Tandeta (Trash): Bruno Schulz and the Micropolitics of Everyday Life

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> How to express this in words? Where other towns developed into economies, evolved into statistics, quantified themselves—ours regressed into essence.
>
> —Bruno Schulz, "The Republic of Dreams"

A Metaphysics of Provincial Matter

Bruno Schulz (1892–1942) probably does not seem like a prime candidate for the title of Poland's most important twentieth-century writer. After all, his combined output was slim—just two collections of short stories; a manuscript for a big novel of ideas, *The Messiah*, lost in the fires of the Shoah; another volume, a dream book of illustrated nightmares and erotic longings; assorted sketches and portraits; a few reviews of his contemporaries' novels; musings on the nature of art and the tasks of artists; a handful of letters; and a cotranslation of Franz Kafka.[1] He lived and died where he was born, in Drohobycz, a provincial outpost of what had at the time been Europe's most provincial empire (the Austrian) and then became one of interwar Europe's most ambitious—though no less provincial—arrivistes (reborn Poland). Over the course of his life a subject of and to three empires (the Austrian, the Soviet, and, briefly, the German National Socialist) and one parliamentary republic (the Second, or interwar, Polish), Schulz for the most part lived a quiet life, a life of interiority, but a life nonetheless cut short one late fall afternoon by a Nazi bullet. Apart from the curious legacy (or, if one prefers, the storied afterlife) of a number of his visual works—especially the drawings and paintings he created under duress for his Nazi "protector" between 1941 and 1942—Schulz's life engendered no great controversies.[2] Apart from a fleeting romance with

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1. See Dorota Głowacka's interview with Jerzy Ficowski, "Interview in Warsaw, July 3, 1993," in Czeslaw Z. Prokopczyk, ed., *Bruno Schulz: New Documents and Interpretations* (New York, 1999), 55–57; and Jerzy Ficowski, "W oczekiwaniu na Mesjasza: Czy w archiwum KGB znajdują się rękopisy Brunona Schulza?," *Polityka*, no. 46, November 19, 1992, 8. See also Brian R. Banks, *Muse and Messiah: The Life, Imagination, and Legacy of Bruno Schulz (1892–1942)* (Ashby-de-la-Zouch, 2006), 166–71; and Jerzy Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice: Bruno Schulz i jego mitologia*, rev. ed. (Kraków, 1967; Sejny, 2002); in English as *Regions of the Great Heresy: Bruno Schulz, A Biographical Portrait*, trans. Theodosia Robertson (New York, 2003).

2. In 2009, the Yad Vashem Museum of Holocaust Art organized an exhibition devoted to the murals, "Bruno Schulz: Wall Painting under Coercion." See the curatorial note, dated February 17, 2009, at www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/pressroom/pressreleases/

a grande dame of Warsaw's literary society, he was involved in no scandals of note.[3] In an era when Polish creative artists were frequently courted by various agencies of the resurrected state, and leaned on to reify its visions and ambitions through their work, Schulz remained relatively neutral: no pamphlets staunchly advocating nationalist causes, patiently explicating the social democratic ones, or stridently justifying the communist ones' historical necessity—to offer only a few representative examples—can be traced back to his pen.[4] (Similarly, no dizzying visions of a luminous future Poland can be tracked to his paintbrush and easel.) For the most part, aside from several intensely personal engagements—such as his epistolary and, for a time, romantic relationship with the Lwów-based Yiddish-Polish philosopher and experimental poet Debora Vogel—Schulz stayed away from the major avant-garde circles of the time, even as its members exalted and pursued him.[5] We still do not (and, given the destruction of physical evidence and the scattering of witnesses wrought by the war and the Holocaust, likely never will) possess a satisfactory picture of what Schulz may have thought of any number of the big issues of his day, including Poland's regained independence after over a century of political nonexistence, the epoch-defining Polish-Soviet War of 1920, or the fraught question of assimilation of Jews and other minorities in the reborn republic.[6] He was also murky, self-ironic, or entirely silent on

pr_details.asp?cid=114 (last accessed July 30, 2015). For a more detailed discussion of the "Schulz affair," see also Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak, *Schulzowskie marginalia* (Lublin, 2007), 143–62. Jerzy Jarzębski is perhaps the first critic to refer to Felix Landau as Schulz's "protector" (*protektor*), in Jerzy Jarzębski, *Schulz* (Wrocław, 1999), 81–87.

3. Unlike nearly all of his Polish literary colleagues, it should be added. For discussions of Schulz's contacts and "entanglements," literary and romantic, see Jaroslaw Anders, *Between Fire and Sleep: Essays on Modern Polish Poetry and Prose* (New Haven, 2009), 5–12.

4. On the other hand, in 1938 he did accept the Golden Laurel from the Polish Literature Association (Polska Akademia Literatury). He also penned a study about the cult of personality of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, along with two reviews of works of poetry and prose about Piłsudski in the wake of the marshal's death. See W. Bolecki, J. Jarzębski, and S. Rosiek, eds., *Słownik szulcowski* (Gdańsk, 2003), 263–64; and Thomas Anessi, "The Great Heresy of the Varsovian Center," in Dieter De Bruyn and Kris Van Heuckelom, eds., *(Un)masking Bruno Schulz: New Combinations, Further Fragmentations, Ultimate Reintegrations* (Amsterdam, 2009), 401, 411–15.

5. Thomas Anessi offers the interesting counterpoint that Schulz's contacts and occasional collaboration with members of the avant-garde Skamander group in Warsaw (Julian Tuwim in particular) constituted a relationship of convenience that gave him access to publication venues in Warsaw-based journals. See Anessi, "The Great Heresy of the Varsovian Center," 399–406. However, Schulz was never formally linked with Skamander.

Vogel was the primary sounding board for Schulz's early ideas, especially on the demiurgic aspect of the creative act. See Jerzy Ficowski, ed., *Bruno Schulz: Księga listów* (Kraków, 1975), 8–9, 169–70; Brygida Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, *Sens i chaos w grotesce literackiej: Od "Pałuby" do "Kosmosu"* (Kraków, 2002), 102; and Bolecki, Jarzębski, and Rosiek, eds., *Słownik szulcowski*, 404. On the other hand, unlike Vogel he did not join the Yiddishist movement then gaining popularity, especially in eastern Poland (the former Pale of Settlement). See Karen Underhill, "Ecstasy and Heresy: Martin Buber, Bruno Schulz, and Jewish Modernity," in De Bruyn and Van Heuckelom, eds., *(Un)masking Bruno Schulz*, 31.

6. Ficowski, ed., *Bruno Schulz: Księga listów*, 10–13. It is worth noting that the Jewish community—when invoked at all—is in no way constructed as an Other in his narratives,

questions of his own Jewishness and the use or revival of Yiddish and Hebrew in reborn Poland.[7]

Despite these lacunae, effectively this partial knowledge, calling Schulz Poland's greatest twentieth-century writer—or, at the very least, master stylist—is more than justified. Through a stunning concatenation and distillation of the surfaces, grains, textures, and reflections of everyday life, and an astonishing mnemotechnics subtended by a mythopoeic drive to reorder (without necessarily ranking) its substances, his narratives galvanize the spaces of a vanished Polish provincial past while strategically shifting them into a parallel plane of mythic potentiality.[8] In short, Schulz invests readers with the transforming mark of witness. No less significant, the surviving oeuvre, and in particular his debut work, a collection of stories-cum-Bildungsroman titled *The Street of Crocodiles*, exemplifies a brilliantly original tactical reengagement with issues of micropolitics (those of everyday life) and specific practices of resistance to the leading discourses of both local and more universal(-izing) western modernity. While the specific ecology of provincial deterritorialization and authorial nonengagement have been examined in detail in Schulz criticism, the pragmatics of his subjective marginality as the defining feature of micropolitics—as refracted by the voice that speaks in *The Street of Crocodiles*, in particular—have largely been neglected.[9] In what follows, I read Schulz's groundbreaking novel as a case study of mythopoeia that recuperates the topos of resistance (to the authority of reality as such—that is, against the related problems of automatized perception and that of assimilation or acceptance of reality) in the practice of everyday life.[10]

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which were written in Polish and intended for a contemporary Polish readership. Schulz was representing his own, "domestic" community, even though Jerzy Ficowski is emphatic that the Schulzes were assimilated and that he spoke Polish at home. Second, this community and its social realities would have been immediately recognizable to non-Jewish Polish readers of Schulz's generation. This does not mean it would have been properly understood or even accepted but simply that the depictions do not call for extensive ethnographic explication.

