages in Adrienne Rich and Aimé Césaire" (in *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?*). A useful juxtaposition of Brathwaite's work with that of Charles Bernstein appears in Perelman's *Marginalization*.

4. My thanks to James Rolleston for recalling these two points of reference in particular in this context and for his helpful suggestions generally in response to this essay.

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