Chapter 1
The Presence of the 'Primitive': An Introduction

This book is about modernity under the spell of the 'primitive.'[1] From proponents of the ideology of progress to critics of civilization, from utopians dreaming of a re-enchanted existence to the supporters and opponents of nascent fascism, the first decades of the twentieth century were profoundly shaped by the phantasm of the 'primitive,' which European modernity in its many variations regarded as both its origin and opposite. This book, however, argues that the 'primitive' must instead be seen as modernity's own product and presence.

Exploring modernity's primitivism, it takes a somewhat different angle than previous research.[2] A central element of the phantasm of the 'primitive,' this book shows, is the notion of 'primitive thought,' a distinct mode of thinking – characterized by turns as magical, mythical, mystical, or prelogical – that forges a fundamentally other relationship to the world. In this respect, modernity's fascination with the 'primitive' may also be described as *epistemological primitivism*. The book also demonstrates that epistemological primitivism of the early

1 *Modernity* is used here first as an epochal designation, that is, as "a shorthand term for modern society, or industrial civilization" (Anthony Giddens, *Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], 94) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which witnessed the emergence of philosophical and aesthetic modernism. It is used, second, as a critical concept, applied by social and cultural theorists of that time when reflecting upon the specificities of their own society (whether in a normative and affirmative sense, or to negative and critical ends). Throughout this study, part of my aim is to show the extent to which this self-understanding of modernity depended on the 'primitive' as its imaginary counterpart. Because this problem is inscribed into the very concept of modernity, its uncritical, naïve use has quite rightly provoked critique (e. g., from a postcolonial perspective by Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005] or from a sociological standpoint by Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern,* trans. Catherine Porter [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993]).

2 Representative works from literary studies, which I will talk about below in more detail, include Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Erhard Schüttpelz, *Die Moderne im Spiegel des Primitiven. Weltliteratur und Ethnologie (1870 – 1960)* (Munich: Fink, 2005); and Sven Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift. Zur Figur des Primitiven in Ethnologie, Kulturtheorie und Literatur um 1900* (Munich: Fink, 2010). Last to appear, after the publication of the German edition of this book, was Ben Etherington, *Literary Primitivism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); and Samuel Spinner, *Jewish Primitivism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021). Further works from literary studies and adjacent fields such as art history, cultural studies, and anthropology will be referenced below.

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twentieth century concerned not only indigenous cultures but also other figures of alterity. As important as the postcolonial perspective on the 'primitive' has been, its focus on the (false) representation of indigenous cultures has tended to obscure two things: First, the constructed nature of the 'primitive,' which should be understood as the product, not the object, of primitivism. And second, the observation that indigenous cultures constitute only one of many figurations of alterity constructed by early twentieth-century primitivist discourse.[3] Other embodiments of the 'primitive' that proved just as important include children and the mentally ill.[4] Thus, in this book I locate primitivism first of all in the human sciences, noting how the emergent disciplines of ethnology, child psychology, and psychopathology conceived of children, indigenous cultures, and the mentally ill as contemporary incarnations of the 'primitive.' The heterogeneity of the three groups makes plain that this conception was not motivated by scholarly interest in any one of these figures in particular. Instead, their shared interest in the 'primitive' (and classification of these groups as 'primitive' in the first place) concerned their supposed representation of a *presence* of an *origin* marked, among other traits, by 'primitive thinking.'

Based on these premises, the book focuses on the relevance of epistemological primitivism for the theory and practice of the arts in early twentieth-century Europe and for German literature in particular. The search for humankind's origins and the widespread fascination with other modes of thinking, both of which were shaped by the paradigm of the 'primitive,' intersected with contemplations on the arts to yield a new perspective on both. Interest turned to art's beginning, which was supposed to shed light on the origins of modern civilization and the essence of humanity.[5] Even more importantly, a new view of contemporary art

3 This runs counter to what most scholarship on literary primitivism has assumed. However, since the publication of the German edition of this book, two studies have appeared that offer a corrective: the exhibition catalog edited by Anselm Franke and Tom Holert, *Neolithische Kindheit: Kunst in einer falschen Gegenwart, ca. 1930* (Zurich: HKW, 2018); and Barbara Wittmann, *Bedeutungsvolle Kritzeleien: Eine Kultur- und Wissensgeschichte der Kinderzeichnung, 1500–1950* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2018).

4 These three figures are only the most conspicuous. Others – with a range of different connotations – include women, the working class (cf. Gina M. Rossetti, *Imagining the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature* [Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006]), ethnic minorities (cf. Eva Blome, *Reinheit und Vermischung. Literarisch-kulturelle Entwürfe von "Rasse" und Sexualität [1900–1930]* [Cologne: Böhlau, 2011]; Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998]), and rural populations.

5 In respect to the fine arts, see Susanne Leeb's approach in *Die Kunst der Anderen: "Weltkunst" und die anthropologische Konfiguration der Moderne* (Berlin: b-books, 2015).

emerged insofar as it was supposed to have preserved 'primitive thinking,' which was thought to be observable also in children at play, the delusions of the mentally ill and the rituals and myths of indigenous peoples. In these contexts the arts enjoyed a new form of legitimacy. They became a privileged site to which questions of origin were addressed and a starting point for utopian efforts promoting 'primitive thinking' against a disenchanted modernity.

In this introduction I would like to accomplish three goals: The first is to address the question of why the 'primitive' held such an abiding fascination for European modernity. To do so, I approach the category of the 'primitive' as a narrative of origin, an instrument for critiquing civilization, a literary utopia, and a diagnosis of the present (of that time) – four assumptions that I consider to be fundamental to understanding the early twentieth century's primitivist discourse. The second goal is to reconceptualize the 'primitive' as a paradigm, a figure of thought, and a *poème*. Third, and finally, I offer a brief overview of existing research on literary primitivism before moving on to preview the structure of this book.

The 'Primitive' as a Narrative of Origins

"They *are* what we *were*" – Friedrich Schiller's famous dictum in "Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung" (1795–1796; "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," 1861) summarizes a view that has recurred time and again throughout European history: a primordial condition of human existence may be found among peoples living elsewhere, and also among children, animals, and parts of the natural world.[6] "We were nature just as they," Schiller writes, referring to "plants, minerals, animals, [...] landscapes, [...] children, [...] the customs of country folk, and [...] the primitive world."[7] At a basic level, this figure of thought transfers the foreign of the present into the past of the familiar – what Johannes Fabian has called "allochronic discourse."[8] The 'foreign' can appear in any number of roles here, but always in contrast to the culture in which it is pronounced. Either it is essentially undeveloped, or it stands at the very beginning of a developmental process. In

6 Friedrich Schiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," trans. Julias A. Elias, in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, and Goethe*, ed. H.S. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 181. Italics modified to reflect German publication.

7 Friedrich Schiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," 181, 180.

8 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

any case, its 'proper' place lies at the point of origin, and inasmuch as it persists in the present, it constitutes an anachronistic survival. Such a view readily translates into the opposition between nature and culture, whereby the foreign, located outside or at the beginning of history, is understood as nature and European society, which is thought to display history and progress, as culture.

Reflecting its durability, this figure of thought has varied with historical and scientific circumstances.[9] Medieval accounts of travel – undertaken in the hope of discovering a paradisiacal world far from Europe – clearly differ from what Schiller had in mind. The decisive difference is that from a medieval and biblical perspective, the origin did not represent the beginning of a historical development; rather, it was seen to lie *outside* of history (i. e., in paradise). The border between nature (that is, the "state of nature") and culture ("history") was drawn just as clearly. This is, for example, still true for Rousseau and his idea of the 'noble savage,' but not for Schiller.[10] According to Michel Foucault, around 1800 the "age of representation" passed into the "age of history,"[11] at which point the primal source ceased to be located outside the sphere of historical development. In Foucault's words, "In modern thought, such an origin is no longer conceivable."[12] The contemporary world and the birthplace it was supposed to have left behind were no longer opposites – instead they were connected, even continuous. This also holds for Schiller's reflections, as Sven Werkmeister has demonstrated.[13] In the foreign identity of "they are," Schiller finds his and his intended readers' own past: "what we were." The study of faraway peoples now furthers self-understanding. He declares, "A wise hand seems to have preserved these raw tribes for us down to our times, where we would be advanced enough in our own culture to make fruitful application of this discovery upon ourselves, and to restore out of this mirror the forgotten origin of our species."[14] Engagement with "raw tribes" then serves a reassuring function. Simultaneously,

9 For a summary and discussion of this figure's evolution, cf. Wolfgang Riedel, "Wandlungen und Symbole des Todestriebs. Benns Lyrik im Kontext eines metapsychologischen Gedankens," in *Sigmund Freud und das Wissen der Literatur*, ed. Peter-André Alt and Thomas Anz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 111–112.