7. Andrea Mayer-Fraatz, "Exposing and Concealing Jewish Origin: Schulz and Leśmian," in De Bruyn and Van Heuckelom, eds., *(Un)masking Bruno Schulz*, 56–59.

8. Of all the attempts to synthesize this subject position, Michał Paweł Markowski's is particularly convincing. Markowski moves the nexus of perfection and perfectionment from the side of recuperating fallen matter to that of its potentiality (or becoming). He thus overcomes a chief impasse in Schulz criticism: namely, the problem of classifying human labor, including the artistic. In Markowski's reading, the second-hand material (for instance, entities that can be labeled "tandeta" [trash] or "bylejakość" [mediocrity]) of which there is a surfeit in the Schulzian world is reclaimed as a subject of and for myth. No scrap or fragment is wasted in this imaginarium; all are essential. The repertory of rejects is simultaneously a vast reservoir of possible shapes ("rezerwuar możliwych kształtów"), while reality as such is always insufficient, so that myth represents a longed-for semiotic supplement. See Michał Paweł Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiązłość: Schulz, egzystencja, literatura* (Kraków, 2012), esp. 111–13; 185–86.

9. While it is the case that the majority of these interventions are in Polish, especially the first phase of explications published in the wake of Ficowski's seminal research (*Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*), there are a number of more recent critical texts to be recommended in English. See the curated online archive at www.brunoschulz.org/biblio-schulz.html (last accessed September 8, 2015).

10. See also Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiązłość*.

The Street of Crocodiles (*Sklepy cynamonowe*) was published in January 1934 in Warsaw and immediately hailed as a minor masterpiece. The stories, reinventing themselves in the course of reading into an entity generically resembling a novel, are narrated by Jakub, a boy in his early teens (though the precise age is never given and may be intended as fluid). They are predominantly set in Drohobycz, then a town of some thirty thousand residents, located within a hundred-mile radius of Lwów and Przemyśl, at the center of the historical region of Galicia, and part of the old Polish eastern borderlands (Kresy wschodnie, today western Ukraine). Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Drohobycz was a provincial locus classicus: a largely somnolent space, though not without subterranean stirrings and the taste of true innovations coming from elsewhere, even if the latter were softened, the better to fit with the prevailing social conditions—in Schulz's view, a kind of unbearable banality of being that cried out for nothing less than the prosthesis of myth for its reconstitution.[11] In his 1956 essay "Rzeczywistość zdegradowana (Rzecz o Brunonie Schulzu)" ("A Reality Degraded: An Essay about Bruno Schulz"), Artur Sandauer was the first to isolate the specific quality of Schulz's provincial milieu as an inherently "conserving space," in which styles linger well past their sell-by date and lives are led at a downbeat tempo (yet the conservation itself implicates a formal distortion).[12] The delay with which new ideas in art became implanted in his district situated Schulz's poetics within the dominant forms and styles of previous literary epochs, especially decadence, and in the specific Polish context, within the symbolist or proto-expressionist dreamscapes of the Młoda Polska (Young Poland) movement. This is to say, his orientation varied radically from that of the majority of his immediate contemporaries (excepting, perhaps, the late expressionist epigone "madman" S. I. Witkiewicz), who were all propelled headfirst toward the "dynamism" and "concretism" of vanguardist reconfigurations of art and life praxis.[13] His peers in the larger artistic centers (Warsaw, Lwów, Kraków, Łódź) typically became belated avatars or adherents of one or more of the Polish adaptations of futurism, cubism, suprematism, surrealism, or constructivism. Indeed, sometimes they "tried on" all of these aesthetic, ideological, ethical positions in quick succession, as in a (Dada) cabaret performance.

Yet it is of crucial importance to note that, within this specific artistic symbology, lexicon, and modus vivendi of conserving forces, Schulz was nonetheless able to forge a new poetics: the poetics of provincial trash and cast-offs, *tandeta*. Occurring—indeed thriving—on the margins of real time and space as a kind of imaginary supplement, tandeta can function as both an exultation and an epithet (referring to "inferior quality, artificiality, tawdriness,

11. See Jarzębski's discussion in "Życie" (Life), chap. 1 in his *Schulz*, of the relatively delayed arrival of new capital—thanks to the discovery of oil in nearby Borysław, the "Galician Klondike," in the 1880s—and attendant ideas of new metropolitan modernity (the boom years corresponding to the first two decades of the twentieth century).

12. Artur Sandauer, "Rzeczywistość zdegradowana (Rzecz o Brunonie Schulzu)," in Bruno Schulz, *Sklepy cynamonowe: Sanatorium pod klepsydrą* (Kraków, 1957), 26–27. The text first appeared in the official state-run journal *Przegląd Kulturalny*, no. 31 (1956): 6–7, 9.

13. Sandauer, "Rzeczywistość zdegradowana," 26.

or poor manufacture," as well as second-handedness, whether occurring in nature, people, objects, or man-made things, including, of course, art).[14] Regarding the former, as a primal force tandeta is emblematized in the novel by recurrent metaphors of generation, fertility, and willful miscegenation occurring in proscribed locations generally or in the margins. Equally important to the textual rhythms, whatever the configurations of the inhabitants' provincial desires or longings, the external clock keeps ticking.[15] This type of temporality, the tracking of day-to-day business and thus of modernity—was the second constituent of Schulz's double-tracked time ("czas dwutorowy"), the first tracing precisely the mythopoeia of the margin, in all its splendid belatedness and anachrony.[16] On the metahistorical level, of course, none of this matters very much: Drohobycz as both physical locus in the provinces and as the epicenter of an interstitial or second-hand myth, that is, as both a workaday and a timeless place, continued to exist until the fall of 1939, whereupon it—the prewar city and its culture(s)—was annihilated and swept aside by history like so much trash.

Trash at first glance may suffer the ontological status of an afterthought or a side-effect, insofar as it represents matter typically rejected from cultural production, even as it itself constitutes a chief consequence of economic production.[17] However, in the conserving space of the provinces, trash—as well as other shoddy, second-hand products and objects, the very embodiment of tandeta—can be put to novel uses, often of necessity (such as lack of resources or finer materials) but also as a modality of resistance to bourgeois prescriptions of propriety and even beauty, through bricolage or interpellation of the *objet trouvé*.[18] It is thus possible to speak of a poetics of trash—which also incorporates the handy Polish concept *bylejakość*—wherein civilizational detritus is made to return to the foreground as a productive, possibly eloquent, and in any event necessary mode of representation.[19] Treated in typical depictions of the provinces as embarrassing or pitiful, trash finds itself reterritorialized in *The Street of Crocodiles* due to its value as an archive of individual long-

14. For a fuller characterization, see Bolecki, Jarzębski, and Rosiek, eds., *Słownik szulcowski*, 382.

15. See Ficowski, "Czas Schulzowski, czyli mityczna droga do wolności," chap. 2 in *Regiony wielkiej herezji i okolice*.

16. This stipulation of authorial marginality, a mainstay of Schulz criticism that largely determined the "horizon of writing and thinking" of the early exegetes, made its first appearance in Sandauer's oft-cited "Rzeczywistość zdegradowana." See Bolecki, Jarzębski, and Rosiek, eds., *Słownik szulcowski*, 334.

17. See John Knechtel, ed., *Alphabet City*, vol. 11, *Trash* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), esp. the introduction.

18. See David A. Goldfarb's discussion of the term in his introduction to Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, xvi.

