

Mysticism, Modernity, and the Invention of Aesthetic Experience

THE HISTORY OF MYSTICISM AND modernity has been told in many ways. Often, the historiography has focused either on key motifs in the thought of medieval mystics and their reception from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, or on specific intellectual paradigms that are thought to have a prehistory in medieval mysticism. Typical examples for the former can be seen in the ways in which Heidegger and Derrida make use of the concept of “Gelassenheit” (detachment), connecting Meister Eckhart’s texts with questions of twentieth-century philosophy and the challenges of postmetaphysical thought.¹ Other examples abound: Georges Bataille’s references to medieval mystics, especially to Angela of Foligno, in his book on “inner experience”; Pierre Klossowski’s use of extended quotes from Eckhart’s German and Latin works in his *Roberte Ce Soir*; Ingeborg Bachmann’s, Paul Celan’s, and Robert Musil’s similar use of textual quotations from so-called mystical writings from the Middle Ages in their texts.² A more recent example is John Cage’s poem, written shortly before his death, for Duchamp and Meister Eckhart.³ Major intellectual paradigms of modernity have also been understood in light of medieval mystical texts. The most famous is certainly Hegel’s encounter with Eckhart’s vernacular sermons. The historical legend tells us that Hegel exclaimed enthusiastically “da haben wir es ja, was wir wollen!” (there we have what we were looking for!) when Franz von Baader showed him a collection of Meister Eckhart’s German sermons.⁴ And this in turn led Hegel himself and his interpreters to speak of Eckhart’s mysticism as an anticipation of modern concepts of subjectivity.⁵

One recent and quite influential reference to medieval mysticism can be found in Derrida’s engagement with questions of negative theology in a short text published under the English title “How to Avoid Speaking.”⁶ Here Derrida unwittingly indicates that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts

ABSTRACT In this article I argue that Luther’s critique of the radical reformers establishes a specific distinction between the spiritual and the secular. It excludes the use of inspired speech and mystical tropes from legitimate readings of the Bible and from the political sphere. In doing so, Luther’s intervention not only neutralizes certain mystical traditions but also prepares the grounds for the use of mystical tropes in a new epistemological space, the realm of aesthetic experience and self-fashioning, and for the discussions about aesthetics in modernity. / REPRESENTATIONS 105. Winter 2009 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734–6018, electronic ISSN 1533–855X, pages 37–60. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI:10.1525/rep.2009.105.1.37.

play an important mediating role in his reading of medieval sources. In *On the Name* Derrida extensively quotes not only the fourteenth-century Eckhart but also, more prominently, the Baroque writer Angelus Silesius, possibly emphasizing the fact that Silesius, an early modern writer, functions as a link between medieval mystical tropes and their modern adaptations.⁷ Without acknowledging it explicitly, Derrida picks up on a line of thought that, once again, has been prepared by Martin Heidegger. In his fifth lecture on *The Principle of Reason*, given in 1955–56 and published in 1957 under the title *Der Satz vom Grund*, Heidegger quotes the famous verses written by Angelus Silesius:

The rose is without a why: it blooms because it blooms,
It pays no attention to itself, asks not whether it is seen.⁸

In his lecture Heidegger goes on:

The verses are found in the first book of the spiritual poetry of Angelus Silesius, which is entitled *The Cherubic Wanderer: Sensual Description of the Four Final Things*. The work first appeared in 1657. The verses carry the number 289 with the heading “Without Why.” Angelus Silesius, whose given name was Johann Scheffler, *doctor philosophiae et medicinae*, by profession a medical doctor, lived from 1624 to 1677 in Silesia.

To this short historical note Heidegger adds:

Leibniz . . . was a younger contemporary of Angelus Silesius and was familiar with *The Cherubic Wanderer*. Leibniz often speaks in his writings and letters of Angelus Silesius. Thus, in a letter to Paccius on January 28, 1695 he once wrote: “With every mystic there are a few places that are extraordinarily clever, full of difficult metaphors and virtually inclining to Godlessness, just as I have sometimes seen in the German—otherwise beautiful—poems of a certain man who is called Johannes Angelus Silesius.” And in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel says the following: “Now the pantheistic unity, raised up in relation to *the subject* that senses *itself* in this unity with God and God as this presence in subjective consciousness, would in general yield the *mystic* as it has come to be formed in this subjective manner even within Christianity. As an example I will only cite Angelus Silesius, who with the greatest cleverness and depth of intuition and sensibility has spoken with a wonderfully mystical power of description about the substantial existence of God in things and the unification of the self with God and of God with human subjectivity.”

Heidegger concludes his short remarks about the mystics:

The judgments of Leibniz and Hegel about Angelus Silesius are only intended to briefly allude to the fact that the words cited from “Without Why” stem from an influential source. But one might immediately point out that this source is indeed mystical and poetic. The one as well as the other belong equally little in thinking. Certainly not *in* thinking, but perhaps *before* thinking. Leibniz and Hegel, whose thinking it is difficult to surpass in sobriety and rigor, testify to this.⁹

In this essay I will not venture into an exegesis of Heidegger's engagement with mysticism nor into the larger question of mysticism and subjectivity evoked by Heidegger's quote from Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Rather, I want to draw attention to the importance of early modern sources in this engagement and to the function of these sources with regard to the specific character of the survival of so-called medieval mysticism—of what I will call mystical tropes—in a seemingly secular modernity. It is significant, then, that in Hegel, Leibniz, and Heidegger the mystical tradition is not only associated with a specific language—something we can speak of, with Hans Blumenberg, in terms of a historical metaphorology—but also, and quite prominently, with a specific emphasis on sensation and perception, in other words, something we can speak of in terms of experience.¹⁰ This may be unsurprising, since references to so-called mystical traditions in modernity often seem to be associated with commonsense understandings of romantic turns and forms of a “return” to pre-enlightenment, seemingly medieval, concepts of immediacy, spontaneity, and spiritual unity.

In the following, I want to argue that Martin Heidegger's reference to the “poetic” nature of Silesius's thought hides something that is essential in early modern reworkings of medieval mystical sources, namely, a very specific emphasis not so much on “subjectivity” or on a “romantic turn” but on something we might call a poetics or poiesis of experience. In my understanding, the specificity of this emphasis on experience is not to be seen in the fact that it is—as Heidegger puts it, with and against Immanuel Kant—“before thinking,” or that it represents a poetic adaptation of medieval mystical texts, but that it provides us with models of an experimental poetic understanding of experience and sensation. As I will argue, the genealogy of these models is intimately linked with the institution of the secular and the disjunction of the secular and the spiritual that is introduced by Martin Luther. Thus, in early modern times mystical tropes come to be increasingly projected into a new epistemological space. This projection into an epistemology of experience transposes the mystical language from its medieval hermeneutical context and makes it available to a series of transformations from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, finally leading to Heidegger's identification of the mystical with something that is “before thinking”—which, one might want to add, is not at all what is intended in medieval discourses about the “experiential knowledge of the divine.”¹¹

In order to show what I mean about this transformation I want to return first to Martin Luther and his sharp critique of the most mystical of the reformers, namely, the radical spiritualists. In this critique we encounter a framing of inspired, mystical reading that represents a significant shift in the way medieval concepts of mystical experience turn into a specific model, a new epistemology, of experience that is later invoked by Hegel, Leibniz, and

others. After Luther and his critical intervention—an intervention that isolates inspired reading from the newly instituted secular realm—a practice that in the medieval context is quite narrowly framed within monastic practices of reading takes shape as a model for the experience of the self and the world.