10 See Sven Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 59.

11 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 217.

12 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 329.

13 Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 59–65.

14 Friedrich Schiller, "What Means, and for What Purpose Do We Study, Universal History?", in *Complete Works in Two Volumes*, ed. and trans. Charles J. Hempell, M.D. (Philadelphia: Kohler, 1861), 2: 348 (translation slightly modified). Also quoted in Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 60.

however, it destabilizes identity by confronting the unassimilably alien that lies at the foundation of the self.

According to "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," knowledge of what one was does not inspire alienation so much as melancholy. For Schiller, what one loves in nature is "quietly working life, the calm effects out from itself, existence under its own laws, the inner necessity, the eternal unity with itself."[15] This idealization bears clear traces of the paradisiacal tradition mentioned above. Following the triadic scheme of history, Schiller expresses the wish to ultimately return to the Golden Age.[16] That said, Schiller's inaugural address at the university in Jena presents a rather different picture of humankind's origins when he states, "how shaming and sad is the picture these people give us of our childhood!" Speaking of civilized man's supposed counterpart, Schiller declares, "His crude taste seeks joy in stupor, beauty in distortion, glory in exaggeration; even his virtue awakens horror in us, and what he calls his bliss can only arouse our disgust and pity. So were *we*."[17] The ambivalence of modern thought concerning human origins is in full evidence here. On the one hand, faraway peoples epitomize the other, that is, the opposite of one's own self-image. Schiller's and other contemporaries' self-understanding as mature, reasonable, self-disciplined, socialized, and cultivated contrasts with 'children of nature' who are portrayed as irrational, governed by emotion and drives, and potentially antisocial. In this manner, indigenous peoples are used as a screen for projecting everything that must be excluded from one's own sense of identity. On the other hand, these foreigners are supposed to represent modern society's point of departure. In this way, encounters with others who are meant to affirm one's own identity by revealing one's origins actually also unsettle this same sense of self.

The 'Primitive' as a Scientific Paradigm

The formula exemplified by Schiller's phrase, "They are what we were," ran through the cultural history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, it assumed a new form in the context of the emergent human scien-

15 Schiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," 181 (translation slightly modified).

16 The triadic model of history premises that humanity developed in three phases: a paradisical original condition, a state of alienation and disharmony between nature and society, and finally an anticipated reentry to paradise, which, however, is not a mere return but is thought of as a return to a higher level (e. g., through reflection by means of art), especially in theories of history around 1800.

17 Schiller, "What Means, and for What Purpose," 348.

ces.[18] Around 1800, equating humanity's origins with indigenous peoples, children, and even animals amounted to no more than an analogy. Schiller recognizes as much and advocates caution: "The method of drawing conclusions by analogies is as powerful an aid in history, as everywhere else, but it must be [...] exercised with as much circumspection as judgment."[19] But in the anthropological configuration of modernity and the new human sciences, it soon achieved the status of scientific fact. Ethnologists, developmental psychologists, and psychopathologists now believed they had found empirical evidence that the origins of humankind really were present in indigenous cultures, children, and the mentally ill. Indeed, the 'primitive' – understood as the presence of an origin – was the very *paradigm* that framed and organized their questions and answers.

Ethnologists and social anthropologists believed they had discovered that the thought and behavior of indigenous peoples corresponded to those of early humans. The supposed simplicity of these cultures was seen as evidence that they had not developed, thus had no history of their own, and were still living in a 'state of nature.' Developmental psychologists and biologists claimed the same of children, who, in the process of maturation, were thought to recapitulate the development of the species (in keeping with the biogenetic law established by the physician Ernst Haeckel). Finally, psychologists and psychiatrists exposed the 'primitive' in the mentally ill (especially schizophrenics), whom they considered to have regressed to an earlier stage of human development archived in the unconscious mind and specific organs of the body, such as the brain stem.

This pattern of reasoning secured the 'primitive' as a common point of reference among the different disciplines. Identical mental operations ('primitive thinking') were supposed to prevail across the board: scientists assumed that the mentally ill think like members of indigenous tribes, who think like children, who think like the mentally ill, and so on. In other words, the 'primitive' provided a platform for homogenizing objects of study. At the same time, it offered a paradigm for speculating about the origins and essence of humanity. Thus, Heinz Werner's *Einführung in die Entwicklungspsychologie* (1926; *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development*, 1940) identifies indigenous peoples, children, and the mentally ill as "primitive types" whose common features were supposed to shed light on the "general developmental laws of mental life."[20] These three groups were the epistemic objects where the search for first beginnings was car-

18 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 330.

19 Schiller, "What Means, and for What Purpose," 352 (translation slightly modified).

20 Heinz Werner, *Einführung in die Entwicklungspsychologie* (Leipzig: Barth, 1926), 150, 23, 3. Tellingly, his 1919 study was devoted to the "origins of metaphor" (*Ursprünge der Metapher*).

ried out. And what began as an evolutionary enterprise quickly became an ontological one focused on the 'essence of man.'[21] Since the 1910s, this ontological orientation was particularly pronounced in the study of art. A late, but well-known example is Martin Heidegger's 1935 lecture, "Ursprung des Kunstwerks" ("The Origin of the Work of Art," 1971), which understands "origin" to mean essence. From this perspective, the 'primitive' no longer represents a historical beginning so much as an a-historical core, on the basis of which general rules and tasks of art may be formulated.

The 'Primitive' in the Service of Cultural Critique

In 1917, the German sociologist Max Weber delivered his lecture, "Wissenschaft als Beruf" ("Science as a Vocation," 1946), to the *Freistudentischer Bund* (Union of Free Students) at the University of Munich. The speaker was addressing an audience he believed to be deeply disillusioned with modernity. Members of the rising generation, Weber observes, want "to return to their own nature and hence to nature as such" – "a life in communion with the divine" – and are hoping for "release from the rationalism and intellectualism of science."[22] They are cultivating a cult of "experience" and "personality"[23] and yearning for a prophetic "leader"[24] in contempt of the "realm of artificial abstractions."[25] Instead of accepting the "destiny of our culture,"[26] they are fashioning "idols"[27] and looking for "professorial prophets"[28] to relieve them of thinking for themselves. Such "intellectualist romanticism of the irrational,"[29] Weber continues, amounts to "interpret[ing] human communities in religious, cosmic, or mystical terms," "furnish[ing] their souls, as it were, with antique objects," and "decorating [their] private chapel with pictures of the saints that they have picked up in

21 This shift also involves a change of historical models: "At the beginning of the twentieth century, the evolutionism proceeding by steps was increasingly replaced by synchronic approaches [...]. Now, reference to the primitive and the archaic could perform a critical function by opening the possibility for reversal [of perspective]" (Franke and Holert, *Neolithische Kindheit*, 319).
22 Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures:* "*Science as a Vocation, Politics as a Vocation,*" trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 15.
23 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 10.
24 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 24.
25 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 14.
26 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 24.
27 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 10.
28 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 28.
29 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 16.

all sorts of places," "creat[ing] a surrogate by collecting experiences of all kinds that they endow with the dignity of a mystical sanctity."[30]

According to Weber's psychological sketch then, a comprehensive critique of civilization, progress, and rationality took hold among young people toward the end of the First World War. It was accompanied by a yearning for a different relationship to the world, which he describes in terms such as "nature," "life," "experience," "personality," "soul," "community," and "religion" – diction that also features prominently in artistic primitivism of the interwar period.[31] Indeed, Weber himself refers to the 'primitive,' but not in his characterization of youth so much as his analysis of the state of society as a whole.

Weber criticizes the cowardice of the young generation, but he shares its disillusionment, expressing the conviction that the "process of intellectualization [...] at work in Western culture for thousands of years" – that is, "rationalization through science and a science-based technology" – leads to the wholesale "disenchantment of the world."[32] In order to understand what "disenchantment" means in this context, it is important to note that he employs the term *ex negativo*, that is, by way of a counterpole predicated on the phantasm of the 'primitive.' By disenchantment, he means that "[u]nlike the savage for whom such

30 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 30. The critical edition of this text notes oblique reference to the ideals of the youth movement surrounding Gustav Wyneken and particularly the "neo-mystical" publishing house Eugen Diederichs, which provided a forum for critics of modern rationalism (Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf," in *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Horst Baier et al., vol. 17, section 1, *Schriften und Reden* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1992], 109n61 and 62).

31 Franke and Holert describe the interwar period as a time when "the loss of a unifying collectivity through the dividing processes of labor, scientification, and the 'liberal' individualization of capitalist modernity [...] led intellectuals and artists [...] to ideologically extreme and diverging scenarios of flight and evasion" (Franke and Holert, "Einführung," in *Neolithische Kindheit*, 10).