19. *Bylejakość* could be translated as "tawdriness" or "mediocrity," though both lack the performative "bite" of the original. See also Markowski's discussion of this primarily technical term's formal registers in *Powszechna rozwiązłość*, 88–90. *Trash* is here opposed to *kitsch*, which is typically far more ironic in its deployment (the distance between utterance and intent more insistently policed than it is in Schulz). It constitutes a strategy of rhetoric, not mythopoeia, and engages primarily with simulacrum rather than the recuperation of second-handedness. See Matei Calinescu, "Kitsch," chap. 4 in *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, 1987).

ings and desires (that is, as a technique) and of local achievement. Schulzian tandeta is a substance to be exultingly reclaimed into the strategies and repertories of the quotidian, as a technique of resistance if not overtly political engagement. (Despite the seemingly universal political galvanization characteristic of this time period in Poland and, locally, of the rise of both Polish nationalist and Zionist discourses, it is still difficult to imagine Schulz as an explicitly political being.) The question is, reclaimed through what means and, no less important, to what end?

In his seminal "*Cinnamon Shops* by Bruno Schulz: The Apology of Tandeta," Andreas Schönle, working from a set of binary oppositions about tandeta's functioning and purpose that Sandauer had established, avers that in contradistinction to kitsch, an obviously related topos of late modernism, "tandeta bears fundamental ambiguity as something that is contemplated by turns with dread and fascination: being a metaphor for human imagination (and thus for artistic creation), it is loaded with all the implications associated with human production as opposed to divine creation."[20] I extend Schönle's line of thought here to show that tandeta, in its crucial ambivalence as simultaneously trash, cast-off, and fallen object and the subject of ontological exultation, does not "merely imitate form."[21] Rather, it constitutes the foundation of the Schulzian practice of everyday life—and thus his provincial micropoetics—in ways both narratological and performative (and, importantly, in the mythopoeic tension between these two modalities of textual being).[22] Tandeta thereby transcends its alleged metaphoric functionality (and hence its rank as simulacrum) to ascend, intermittently, to the status of an essential subject. In so doing, I also complicate the conclusions of Dieter De Bruyn, who, in an illuminating vindication of the valences of tandeta in *The Street of Crocodiles*, maintains that "the illusoriness and defectiveness of the setting . . . can best be observed in the periphery, on the margins of the represented world."[23] The problem with this statement is that it both is and is not true, depending on the speaker's subject position and on the palimpsest of definitions and cultural-historical praxes one wishes to impose on the text under scrutiny. On the one hand, trash in Schulz is indeed often (and often hurriedly) pushed to the side, a byproduct of provincial modernity. On the other hand, with Schulz we are always already in the margins, and there tandeta is the central and perhaps inevitable construction material, the only one honest enough to be unapologetically worked over by men and women of the district.

20. Andreas Schönle, "*Cinnamon Shops* by Bruno Schulz: The Apology of Tandeta," *Polish Review* 36, no. 2 (1991): 130.

21. Ibid., 132.

22. In this respect, I side with Markowski's findings in his *Powszechna rozwiązłość* with regard to the foundational status (the potentiality) of matter, though my own treatment takes this problem in a different direction. On the immanent tension between the performative and enunciatory aspects of narratological tactics of resistance, see Joseph Valente, "Between Resistance and Complicity: Metro-Colonial Tactics in Joyce's *Dubliners*," in "Michel de Certeau and Narrative Tactics," ed. Richard Pearce, special issue, *Narrative* 6, no. 3 (October 1998): esp. 325–29.

23. Dieter De Bruyn, "'The Lie Always Rises to the Surface Like Oil': Toward a Metafictional Reading of Karol Irzykowski's *Pałuba* and Bruno Schulz's Fiction," in De Bruyn and Van Heuckelom, eds., *(Un)masking Bruno Schulz*, 128.

Micropolitics as a phenomenon and practice typically occurs within institutional bounds, engaging existing cultural apparatuses. Frequently, micropolitical action is embodied in—that is, performed across—the interstices of cultural expression.[24] The possibility of action, of course, presupposes a subject who wields some type of power, as well as a recognized need for the articulation of this power—commonly concretized as resistance by local individuals to those systems of power that bind them (or seek to discipline their expression), a resistance enacted strategically at whatever nodes or apertures may be available or visible. Indeed, according to Michel Foucault, the investiture of resistance, whether symbolic or performative, occurs "at the same place as power," as a semiotic struggle over representation precisely, over that reality which is posited and described—that is, over reality as such.[25] Hence, resistance is inscribed in the substance of subjects' political lives, signifying (narratologically) the struggle over the instrumental meaning of the very definition of subjectivity, which never occurs in an ideational vacuum but is always already politicized.[26] Paraphrasing Michel de Certeau's stipulation, in the epoch of the electronicized megalopolis—the era of modern culture and power centers within "our" western zone—the subject's involvement in political life tends to diminish in proportion to the system's "technocratic expansion."[27] The provincial subject within such a schema, then, emerges as a marginal figure in the "vast framework" of metropolitan society, preoccupied less by the formal logics of governmentality, the macro-level pragmatics of the "violence of order, transmuted into a disciplinary technology," than with the problem of individual conflicts and "local operations"—that is, with the forms of everyday action(ability).[28] While de Certeau is principally concerned with the deleterious effects of the atomization of the "social fabric" on political bodies—a consequence, for him as for his mentor Foucault, of the consolidation of specialized hegemonic power—he adduces a classic textual figure of Polish provincial modernity as an apotheosis of what can be termed a viable strategy of micropolitical resistance.[29] De Certeau's paradigmatic "man without qualities," a subject who aims to fight back against apparatuses and abuses of centralized power, whose construction is also cultural, is one of the antiheroes of Witold Gombrowicz's novel *Kosmos*, a work published in 1965

24. Political action, whether local or "glocal" (or effected at some intersection of the two), has in the last two decades been increasingly described as performative and aligned with practices or technologies of the self. Performativity renders readily transparent both the "effect of [institutional, ideological] power" on bodies and the contours of subjectivity in activist world (re)making. Micropolitical resistance, then, can take place as much on the level of discourse as the level of the body. See, for example, Jessica J. Kulynych, "Performing Politics: Foucault, Habermas, and Postmodern Participation," *Polity* 30, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 330–32; cf. Valente, "Between Resistance and Complicity."

25. Michel Foucault, "Powers and Strategies," in his *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York, 1980), 142.

26. See again Kulynych, "Performing Politics."

27. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1988), xxiii.

28. Ibid., xiv, xxiv. See Foucault's 1978 essay "Governmentality," in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York, 2003), 239–45.

29. De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xxiv.

though set in the late 1920s in southern Poland.[30] This figure, Leo (Leon in the original), a retired bank clerk and, on the surface of things, an upright family man though in actuality an inveterate skeptic of all systems of authority, seems to have elaborated an idiosyncratic, recuperative "way of operating" in confronting the problem of his own marginality vis-à-vis central power:[31] "'When one does not have what one wants, one must want what one has': 'I have had, you see, to resort more and more to very small, almost invisible pleasures, little extras. . . . You've no idea how great one becomes with all these details, it's incredible how one grows.'"[32] The specific mode of provincial micropolitical resistance, then, foregrounds again the body as the site of pleasure and subjective articulation. It also incorporates objects as a kind of requisite "extra" or supplement to be engaged, manipulated, and reworked for one's own purpose (here explicitly pleasure).[33] And the more banal the entity, apparently, the better: as de Certeau asserts, political power rests "inherently within ostensibly mundane, value-neutral actions."[34]

Complementing this defensive tekhne of radical solipsism as a tactic for gaining a measure of freedom, the second key element of provincial cultural production—as well as provincial self-knowledge and, as follows, strategic self-empowerment—lies in the reuse or even misuse of objects and icons of metropolitan culture.[35] In its reappropriation (a kind of rescue) of the products and byproducts of the center, however defined, by the populations inhabiting the margins, the very "ordinariness" of everyday men and women and their everyday actions becomes amplified not only by their extraterritorial position but also by contact with representatives inhabiting other coordinates of the margins, until it attains something on the order of a new archetype.[36] In the process, "new crossings" and interdependencies may find articulation, simultaneously issuing to the center the challenge of innovative forms of subjectivi-

30. Witold Gombrowicz, *Kosmos* (Paris, 1965; Kraków, 2000). The narrative unfolds perhaps during the very summer when Schulz and Gombrowicz both spent time in the Tatras—1926—and could easily have run across each other (though they did not formally meet until 1934). Zakopane—the setting—is a small town with only one main street even today, and its artistic "zone" in the 1920s and '30s was smaller still. See also Banks, *Muse and Messiah*, 286.