Rewritten as a form of cosmopoiesis and poetic self-fashioning under the pressure of Luther's institution of the secular and Kant's critique, medieval mystical traditions serve specific purposes in modernity. These purposes are in no way limited to nostalgia and esoteric inclinations—although these sometimes play a role as well—but they fit into a structure of the modern poetic elaboration of possibilities and possible worlds, testifying both to the power of the institution of the secular in Luther's works and its capacity to conceal its theological origin. I hope to show the outline of this shift in the following pages, focusing on the importance of Luther's arguments for an irreducible secular order, on one of the ways mystical tropes figure in the postreformation world, and finally on Kant's reiteration and elaboration of Luther's distinction between the secular and the spiritual realm.

Vernacular Hermeneutics and the Institution of the Secular Order

Quite remarkably, most modern engagements with medieval mysticism happen outside the common practices that frame the use of mystical tropes—such tropes as ecstatic union and suffering, inspired speech, intense emotion and sensation—during the Middle Ages, namely, outside the context of monastic practice, especially prayer, meditation, liturgy, and the reading of the scriptures. As we know, medieval mysticism cannot be adequately understood outside of this framework, and mysticism can in many ways be described in terms of a hermeneutic practice. From William of Saint Thierry to Hadewijch of Antwerp, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Meister Eckhart, and many other late medieval mystics, so-called mystical experience has its place in the context of regulated forms of reading, preaching, prayer, and above all in the reading of the scriptures and in liturgical forms that enact, recall, and perform aspects of the scriptures and provide a general hermeneutical framework. Mystical experience—“*cognitio Dei experimentalis*” (experiential knowledge of God) in the terms of Thomas Aquinas—is embedded in a specific culture of prayer and contemplation, most often a monastic one, and for a long time it is determined by a specific language, namely, Latin. Speaking of a hermeneutical framework here means to acknowledge that the experience in question is evoked and produced through a set of practices exercised in view of an understanding of the text and a rhetorical amplification of this understanding that often takes shape

in the form of intense sensation and emotion.¹² The pedagogy that supports these practices can be found in treatises that are part of a larger monastic culture and its emphasis on experiential piety. Within the monastic culture the production of such moments of ecstatic experience is accompanied by the subtle and elaborate practices of the “discernment of spirits,” that is, a phenomenological approach and evaluation of the validity of these moments of experiential intensity.¹³

During the later Middle Ages, the increasing number of vernacular texts dealing with mystical experience supports a transformation—a transformation that tends to dissolve the institutional and hermeneutical framework in which medieval mysticism subsists. This shift can be traced back to books like Hadewijch’s *Poems in Stanzas* and her *Visions*, Mechthild of Magdeburg’s *Flowing Light of the Godhead*, and Marguerite Porete’s *Mirror of Simple Souls*, all written in vernacular languages for communities of readers that are not part of traditional monastic orders.¹⁴ Instead, the sometimes audacious and theologically ambitious writings of these women are at the core of the formation of new communities, often, as in the case of beguine communities, alternatives to traditional monasteries. They rely on exegetic practices in the vernacular, a shared emphasis on spiritual experience, and the continuous production of vernacular writings that circulate within and between these social groups. The attempts to keep this evolution under control can be seen in reactions of the church hierarchy against some of the late medieval beguine movements and in the works of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century theologians who criticize some aspects of vernacular mysticism and try to enforce the practice of “discernment of spirits” beyond the traditional context of monastic discipline, focusing increasingly on beguine and lay religious practices. Henry of Friemar (d. 1340), Henry of Langenstein (d. 1397), Peter of Ailly (d. 1420), Jean Gerson (d. 1429), and Denys the Carthusian (d. 1471) are key figures in the elaboration of these critical responses to the propagation of vernacular mysticism.¹⁵

However, the major impact of the shift and transformation I am interested in becomes most visible in the context of Luther’s works. In Martin Luther’s writings, the issue turns out to be much larger than it was in earlier attempts to control and frame mystical hermeneutics. At stake here is the very question of containment of the meaning of the biblical text—and other “religious” texts—as it was addressed by Luther in his polemical exchanges with the so-called radical reformers, the groups of anabaptists and social revolutionaries who made use of the new possibilities offered by the printing press in the sixteenth century.¹⁶ At the center of these polemical exchanges—exchanges that often happen in the form of so-called *Flugschriften* and pamphlets—we encounter the question of who is entitled and justified to propose and publicly defend a specific reading of the scriptures, which is

often an “inspired,” “mystical,” or “prophetic” reading of the biblical text. It is in this move against the mystical and inspired readers of the scriptures that Luther introduces the concept of the “secular” as a new corrective and as an instrument that is meant to control the use of mystical tropes. The institution of the “secular” replaces the medieval, essentially phenomenological practice of the “discernment of spirits”—applied on a case-by-case basis to evaluate the effects (and texts) produced by spiritual practices—through a normative framework that is meant to limit the possibilities of scriptural exegesis.¹⁷

In his critique of the anabaptists and other “enthusiasts” (Schwärmer), Luther’s arguments against the radical interpreters of the Bible perform a very specific move. Luther produces a notion of the secular not as a realm that is subordinated to the religious, absolutely disassociated from it, or opposed to it, nor primarily as a realm that is an expression of the faith of the believer—analyzed by Max Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*—but as an institutional context that is meant to contain and limit the use that can be made of the scriptures and of scriptural exegesis. The secular order (“weltliche oberkeit oder ampt,” or “des weltlichen regiments werck,” the function of the secular order, as opposed to the “predig ampt,” the work of preaching, exegesis, and interpretation) is not only meant to distinguish humans from animals and submit them to the civilizing force of law (“rechte”) and reason (“vernunfft”) but also to form the core of a pedagogy of faith that censors the reach of scriptural hermeneutics and the texts that are allowed to circulate.¹⁸ In a short essay on the schooling of children Luther writes: “Denn jm predig ampt thuts Christus fast gar durch seinen geist, Aber jnn weltlichem reich mus man aus der vernunfft (da her die Rechte auch komen sind) handeln, denn Got hat der vernunfft unterworffen solch zeitlich regiment und leiblich wesen, Gene. 2 [1 Moses 2: 19], und nicht den heiligen geist vom himel dazu gesand.” (In the office of preaching Christ acts through his spirit. However, in the secular realm we have to act on the basis of reason {where the laws have their origin, as well}, since God has subjected the temporal powers and the material world to reason, and he has not sent the holy spirit to interfere with it.)¹⁹ As we will see, Luther here does not operate on the basis of a distinction between faith and reason. Instead, he establishes and justifies the secular order as a social and pedagogical institution that is meant to control the ways in which the Bible can be read. While he makes the biblical text available in the vernacular, translating it into German and thus into the language of all possible readers, he introduces the secular order as an institution that limits the engagement of the reader with the biblical text, containing the exegetical practice and inspired hermeneutics within the borders of the “predig ampt,” that is, the office of preaching. Thus, Luther

also contains the formation of legitimate communities of readers, limiting the act of reading and the “freedom of a Christian” to the “inner man” or a contained religious community.²⁰