32 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 30 – 31. Weber could "only grasp the rationalization process after he had discovered the process of disenchantment. Therefore, the question of when and where this happened leads to the heart of his sociology" (Friedrich H. Tenbruck, "Das Werk Max Webers," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 69, Suppl. 1 [2017]: 384) – and also leads, I would add, to the counter-image of "disenchantment" or the paradigm of the 'primitive' in which the latter takes shape. As Hartmut Lehmann has put matters, "As of now, nobody has been able to explain the origin of the term 'disenchantment of the world'" (*Die Entzauberung der Welt: Studien zu Themen von Max Weber* [Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009], 13). The answer, in my estimation, may be found by examining the discourse of the 'primitive.' Thus, Fuyuki Kurasava observes that "[t]he ethnological imagination is [...] essential to Weber's identification of the dynamics of rationalization that distinguish modern Euro-American societies from other sociohistorical formations" (*The Ethnological Imagination: A Cross-Cultural Critique of Modernity* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004], 84).

forces existed, we need no longer have recourse to magic in order to control the spirits or pray to them. Instead, technology and calculation achieve our ends."[33] Weber's reflection is preceded by another direct comparison between "the savage" and "us": "The savage has an incomparably greater knowledge of his tools" and "knows how to obtain his daily food and what institutions enable him to do so." "We," on the other hand, know that we *could* arrive at the same understanding "if *only we wished* to."[34] Later in the lecture, Weber again speaks of a time "before the world had been divested of the magic of its gods and demons" and the "bygone days" when a "prophetic spirit [...] swept through great communities like a firestorm and welded them together."[35] Weber's diagnosis of the "disenchantment of the world" is predicated on its opposite, then: the idea of a *primitive worldview* under the spell of magical plenitude.[36]

The 'Primitive' as a Figure of Thought

The paradigm of the 'primitive' determining Weber's conception of modernity as its counterpole is characterized by the assumption of a distinct form of non-rational thinking and thus a fundamentally *other* relationship to the world. Therefore, the concept of the 'primitive' functions not only as a paradigm, but also as a pervasive "figure of thought"[37] in primitivist discourse in the early twentieth century. The adjective "primitive" (like the German *primitiv* and French *primitif*) comes from the Latin noun, *primitivus*, or "first of its kind."[38] Turned back into a

33 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 13.

34 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 12. Whenever two or more quotes in a paragraph derive from the same page number of the same source, they will be cited together with a concluding note. Thus, the citation in this note documents material from the previous two sentences.

35 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 30.

36 That said – and in contrast to the thinkers discussed below – Weber himself did not think of such a worldview as a utopian ideal, but in terms of an irretrievable loss.

37 "Figure of thought" is used here in the sense defined by Jutta Müller-Tamm, "Die Denkfigur als wissensgeschichtliche Kategorie," in Nicola Gess and Sandra Janssen, eds., *Wissens-Ordnungen: Zu einer historischen Epistemologie der Literatur* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014). In *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 11–78, Müller-Tamm draws on Erich Auerbach's "Figura" as well as on the essays collected in Gabriele Brandstetter and Sibylle Peters, eds., *De figura: Rhetorik – Bewegung – Gestalt* (Munich: Fink, 2002). See also George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), and Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology,* trans. Robert Savage (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

38 "primitiv," in Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 647.

noun in modern languages, the adjective yields the 'primitive,' i.e., a human being in the primal state, which, as mentioned above, was 'rediscovered' around 1900 in indigenous peoples, children, and the mentally ill. The result was a flexible anthropomorphic *figure* that organized scientific *thought* about the origins of humanity, culture, and nature. And the most important feature of this *figure* was that they were supposed to embody a different kind of *thinking* and mentality. According to early twentieth-century human scientists, this other frame of mind was defined by alogical relations and associations that determined how indigenous peoples, children, and the mentally ill perceived and understood the world. For the ethnologist Karl von den Steinen, this meant, for example, that members of the Bororo tribe in Brazil believed they were humans and parrots at the same time. Or for the psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer, that schizophrenics thought distant magical powers control their lives. And for the developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, that children believed they could talk to animals, steer the path of the sun, or transform one object into another.[39] By turns, such thinking is characterized as 'magical,' 'mythical,' 'prelogical,' or 'mystical.' In 1925, for instance, the philosopher Ernst Cassirer offers a comprehensive philosophical assessment of what he calls "mythical thought."[40] For him, such thought does not differentiate between perception and imagination. Also, it entails a different sense of causality insofar as all things that seem similar or were once in contact with each other are believed to exercise necessary and reciprocal influence on each other.

Significantly, Cassirer and other scholars in the human sciences affirmed a direct connection between 'primitive thinking' and the essence of art and artistic creation. For instance, in his foundational study, *Primitive Culture,* the social anthropologist Edward B. Tylor presents the mental constitution of indigenous peoples as the key to poetry and literature:

39 I will return to these examples in Chapters 2–4.

40 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* vol. 2, *Mythical Thought,* trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955). For another good example, see Richard Thurnwald's entry, "Primitives Denken," in Max Ebert, ed., *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1927/1928), 10: 294–316. From a resolutely ethnological perspective, Thurnwald describes 'primitive thinking' as "adhering predominantly to a complex of phenomena without discrimination, [that is,] without having learned to distinguish between the reality of thought and that of its object" (296).

> In so far as myth [...] is the subject of poetry, and in so far as it is couched in languages whose characteristic is that wild and rambling metaphor which represents the habitual expression of savage thought, the mental condition of the lower races is the key to poetry.[41]

Similarly, psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer advances the thesis that Expressionist art can be explained on the basis of how schizophrenics think – which is to say, on the basis of the thinking of early humans, which for him resurfaces in schizophrenia.[42] And in *Der Genius im Kinde* (The Genius in the Child, 1922), the pedagogical reformer and art historian Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub claims, "Only the poet and the artist preserve [...] this general imaginative potential of the child [...]. The 'artist' alone knows how to salvage, more or less, [what remains of] the immense inner life of childhood."[43] Here, art and origins condition and ground each other reciprocally.

These theses were also adopted by scholars of philosophy and art seeking to affirm the scientific nature of their enterprise of *Kunstwissenschaften* (art studies, but literally meaning science of art) and present a new set of aesthetic concepts. They strive to fill the causal void that 'genius' meant for earlier aesthetic theories by no longer linking artists' creativity to their talent, but to 'primitive thinking,' a capacity that – in contrast to the notion of 'genius' – presented no mysteries inasmuch as the human sciences had investigated it empirically and declared that it might still be found in the core essence of any and every human.[44] Similarly, scholars of art adopted theories of 'primitive language.' Thus, the literary historian Alfred Biese, in *Philosophie des Metaphorischen* (Philosophy of the Metaphorical, 1893), expresses the conviction that metaphor represents a survival of primeval language whose words are directly motivated by the objects they signify. Accordingly, poetry and the literary arts in general (*Dichtung* in German) afford privileged access to the world-in-itself.[45]

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41 Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (London: Murray, 1871), 2: 404.

42 Ernst Kretschmer, *A Text-book of Medical Psychology* (London: Hogarth Press, 1952), 134 – 138.

43 Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, *Der Genius im Kinde: Zeichnungen und Malversuche begabter Kinder* (Breslau: F. Hirt, 1922), 30.

44 And with that, as Leeb notes, art is declared a "generic feature" of the human essence (Leeb, *Die Kunst der Anderen*, 12).

45 Alfred Biese, *Die Philosophie des Metaphorischen In Grundlinien dargestellt* (Leipzig: L. Voss, 1893). On the fascination with 'primitive thinking' held by theories of language and metaphor, see Chapter 6; key points of reference are Wolfgang Riedel's essays, "Arara ist Bororo oder die metaphorische Synthesis," in *Anthropologie der Literatur. Poetogene Strukturen und ästhetisch-soziale Handlungsfelder*, ed. Rüdiger Zymner and Manfred Engel (Paderborn: Mentis, 2004); and "Archäologie des Geistes. Theorien des wilden Denken um 1900," in *Das schwierige*

In this way, recourse to the figure of the 'primitive' enabled scholars to find a new social function and justification for art, that is, as a way to reconnect with origins, gain acccess to a different kind of thinking, and explore its potentials. Artists did the same by presenting themselves as the spiritual kinsmen of indigenous peoples and other figurations of the 'primitive.' As the artist Paul Klee succinctly puts it,

> For these are primitive beginnings in art, such as one usually finds in ethnographic collections or at home in one's nursery. [...] Parallel phenomena are provided by the works of the mentally diseased; [...]. All this is to be taken very seriously, more seriously than all the public galleries, when it comes to reforming today's art. [This is how far we must go in order to not simply become antiquated.][46]

The 'Primitive' as Literary Utopia

The generation weary of civilization addressed by Weber gladly took up the figure of the 'primitive.' Or, to put it the other way around, the idealizing or utopian primitivism that flourished in the arts from the 1910s to the 1930s expressed the same yearning for (re)enchantment that he notes.[47] Indeed, the arts played a leading role in bringing about a primitivist perspective meant to counter the ills of civilization. This was due first to the dependence of the phantasm of the 'primitive' on aesthetic procedures to illustrate and animate it. Ben Etherington has recently stressed this point: "Owing to its inherently speculative nature, the wish for the primitive could only be realized in the kinesis of aesthetic mak-

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neunzehnte Jahrhundert, ed. Jürgen Barkhoff, Gilbert Carr, and Roger Paulin (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000); as well as Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 197–247.