31. De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xiv. See, for example, Leo's categorical rejection of the grand narrative of humanist progress, central to the quest for a "rational organization of society." Gombrowicz, *Kosmos*, 36–38, 46–47.

32. Witold Gombrowicz, *Cosmos* (Paris, 1971), 165–68; quoted in de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xxiv. De Certeau omits to mention that one of Leo's most important recuperative practices of the self involves rituals of semi-public masturbation in front of family and friends—surely a type of pollution. See Gombrowicz, *Kosmos*, 146–48.

33. In Leo's case, the paradigmatic activity consists of creating small balls out of pieces of bread and lining them up in rows, but he also "enjoys" (assimilates) ashtrays, spoons, and similar everyday items, as well as food of all kinds. See Gombrowicz, *Kosmos*, 18–19, 34–35, and esp. 20–21.

34. Jason Evan Kosnoski, "Rambling as Resistance: Frederick Law Olmsted, Michel de Certeau, and the Micropolitics of Walking in the City," *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination* 3, no. 2 (2010): 115.

35. See Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, 2005), 340–41.

36. De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 2.

ty.[37] In other words, it is through Schulz's semiotic play with, and archeologizing of, trash that writing becomes concretized as a form of resistance.

The signposts and ecosystems of his narrative fabrication of *The Street of Crocodiles* can thus be analyzed from two complementary perspectives. The first, a confrontation with the inadequacy-superabundance binary in provincial form, seeks to illuminate the compensatory role of myth in Schulz's narratives, including the mythos of artistic creation itself. The second, concerned with questions of textual identity or situatedness, elaborates a number of narratological conditions that subtend the logic of provincial displacement and determine the arcs of the narrator's subject position as at once excavator of the cultural palimpsest of trash and architect of a new mythopoeic quintessence of provincial writing.

In the Polish Provinces

Readers of Schulz, as well as those familiar with his visual texts, are often struck by the transformations that the spaces of his home district undergo when illuminated by the klieg lights of his mythopoeic imagination. The major "movements" in the stories nearly all start innocently enough—a set piece on the main town square on a summer afternoon, a report on what the maid brought home from the market, a sleigh ride on a snowy evening, a description of some new technological device available for purchase in local shops—but then an unnamed catalyst, an agent of cathexis, irrupts into Schulz's imagination, triggering a descent into surreality, a labyrinth of pure suggestibility.[38] Indeed, reality in Schulz is postulated a priori as incomplete and as existing in a constant state of flux. It is defined by lack, always at risk of detaching itself from properly documentary moorings. This refusal of material "docility" has engrossed Schulz readers. For example, one of the most astute, Markowski, notes that documentary reality itself—defined as a cataloguing of things seen and perceived by the subject in the act of moving through various localities of daily life and in time—is made to appear "frivolous," even "deceptive."[39] The traditional opposition between essences and effects, between "substance and its attributes," is forever amenable to processes of reciprocal pollution and interpenetration, which in turn make "artificiality" (or fictionalization) the texts' key attribute and, ultimately, marks as insecure the true coordinates of the narrating subject.[40]

The optic (and ontological) instability or "shimmering" invoked here is immanent in the logic of suggestibility that governs the work. Once set in mo-

37. On the potentiality of the provinces or borderlands for new configurations of power relations, see, for example, José David Saldivar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley, 1997), 17–24.

38. Michał Paweł Markowski, "Text and Theater: The Ironic Imagination of Bruno Schulz," in De Bruyn and Van Heuckelom, eds., *(Un)masking Bruno Schulz*, 447. On the forces, directions, and motivations of "movement" (*ruch*) in Schulz's prose, as a correlative of the logic of origins, see Władysław Panas, *Księga blasku: Traktat o kabale w prozie Brunona Schulza* (Lublin, 1997), esp. 71–75.

39. Markowski, "Text and Theater," 443–44.

40. Ibid., 445.

tion and allowed to roam across the various topographies of his "Drohobycz," though, the imaginary sublime begins to reveal its limitations as a tool of representation (or as refraction of limit-experiences) as soon as it encounters the deep paradoxes of subjective perception.[41] Lacking the intuition of parallax view, confronted time and again with mysteries of the unknown or with true alterity, for example, the represented new world withers, such "reality" as there had been (or had been self-confidently stipulated a moment earlier) wilting into nothingness or negating itself, "scatter[ing] into ashes."[42] The process stops short of the ultimate revelation of any "truth" of the senses—possibly because none exists. Readers thus enter into temporary—and classically surrealist—phantasmagorias of a juxtaposition that considers the ordinary reality of "the waking state" as akin to a "phenomenon of interference."[43] However, these phantasmagorias terminate abruptly for reasons that readers are at a loss to apprehend, usually at a moment just prior to the attainment of an ecstatic state of pure form (*jouissance*), divorced from its conditional housedness within language.[44] The narrator's descents certainly allow readers to bear witness to the potentiality of *écriture* as a dependable instrument for dredging up secrets of the unconscious; however, the textures, grains, and perimeters of the narratological forays often prove no more durable than gossamer, ultimately deprived of materiality.[45]

Indeed, it is almost always the case in the stories composing (and giving form to) the novel that the diurnal clock—marking the modern bourgeois time of production, its trash and all—ultimately triumphs, restoring the documentary reality of the status quo ante. The symbolic order seems in the end unaffected by the excursions—*seems*, because it is often the case that certain objects, gestural vocabularies, utterances, memories, shapes, sounds, and colors will continue to linger in the texture woven by the narrative, their

41. See ibid., 447–49. Here the critic elaborates a clever postmodern solution to the "radical ambivalence of [Schulzian] reality" through a valorization of the paradoxical force of irony—that is, through celebrating the condition of "indeterminatedness" as the only reality of which we (readers and subjects) can truly be certain.

42. Bruno Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles*, trans. Celina Wieniewska (New York, 1977), 109.

43. André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), at www.tcf.ua.edu/Classes/Jbutler/T340/SurManifesto/ManifestoOfSurrealism.htm (last accessed October 7, 2014 ; no longer available).

44. It is worth mentioning that one of Schulz's persistent anxieties was impotence and castration—here sublimated into an unease about fulfilment and finitude. See Michał Paweł Markowski, *Polska literatura nowoczesna: Leśmian, Schulz, Witkacy* (Kraków, 2007), 255–56. Also of note is Markowski's tracing of Schulz's formulations of ecstatic subjectivity (*tożsamość ekstatyczna*). Ibid., 238–39.

45. See Banks's discussion in *Muse and Messiah*, 18–20. Dorota Głowacka diagnoses this textual condition as a desire to overwrite order and, abolishing the myth of the return (toward a denouement, for example), constantly to escape being captured by form; consequently, the texts seem to "overwrite themselves and spill into the wild gardens of untamed creativity." This description, however, mainly reproduces the effect of Schulz's fiction, employing his lexicon without explicating these modalities. See Dorota Głowacka, "Sublime Trash and the Simulacrum: Bruno Schulz in the Postmodern Neighborhood," in Czeslaw Z. Prokopczyk, ed., *Bruno Schulz: New Documents and Interpretations* (New York, 1999), 91.

recurrence a shadow or supplement troubling the protagonist profoundly.[46] A principal task for explicators of Schulz has thus typically—and defensively—involved excavating and affixing reality onto a stable representational grid, thereby separating it from the dream realm to the extent that this is possible.