I want to explain this further with an example. In 1524 Luther wrote his letter to the dukes of Saxony against the radical reformers of Allstedt. It has the title “von dem auffrurischen geyst” (On the Revolutionary Spirit).²¹ In this letter he attacks the social and revolutionary tendencies in the reform movement (in Luther’s words, “those who want to change the world with their fists” and to “overthrow the secular powers”). “Weltliche oberkeyt zu stürmen und selbst herr in der welt zu sein” (to overthrow the secular powers and to be masters of this world themselves) is, in his words, their political and religious program. What they are acting on, he argues, is not, however, a correct reading of the scriptures, but an “inspired” reading, an uncontrolled and uncontrollable scriptural hermeneutics that leads them to form a new community and to overthrow the existing social hierarchy. This inspired, mystical, radically eschatological, and—speaking from Luther’s point of view—“wild” hermeneutics is often at the origin of what we call *Flugschriften*, a genre of printed pamphlets that circulate among groups of reformers and inform radical communities.²² In the case of one of Luther’s enemies, the anabaptist Thomas Müntzer, this form of reading the scriptures links prophetic dreams and divine communication through the holy spirit with a community of interlocutors that explicitly competes with the secular order (“weltliche obrigkeyt”) and that enacts a mystical eschatology, emphasizing the political relevance of an egalitarian biblical message. Consequently, Müntzer draws the conclusion from the biblical text that the message of the gospel is to be understood in terms of profound social change and an eschatology that projects the day of judgment into historical time.²³

Quoting John 18:36 (“his kingdom is not of this world”), Luther argues against the position of Müntzer and the radical reformers, emphasizing that a correct biblical teaching and exegetical practice has to be contained. It has to be contained, he writes, by the institution of the very secular order that a correct reading of the scriptures must draw from the divine word. In “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed” he writes, summarizing his references to biblical passages and pointing to the irreducible status of the secular law: “The law of this temporal sword has existed from the beginning of the world. For when Cain slew his brother Abel, he was in such great terror of being killed in turn that God even placed a special prohibition on it and suspended the sword for his sake, so that no one was to slay him. He would not have had this fear if he had not seen and heard from Adam that murderers are to be slain.”²⁴ In other words, the institution of justice as a secular practice and as a prerogative of worldly authority that asks for subjection is to be found in the scriptures through a correct reading. It

forms the divine corrective that prevents the hermeneutical engagement with the text from turning into a practice that could form inspired communities of readers who might compete with the established structures of social hierarchy and seek their own justice. As Luther argues also in his treatise “The Freedom of a Christian,” freedom and faith are to be correlated with the inner, spiritual man, while the “outer,” worldly man is to be seen as a subject of the worldly order.²⁵

What Luther responds to in his critique of the radical reformers is indeed not just a local problem of social upheaval with a religious background during the 1520s. It is a larger problem that arose within and at the margins of the Church and late medieval religious culture after the thirteenth century, mainly since writings in vernacular languages offer their own readings of biblical texts, often in ways that we call inspired or mystical. The problem that church censorship tried to address at several fourteenth- and fifteenth-century councils lies, however, less with issues of social justice or the so-called inspired or mystical character of such texts and the increasingly common use of mystical tropes of unity, divinization, ecstatic suffering, and visionary experience. The key issue appears more prominently where vernacular texts start to circulate and to produce a realm of communication about the reading of the scriptures in the vernacular that threatens the authorized exegesis of the canonical texts. What is at stake here are not primarily the teachings offered by these vernacular texts (not the popularized use of mystical tropes per se), but rather the fact that such texts tend to become the core of the formation of communities of interpreters of the scriptures that compete with established authoritative readings. Thus, for example, Marguerite Porete was burnt at the stake in 1305 not mainly for what she wrote in her book *The Mirror of Simple Souls* but for the fact that she did not refrain from circulating it and encouraging others to practice that same form of inspired reading of the scriptures.²⁶

In his definition of the “worldly” or the secular, Luther draws the consequences of this strategy of framing mystical hermeneutics that focused on the formation of communities of readers and interpreters of the scriptures. He does so, however, not in terms of the traditional practice of “discernment of spirits” but in a way that foregrounds a new paradigm, namely, the disjunction between the secular realm (the realm of worldly powers, “weltliche Obrigkeit”) and the realm of the spirit, faith, and freedom. This very disjunction, Luther argues, has its ground in the divine order, in the order that is communicated through the scriptures, that invalidates certain readings, and that grants social stability in the temporal realm of a postlapsarian world. What we might conclude, then, is the following: Luther evokes and defines the “secular,” what he calls the “outer” man, and the “worldly authorities” (“weltliche Obrigkeit”) from within the religious, transforming

a late medieval practice of “discernment of spirits” and establishing instead a normative frame, which has the function of restricting the realm of legitimate readings of the biblical text. Thus, the secular is not autonomous with regard to the religious (a reading, I would like to add, that would be too modernist anyway). On the contrary, the secular is the normative limit that Luther draws from his reading of the scriptures, mainly Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 13, as the means to control the hermeneutical possibilities that are explored by the radical reformers. The secular order is in Luther’s view the frame that the scriptures evoke to limit these possibilities and the use of mystical tropes with their specific hermeneutical claims. In other words, the normative character of the secular order forms the limit of religious communication. It is dictated, as Luther would have it, by the divine revelation through the biblical text itself, and it takes shape in the governing power of “reason.”

The secular is thus a principle of inclusion and exclusion. It establishes itself as the universal order of the social world in its temporal state, defining a rational economy of governance and subjection that conceals its origin, namely the exclusion of specific hermeneutical possibilities and their force in community-formation. As a normative framework that validates and invalidates certain readings of the scriptures, it replaces a phenomenological approach that had been used by monks, nuns, laypeople, and church authorities in the form of the “discernment of spirits.”

Experimental Mysticism and the New Order of Communication

In what follows I will pursue two lines of interpretation. The first points back toward the late Middle Ages, to the problem of mystical texts as it was addressed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and the fate of mystical experience after Luther. A second offers a short comment on the relation between the harshest critic of mysticism in modernity, Immanuel Kant, and Luther’s distinction between the secular and the spiritual.

As I mentioned earlier, Luther’s arguments against the radical reformers can be seen in the larger context of the emergence of vernacular religious texts in the late Middle Ages. As we can see from council documents, for example from texts written by the fifteenth-century theologian Jean Gerson, the main problem between the church and so-called heretical movements was not that the doctrinal positions in their writings were sometimes seen as unorthodox, heretical, or questionable by the church authorities. Rather, it was the fact that “conversation,” as Gerson writes, “a delirious wish to talk,” accompanied the propagation of such vernacular texts and their ambitions.²⁷ Much of this must be seen as part of a new order of communication that

actually leads toward and is part of what we call the Reformation. From this point of view, Luther's intervention forms an attempt to contain this "desire to converse" about the scriptures in the vernacular, to limit the realm of justified readings, and to control the formation of social communities with their own interpretations of canonical texts. It is at this point that he introduces the secular order as the essential corrective, using it as the new institutional and normative context that replaces the practices of church censorship and "discernment of the spirits," which had previously been exercised by the Catholic Church through a set of defined practices. In Luther's text, one might say, the newly established authority of the secular has replaced the specific character of censoring practices of the Catholic Church, defining the limits of what is permissible and what is not permissible religious communication and mystical hermeneutics in terms of a universalized "secular regime" ("weltliches Regiment") that is detached from "the gospel, from conscience, and from grace."²⁸ Thus, the secular can be seen as the public realm that turns "wild animals" into humans and controls the ways religious communities are allowed to form and communicate based on their readings of the scriptures.²⁹ Or, to put it in more general terms, the secular establishes itself as a paradigm of rationality that dismisses "inspired" readings of the canonical texts whenever they threaten it.