46 Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee: 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 266. The bracketed sentence of this quote was translated directly from the German text because it was not included in the published translation.

47 Joyce S. Cheng points out the difference between "modernist primitivism of the prewar period" (in Cubism, for example) and the "dialectical and subversive primitivisms of the late 1920s and 1930s," which "did not view aesthetic claims as ends unto themselves so much as tools for critical thinking. The latter discerned the possibility, in contemporary criticism, to dismantle the foundations of Western, post-Enlightenment humanism, especially its legitimation of Reason." Now, "epistemological authority" was lent to "modes of experience" that traditionally had been viewed as the "Other of Reason: childhood, dreams, hallucinations, trance states, and madness" ("Primitivismen," in *Neolithische Kindheit. Kunst in einer falschen Gegenwart*, ed. Anselm Franke and Tom Holert [Zurich: diaphanes, 2018], 185). However, this turn – as I show below – had been made previously in the discourses of the human sciences and study of art, as well as in certain works of literature.

ing."[48] Second, as already noted, artistic activity was deemed a survival of 'primitive thinking.' Whether contemplating or producing art, one already seemed to stand closer to the 'primitive' than in other forms of activity. Finally, those inspired by primitivism considered it their mission to make the primitivistic utopia of a reenchanted world a reality by artistic creation. In a literary context, this meant *bringing about* 'primitive thinking,' its particular relationship to (figurative) language, and the transformation from a disenchanted to a reenchanted world, *in* and *as* literature – and by doing so to potentially reshape reality as well.

Insofar as these literary texts often projected *possible* worlds, thereby situating the 'primitive' in a space of open potential, it is correct to describe them as utopias, as Etherington does. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these literary utopias did not represent an exclusively affirmative stance. Rather, as I will demonstrate in later chapters, they were marked by a high degree of ambivalence, for example states of anxiety and self-loss, as portrayed by Robert Müller (see chapter 7). Furthermore, they head in different directions, in keeping with the different figurations of the 'primitive.' That is, they needed not straightforwardly imagine a different kind of society, but could just as well envisage aesthetic or epistemic utopias that simply concerned other ways of seeing the world. And while the primitivist longing for a magical state of the world often focused on indigenous cultures or a supposedly archaic way of life, it was equally characteristic of them to seek out the 'primitive' among children or to understand it as a hidden *other side* of oneself, as the following brief examples, not all of which can be treated in the book, intend to show. For instance, this other side was understood as an archaic stage of development, reactualized in states of frenzy or intoxication. This is the case in Alfred Kubin's dystopian novel, *Die andere Seite* (1909; *The Other Side,* 1969), where the god/dictator Patera gathers people with deviant behaviors in a "Dream Empire" in the Far East. They regress to an archaic level through collective states of intoxication and annex indigenous practices that open a different perspective onto the world.

Others claimed that modern Europeans had not grown out of, but only neglected their inborn capacity to think differently. By pushing it aside, it follows, they prevented further development of such thinking and forced it to *become* 'primitive' (i. e., undeveloped) in the first place. In this case, the primitivistic utopia involved reactivating this atrophied ability, cultivating it, and using it to improve European civilization. This is the case, for example, in Robert Musil's novelistic reflections on the so-called "other condition," which I deal with in great

48 Ben Etherington, *Literary Primitivism*, xiv.

detail in chapter 8. Closely related to this kind of primitivism is also the "magical Surrealist art."[49] The manifesto André Breton wrote for the movement (*Manifeste du Surréalisme*, 1924) levels a withering critique at dogmatic rationalism, which leaves no room for the imagination and other parts of the psyche. Breton and his associates set out to sound the depths of these stifled aspects of mental life, appealing to the well-known constellation of children, the insane, and archaic societies to foreground other possible ways of seeing the world. By fusing waking life and dream states as well as conscious and unconscious registers of meaning, they aimed to bring forth a higher plane of experience that would capture the "marvelous" essence of the world and make it visible.[50]

By contrast, Carl Einstein, an early proponent of primitivism in *Bebuquin oder die Dilettanten des Wunders* (1912; *Bebuquin, or the Dilettantes of the Miracle*, 2017) and the forerunner of Dada and Surrealism, came in his late work to reject in no uncertain terms the idealist notion that the world could be changed by means of the imagination.[51] Looking back in *Die Fabrikation der Fiktionen* (The Fabrication of Fiction, 1973 [but written 1933–1934]), he writes self-critically,

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49 André Breton, "First Manifesto of Surrealism," trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane, in Breton, *Manifestos of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 29.

50 Breton, "First Manifesto of Surrealism," 14–18. Somewhat unimaginatively, Breton's novel *Nadja* (1928) enlists the exoticizing cliché of a mysterious woman who opens the way for the male narrator to enter primitivist surreality through the transports of inspired madness. The author/narrator deems Nadja – who sees herself as the "mythological character" of "Melusina" (and calls Breton [or his alter-ego] "a god" or "the sun") – "one of those spirits of the air which certain magical practices momentarily permit us to entertain," and she becomes his muse (*Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard [New York: Grove, 1960], 106, 111). Through her mediation, the author/narrator experiences a fusion of dream and reality, a mode of thinking and perception guided by the power of imagination. As is typical for so many works since the age of Romanticism, these flights occur at the expense of the muse herself. (On this common fate of inspiring women, see Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992]). At the end of the tale, the narrator abandons her when she is admitted to an institution. This turn may be read as a critique of the utopia of another kind of thinking or as a rebuke to the society that pathologizes such logic (which is Breton's intention). However, one can also see it as an admission of guilt on the part of the male author/narrator, who encourages his muse to join him in delusional journeys until they finally do her in. (Breton already anticipates and seeks to defend himself against charges of this kind. Nevertheless, as Karl Heinz Bohrer writes, critics early on faulted the author for "aesthetic, indeed factual, cannibalism (Roger Shattuck), … a reproach subsequently reformulated as inhumanity (Peter Bürger)" ("Nachwort," in André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Bernd Schwibs [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002], 153).

51 Here, one sees clear proximity to the so-called Expressionism debate. Einstein's position is related to that of Lukács – whose prominent opponents included Ernst Bloch (discussed below).

> Liberal nominalists, we thought to change the world with signs alone. Ambiguous pictures had made us forget Being, and we believed that a change in imagery would bring about the actual transformation of Being. We had sunk back to archaic magic and infantile fantasy. (The delusion that fiction should provide the starting-point and primary elements of Being. The gap between private, mythical notions and the collective reality at our disposal couldn't be bridged.)[52]

Einstein's critique evokes the primitivist utopia articulated in the works of Breton and Kubin: being able to change the world by simply thinking it or imagining it differently. And his words make something else plain, too: he accuses his younger self and his primitivist contemporaries of having succumbed to mythical thinking in their benighted quest for the 'primitive.' Instead he now casts his support for art serving the proletarian collective and ultimately for the necessity not of dreaming, but of political battle. Einstein says, in other words, that the assumption that reality can be changed through the power of imagination was *already* magical thinking. Thus, in these beliefs magical thinking *had already returned*, even though people still thought they had to seek it out.

At the same time, even in voicing this critique, Einstein still adheres to the primitivistic conviction that art has affinities with the 'primitive': "Something exceptionally conservative seems inherent to art, because vigorous art always takes us back to ancient strata."[53] In other words, for Einstein, surrealist "expectations of art" stem from "its magical-religious prehistory. Under modern conditions, its heightened claims are atavistic."[54] Thus, while Einstein accuses the surrealist movement of having succumbed to mythical thinking, his own critique is itself still located in the paradigm of the 'primitive.'

The Presence of the 'Primitive' in Disenchanted Modernity

With Einstein's remarks in mind, let us return to Weber's "Science as a Vocation." In a "disenchanted world," it seems, everything can be calculated and controlled. Weber writes that "mysterious, unpredictable forces"[55] no longer exist for modern

52 Carl Einstein, *Die Fabrikation der Fiktionen*, ed. Sibylle Penkert (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1973), 32.