The usual strategy for obtaining such satisfaction has been to cut through the apparent solipsistic noise and delineate the contours of the one constant figure of his canvasses: the town of Drohobycz, its topographies and, more obliquely, some of its (and thus his) secrets and memories.[47] It should be noted, à propos of the topographies of this "documentary" Drohobycz, that both town and region hold a strong mythic value not just for Schulz but for the entire project of Polish national identity maintenance, constituting an essential social text in the cultural imaginary. Historically, the region was among the poorest of the Polish lands, with an immiserated peasantry and uncertain harvests, caused by poor soil and frequent drought. As if in compensation, spirituality became firmly inscribed in the practice of everyday life, manifesting itself in a profusion of mystics and religious prophets among the Christian and Jewish communities alike (the Hasidic movement is just one example).[48] In addition, cycles of famine, pogroms, peasant uprisings and their pacifications, legacies of Ottoman invasions and Ruthenian/Ukrainian counterinsurgencies, and imperial Russian and Austrian policies of colonial administration—in short, nearly the entire index of Poland's fates in its historic wager to hold and Polonize the eastern borderland—marked eastern Małopolska/Galicja as a special zone if not a realm apart.[49] Myth, then, is inextricable from the region's cultural history and historiography (and also deeply situated in the archives of Polish collective imagination and postmemory).[50]

Yet, in following the outlines of the region's social history, myth and all, one risks overlooking or downplaying the concrete fruit of its inhabitants' daily tasks, its products and byproducts, its exertions and excretions—that is, its micropolitics. Further, the tendency toward "Schulzomania," a kind of enchantment with the catalogues of Schulz's hometown as elaborated in his tales and drawings, as well as regular outbreaks of "Schulzophobia," a capitulation before his texts' putative "resistance" to any sustained critical aperture, may help explain the relative timidity of the foundational readings.[51]

46. Generally, these objects fall under the rubric of fetishized subjects of cathexis, the Schulzian "shapely foot," most often affiliated with Adele the maid, being one such tenacious icon. (The modern origin of this image is, of course, the Galician writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's 1870 *Venus in Furs*, a text with which Schulz was well acquainted.)

47. Or, rather, the town and its topographies have emerged as a cultural touchstone for discourses about the Polish borderlands principally as a *lieu de mémoire*, "Drohobycz" in the meanwhile having been transformed by the events of World War II into another entity altogether, though one bearing the same name (Дрогобич in Ukrainian).

48. Alfred Sproede, "Bruno Schulz: Between Avant-Garde and Hasidic Redemption," in De Bruyn and Van Heuckelom, eds., *(Un)masking Bruno Schulz*, 476–78.

49. Luiza Bialasiewicz, "Back to Galicia Felix?," in Paul Robert Magosci and Christopher M. Hann, eds., *Galicia: A Multicultured Land* (Toronto, 2005), 160–84.

50. Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland* (Cambridge, Eng., 2001), 204–8; Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York, 2012), esp. the introduction and section 1.

51. See Dieter De Bruyn and Kris Van Heuckelom, "Introduction: Seven Decades of Schulzology," in De Bruyn and Van Heuckelom, eds., *(Un)masking Bruno Schulz*, 9–17.

These often reductively and erroneously—though seductively—posited the narrator/author as someone overwhelmed and perhaps overmastered by his (supposedly oneiric) birthplace, by the weight of its specific gravity, or situated the writer as someone constitutionally impervious to the need to provide any cogent social message.[52]

This emergent portrait of Schulz—the one with which Polish literature grew up, thanks to poet and polyglot Jerzy Ficowski's unremitting labors—presents a figure standing apart, an artist whose self-isolation-cum-radical "deracination" made him unable to perceive, among other things, the apocalypse that was about to be visited on his part of the world.[53] More recent research has presented the rather more intriguing scenario that while Schulz was well aware of the political forces swirling around him and understood what they portended for east central Europe and beyond, the spasms of that world, in the end, failed to hold his attention, apart from providing further impetus to mythologize the late interwar period as an epoch of legends and heroes (such as Marshal Piłsudski) who inhabited a "dark mythical fatherland."[54]

In fact, to engage this problem equitably requires that one think of Schulz's own practices of everyday life in almost heroic terms. Imagining him working in his small studio on Floriańska Street, we must see him tasked with a project of a symbolically colossal value—not unlike, for example, the narrator in Jorge Luis Borges's celebrated, near-contemporaneous short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" (1940). In Borges's parable on the rise of totalitarian epistemology, as the world verges on becoming Tlön—that is, as new knowledge begins to "re-form" all existing world explanations, rendering them void and obsolete and indeed "changing the face of the world"—the doomed narrator perseveres in his quixotic labors. Recall that his self-appointed task—a tentative or "uncertain" translation of an iconic baroque English text celebrated for its solemn, decorous style into a baroque Spanish characterized by brevity and wit—is exquisitely solipsistic. Moreover, for all the energy (in)vested in it, as a project of provincial resistance—since "mere" Spanish is also to be extirpated as part of this reconstruction—it will not hold off the apocalypse.[55] No, it (the narrator's work and he himself), too, will be disposed of like so much trash. Crucially, though, in an age of burned or plundered libraries, he has no other materials at hand to (re)work. Borges's parable of the annihilation of one epistemological system through another was completed in 1939, and he was thinking of, among other things, Nazi narratives of world-remaking that seemingly provided a step-by-step moral justification and ideological validation for expanding a racialized empire.

Equally if not more provincial in the 1930s, Schulz was much nearer the epicenter of fascism than Borges (though the latter was also looking at

52. Ibid., 11–13. This may be partially explained by the fact that the town and region had meanwhile passed to Soviet control and as such was inaccessible to all but the most dogged of researchers.

53. Ibid., 18.

54. Anessi, "The Great Heresy of the Varsovian Center," 415. Some critics contend that the lost work *The Messiah* was planned at least in part as a spiritual exploration of this era from a Kabbalist perspective.

55. Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York, 1964), 18.

Francoist Spain). Indeed, as a citizen of Poland, Schulz was in an ideal position to follow closely the Nazi regime's mythopoeic endeavors; how could he not have registered the magnitude of the catastrophe on the horizon? After all, the subject had captured the full attention of the majority of his contemporaries. Moreover, Schulz himself had read and commented on the eschatological panic of Poland's leading voice of that period, Witkiewicz (aka Witkacy); the two corresponded throughout the late 1920s and early '30s and reviewed each other's works. Witkacy's canvasses, plays, and novels, such as *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (versions 1 and especially 2), "The Water Hen," and *Insatiability*, respectively, all produced between 1921 and 1930, brim with dark premonitions of a totalitarian juggernaut that will inexorably—indeed, momentarily—transform the face of the earth or at the very least of their province. And, if Witkacy's flamboyantly catastrophist weltanschauung could be rebutted for gratuitous solipsism—the artist all too easily abandoned to his self-destructive compulsions—the canon readily reveals other major warning signs, the works and fate of Bruno Jasieński being paradigmatic.[56] So, how could Schulz not have appreciated the catastrophe in the offing? Or perhaps the more germane question is, how did it not matter to him?

It is not sufficient to declare that unlike, say, Jasieński, Schulz was justified in feeling safe because he had engendered no controversies, no manifesto for a future "Widened Polish Nation" (a space revolutionarily renewed yet wryly mindful of its past), or that he had produced no concrete images of political or social transformation.[57] It is certainly the case that Schulz gauged properly the fleeting nature of political intentions and affiliations effected during this liminal moment in the nation's history and effectively obviated them while pursuing the fount of literary myth. Perhaps the closest he came to articulating his personal micropolitical solution for survival and resistance was in a short text on the method of *The Street of Crocodiles*. Here, Schulz acknowledges that his creative impulse was pulling him in a direction opposite that of his colleagues who would remake the world, and he then sketches out the contours of an intimate project in which he himself could enact the role of world maker: "I undertook to establish for myself some mythical generation of forebears, a fictitious family from which I trace my true descent. In a way, these 'Stories' . . . represent my way of living, my personal fate. The overriding motif of this fate is . . . isolation from the stuff of daily life."[58] Inspired by, among other things, the Hebrew lunar calendar and Kabbalah and, in particular, an "absolute, unknowable, and unnamable entity," the zero-point of cre-

56. A fellow luminary on interwar Poland's relatively intimate vanguard scene, the futurist, Marxist, constructivist poet Jasieński was executed (ostensibly for a personal transgression—a romantic entanglement with a top Soviet official's wife) as part of a Stalinist purge of Polish heretics in Moscow in September 1938.