This situation can, as many have shown before me, also be read in terms of media politics. We have to remind ourselves that Luther finds himself in a paradoxical position. It is with and around Luther that we encounter the use of the printed word in a hitherto unknown way. With him the production of a mass of pamphlets or *Flugschriften* sets in, and there is no doubt that the success of the Reformation depended in some part on the effects of the circulation of these texts. They address issues of church politics, theology, and dogmatics, but also social issues. Questions of iconoclasm, childhood baptism, beggars, the interpretation of the eucharist and other sacraments appear at the center of these pamphlets, and the printing of the pamphlets turns into a stage where all the polemical issues between the parties are fought out. This proliferation of discussions represents exactly what fifteenth-century church authorities were already afraid of when they warned at the Council of Constance against the all-too-loquacious nature of many people who discuss the Bible and their religious experience in vernacular languages using the tropes of mystical language.³⁰ The possibilities offered by the printing press to produce pamphlets led to an intensification of these discussions and to a proliferation of positions that all claimed to represent alternative readings of the biblical text. Many voices had predicted this evolution. Jean Gerson, mentioned earlier, was concerned that the books and pamphlets in vernacular languages would produce confusion and heresy, and a Nürnberg decree concurs:

Pay attention to preventing and controlling the pest of printed books, the translations of the Holy Scriptures, since these translations undermine the authority of the church and true faith, they create confusion in the Holy Church, lead to the condemnation of the souls and destroy both the worldly and spiritual order. . . . You have to be opposed to this in the beginnings, before the increasing number of German books leads from a sparkle of error to a conflagration.

[Achtet darauf, dass ihr diesem Übel des Druckes von Büchern, die aus den heiligen Schriften in die Volkssprache übersetzt sind, vorsorglich entgegentretet, denn diese Übersetzung zielt, wie gesagt wurde, auf die Schwächung der kirchlichen Hierarchie, auf die schwere Gefährdung des orthodoxen Glaubens, auf die Verwirrung der heiligen Kirche, auf die Verdammnis der Seelen und endlich auf die Vernichtung gleicher Weise der weltlichen wie der geistlichen Ordnung. . . . In den Anfängen muss man Widerstand leisten, damit nicht durch Vermehrung der deutschsprachigen Bücher der Funke des Irrtums sich zu einem grossen Feuer entwickle.]³¹

We might say that the medium of the printing press itself made it impossible to prevent the consequences, namely the “fire” of the Reformation. In Luther’s reaction, in the attempts to contain the danger of a “conflagration,” there lies also one of the origins of the projection of mystical tropes into a new realm, removing them from authorized hermeneutics and thus setting them free—so to speak—for their use in a different epistemological realm. Luther’s position is paradoxical. He profits from the possibilities of the new medium of printed pamphlets to create a public space of conversation (“Öffentlichkeit”) about church hierarchy and hermeneutic authority that supports the Reformation. On the other side, he wants to restrict the very danger that the printed pamphlets pose in his eyes, namely, the unleashing of an uncontrollable number of competing interpretations of the biblical text and its message, and thus a potential disturbance of the worldly order. He draws the consequences, namely, the isolation of the secular order from radical interpretations of the Bible, primarily in and through the famous distinction he makes when he discusses the specific “freedom” of the believer. His declaration that a Christian is “free inside” and “bound outside,” that is, that a Christian is free in his faith and in his reading of the scriptures but bound in his very exegetical practice by the worldly order that has been instated by God, stands on theological and biblical grounds. At the same time, however, it sets up a distinction between the spiritual and the secular, worldly realm that allows for a censorship that can be exercised against the distribution of the new media insofar as they threaten to destabilize this very distinction.

Beyond this, I want to point to another aspect of Luther’s intervention. As we have seen, Luther invalidates the legitimacy of the radical political and spiritualist hermeneutics that is practiced by Thomas Müntzer and others. Thus, he negates the possibility of drawing political consequences from the

mystical readings of the scriptures that try to enact a presentist eschatology. At the same time, however, he draws in his own work, especially through his edition of the late medieval *Theologia Deutsch*, on the same vernacular tradition of mysticism, when he puts strong emphasis on the importance of the individual act of reading the scriptures and the presence of the spirit in this very act.³² However, he removes this act of reading from the medieval framework of liturgy, monastic practice, and contemplative reading with its mystical tropes. In doing so, he prepares—quite paradoxically, again—the ground for a new way of reading the mystical texts that early modern readers inherit from the medieval tradition. Devoid of their liturgical and hermeneutical embeddedness and their institutional frame on one side, and from their political-eschatological meaning on the other, these texts and the mystical practices of prayer and contemplation turn into something new, namely, the basis for what we could call an experimental poetic mysticism that is explored in many forms from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Since it no longer has a place within an authorized hermeneutics, and since its subversive political and eschatological power has been neutralized through the distinction between secular and spiritual, the mystical tropes are thus set free to be used in a different realm, a realm I think we could call an experiential supplement to the spiritual freedom of the Christian. Luther himself does not explore this and, in fact, is highly critical of any use of mystical tropes to support and produce private mystical experiences that result from the reading of the scriptures. However, in extracting them from the realm of authoritative reading he also makes them available for a new use, which in Baroque mysticism will take the form not of a hermeneutical practice but of a poetics of self-fashioning that is meant to bridge the abyss between the secular order of submission and the abstract freedom in faith.

Many of the forms in which mystical tropes will be adopted subsequently are indeed “poetic,” as Heidegger suggests in the passage I quoted at the beginning of this essay. Angelus Silesius is only one of the many examples that could be quoted here. Katharina Regina von Greiffenberg would be another that fits this new paradigm, and a detailed analysis of Silesius’s and von Greiffenberg’s works would show exactly how they make use of common figures of thought and experience from medieval mysticism in their poetry.³³ Here I can only sketch the question of how the use of mystical tropes is reconfigured in response to Luther’s institution of the secular and in terms of what I call an experimental use and a constructivist understanding of experience. Heidegger, I think, does not do justice to this experimental use when he calls the use of mystical tropes (merely) “poetic,” mainly because he does not take into account the projection of the mystical tropes into an epistemological realm where experience, perception, and knowledge take shape in certain forms that would undermine his own approach.

No doubt what I call the experimental and constructivist understanding of experience has been well prepared by the medieval mystics themselves. They use rhetorical means, quotes from the scriptures, passages from the Song of Songs, moments of the liturgy throughout the year, to produce certain effects and to construct their experience of the biblical word. These effects include strong emotions, sensations, and stages of an experience of unity with God and the world. In many cases medieval authors do this with the acknowledged and highly self-conscious intent to produce an anticipated eschatological state, often described as a “foretaste of heaven.” This production can be described in terms of a rhetoric, a phenomenology, even a mechanics that is used quite methodically to evoke certain effects and to enact aspects of ecstatic suffering, vision, passion, and divine unity under the sign of eschatological reconciliation.