53 Carl Einstein, "Berliner Vortrag über den Surrealismus," in Sibylle Penkert, ed., *Carl Einstein. Existenz und Ästhetik. Einführung mit einem Anhang unveröffentlichter Nachlaßtexte* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1970), 61; quoted in Katrin Sello, "Zur 'Fabrikation der Fiktionen,'" in Carl Einstein, *Die Fabrikation der Fiktionen*, ed. Sibylle Penkert (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowolt, 1973), 365.

54 Sello, "Zur 'Fabrikation der Fiktionen,'" 365.

55 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 13.

men and women. Yet it is clear that Weber himself perceives his own times quite differently when he speaks of how "numerous gods of yore, divested of their magic and hence assuming the shape of impersonal forces, rise from their graves, strive for power over our lives, and resume their eternal struggle among themselves."[56] Weber made this declaration in the middle of the First World War, specifically with an eye toward the "conflict" about the "*value* of French and German culture,"[57] which in his estimation did not concern science, economy, or politics so much as an existential "destiny."[58] For "a millennium," Weber asserts, "reliance on the glorious pathos of the Christian ethic had blinded us" to this mythical reality, that is, to the fateful necessity of an overriding struggle commanding human existence, whether one attributes it to "impersonal forces" or "gods."[59] Weber's demand "to look the fate of the age full in the face"[60] then means both to confront the condition of transcendental homelessness and disorientation and to choose one god over another without a sure bearing.

> As long as life is left to itself and is understood on its own terms, it knows only that the conflict between these gods is never-ending. Or, in nonfigurative language, life is about the incompatibility of ultimate *possible* attitudes and hence the inability to ever resolve the conflicts between them. Hence the necessity of *deciding* between them.[61]

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56 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 24. According to Friedrich H. Tenbruck, "this declaration," which "most sociologists [would] consider utter nonsense" shows that the late Weber was convinced that "we are taking leave from thousands of years of history" shaped by "an ethically unified way of life" backed by religion. "Modern man calls only by abstract names on the multiplicity of deities," who "engage in interminable battle on the social and political stage"; now, "decision is only possible through fanaticism," and "moderation takes the form of conformity or apathy. [This is] the point where Weber's sociology breaks down" (412–413). Hans-Peter Müller notes that here, "Weber relies on John Stuart Mill's formula of the polytheism of values and the eternal battle of the gods" (Hans Peter Müller, "Wissenschaft als Beruf," in *Max Weber Handbuch*, ed. Hans-Peter Müller and Steffen Sigmund [Stuttgart: Metzler, 2020], 263). Matthias Bormuth refers to this as Weber's "antique-Christian metaphorics" ("Max Weber im Lichte Nietzches," in Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf: Mit zeitgenössischen Resonanzen und einem Gespräch mit Dieter Henrich*, ed. Matthias Bormuth [Berlin: Matthes and Seitz, 2018], 26–27).
57 The backdrop here includes the nationalistic and implicitly racist assumption, widespread in Germany after the First World War, of conflict between "civilization" (largely "French" in the nineteenth century and increasingly "English/North American" in the twentieth), which was thought to be "superficial" and "alienated," and German "culture," which counted as "deep" and "authentic"; cf. Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (1918; *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, 1983) or Werner Sombart's *Händler und Helden* (1915; Merchants and Heroes).
58 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 23.
59 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 24.
60 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 24
61 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 27.

Thus, in Weber's own experience it is *not* predictability that characterizes disenchanted modernity. Instead, it is the feeling to be once again at the mercy of "impersonal forces," which, because they surpass human understanding, are experienced as ineluctable fatality. No possibility for controlling circumstances exists, only the bare necessity of opting for one of two mutually hostile poles of life; the result can only be tragic insofar as "serving [one] particular god [...] will *give offense to every other god*."[62]

Weber thus diagnoses disenchantment, and at the same time – albeit without reflecting on the matter along dialectical lines – he enacts its turn into a mythically experienced world.[63] In this light, the rising generation's longing for transcendental sources of comfort and reassurance is entirely logical. Calls for prophecy and the balms of religious community speak volumes about how these young people saw their world: however "disenchanted" it may have seemed, the world had become mythical to them. Notably, from this it follows that the 'primitive' was simultaneously relevant on two registers: as both an *archaic* utopia and as an image of the *present*. The 'primitive' had not come and gone – and this is a crucial point – it was extant in the here and now as the *presence and reality of modernity itself*.

This presence of the 'primitive' was conceived in three different ways at the time. A model inspired by depth psychology saw it as the collective return of remnants from an unfinished past. A second, synchronistic, and anti-evolutionary model posited the co-presence of 'modern' and 'primitive' forces in human existence and therefore questioned the modern self-image.[64] Finally a dialectical

62 Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 26.

63 Hartmut Lehmann refers to this passage when looking for evidence that Weber's work "come[s] very close to the idea of re-enchantment" (*Die Entzauberung der Welt*, 14). Thus, according to the recollections of Karl Löwith, who had attended the lecture, Weber's appearance and his discourse exuded the "somber glow" of a "prophet" (qtd. in Matthias Bormuth, "Max Weber im Lichte Nietzsches," in *Wissenschaft als Beruf: Mit zeitgenössischen Resonanzen und einem Gespräch mit Dieter Henrich* [Berlin: Matthes und Seitz, 2018], 7). See also Bormuth's question of whether Weber himself had also given "catheter-prophecies" (19), as well as his numerous references to Weber's pathos-laden style (e.g., 27).

64 Current scholarship in the fields of cultural and literary history argues along similar lines. Hartmut Böhme, for instance, claims that it is necessary to incorporate "magic" into the theory of modernity, that is, to not leave today's "fetishes, idols, and cultic forms" out of the equation (*Fetischismus und Kultur: Eine andere Theorie der Moderne* [Hamburg: Reinbek, 2006], 23). Iris Därmann concludes her study by calling for scholars to take not only European tradition into account, but also to "consult foreign philosophies" in equal measure (*Fremde Monde der Vernunft: Die ethnologische Provokation der Philosophie* [Paderborn: Fink, 2005], 725). Erhard Schüttpelz voices a plea for a perspective that connects to Latour's thesis that "We have never been modern": if "the moderns" have conceived "the foreignness of worlds outside

model viewed the presence of the 'primitive' as the mythological result of a misguided Enlightenment. Here, the 'primitive' no longer represents modernity's origin but its present, no longer constitutes modernization's opposite but its consequence. The 'primitive' is no longer seen as original but mediated, not as nature but culture, not as imago but reality. In this sense in 1934 Theodor W. Adorno writes of the "coincidence of the modern with the archaic" to Walter Benjamin:

> I have come to realize that just as the modern is the most ancient, so too the archaic itself is a function of the new: it is thus first produced historically as the archaic, and to that extent it is dialectical in character and not 'pre-historical,' but rather the exact opposite.[65]

For Weber, the presence of the 'primitive' had led to a resigned mythical worldview, in which people were caught between warring powers with only the possibility of making decisions that would ultimately prove tragic.[66] Einstein, the erstwhile celebrant of primitivism confronting the rise of fascism in Europe some ten years later, responded to the same circumstance by adopting a cooler attitude toward art, which he hoped would stand in the service of the proletarian collective and communist revolution. Still others, e. g., Robert Müller and Gottfried Benn (see chapter 7), used the ongoing vigor of the 'primitive' to affirm a barbarian status quo: the 'will to power' is simply the 'essence' of human existence and society.

Along these lines, but from the opposing political standpoint, Alfred Döblin indicts the "false primitivity" of National Socialism in his essay, "Prometheus und das Primitive" (1938, Prometheus and the Primitive). Cold-blooded pursuit of power, he argues, leads to "estrangement and brutalization" in social relations: "Here we have barbarism as the result of a denatured, Promethean im-

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their own through a cosmological time-barrier, other cultures and societies" have done the same (Schüttpelz, *Die Moderne im Spiegel des Primitiven*, 410).

65 Theodor Adorno to Walter Benjamin, 5 April 1934, in *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 38. Christopher Bracken in his reading of this quote stresses the inscription of the archaic (or magical) in modern forms of critique; thus, "Benjamin suggests that a properly 'magical' criticism does not decipher the meaning of the artwork. Instead it brings it back to life. Interpretation is therefore animation" (*Magical Criticism: The Recourse of Savage Philosophy*. [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007], 17). As will be shown in Chapter 9, the dialectical moment goes missing in this account.