57. Bruno Jasieński, "To the Polish Nation: A Manifesto Concerning the Immediate Futurization of Life," in Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács, eds., *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 187. On the discourse of socio-spatial transformation in the new national spaces of post-Versailles east central Europe, see, for example, Andrzej Szczerski, *Modernizacje: Sztuka i architektura w nowych państwach Europy Środkowo-wschodniej, 1918–1939* (Łódź, 2010), 6–12.

58. Bruno Schulz, "An Essay for S. I. Witkiewicz," in Adam Zagajewski, ed., *Polish Writers on Writing* (San Antonio, 2007), 34.

ativity Schulz terms simply "The Book," the narratological space of the tales governs over a general accumulation of material excess at the edges of what Goldfarb calls a surreptitiously "degraded reality"—a reality that nonetheless, as Głowacka avers, does not "disown its own materiality."[59] The Schulzian project is a compendium of codes combining pagan cultural wisdom as natural law and Judeo-Christian scriptural verities qua law of the realm, thereby also opening the door to heresy—an intoxicating yet perilous source of creativity. It elevates the artist as both the true head of creation and a point of origin for the autonomous narrative gaze. Seeking means of complicating the "stultifying tedium" of life, as well as an escape from its present or future brutalities, the narrator plunges into an interstitial, contingent world, only to find that the matter of daily life, the provincial detritus, jerrybuilt cast-offs of modernity, and the assorted nostalgic signs and holdovers from a simpler time of mercantile capitalism—in short, the mythopoeic trash—reenters by the back door.[60]

Trash; or, Cultural Production in the Provinces

In the essay I quoted above—in fact a letter to Witkacy, in which Schulz, responding to a challenge made by his friend, commits on paper to a literary program or a manifesto of sorts—Schulz also advances the notion that the narratives of *The Street of Crocodiles* constitute a certain recipe for reality. The texts, he says, posit a "special kind of substance: the substance of that reality exists in a state of constant fermentation, germination, hidden life, potential excess. Everything diffuses beyond its borders, remains in a given shape only momentarily."[61] The emergent expressionist or surrealist manifesto of the impossibility of its objects' remaining fixed in form and meaning (that is, of remaining objective) when exposed to the radical subjectivity of the demiurge also claims the protean potentialities of provincial form. Schulz's chronotopic discourse and, in particular, his poetics of marginal subjectivity enacted through prisms of subjective deformation possess several distinguishing layers or conditions, all of them subordinate to the guiding prerogative of recuperating provincial trash.

I define the condition of special relativity in both the work's architectonics and its narratological program as an instability of space. As noted above, the symbolic and oneiric economies of space in *The Street of Crocodiles* are

59. Goldfarb, introduction to Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, xxi; and Głowacka, "Sublime Trash and the Simulacrum," 96, 114. See also Banks, *Muse and Messiah*, 70; Underhill, "Ecstasy and Heresy"; S. J. Żurek, "As One Kabbalist to Another . . . On Arnold Słucki's Mystical Visions of the World in the Poem 'Bruno Schulz,'" in De Bruyn and Van Heuckelom, eds., *(Un)masking Bruno Schulz*, 67–82; and Sproede, "Bruno Schulz: Between Avant-Garde and Hasidic Redemption." The most oft-cited Polish-language treatment of Schulz's engagement with the Kabbalah is Panas's groundbreaking *Księga blasku*.

60. Banks, *Muse and Messiah*, 93; Paul Robert Magosci and Christopher M. Hann, eds., *Galicia: A Multicultured Land* (Toronto, 2005), 5–7. It is the provinces, after all. Doors are frequently left unlocked or, more magic-realistically, can be found yielding to a gentle push or "opening" by themselves, as in the story "Visitation." Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 36.

61. Schulz, "An Essay for S. I. Witkiewicz," 33.

marked by malleability and a constant risk of augmentation, evolution, or decomposition; space is protean here in the sense of always being subject to the imprint of the narrator's radical subjectivity and his imagination (and its dream logic), which foreground sequences of tumescence and detumescence, disconnection, disruption, and general bewilderment.[62] Put differently, in an evocation of a post-Freudian surrealist program of inscribing the fractured yet authentic self reassembled via dredging up elements from the unconscious and connecting them by covert economies of latency, the figurations of spatial representation readily yield to the narrator's interior reality and its contingent needs.[63]

While present in the volume in toto (and in Schulz's other literary and visual works), this dynamic is most clearly manifest in passages devoted to the titular "Street of Crocodiles." Drohobycz's main business artery—Schulz's cipher for what was known before WWII as Ulica Stryjska—passes itself off as a metropolitan boulevard; however, this is mere trompe-l'oeil, as the buildings are seemingly fabricated from papier-mâché (or a similar inferior, absurd material), with already-peeling stucco façades.[64] It is also readily detectable in the section depicting the Cinnamon Shops, in which the narrator weaves a nostalgic, phantasmagoric fabric of a candle-lit and indeed semi-conspiratorial mercantile past-time. It is on view likewise in his ruminations on domestic spaces encountered during flights from the tedium of the everyday. The family house and its various nooks and crannies are paradoxically—given that the home should by definition stand for an intimate and thus a safely familiar zone—subject to the most concentrated spatio-temporal contortions and distortions (or repression and sublimation, when translated into the terms of Freudian dream-work), as in the following dizzying vision:[65]

> We lived on Market Square, in one of these dark houses with empty blind looks, so difficult to distinguish one from the other. This gave endless possibilities for mistakes. For, once you had entered the wrong doorway and set foot on the wrong staircase, you were liable to find yourself in a real labyrinth of unfamiliar apartments and balconies . . . , and you forgot the initial object of the expedition, only to recall it days later after numerous strange and complicated adventures, on regaining the family home in the gray light of dawn. . . .
>
> No one ever knew exactly how many rooms we had in our apartment, because no one ever remembered how many of them were let to strangers.

62. Głowacka makes the point that in Schulz, space curves "around consciousness." Głowacka, "Sublime Trash and the Simulacrum," 88. Here Schulz's program coincides with the third and most complex kind of dreams described in Sigmund Freud's "On Dreams"—the type freighted with symbolic values and hence most useful for demarcating the crucial latent content and, simultaneously, or consequently, the zone of greatest resistance on the analysand's part. See Sigmund Freud, "On Dreams," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York, 1989), 146–48.

63. Freud, "On Dreams," 146.

64. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 105–6.

65. But then, in those terms, it is not paradoxical at all, as Freud considered the domestic structure to be modern society's greatest storehouse of repression and "approved" violence. Home, by definition, constitutes a terrifying space.

> Often one would by chance open the door to one of these forgotten rooms and find it empty; the lodger had moved out a long time ago. In the drawers, untouched for months, one would make unexpected discoveries. . . .
>
> In the corners, cockroaches sat immobile, hideously enlarged by their own shadows which the burning candle imposed on them and which remained attached to their flat, headless bodies.[66]

Time conjugates space; space ratiocinates time. Labyrinthine, yet possessed of a specific center and a center of gravity (its location as nucleus), as well as a surfeit of punctiliously noted details (shadowy immobilized cockroaches in the corners), space becomes subject to temporal reduplication, refraction, and augmentation by supplement. Trash here, then, assumes an existential character: far from signifying merely fallen matter, it is elevated to the status of subject. Time, whose instrumental trustworthiness is already suspect, is increasingly marked predominantly by its aftereffects (the burning candle and the shadows it produces, the first gray light of dawn) rather than its direct experience.[67] The initial solidity of the roaming, impressionistic gaze gives way to far more tentative, fragile, dream-work modes of association.