Devoid of their monastic and liturgical framings after Luther’s elimination of their hermeneutical significance, these methods do not entirely disappear. Instead they resurface and become available to an experimental poetics of both the self and the world, evoking time and again the old goal of producing a “foretaste of things to come,” but shifting and opening up new realms for locating this “foretaste” and enacting the eschatological drama in epistemological terms of perception and experience. They have lost the revolutionary meaning the experience of a “foretaste of heaven” had for Thomas Müntzer.³⁴ The place of this experience, however, is also no longer—as, for example, in Hadewijch’s and Mechthild’s writings—primarily in visionary events that happen during the liturgy or the reading of the scriptures. Instead, the experience is in the perception of the world and through the rhetorical construction of relations to the material world and the self. Thus, as it has been widely described, natural philosophy, experience of the world, sensation, and emotion become the chosen fields for an application of the mystical tropes—unity, love, suffering, sweetness, and pain, among others. As could be shown in many passages from Baroque poetry, the experience of nature itself turns into a playground for the use of such tropes, enacting a new order of communication where the self experiments with the possibilities of sensual and emotional intensity drawn from mystical tropes, and with possibilities of experiencing the world in light of them. A line can be drawn from Paracelsus to Johann Arndt, to Jacob Böhme and to the pietists, to Nikolaus von Zinzendorf and Susanna Katharina von Klettenberg. Along this line, it is not so much the production of a spiritual experience of the scriptures that moves into the foreground, but more often the production of a specific experience of nature and the production of sensual experience as an experiential supplement to the abstract concept of faith.

Not surprisingly, the imagination now plays an important and growing role in this tradition. Here, again, medieval sources and backgrounds could

be cited, especially in traditions of Franciscan mysticism. However, the multiple intersections with alchemical and hermetic traditions that are characteristic for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century understandings of the imagination point to the new significance of its productive force and the use of mystical tropes in terms of what we might want to call a cosmopoiesis—that is, a set of practices through which the scriptures, the mind, and the book of nature are made to converge. It is significant that this experience of the world is mediated through these very practices, through the use of scriptural quotes and images that inform and shape the imagination and thus give form to the experience of the world. In other words, the foretaste of heaven and the intimacy with Christ that medieval mystics found in their enactment of the scriptures and the liturgy, this very foretaste, now takes shape in the form of experiential modes of perception produced with the help of the scriptures and their poetic transformation. The adaptation of mystical language is not just allegory and illustration, it is a practice that shapes the mind, perception, and knowledge of the world, and this practice has its place now outside the strictly hermeneutical setting of medieval mystical practice.

Again, a quote from Silesius illustrates my point. In a conclusive aphorism he writes:

Freund es ist auch genug. Im fall du mehr wilt lesen,
So geh und werde selbst die Schrift und selbst das Wesen.

[Friend, let this be enough; if you wish to read beyond,
Go and become yourself the writ and yourself the essence.]³⁵

This very act (“become yourself the writ”) now stands outside the medieval hermeneutical framework and its claims. It takes shape as an application of mystical tropes that produces ever new forms of experience on the basis of rhetorical experiments. The “science of saints” turns into an “experimental science” (Jean-Jacques Surin), an art of figuration of the life of the soul in its conversation with itself, a community, and the world.³⁶ It is an art of figuration that makes use of the mystical tropes inherited from medieval mysticism. However, it projects these tropes into a practice of writing and conversation that is evacuated of their objective claims, contained by the limits set up by Luther, and adding to it in the form of an experiential supplement that we might be tempted to qualify as aesthetic or subjective.

The radical pietist Susanna Katharina von Klettenberg describes her understanding of this very process in a letter to Johann Kaspar Lavater dated January 9, 1774, defending the thought that the “imagination,” “when filled with such images” enables us to experience “true beatitude” (“réelle Seeligkeit”) in this life.³⁷ She thus points out that the imagination, informed by

“images” drawn from the scriptures and other mostly mystical sources, is the mediator between the self, nature, and the divine. The imagination functions as mediator insofar as it provides humankind with the sensual, emotional, and intellectual experience, and insofar as it allows this very experience to be produced through the practices of giving shape to the imagination and anticipating an eschatological state, “réelle Seeligkeit” here and now. Most significantly, this eschatological state has its place not in visionary experience of the divine word but in the multiplicity of experience of the world that is informed by the practice of the imagination, by and through the use of an inherited mystical language in a pedagogy of perception.

Again, I want to emphasize that for both Angelus Silesius and Susanna Katharina von Klettenberg mystical tropes are detached from the medieval hermeneutical framework and projected into a new epistemological space. There, they serve not only the production of specific sensual and emotional experience but also the constitution of a specific knowledge of the world and the self. It is characteristic for this knowledge that it attempts to unite the interior and the exterior, imagination and perception, sensuality and spirit, addressing issues of the convertibility and reversibility of Luther’s “inner” and “outer,” of the effects of the world on the self and the self on the world in processes of perception and cognition. And it is characteristic that this unification of “the interior and the exterior,” this construction of moments of convergence, depends heavily on the specific use of mystical tropes that are meant to shape the imagination. Thus, they transpose the eschatological goal of a union with the divine into something that Katharina von Klettenberg calls “Lebenskunst,” an “art of living” that has its ground in an art of perception shaped by the use of mystical tropes.

Two writers, Novalis and Robert Musil, show how this art of figuration is recuperated in modernity as an “art of living.” Novalis inherits the impulse for a new configuration of interiority and exteriority when he writes:

We have two sense systems which, however different they appear, are yet entwined extremely closely with one another. One system is called the body, one the soul. The former is dependent on external stimuli, whose essence we call nature or the external world. The latter originally is dependent on the essence of inner stimuli that we call spirit, or the world of spirits. Usually this last system stands in a nexus of association with the other system—and is affected by it. Nevertheless frequent traces of a converse relation are to be found, and one soon notices that both systems ought actually to stand in perfect reciprocal relation to one another, in which, while each of them is affected by its world, they should create harmony. . . . In short, both worlds, like both systems, are to create free harmony, not disharmony or monotony.³⁸

In this programmatic statement, it appears that the German romantic poet Novalis describes body and soul, the senses, the emotions, and reason

in terms quite typical of romanticism and German idealism. In fact, however, Novalis here draws upon a terminology and a use of mystical tropes that come to him through the pietist tradition, particularly in the specific concepts of “inner” and “outer” upon which his discussion of sensation depends. Novalis is in this regard exemplary of a particular engagement in romantic and postromantic thought on sensation with certain key conceptual turns, namely the distinction between internal and external stimuli, the idea of their “converse relation,” and the desire for a new configuration of this relation. What Novalis inherits as well, mediated mainly through the pietist literature about the topic, is the idea of an artificial, rhetorical stimulation and formation of the senses. And, last, he inherits the idea of an eschatological reconciliation that is projected into the realm of perception. In the version quoted here, it expresses itself in the idea of a “free harmony” between the “two systems,” the inner and the outer, where both systems interact and affect each other in an ideal state of perception and knowledge.

