

perception in an unbroken, linear intention from the act of creation, which is good and, by virtue only of being seen as "good," can constitute "seeing."

[The following paragraph has been crossed out.—*Ed.*]

The intention of beauty, however, does not break the resistance of intuition so utterly as to enter into the sphere of perception as a configuration of beauty. Instead the work subordinates itself to the necessity of its purity and rigor.

The nature of creation is paradigmatic for the moral determination of utopian perception. To the degree that a work breaks through the realm of art and becomes utopian perception, it is creation—meaning that it is subject to moral categories in relation not just to human beings in the act of conception, but to man's existence in the sphere of perception. The moral nature of creation gives the work the stamp of the expressionless. With reference to the beginnings of Genesis, it is important to reveal the order according to which creation can be perceived only morally.

Fragment written in 1919–1920; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. Translated by Rodney Livingstone.

Notes

1. Eduard Mörike (1804–1875), post-Romantic author of prose fiction and poetry.—*Trans.*

On Semblance

"Not everything is possible, but the semblance of everything is."

—Hebbel

Semblance [*Schein*] that must be explained (for example, error):¹

that must be eschewed (for example, Sirens);

that should be ignored (for example, will-o'-the-wisps).

Another classification of semblance:

Semblance behind which something is concealed (for example, the seductive: the Lady World of medieval legend whose back is devoured by worms, while from the front she looks beautiful).

Semblance behind which nothing lies concealed (for example, a *fata morgana* or *chimera*?).

Connection between semblance and the world of the visual.—An eidetic experiment: A man is crossing the street when out of the clouds a coach with four horses appears, coming toward him. During another walk he hears a voice from the clouds, saying, "You have left your cigarette case at home." In our analysis of the two events, if we set aside the possibility of hallucination—that is, the possibility that this semblance has a subjective cause—we find, in the first case, it is conceivable that nothing lies behind the manifestation, but in the second case this is inconceivable. The semblance in which nothing appears is the more potent one, the authentic one. This is conceivable only in the visual realm.

Does the intentional object that appears as semblance, as the consequence of a subjective cause (such as hallucinations), have the authentic character of semblance?—And if so, is this the same as a purely objective semblance?

destroys whatever legacy of chaos still survives in the beautiful semblance: the false, the mendacious, the aberrant—in short, the absolute. It is this that completes the work by shattering it into fragments, reducing it to the *smallest* totality of semblance, a totality that is a great fragment taken from the true world, the fragment of a symbol.

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Notes

1. Throughout this fragment, and throughout his essay "Goethe's Elective Affinities" (to which it is intimately related), Benjamin plays on the words *Schein* (mere semblance, but also the glimmer of the numinous in the Romantic symbol) and *erscheinen* (to appear).—*Trans.*

"On our way there, we perceived at the end of the rue des Chanoines, as if framed by a camera obscura, the twin towers of the old Saint-Étienne (l'Abbaye-aux-Hommes) veiled in a mist which made them more beautiful; for veils embellish all they conceal and all they reveal: women, horizons, and monuments!"—Barbey D'Aurevilly, *Memoranda*.

Nietzsche's definition of semblance in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

In every work and every genre of art, the beautiful semblance is present; everything beautiful in art can be ascribed to the realm of beautiful semblance. [Last sentence crossed out.—*Ed.*] This beautiful semblance should be clearly distinguished from other kinds of semblance. Not only is it to be found in art, but all true beauty *in art* must be assigned to it. Furthermore, both inside and outside art, only the beautiful shall be assigned to it; and nothing ugly, whether in art or elsewhere, belongs, even if it is semblance, to the realm of beautiful semblance. There are different degrees of beautiful semblance, a scale that is determined not by the greater or lesser degree of beauty but by the extent to which a thing has more or less the character of semblance. The law governing this scale is not just fundamental for the theory of beautiful semblance, but essential for metaphysics in general. It asserts that in an artifact of beautiful semblance, the semblance is all the greater the more alive it seems. This makes it possible to define the nature and limits of art, as well as to establish a hierarchy of its modes from the point of view of semblance.

No work of art may appear completely alive without becoming mere semblance, and ceasing to be a work of art. The life quivering in it must appear petrified and as if spellbound in a single moment. The life quivering within it is beauty, the harmony that flows through chaos and—that only appears to tremble. What arrests this semblance, what holds life spellbound and disrupts the harmony, is the expressionless [*das Ausdruckslose*]. That quivering is what constitutes the beauty of the work; the paralysis is what defines its truth. For just as an interruption can, by a word of command, extract the truth from the speech of a liar, in the same way the expressionless compels the trembling harmony to stop and immortalizes that quivering through its objection [*Einspruch*]. In this immortalization the beautiful must vindicate itself, but it now seems to be interrupted in its vindication. The expressionless is the critical violence which, while unable to separate semblance from truth in art, prevents them from mingling. But it possesses this violence as a moral dictum. In the expressionless, the sublime violence of the true appears as it determines the symbolism of the existing universe according to the laws of the moral universe. Quivering life is never symbolic, because it lacks form; but the beautiful is even less so, because it is semblance. But that which has been spellbound, that which is petrified and mortified, is undoubtedly in a position to indicate the symbolic. It achieves this thanks to the power of the expressionless.—For the expressionless