66 Cf. Wolfgang Mommsen: "The ultimate message of Max Weber's sociology was resignation; he offered no answer to the great ethical questions. The demagification of the world, the universal process of rationalization, which Weber described and fatefully affirmed, resulted ironically in the emergence of a new irrationalism" (*Max Weber and German Politics: 1890–1920*, trans. Michael S. Steinberg [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984], 66).

pulse."[67] Indeed, Döblin originally intended to call his piece "Das wahre und das falsche Primitive" (The True and the False Primitive).[68] The "false primitive," which is synonymous with "barbarism," emerges when man's excessive control over nature switches over into rule by violence; its corollary is an "illusory mysticism" (*Scheinmystik*) that glorifies the "absolute state."[69] This barbarism invokes "origins" only to legitimize its rule; its goal is appropriation. Döblin counters such a vision with a utopian appeal to the "true primitive." Such a different turn to "origins" would involve readiness to give one's self up. This move would even be required inasmuch as the primal state, as Döblin imagines it, occupies a space *before* individuation.[70] Encounter with the other – whether a foreign people or nature itself – is then a matter of participation, not acquisition.[71]

Whereas Döblin only hints at the need to preserve the critical and utopian impulse against the negative presence of the 'primitive,' the philosopher Ernst Bloch makes it a political demand. In essays written between 1929 and 1935, most of which are collected in *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (1935; *Heritage of Our Time*s, 1991), Bloch endeavors to think in dialectical terms, that is, to wrest a utopian 'primitive' from the archaic 'primitive,' thereby saving it from the fascists.[72]

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67 Alfred Döblin, "Prometheus und das Primitive (1938)," in *Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft* (Freiburg: Walter, 1972), 364.

68 Döblin, Note on "Prometheus und das Primitive," *Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft*, 508.

69 Döblin, "Prometheus und das Primitive," 365.

70 Döblin, "Prometheus und das Primitive," 349.

71 This view finds expression in the first book of the *Amazonas* trilogy, which Döblin wrote in the years immediately preceding the essay's publication. Here, the author crafts a mythical narrative of his own (on this, see Vera Hildenbrandt, *Europa in Alfred Döblins Amazonas-Trilogie: Diagnose eines kranken Kontinents* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011], 209–233), "transforming himself," as Jorge Luis Borges would write in a 1938 review, "into his own creatures" (Borges, "Die Fahrt ins Land ohne Tod, de Alfred Döblin," quoted in the afterword to Alfred Döblin, *Amazonas. Romantrilogie*, 234). The same dynamic is also at work in the events narrated. Thus, the first European soldiers to penetrate the jungle adopt the ways of its inhabitants to such a degree that their captain, worried they are losing their European identity, remarks that "it is their attachment to the brown-skinned people among whom the soldiers live, the life with the animals and on the water; and the priests are quite right: it's like the people are under the spell of the [natives]" (Döblin, *Amazonas*, 175. See Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift*, 312).

72 Bloch was not alone in such an effort. Thus, only a few years later in France, members of the Collège de Sociologie undertook something similar: "The forms of a mythopoiesis constituting the world, as reconstructed in cultural-philosophical and ethnological research, were supposed to wrest the force of the collective from the hands of fascists" (Franke and Holert, "Einführung," in *Neolithische Kindheit*, 10).

In the essay "Zusammenfassender Übergang" (1935, "Summary Transition," 1990) Bloch declares, "Not all people exist in the same Now." A materialist and teleological view of history prompts him to locate certain social groups (e.g., peasants, lower-level office staff) in a temporal dimension that is out of sync with that of other groups: "depending on where someone stands physically, above all in terms of class, [there] he has his times."[73] Bloch stresses that "*real non-contemporaneity*"[74] stands at issue here – anachronistic modes of production and consciousness. For him, this anachronism is also responsible for the masses of clerks and other low-level employees turning to National Socialism, not to Communism, in the late Weimar Republic: "Impulses and reserves from pre-capitalist times and superstructures are then at work, [...] which a sinking class revives [...] in its consciousness."[75] Bloch describes such a return of what belongs to the distant past by way of the paradigm of the 'primitive,' thereby participating in the allochronistic discourse of primitivism. For example, he notes that the "excess" of nationalism in his time calls to mind an "atavistic 'participation mystique,' of the attachment of the primitive man to the soil which contains the spirits of his ancestors." He also notes an "orgiastic hatred of reason, [...] in which – with a non-contemporaneity which becomes extraterritoriality in places – negro drums rumble and central Africa rises."[76]

For Bloch, then, the present of the interwar period had fallen under the spell of a form of the 'primitive' that displays all the negative traits warned about in evolutionist theories of the late nineteenth century: regression, irrationality, violence, and superstition. This primitivist superstructure, he argues, is unsuited to resolve the real contradictions of social life; it only obscures the "rift" "between the non-contemporaneous contradiction and capitalism."[77] Nevertheless, Bloch hopes to turn things around. For one, he does not wish to abandon the "'archaically' anticapitalist" forces to the fascists.[78] Secondly, he insists that the "not yet Past" – in other words, the 'primitive' – still harbors "subversive and utopian el-

73 Ernst Bloch, "Summary Transition: Non-Contemporaneity and Obligation to its Dialectic," in *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 97.

74 Bloch, "Summary Transition," 106.

75 Bloch, "Summary Transition," 105–106.

76 Bloch, "Summary Transition," 102. He also notes "non-contemporaneous" phenomena emerging from "even 'deeper' backwardness, namely from *barbarism*"; now, "needs and resources of olden times consequently break through [...] like magma through a thin crust," summoning forth the "darkest primitivization, of a totally non-contemporaneous, indeed disparate insanity," which might also be called "anachronistic degeneration" (107, 109).

77 Bloch, "Summary Transition,"110.

78 Bloch, "Summary Transition," 113.

ements,"[79] and that it is up to the coming "socialist revolution" to "recover[]" that "primitiveness concretely."[80]

Thus, in Bloch's thinking, the 'primitive' bears not only a reactionary but also a progressive signature.[81] He understands the 'primitive' as the product of a fertile imagination in a time of crisis, in which the yearning for the archaic is actually the desire for a better future.[82] According to Bloch, the 'primitive' (as a figure for "the 'real' *new Adam*"[83]) does not come from the past; though related to backward elements ("real non-contemporaneity") in society, it represents a task for the future.[84] However, in order to "recover" this 'primitive' potential from the unredeemed past, its utopian elements must first be freed from their "banishment" to false archaism.[85] Therefore its substance must not be grasped irrationally, but with the "new, more concrete rationalism" of socialism.[86] Whether or not the utopian content of the 'primitive' can be secured is thus ultimately a class question: "only a class with a future can use the 'distant fragrance of the *horizon*' and the 'images' which stand in it, and blast out the encapsulated element: namely the future significance of the images encapsulated into an undischarged past."[87]

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79 Bloch, "Summary Transition," 114. See also 115. For support, he invokes Karl Marx, according to whom the "'social childhood of humanity'" represents a "stimulus" that capitalism has not quieted (114).

80 Bloch, "Imago as Appearance from the 'Depths': Romanticism of Diluvium," in *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 317.

81 Its "emergence" occurs "in all times of genuine revolution" (Bloch, "Philosophies of Unrest, Process, Dionysus," in *Heritage of Our Times*, 316).

82 Bloch's essay, "Die Felstaube, das Neandertal und der wirkliche Mensch" (The Rock Dove, the Neanderthal, and the Real Human, 1929) in *Literarische Aufsätze. Werkausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965), makes this point particularly clear. Many contemporaries (e. g., Ludwig Klages, Carl Jung, Edgar Dacqué, and Gottfried Benn), he argues, want to go back "into primeval forests," which, however, have never really existed (462). In fact, Bloch stresses, cultivated individuals at all times and places have always seen their "negative image" in people living in a supposed state of nature or irrational Dionysian transports. Such images have never said anything about primordial reality or nascent humanity at all; instead, they bear witness to their own day, at times when the wish for a different future has arisen.

83 Bloch, "Die Felstaube, das Neandertal und der wirkliche Mensch," 468.

84 "[It is meaningless] to look for a *fact* [*ein Gegebenes*] when, from the beginning, it was a task [*ein Aufgegebenes*]" (Bloch, "Die Felstaube, das Neandertal und der wirkliche Mensch," 469).

85 The "utopia of the first 'beginning' seeks to escape from [...] mere 'primeval times'" (Bloch, "Final Form: Romantic Hook-Formation," in *Heritage of Our Times*, 150).

86 Bloch, "Loch Ness, die Seeschlange und Dacqués Urweltsage," in *Literarische Aufsätze*, 470.

87 Bloch, "Imago as Appearance," 308. Etherington (*Literary Primitivism*, xv, 8–9, 33) overlooks this matter when he invokes Bloch's "nonsynchronicity," failing to note his historical materialist

I have reported on Bloch's thought in such detail to demonstrate two important aspects of 1920s–1930s primitivist discourse: First, the 'primitive' of the present and the critical-utopian 'primitive' do not simply oppose each other as dichotomies; they are dialectically intertwined. Second, even this dialectical perspective retains the standing paradigm of the 'primitive' by assuming non-simultaneity between different populations or by thinking of a better future under the spell of the 'primitive.'