The less intimate sites of "papier-mâché" modernity elsewhere in the town are even more vulnerable to reorganization through a chronotopic modality of temporal thickening and free spatial association, frequently in conjunction with a libidinal causality produced by a stunted, immature, and—as it invariably turns out—unachievable desire, set against the solid backdrop of provincial trash. The paradigmatic instance of such an aggregation and agglutination of tandeta and desire for (the appearance of) modernity—the two core aspects of provincial life force (that is, libido) proposed by the text—can be traced in the tableaux of the town's main thoroughfare:[68]

> The spirit of the times, the mechanism of economics, had not spared our city. . . . In the new district modern, sober forms of commercial endeavor had flourished at once. . . . One could see there cheap jerrybuilt houses with grotesque façades, covered in a monstrous stucco of cracked plaster. . . . At times one has the impression that it is only the small section . . . that falls into the expected pointillistic picture of a city thoroughfare, while on either side, the improvised masquerade is already disintegrating and, unable to endure, crumbled behind us into plaster and sawdust. . . .
>
> Rows of small, one-story suburban houses alternate with many-storied buildings which, looking as if made of cardboard, are a mixture of blind office windows, of fascia, or advertisements and numbers. . . . [T]he figures pass in gentle disarray, never reaching complete sharpness of outline. The

66. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 36–38.

67. See Banks's discussion of Schulz's games with temporality in *Muse and Messiah*, 69–80. For a detailed discussion of the binary of supplement and remainder (trace) in *The Street of Crocodiles*, cf. Krzysztof Stala, *On the Margins of Reality: The Paradoxes of Representation in Bruno Schulz's Fiction* (Stockholm, 1993), 67–76.

68. On the channels through which life force (libidinal energy) becomes refocused on sexual problems, see Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Gay, 240–93; for a discussion of libidinal energy becoming aimed at the objects of one's desire (i.e., gaining a narcissistic edge), see Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," in ibid., 753–54.

> street is as broad as a city boulevard, but the roadway is made, like village squares, of beaten clay, full of puddles and overgrown with grass.[69]

In Schulz's autonomous textual zone, the town's main street aspires to be a thoroughfare of modernity that will displace the traditional spaces and forms of premodern commerce. The iconography seems complete, though at a closer look, one cannot help but note the distressed artifice of its construction, its very contingency, with the sawdust and other trash piled to the side (but still well within view and inseparable from the total image as an image). In fact, the "Street of Crocodiles" cannot escape tawdriness, temporariness, and simulation. The "crazy poppies of excitement" must inevitably "scatter into ashes"; the true flavor of the provinces must shortly revert to a palette of grays, mixing with the mud and the dirt.[70] Why? The narrator's reply: in this particular district, "reality betrays with all its cracks its imitative character"—this despite the "great bravura and prodigality in intentions, projects, and anticipations."[71] The predicament may be more sharply rendered in the outlying districts of this always-already provincial town, in which "the street cease[s] to maintain any pretense of urbanity like a man returning to his little village who, piece by piece, strips off his Sunday best, slowly changing back into a peasant as he gets closer to his home," but it remains, here as on the main street, its aesthetic hallmark.[72] Moreover, these are the sole materials and thus the colors and textures available to the narrator as he re-mythologizes the town's narrative of its own modernity and relative success (reproducing the apparent "bravura" of the local capitalists' and town planners' intentions). There are no others, and it is the work's central premise that to reject these particular "imitations" would be tantamount to a wholesale refutation of home and self.[73] As we saw earlier, the narrator may roam hither and thither, yet he always returns to his local space and time, the zero-point or touchstone for his composite reality, and through working with these coordinates, he invests them with a crucial instrumental meaning as part of a radical reterritorialization.

Perhaps the most sustained instance of the quest for mythic authenticity, and an exposition of the entire method, is found in "August," the opening chapter of the first English-language edition of *The Street of Crocodiles*. Here the reader is confronted with an urgent domestic drama: in the absence of Father—and thus of a defined embodiment of the Law and adjudicator of order—ordinary "vacation" time, already weighed down by provincial boredom, becomes dramatically condensed when juxtaposed with mythic time that in turn comprises the grand cosmic cycle.[74] Mythopoeia, particularly pagan myths of classical antiquity, enters at the edges of the fabric of petty bourgeois

69. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 100–106.

70. Ibid., 109. This is a consumerist, erotic excitation, the one constituting sublimation of the other, at least in classic psychoanalytic theory. See Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," 735–42.

71. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 105, 109.

72. Ibid., 28.

73. Ibid., 110.

74. Ibid., 25.

domesticity and a "hackneyed" provincial reality.[75] To escape its clutches, the narrator engages his own cosmology of icons of a luxuriant though overbearing nature that, while chaotic on its face, is nonetheless governed by the regular and inexorable succession of seasons—"agricultural time," rooted in rituals of cyclical rebirth.[76] Apart from classic pagan elements, the founding principles of this particular mythos—which erodes the conceit of structural stability through distortions of form and of perception—include the topoi of unnatural heat, anarchic wildness, and omnipresent fertility and overripeness (with both male and female attributes). In practice, unconstrained for the moment by any sense of bourgeois propriety, the mythopoeic gaze is capable of assimilating even the most egregious manifestations of trash.

> Overlooked by the light of day, weeds and wild flowers of all kinds luxuriated quietly, glad of the interval for dreams beyond the margin of time on the borders of an endless day. . . . And over by the fence . . . the untidy, feminine ripeness of August had expanded into enormous, impenetrable clumps of burdocks spreading their sheets of leafy tin. . . . There, the garden offered free of charge the cheapest fruits of wild lilac, the heady aquavit of mint and all kinds of August trash . . . there, on that refuse dump, the month of August had chosen to hold that year its pagan orgies. . . . Everyone in this golden day wore the grimace of heat—as if the sun had forced its worshippers to wear identical masks of gold. The old and the young, women and children, greeted each other with these masks, painted on their faces with thick gold paint; they smiled at each other's pagan faces—the barbaric smiles of Bacchus.[77]

One thus enters a world ruled by paradox: if this mythic space is always marked by an insufficiency or, alternatively, an overdetermination (overripeness) of form, it is largely because desire is never fully articulated and synchronized with objects, while the objects are merely glimpsed or observed with an invariably faulty (radically subjective) optics and therefore can never be truly accessed or tamed. However, this mythic or phantasmal response is self-sufficient; it is formulated by the narrator in answer to both the lack and the excess of banal reality as a kind of complement or "extra" to help negotiate the ongoing deformations (which despite or perhaps because of their uncanny or sublime terror still manage to "[excite] one to frenzy").[78] Still, in the end, akin to a mechanism of Freudian repression, documentary reality becomes reinstated narratologically. While, as Dorota Głowacka observes, "surplus or secondary time" can divide into "endless conduits" of suggestibility that the narrator is free to follow (or become lost in), linear time, the necessary countersign of social order, generally triumphs over the wild heaps of refuse.[79] Until next time.

75. Banks, *Muse and Messiah*, 28. Stala even asserts that in Schulz, "the whole of reality is undermined by 'the dark foundation of myths'"—a compelling though imprecise image. See Stala, *On the Margins of Reality*, 74–75.

76. Banks, *Muse and Messiah*, 100.

77. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 26, 28–29.

78. Ibid., 29.

79. Głowacka, "Sublime Trash and the Simulacrum," 84–89.

In short, in the Schulzian provinces, equilibrium reigns by decree until myth is compelled to reawaken by the appearance of diurnal or nocturnal trash and is then ultimately stifled by recursive agents of cultural law, specifically mechanisms of repression, which move aside the trash and terminate the reign of the dream-world. Any such epistemic violence by the central censorship mechanism, internal or external, in turn requires a further mythic countermeasure that distorts time and space by sublimating them to the narrator's inner logic of association—and so on, perhaps ad infinitum, for myth (as a form of agency and a technology of resistance) is irrepressible.[80] Still, as noted, the collection's episodic structure, with the cleanly defined conclusions to each chapter, restores a measure of order extradiagetically. Here, the incontrovertible sign of the reign of quotidian reality is perhaps Adela the maid's broom.[81] This object, introduced toward the chapters' ends, reinstates epistemic objectivity by pushing aside the accumulating "excess" and "junk objects" of the narrator's augmented reality. A recursive agent of the Law, proxy and prosthesis for the law of the father, the broom appears at crucial moments to "clean up" the trash and the castoffs of libidinous desires or purely escapist fantasies, to regulate unruly matter by putting it in its proper place (that is, to the side, just like the consumed tandeta of Stryjska Street).[82] Most important, the broom, in its particular engagement with cast-off matter, never fails to bring Father—that irrepressible mythologist of the self and reshaper of his ersatz worlds—"back" from his phantasmal realms, where he creates his papier-mâché monsters, to this familiar yet, for him, inferior one, to which he returns crestfallen like a "king who had lost his throne."[83] (Trash has the opposite effect on the narrator: it apotheosizes his reality.)