I want to conclude, however, with a short reference to Robert Musil, evoking a thought that I have not fully explored here, namely, the convergence of the application of mystical tropes in an epistemology of perception and the concept of possibility. It is Musil who moves this to the center when he writes, and I am quoting from the fourth chapter of his *Man Without Qualities*, still within the first part of the book called “A Sort of Introduction” (Eine Art Einleitung): “To pass freely through open doors, it is necessary to respect the fact that they have solid frames. This principle, by which the old professor [that is, the father of Ulrich, the man without qualities] had always lived, is simply a requisite of the sense of reality. But if there is a sense of reality, and no one will doubt that it has its justification for existing, then there must also be something we call a sense of possibility.” And he goes on in the next paragraph:

Whoever has it does not say, for instance: Here this or that has happened, will happen, must happen; but he invents: Here this or that might, could, or ought to happen. If he is told that something is the way it is, he will think: Well, it could probably just as well be otherwise. So the sense of possibility could be defined outright as the ability to conceive of everything there might be just as well, and to attach no more importance to what is than to what is not. The consequences of so creative a disposition can be remarkable, and may, regrettably, often make what people admire seem wrong, and what is taboo permissible, or, also, make both a matter of indifference. Such possibilists are said to inhabit a more delicate medium, a hazy medium of mist, fantasy, daydreams, and the subjunctive mood. Children who show this tendency are dealt with firmly and warned that such persons are cranks, dreamers, weaklings, know-it-alls, or troublemakers. Such fools are also called idealists by those who wish to praise them. But all this clearly applies only to their weak subspecies,

those who cannot comprehend reality or who, in their melancholic condition, avoid it. These are people in whom the lack of reality is a real deficiency. But the possible includes not only the fantasies of people with weak nerves but also the as yet unawakened intentions of God. A possible experience or truth is not the same as an actual experience or truth minus its “reality value” but has—according to its partisans, at least—something quite divine about it, a fire, a readiness to build and a conscious utopianism that does not shrink from reality but sees it as a project, something yet to be invented. After all, the earth is not that old, and was apparently never so ready as now to give birth to its full potential.³⁹

I quote this passage at length because it brings together all the elements that play a role in my reading of Musil. What appears here is not only the reference to the “unawakened intentions of God,” the “divine” character of a “conscious utopianism,” the allusion to the image of the “holy fool,” and the conjunction of “creativity” and “birth” that connects this text with Eckhart’s thought, but also the very notion of “possibility” itself as it is introduced by Musil in a chapter that ends with a consideration of “Eigenschaftslosigkeit” (being without qualities). It is this notion of “possibility” and some of its conceptual aspects that Musil quotes from a sermon by Eckhart, reconfiguring its meaning in view of a nonmessianic, ethically refined, and—as Musil calls it—“essayistic” “utopia of precision.” The human being engaged in this “utopia of precision,” he writes, “would be full of the paradoxical interplay of exactitude and indefiniteness,” and thus the “stable internal conditions guaranteed by a system of morality have little value for a man whose imagination is geared to change.”⁴⁰ “Ultimately,” he goes on, “when the demand for the greatest and most exact fulfillment is transferred from the intellectual realm to that of the passions, it becomes evident . . . that the passions disappear and that in their place arises something like a primordial fire of goodness.”⁴¹ Thus, “the pallid resemblance of actions to virtues would disappear from the image of life; in their place we would have these virtues’ intoxicating fusion in holiness.”

Indeed, we are at a different place with Musil, and we certainly cannot draw a line from early modern uses of mystical tropes to his adaptation of Eckhart texts. However, there is one structural element here that we can connect with my earlier discussion. For Musil, as well as for the “Freigeist” and radical pietist Susanna Katharina von Klettenberg, the application of mystical tropes does not above all produce an experience of the divine, but instead it deploys its effects within an epistemology of perception and experience, introducing a moment of eschatological resolution expressed in terms of “possibility,” “birth,” and “primordial fire” that recall Jacob Böhme and his projection of medieval mystical concepts into rhetorical models of cosmopoiesis and self-fashioning.

Reading Kant with Luther

We might argue, with Kant, that the poetic adaptations of mystical tropes from Jacob Böhme and Angelus Silesius to Novalis and Musil are nothing other than “a pretension of philosophy” (eine vorgebliche Philosophie), born out of “natural laziness” (natürliche Tägheit), and dedicated to “listening and enjoying the oracular voices from within” (nur das Orakel in sich selbst anhören und geniessen). It is, in his terms, philosophy that is caught up in “Anschauung” (contemplation or representation) and in the opinion that its inspiration is drawn immediately from the divine.⁴² Shying away from the labor (“Arbeit”) of true philosophy—for example, the work of Aristotle—mysticism is thus identified with a “salto mortale,” an undue preference for “emotion” (Gefühl), and “the mistuning of heads into exaltation” (Verstimmung der Köpfe zur Schwärmerei).⁴³ This exclusion of the mystical inspiration and enthusiasm from philosophy is not just a technical one. Beyond that, it builds on Luther’s argument that focuses on social control and the restriction of radical, inspired hermeneutics. The “exalted philosopher” endangers the integrity of the social body both through the “tone” of his discourse and the formation of “clubs” that undermine its coherence. The ambition of the inspired philosopher and the community he evokes endanger the “modicum” and “humility” that ideally should result from the “critique of his own reason.”⁴⁴

With his argument Immanuel Kant not only places the legitimate use of mystical tropes exclusively within the language of poetry (in Heidegger’s terms “before thought”); he also reinforces Luther’s institution of the secular in terms of reason itself, obliterating the very origin of a distinction that is also at the basis of his “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” While Luther argued that the institution of the secular (the “worldly regiment,” the realm of “law,” “reason,” and the submission of the “outer man”) has its origin in the scriptures, limiting the scope of reading and hermeneutics, and while he placed true freedom only in the “inner man,” Kant argues that reason itself is the source of both submission and freedom. Excluding inspired speech and the use of mystical tropes in scriptural hermeneutics from the scope of the practice of reason, Kant rewrites Luther’s distinction between the spiritual work of the preacher and the secular regiment in terms of the exercise of reason itself and a distinction between its “public” and “private” use. In the most famous passage from “What Is Enlightenment?” he writes: “The *public use* of one’s reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among mankind; the *private use* of reason may, however, often be very narrowly restricted, without otherwise hindering the progress of enlightenment. By the public use of one’s own reason I understand the use that anyone as a *scholar* makes of reason before the entire *literate*

world. I call the private use of reason that which a person may make in a *civic post* or office that has been entrusted to him.”⁴⁵ In accepting this, he argues, “only a ruler who is himself enlightened and has no dread of shadows, yet who likewise has a well-disciplined, numerous army to guarantee public peace, can say what no republic may dare, namely: ‘*Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!*’”⁴⁶