So far, I hope to have shown that the 'primitive' held an abiding fascination for European modernity as a narrative of origin, an instrument for critiquing civilization, a literary utopia, and a diagnosis of the present. While doing so, I have also reconceptualized the category of the 'primitive' as a scientific paradigm and a figure of thought. In what follows I will discuss the relationship between my literary and scholarly sources, thereby proposing a third reconceptualization of the category of the 'primitive' as a scientific *poème*.

Two Cultures: The 'Primitive' as *Poème*

In this study, I understand primitivism as a discourse that, on the one hand, was *produced by* certain texts, disciplines, and artistic practices and, on the other, itself *generated* the latter insofar as it shaped their questions, answers, scenarios, and blind spots. Even those texts from the late 1920s and 1930s that already take a critical look at the widespread fascination with the 'primitive' remain trapped in this very same paradigm.[88] In this book I therefore adopt the more removed perspective of discourse analysis. The task is not to substantiate, condemn, or rehabilitate the category of the 'primitive.' Rather, the study at hand seeks to understand the function of this phantasm for the thinking of modernity.

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understanding of history. For Bloch, "remnants" are positive only insofar as they, however false or distorted, point to a future that is not *anti-* so much as *post-*capitalist.

88 This is also the case for later critics from the ranks of ethnology – for instance, Lévi-Strauss, who remains within the paradigm of the 'primitive' in spite of the critique he makes of it (cf. Francis L. K. Hsu, "Rethinking the Concept 'Primitive,'" *Current Anthropology* 5, no. 3 [1964]: 169–178; Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society* [London: Routledge, 1988]; and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997], 95–140). It also applies, as Victor Li has convincingly demonstrated, to the neo-primitivistic anti-primitivism of postmodern theories, which are supposed to have abandoned the concept of the 'primitive' but hold fast to the phantasm of the 'radical Other'; see Li, "Primitivism and Postcolonial Literature," in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), and *The Neo-Primitivist Turn: Critical Reflections on Alterity, Culture, and Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

When I say discourse analysis, this discourse includes literary as well as scientific sources – for both participate equally in the discourse of primitivism. Although I attend to both literary and scholarly texts under the single heading of the 'primitive,' it is important to note that by the turn of the century it was already standard practice to distinguish between the "two cultures" of natural scientists and literary intellectuals.[89] The literary and scientific sources treated in this book try to do justice to these two different horizons and expectations. As Nicolas Pethes has shown, different conceptions of knowledge prevailed in each "culture":[90] the "natural-scientific idea of empirically verifiable hypotheses" stood opposed to the "hermeneutic concept of historical understanding." Each realm also had its own methods and aims: empirical analysis and schematic representation with the goal of formulating general laws in the natural sciences versus describing the singularity of phenomena to account for individual expression and aesthetic autonomy in literature.[91]

In order to mark their distance from the *belles-lettres* and secure their status as indispensible disciplines, the young and inchoate fields of ethnology and psychology in particular, but also the study of language and the theory of art, sought to acquire the air of the 'hard sciences' wherever possible. To take just one example, Ernst Grosse's *Die Anfänge der Kunst* (1894; *The Beginnings of Art*, 1897) proposed to sound the laws governing the "nature and life of art" by empirical means starting "at the bottom" – that is, with the study of artifacts made by 'children of nature' (*Naturvölker*).[92] For the same reason, researchers in the fields of developmental psychology and psychopathology conducted laboratory experiments, collected data, and wrote up case histories in order to demonstrate their rigor. Conversely, literature of the period sought to affirm its integrity by distinguishing itself from scientific culture. Robert Musil, for instance, made a point of holding academic psychology at arm's length in order to plumb the depths of

89 This turn of phrase was coined in 1959 by the English literary historian Charles Percy Snow in a lecture of the same name: "I believe the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups" (*The Two Cultures* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959], 4) consisting of literary intellectuals and natural scientists. Of course, this thesis prompted a counter-reaction – e. g., on the part of F.R. Leavis, who pointed out that his colleague was overlooking how scientific-technological culture also belongs to the humanist sphere in the West (Frank Raymond Leavis, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1962]).

90 On the prehistory of the debate, see Nicolas Pethes, "Literatur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte. Ein Forschungsbericht," *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 28, no. 1 (2003): 186 – 191.

91 Pethes, "Literatur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte," 182, 195.

92 Ernst Grosse, *The Beginnings of Art* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1987), 18, 20.

the human soul and the emotions that rage within it in ways that refuse schematization.

Despite scholars' efforts to prove the scientific nature of their fields of endeavor, however, the constructed and imaginary quality of the 'primitive' is obvious. To use the term put into circulation by Gaston Bachelard, it stands at the heart of an epistemological "reverie," that is, a fiction of origination shaped by the affects, needs, and ideas of scientists that is largely devoid of scientific basis. Bachelard writes in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*,

> We are going to study a problem that no one has managed to approach objectively, one in which the initial charm of the object is so strong that it still has the power to warp the minds of the clearest thinkers and to keep bringing them back to the poetic fold in which dreams replace thought and poems [*poèmes*] conceal theorems.[93]

In contrast to the *théorème* and "objective thought" in general, Bachelard defines the *poème* through its affinities with creative language, dreaming, and "[childlike] wonder."[94] What the *théorème* accomplishes in the field of objective science, the *poème* performs in the realm of a type of pre-scientific knowledge that is encumbered by affective and unconscious impulses. Bachelard also likens it to a "psychology of primitiveness."

> In order to construct a psychology of *primitiveness* it is sufficient, then, to consider an essentially new piece of scientific knowledge and to follow the reactions of non-scientific, ill-educated minds that are ignorant of the methods of effective scientific discovery.[95]

While "constrained by the thought of his times" to apply the scheme of the "primitive,"[96] Bachelard's view also subverts commonplace notions because it ascribes primitiveness to European scholars. In other words, in fashioning the *poème* of the 'primitive,' these scholars themselves exhibit, in Bachelard's terms, a "primitive" mindset.

Bachelard's talk of scientific reverie draws the human sciences into the orbit of literature and sheds light on their rhetorical features. As I will show, considerations of genre (e. g., case history, diary, travelogue, mythical tale) in scientific texts are particularly significant here, as are patterns of argument – for instance,

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93 Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, trans. Alan C. M. Ross (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 2.

94 Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 1.

95 Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 25.

96 Erich Hoerl, *Sacred Channels: The Archaic Illusion of Communication*, trans. Nils F. Schott (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 36.

analogy, appeals to origins, and levels of meaning extending from the literal to the figurative. Also, an analytical and argumentative approach is often combined with narrative stylization. Finally, due notice will be taken of tropes and figures of speech, which not only embellish scholarly works but also shape their conceptual content.

Characteristics like these affirm the truism that literary and scientific texts alike are rhetorically determined and that there are fewer categorical boundaries to be drawn between them than the "two cultures" tradition would like. But of course this also applies the other way around. The literary texts dealt with in this book react intensely and in different ways to the sciences of their time. Basically, one can distinguish four types of models conceptualizing the relationship of literature to scientific discourse:[97] models of influence, when scientific topics appear in literature; models of reflection, when literary texts criticize the sciences for their rationalistic and abstract conceptions; models of formal relationship, when procedures such as experiment are adapted by literature and modified for its use; and finally the model of co-evolution, which understands both literature and the sciences as two forms of representation that have grown from one discursive terrain. The present study is mostly based on the fourth model. Nevertheless, these sources will also be used to investigate precisely how the two forms of discourse differ and to what extent literature may play the role of a counter-discourse.

Literary Primitivism

Until fairly recently, scholars have not dedicated much discussion to literary primitivism. This is because studies of primitivism were informed not by the history of discourse so much as by a tradition of art history devoted to formalist modes of critique. At least since Robert Goldwater's *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (1938), and certainly since William Rubin's *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984), discussions of primitivism had centered on how European artists took the artifacts of tribal societies in West Africa and Oceania as inspiration for their own creations.[98]

97 As suggested by Nicolas Pethes in "Literatur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte."

98 William Rubin, ed., *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art. Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984). Rubin's exhibition catalog was not exempt from criticism; see, for example, James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). In the nineteenth century, "primitive art" still referred to European art of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance.

Needless to say, it has proven difficult to detect this form of primitivism in literature. A linguistic barrier separated Europeans from the indigenous verbal arts of the above-mentioned tribal societies. Very few writers could understand the relevant languages, and those translations that were available failed to take the full range of meaning into account (to say nothing of stylistic peculiarities). As Erhard Schüttpelz has observed, the supposed "self-evidence" of visual art stood in contrast to "language itself" in the literary realm.[99] Attempts were made to rework oral traditions from Africa in French or German (e. g., Blaise Cendrars's *Anthologie Nègre* [1921; *The African Saga*, 1927] or Einstein's *Afrikanische Legenden* [African Legends, 1925]) and to imitate indigenous lyrical forms (Einstein's "Drei Negerlieder" [Three Negro Songs, 1916] or Tristan Tzara's "Negerlieder" [Negro Songs, 1916 – 1917]). Yet such efforts were small in number, and they hardly comprised a movement.

More recently, however, other notions have begun to establish themselves in art history that break from the formalist conception of primitivism advocated by Rubin. They have granted more room for developments in literature analogous to those in the visual arts by broadening the scope of inquiry in terms of the definition of primitivism and the diversity of artistic approaches to it available in the early twentieth century. Scholarly literature along these lines stresses that the label of 'primitive' at the time was applied not just to tribal artifacts from West Africa and Oceania, but also to other foreign cultural products – and, significantly, to the art of medieval (or popular) tradition, children, and the mentally ill.[100] In this light, the artists of Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) group, for example, merit attention because the exhibitions organized by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc (as well as the almanac documenting them) included children's, medieval, and folk art to suggest how modernists might reorient their own creative activity. (The passage by Paul Klee quoted above is representative in this regard.)

The first exhibition of primitivistic works was organized in 1910 by Roger Fry (Grafton Galleries, London), featuring Gauguin, Picasso, and others. In this context, Fry engaged intensively with children's drawings, which thereby acquired a certain predominance in the aesthetics of the avant-garde. See Roger Fry, "Children's Drawings," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 30, no.171 (1917).

99 Schüttpelz, *Die Moderne im Spiegel des Primitiven*, 360.

100 Karla Bilang has aptly noted, "For [these] poets and sculptors, 'primitive' is a fluctuating term, which, in keeping with its etymology ('elemental,' 'original'), applies to a vast complex of non-classical, or non-professional, forms of expression such as those from early civilizations, archaic times, and ethnographic art, as well as to naïve painting, European popular tradition, and children's creations" (*Bild und Gegenbild: Das Ursprüngliche in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990], 8).

Additionally, alternative approaches to primitivism in art history stress that attraction to 'primitive' art belonged to a larger trend of interest in 'primitive cultures' in general.[101] Therefore, not only those currents of European art that took certain objects as models but also those that drew inspiration from a supposedly 'primitive worldview' should be understood as primitivistic. As Colin Rhodes puts it,

> there is a large body of Primitivist art, [...] which bears no direct relationship to primitive art – its Primitivism lies in the artists' interest in the primitive mind and it is usually marked by attempts to gain access to what are considered to be more fundamental modes of thinking and seeing.[102]

Thus, in addition to the formalist, analytical perspective exemplified by Rubin (which focuses on Cubism), other currents, such as the perception of reality extolled by Dada and Surrealism, have recently come into view.[103]

This broader understanding of primitivism is fruitful for literary study. For one, including European cultural productions eliminates the language problem: folk tales, works by schizophrenics, children's stories, and medieval writings admit comprehension more readily and lend themselves to adaptation more easily. Secondly, shifting the perspective from artifacts to cultures (or, alternatively, to 'primitive' worldviews and ways of thinking) is especially significant for literature. This is not just because of the concomitant thesis that tropological language stands at the origin of such thought, but also because this approach allows literature to play to one of its strengths, its ability to carry out and reflect on 'primitive thinking' as constructed and realized by discourses of its time.

Aside from the alternative conceptions of primitivism proposed by art historians, the opening of literary studies to the *discursive history* of the 'primitive' has also brought literary texts into view as part of a broader 'Western primitivism.' From the perspective of discursive history, the question is no longer what distinguishes primitivism in the literary and visual arts, but what relationship literary primitivism entertains with wider discourse on the 'primitive.' Thus, in her pioneering study, *Gone Primitive* (1990), Marianna Torgovnick explores how literature participates in an all-encompassing "primitivist discourse" that, while

101 Cf. Cheng, "Primitivismen," who finds a change in objective from the modernist primitivism of the prewar period to primitivism as an instrument of critical thinking in the interwar period.
102 Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 7.
103 As a matter of course, recent studies, such as Susanne Leeb's *Die Kunst der Anderen*, make this perspective their starting point and incorporate the insights of discourse analysis and postcolonial scholarship (22–24).

"fundamental to the Western sense of self and Other," makes "the primitive" mean "whatever Euro-Americans want it to be."[104] In turn, scholars like Erhard Schüttpelz and Sven Werkmeister have foregrounded the media history of primitivism.[105] Thus, Schüttpelz's *Die Moderne im Spiegel des Primitiven* (Modernism in the Mirror of the Primitive, 2005) shows how from the very beginning discourse about the 'primitive' has had a literary cast. Modernist texts carry on an established genre tradition exemplified by Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, which serves the "representation of foreign experiences"[106] and features the figure of the "primitive philosopher," who "affirms and translates a foreign claim to truth."[107] Finally, Etherington's *Literary Primitivism* (2017) stresses the *speculative* impulse underlying literary constructions of the 'primitive,' that is, the fact that it is preceded by primitivism: "If we assume that ideas [...] of the primitive prefigure primitivizing idealization, we have put the cart before the horse."[108] Etherington is interested less in general features of discourse about the 'primitive,' however, than in how literary texts attempt to realize the utopian project they promise.

Primitive Thinking (an earlier version of which appeared in German in 2013 under the title *Primitives Denken. Wilde, Kinder und Wahnsinnige in der literarischen Moderne*) takes a somewhat different angle by focusing on epistemological primitivism, how it was shaped by the human sciences of the early twentieth century, and its relevance for the theory and practice of the arts at that time. The paradigm of the 'primitive' informed the search for the beginnings and essence of humanity as well as scientific interest in fundamentally other ways of thinking. These enterprises were referenced in discourse on the arts, and literature and art in general came to be seen as a contemporary preserve of 'primitive thinking.' Along the same lines, aesthetic products were elevated to a source of knowledge on human origins and treated as the first step on the utopian path of embracing the 'primitive' and rejecting or reforming modern rationality. It is no wonder, then, that self-reflection was a key characteristic of primitivistic literature of the day, as it was concerned with the question of what literature aware of its affinity with the 'primitive' could or should achieve. This also meant reflecting on the dialectics of the 'primitive,' which involved not so much origins, essence, or utopia as much as the actual historical conditions of a society that

104 Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive,* 8, 9.

105 Sven Werkmeister's *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift* explores primitivism as a "reflection on and of the conditions of [literary production] in the age of technological media" (27).

106 Schüttpelz, *Die Moderne im Spiegel des Primitiven*, 390.

107 Schüttpelz, *Die Moderne im Spiegel des Primitiven*, 365.

108 Etherington, *Literary Primitivism*, 7.

was about to embrace fascism. Here, too, questions arose concerning art under the sign of the 'primitive': does it pave the way for the rise of fascism (e. g., in the sense of Döblin's and Bloch's criticism described above) or does it open a space for critical reflection? Thus, realizing 'primitive thinking' in and as literature also implied questioning it and potentially constituting a counter-discourse. This, not only insofar as these literary texts claim autonomy from the general discourse on the 'primitive,' but also because they develop modes of critically engaging with modernity's longing for the 'primitive.'

The book is divided into three parts: The first (chapters 2–4) treats scientific discourse on 'primitive thinking' in ethnology, developmental psychology, and psychopathology and addresses the literary aspects of such texts, namely their uses of analogies based on temporal schemes (survival, recapitulation, and regression), of core motifs (e. g., community, play, and delusion), and of a rhetoric of 'first beginnings.' The second part (chapters 5–6) examines theories on the origins of art, language, and metaphor that make use of the human sciences' theses on the affinity between 'primitive thinking' and artistic creation. On the basis of works by Robert Müller, Gottfried Benn, Robert Musil, and Walter Benjamin, the third part (chapters 7–9) examines how, in German literature of the 1910s to 1930s, indigenous cultures, children, and the mentally ill were treated as figures of 'primitive thought' and became the starting point for imperialist and proto-fascist deliria of progress, self-critical utopias of a different rationality, sentimental fantasies of regression, and dialectical transformations of 'primitive thinking,' each accompanied by renewals of literary language and form. As much as the four authors differ in their handling of the discourse of primitivism, Müller and Benn's reactionary engagement with 'primitive thinking' contrast starkly with efforts by Musil and Benjamin to combine the critique of instrumental reason with a critique of a cult of origins that attempts to make the 'primitive' its own. It is only against the background of such a criticism that a productive engagement with the discourse of 'primitive thinking' becomes possible.