Kant’s image of an ever-increasing enlightenment and enlightened society is bound up with a distinction that replaces Luther’s freedom of the “inner man” with “complete freedom in religious matters” and the “public use” of reason in the form of argument. On the other hand, Luther’s concept of the “outer man” and his submission to the “worldly regiment” reappears in the shape of a submission to “duty” in the “private” use of reason. What Kant inherits from Luther’s distinction between the secular and the religious spheres, however, is not only the fact that he shelters the realm of “duty” from the realm of “freedom,” the realm of the “worldly regiment” from the realm of “argument.” In light of his remarks about the relation between the legitimate practice of reason and the use of mystical tropes (the “oracular voices,” “die Stimme eines Orakels,” and “allerlei Auslegungen,” “all kinds of interpretations”), he also shelters the interaction between the spheres of duty and of free argument from the uncontrollable interference of “inspired” discourses.⁴⁷ As a practice of reason, both its public and private use are only qualified as such insofar as reason excludes its other, that is, inspired, enthusiastic speech and scriptural hermeneutics. It is thus no accident that Kant takes his examples in “What is Enlightenment?” mostly from “religious matters.” No “emergence from self-imposed immaturity” can happen where reason falls back into “enthusiasm” (Schwärmerei) and where it thus disqualifies itself from the “spirit of freedom” that enables it to enter into a public argument with “governments that misunderstand their own function.”⁴⁸

Mystical speech, its tropes, figures, and precritical practices of reading are thus excluded from the “prosaic” private and public use of reason.⁴⁹ They are extracted from their power to claim authority in worldly and private matters and redefined as “ästhetische Vorstellungsart” (“an aesthetic mode of representation”). Thus, in Kant’s view, they gain validity as representations and objects of sensation and emotion only “after” (hinten nach) the conceptual labor of reason. In order to illustrate this, he discusses the image of Isis:

The veiled goddess before whom we of both parties bend our knees is the moral law in us, in its inviolable majesty. We do indeed perceive her voice and also understand very well her command. But when we are listening, we are in doubt whether it comes from man, from the perfected power of his own reason, or whether it comes from an other, whose essence is unknown to us and speaks to man through this, his

own reason. At bottom we would perhaps do better to rise above and spare ourselves research into this matter; since such research is only speculative and since what obliges us (objectively) to act remains always the same, one may place one or the other principle down as foundation. But the didactic procedure of bringing the moral law within us into clear concepts according to a logical methodology is the only authentically *philosophical* one, whereas the procedure whereby the law is personified and reason's moral bidding is made into a veiled Isis (even if we attribute to her no other properties than those discovered according to the method above), is an *aesthetic* mode of representing precisely the same object; one can doubtless use this mode of representation backward, after the first procedure has already purified the principles, in order to enliven those ideas by a sensible, albeit only analogical, presentation, and yet one always runs the danger of falling into an exalting vision [*schwärmerische Vision*], which is the death of philosophy. To be able to *intimate* that goddess would therefore be an expression that means nothing more than to be led to concepts of duty by moral *feeling* before one could have *clarified* the principles on which this feeling depends; such an intimation of a law, as soon as methodical treatment lets it pass into clear insight, is the authentic occupation of philosophy without which the expression of reason would be the voice of an *oracle* that is exposed to all sorts of interpretations.

“At bottom,” Kant adds in a footnote, “all philosophy is indeed prosaic; and the suggestion that we should now start to philosophize poetically would be just as welcome as the suggestion that a businessman should in the future no longer write his account books in prose but rather in verse.”⁵⁰

The exclusion of the “oracle” and of “all sorts of interpretations” means that all hermeneutical practices have to be subordinated to the prior clarification of principles, that is, the exercise of reason. It is this philosophical practice of clarification itself that ultimately redefines Luther's principle of distinction between the secular and the spiritual realm, which, in turn, abolishes the medieval practice of an “art” of discernment of spirits. Visions, inspirations, ecstatic experiences that claimed to be valid readings of the scriptures in the context of medieval mysticism and that were evaluated based on the practice of the discernment of spirits are now—with Kant—qualified as “aesthetic representation,” as images used to illustrate concepts, without a valid claim to an original truth. They have thus been turned into “poetic” speech, into mere means of rhetoric and analogy, which are justified only as illustration, and which can claim to be true only on the basis of a preliminary clarification of principles within reason itself and the realm of aesthetics. This transformation into “aesthetic objects” neutralizes what Luther tried to contain with his institution of the secular, obliterating its origin in Luther's reading of the scriptures, and defining it as a sphere of refuge for the mystical tropes that have lost their critical power. The birth of the philosophical discipline of aesthetics and the discussions about “irrationalism” in the eighteenth century testify to the complexity of the process in which the Baroque experimental and experiential use of mystical tropes

has been critically transformed into the new—bourgeois—world of “disinterested pleasure” and aesthetic experience.⁵¹ In modernity, it will be the function of poetry and art to recover not primarily the spiritual truth of these tropes but a realm of possibility of thought and experience that has been exiled by Luther’s interventions and epistemologically controlled by Kant’s. Marking this realm of possibility, setting it up as a threshold for thought and experience, will hitherto be the hallmark of returns to mystical tropes.

Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking: A Translation of Gelassenheit*, by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, intro. John M. Anderson (New York, 1966). Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood, John P. Leavey, and Ian McLeod (Stanford, CA, 1995), 73–74.
2. Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany, 1988). Pierre Klossowski, *Roberte ce Soir; and, The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (Chicago, 2002). Ingeborg Bachmann, “The Thirtieth Year,” in *The Thirtieth Year: Stories by Ingeborg Bachmann*, trans. Michael Bullock (New York, 1987), 18–55. For Paul Celan, see for example the poem “Du sei wie Du,” in *Lichtzwang. Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Stefan Reichert and Beda Allemann (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), 2:327. For Musil’s quotes from Eckhart’s writings in his *Man Without Qualities*, see Brigitte Spreitzer, “Meister Musil: Eckharts deutsche Predigten als zentrale Quelle des Romans ‘Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften,’” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 119 (2000): 564–88.
3. *Voici Maître Eckhart*, ed. Emilie Zum Brunn (Grenoble, 1998), 430.
4. *Hegel in Berichten seiner Zeitgenossen*, ed. Günther Nicolin (Hamburg, 1970), 261. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
5. Donata Schoeller, *Gottesgeburt und Selbstbewusstsein: Denken der Einheit bei Meister Eckhart und G. W. F. Hegel* (Hildesheim, 1992). See also Niklaus Largier, “Intellekttheorie, Hermeneutik und Allegorie bei Meister Eckhart,” in *Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der modernen Subjektivität*, ed. Reto L. Fetz and R. Hagenbüchle (Berlin, 1998), 460–86.
6. Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” trans. Ken Frieden, in *Languages of the Unsayable*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York, 1989), 3–70.
7. Derrida, *On the Name*, 74–85.
8. Quoted after Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington, 1991), 35.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Hans Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (Frankfurt am Main, 2007), 28.
11. See, for example, the discussions about the relationship between love and intellect in the thirteenth century, examined by Bernard McGinn, “Love, Knowledge and *Unio mystica* in the Western Christian Tradition,” in *Mystical*

- Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York, 1996).
12. See Niklaus Largier, "Inner Senses—Outer Senses: The Practice of Emotions in Medieval Mysticism," in *Codierung von Emotionen im Mittelalter/Emotions and Sensibilities in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Stephen Jaeger and Ingrid Kasten (Berlin, 2003), 3–15. Niklaus Largier, "Medieval Mysticism," *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (New York, 2008), 364–79.
 13. Compare the recent treatment of this topic by Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Suffolk, UK, 1999). Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2003). Carol Thysell, *The Pleasure of Discernment: Marguerite de Navarre as Theologian* (Oxford, 2000). Niklaus Largier, "Rhetorik des Begehrens: Die 'Unterscheidung der Geister' als Paradigma mittelalterlicher Subjektivität," in *Inszenierungen von Subjektivität in der Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. Martin Baisch (Königstein, 2005), 249–70.
 14. See *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York, 1994). Bernard McGinn, "The Four Female Evangelists of the Thirteenth Century: The Invention of Authority," in *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang*, ed. Walter Haug and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin (Tübingen, 2000), 175–94.
 15. See Robert G. Warnock, "'Von den vier Einsprüchen'—Die volkssprachliche Überlieferung," in *Der Traktat Heinrichs von Friemar über die Unterscheidung der Geister. Lateinisch-mittelhochdeutsche Textausgabe mit Untersuchungen*, ed. Robert G. Warnock and Adolar Zumkeller (Würzburg, 1977), 39–145. Cornelius Roth, *Discretio spirituum. Kriterien geistlicher Unterscheidung bei Johannes Gerson* (Würzburg, 2001).
 16. For an overview see Michael Giesecke, *Der Buchdruck in der frühen Neuzeit: Eine historisch Fallstudie über die Durchsetzung neuer Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991).
 17. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, 2007), discusses this transition and the appearance of a secular realm in the Reformation in terms of "the abolition of the enchanted cosmos, and the eventual creation of a humanist alternative to faith" (77). In my essay, I want to argue that specific practices of reading and scriptural hermeneutics (one might say: practices of enchantment) are being newly defined and controlled since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, leading finally to the establishment of a new realm of enchantment, namely a world of aesthetic experience (see 359), which, in turn, pretends to be neutral in religious terms.
 18. *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 61 vols. (Weimar, 2003–), 30(2):555 and 562, 40(1):208.
 19. *Ibid.*, 3(2):562.
 20. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis, 1989), 596–610.
 21. *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 15:212. Cf. Alois Haas, *Der Kampf um den Heiligen Geist: Luther und die Schwärmer* (Freiburg, 1997).
 22. For a collection of these *Flugschriften* see: *Deutsche Flugschriften zur Reformation (1520–1525)*, ed. Karl Simon (Stuttgart, 1980). See G. H. Williams, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation* (London, 1957). *Der linke Flügel der Reformation. Glaubenszeugnisse der Täufer, Spiritualisten,*

- Schwärmer und Antitrinitarier* (Bremen, 1962). *Dokumente aus dem deutschen Bauernkrieg*, ed. Werner Lenk (Leipzig, 1980).
23. See Thomas Müntzer, "Auslegung des anderen Unterschieds Danielis," in Thomas Müntzer, *Schriften und Briefe: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Günther Franz (Gütersloh, 1968), 241–63.
 24. Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis, 1989), 661.
 25. Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," 621: "of the same nature are the precepts which Paul gives in Rom. 13 [:1–7], namely, that Christians should be subject to the governing authorities and be ready to do every good work, not that they shall in this way be justified, since they are righteous through faith, but that in the liberty of the Spirit they shall by so doing serve others and the authorities themselves and obey their will freely and out of love." For a recent treatment of Luther's doctrine of two kingdoms see: Volker Mantey, *Zwei Schwerter—Zwei Reiche: Martin Luthers Zwei-Reiche-Lehre vor ihrem spätmittelalterlichen Hintergrund* (Tübingen, 2005). Per Frostin, *Luther's Two Kingdoms Doctrine* (Lund, 1994).
 26. See, most recently, Robin Anne O'Sullivan, "The School of Love: Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls*," *Journal of Medieval History* 32 (2006): 143–62.
 27. Johannes Gerson, "De probatione spirituum," in Jean Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Palémon Glorieux (Paris, 1962–73), 9:184: "Hoc praecipue considerare necesse est, si sit mulier, qualiter cum suis confessoribus conversatur et instructoribus, si collocutionibus intendit continuis, sub obtentu nunc crebrae confessionis, nunc proluxae narrationis visionum suarum, nunc alterius cujuslibet confabulationis." For an analysis of the gendered aspect of Gerson's intervention and its consequences in Luther and after Luther see Niklaus Largier, "Die Kunst des Weinens und die Kontrolle der Imagination," in *Querelles. Jahrbuch für Frauenforschung*, vol. 7, *Kulturen der Gefühle in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2002), 171–86.
 28. *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 40(1):208.
 29. *Ibid.*, 30(2):555.
 30. See Gerson, "De probatione spirituum," 178, and "De distinctione verarum revelationum a falsis," in *Oeuvres complètes* 3:36–56.
 31. Quoted in Giesecke, *Der Buchdruck*, 176–77.
 32. Luther edited this text for the first time in 1518. See *Der Franckforter (Theologia Deutsch): Kritische Textausgabe*, ed. Wolfgang von Hinten (Munich, 1982). For Luther's relationship to mystical traditions cf. also Alois Haas, *Gottleiden—Gottlieben: Zur volkssprachlichen Mystik im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), 264–94. Gerhard Müller, *Die Mystik oder das Wort? Zur Geschichte eines Spannungsverhältnisses* (Stuttgart, 1999).
 33. Hans-Georg Kemper, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen, 1988), 3:245–78.
 34. Müntzer, "Auslegung."
 35. Angelus Silesius, *Der Cherubinische Wandersmann*, ed. Louise Gnädinger (Stuttgart, 1984), 49. I follow the translation by John P. Leavey, in Derrida, *On the Name*, 41.
 36. Cf. Michel de Certeau, *La fable mystique, XVIe–XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1982), 245–50. For a discussion of the rhetorical aspects of this shift see Marc Fumaroli, *L'école du silence: Le sentiment des images au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1994).

37. Burkhard Dohm, "Radikalpietistin und 'schöne Seele': Susanna Katharina von Klettenberg," in *Goethe und der Pietismus*, ed. Hans-Georg Kemper and Hans Schneider (Tübingen, 2001), 117.
38. Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret M. Stoljar (Albany, 1997), "Logological Fragments" 1.70.
39. Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York, 1995), 1:10–11.
40. *Ibid.*, 266. 41. *Ibid.*
42. Immanuel Kant, "Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie," in Immanuel Kant, *Werke in zwölf Bänden* (Wiesbaden, 1958), 378. English trans.: Immanuel Kant, "On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy," in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*, ed. Peter Fenves (Baltimore, 1993).
43. Kant, "Von einem," 386; "On a Newly," 62.
44. Kant, "Von einem," 393.
45. Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" in Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. and intro. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, 1983), 42.
46. *Ibid.*, 45.
47. Kant, "Von einem," 396.
48. Kant, "An Answer," 45.
49. Kant, "Von einem," 397.
50. Kant, "On a Newly," 71–72.
51. One of the most valuable books about these discussions is still Alfred Baeumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem in der Ästhetik und Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Halla a. d. Saale, 1923). See also Carsten Zelle, "Schrecken/Schock," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden* (Stuttgart, 2003), 6:437–46. Ernst Müller, "Religion/Religiosität," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, 231–43. It should be noted here that the concept of aesthetic experience elaborated by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and Johann Gottfried Herder is based on the adoption of the mystical notion of *fundus animae* (the "ground of the soul"), emphasizing a concept that—as Baumgarten writes—"many philosophers ignore nowadays"; *Metaphysica* (Hildesheim, 1963), 511. With this return to a mystical trope Baumgarten and Herder offer an understanding of aesthetic experience that forms an alternative to Kant's solution.