The second, related textual condition concerns the deployment of, and the narrator's paramount concern with, the problem of matter, materiality, and embodiment and could be termed a narratival subservience of form. In the beginning, writes the narrator—echoing the author's brief 1936 essay "The Mythologizing of Reality" and the opening invocations of many founding myths—there was "Matter." Meaningless and inaccessible to ordering prerogatives, Matter, preceding Logos, belonged to the realm of universal (thus, inhuman) "Sense."[84] Matter was brought forth by the Sovereign and has been ruled over by the demiurge in accordance with an inhuman or inassimilable law. However, in this modern era of dead, deposed, and disposed of gods, the human creator has assumed the individuated role of the demiurge but thus also that of the heretic, the form breaker, the obverse of human creativity that

80. Freud explains the functioning of the mechanisms of repression in several texts. "On Dreams" is the most condensed and accessible of these.

81. Less discreetly, order is signified by the slipper on her "dainty" foot, in a classic invocation of fetishistic power and investment. See Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 53 and esp. 63, where Adela's slipper "trembled" and "shone like a serpent's tongue," causing Father, then deep in meditation on form and matter to halt and suddenly "step forward like an automaton . . . and [fall] to his knees" in an act of supplication straight out of Sacher-Masoch's iconography.

82. Ibid., 47, 50, 115–16.

83. Ibid., 50.

84. Bruno Schulz, "Mityzacja rzeczywistości," *Studio*, nos. 3–4 (1936): 3–4.

is chiefly represented in hieroglyphics issuing forth from the unconscious. Matter has been catalogued and particularized according to an iconoclastic taxonomy of individual subjectivities—here, a provincial micropolitics. But it also came to be ruled by language: Father's disquisition on form and matter in *The Street of Crocodiles* ("Treatise on Tailors' Dummies, or The Second Book of Genesis," in three parts) focuses precisely on this demiurgic essence of all creation.[85] To produce anything, such as art, necessitates that one play with an infinitely malleable matter, of which there is always already an excess in the world—to say nothing of the rejected matter, the trash![86] (Thus Father's battle cry, "Less matter, more form!," though this may also constitute an admission of defeat.)[87] The disaffecting formalist heresy invoked by Father, to whom the narrator refers as a heresiarch of form and for which Adela chastises him, has at its core an invitation and indeed a command to work with available matter, to fabricate, to create, and especially to work in, as it were, the tattered margins (and possibly to overdetermine through form). This, Father indicates, may be a basic human prerogative, yet it also marks us as divine, a potential demiurge: "Matter has been given infinite fertility . . . , and, at the same time, a seductive power of temptation which invites us to create as well. . . . The whole of matter pulsates with infinite possibilities that send dull shivers through It. Waiting for the life-giving breath . . . , it is endlessly in motion. It entices us with a thousand sweet, soft, round shapes which it blindly dreams up within itself."[88] With God(s) banished from the arena of creation, we ourselves now have both free reign over and a tremendous responsibility for the classification of matter, second-rate manifestations of provincial tandeta included; we are invited to do so by an innate urge to mythologize—by poesis.[89]

A paradigmatic textual embodiment of this drive is found in the chapter that immediately follows Father's heated disquisition. "Nimrod" relates the first few weeks in the life of a puppy purchased by the family from a local peasant. The unmistakable and unassailable form of "dogness" appears for the narrator's—and so for the readers'—direct contemplation. Nimrod knows what he is "in his plasma."[90] Somehow, via ancestral recall, perhaps—the memory of "generations"—or through more occult forms of consciousness, or possibly even in the unvoiced unconscious, if dogs can be said to possess a self-reflexivity apart from language, he hermeneutically apprehends his own canine place in the taxonomy, the essential dogness of his world condition.[91] And yet he responds to the forms and representations of the world as all sentient beings do, namely, as a revelation made explicitly for us.[92] We

85. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 51–70. See Panas, "Stworzenie świata, czyli *cimcum*," chap. 1 in *Księga blasku*.

86. See also Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiązłość*, 111–12.

87. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 57.

88. Ibid., 59.

89. Ibid., 61.

90. Ibid., 75.

91. Ibid.

92. Freud speaks of the unconscious as a system ruled over and systematized by a recognizable—and representational—linguistic system, though he also defines it as a struc-

self-reflexively though automatically "submit" to the axiomatic "charms of plurality" as curious innocents, ludically at first.[93] Soon, however, as with the illustration of Nimrod's maturation into himself as subject, the world begins to set "materialist" traps for us. (Kafka's "A Little Fable," a 1920 parable about the mouse and the cat and the axiomatic foreclosing of choices while we travel the path of our lives, is homologous to the process invoked here.)[94] Again and again, reality "tricks" us, transmuting our earlier sense of wonderment into parody or a shadow of its former self.[95] The form of the world, in other words, constitutes an immutable dialectic between an inchoate thirst for freedom (also knowledge) and the forces of oppression and repression (which are also internal, as in a posture of docility before authority, "norms," and other first principles of societal conduct that we submissively internalize). The raising of these twin and opposed imperatives to an architectonic principle through a mythic reclamation of trash is ultimately what's at stake in Schulz's narrative.

The narratological (and epistemological) notion that the desire for durability, for the eternal, has been abolished in favor of a poetics of immediacy—the art of today is for the moment—constitutes a refutation of permanency. This is the third condition. Father-demiurge cries out not so much for a timeless or eternal form of art but a timely art (exactly like the interwar vanguard). The object of the new totality of the work of art is the abolishment of art in favor of incomplete or contingent enunciation, as when Father declares, "We wish to be creators in [a] lower sphere. Our creations will be temporary, to serve for a single occasion."[96] Along with immediacy, the chief objective of the provincial art of the new era will be its (perhaps democratic) accessibility but also its disposability. The manifesto continues: "We shall give priority to trash. We are simply entranced and enchanted by the cheapness, shabbiness, and inferiority of material."[97] The favored mode of representation, then, is through bric-à-brac, that is, through the reapplication and thus the (temporary) reaffirmation of the rejected and the objet trouvé. The narrator's representational technique, reconstituting "reality" from the all-important (though marginal) tatters and "shimmering" fragments, both foregrounds Schulz's narratives as principally pieces of memory work and announces a new aesthetics of trash bricolage.[98]

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ture that is apart, walled off from the language systems of representation of consciousness (and in distinction to the preconscious). See Sigmund Freud, "Repression," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Gay, 576–79.

93. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 74.

94. Franz Kafka, "A Little Fable," *East of the Web: Short Stories*, at www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/LittFabl.shtml (last accessed August 15, 2015). The full text is as follows: "'Alas,' said the mouse, 'the whole world is growing smaller every day. At the beginning it was so big that I was afraid, I kept running and running, and I was glad when I saw walls far away to the right and left, but these long walls have narrowed so quickly that I am in the last chamber already, and there in the corner stands the trap that I must run into.' 'You only need to change your direction,' said the cat, and ate it up."

95. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 74.

96. Ibid., 61.

97. Ibid., 62.

98. Markowski, *Polska literatura nowoczesna*, 196. Goldfarb makes the compelling argument that Schulz's mythopoeic reinscription or "reassembly" of reality from frag-

This is, in particular, the ambition to render man "in the shape and semblance of a tailor's dummy."[99]

While liberating on the face of it, this latter prerogative also glosses several key ideas of social engineering—not merely consumer society of the type predicted by Freud in "Civilization and Its Discontents," its avatars already on parade in Schulz's vision of Stryjska Street.[100] It specifically indicates the demiurgic power of social masters to turn anyone into any requisite form or into a form fit to serve for one particular purpose only—a chief conceit of totalitarianism in its twentieth-century permutations. Thus, politics in Schulz enters again through the back door or even by accident, for the concepts here described reverberate with both those of the socialist new man, via the subject construction of *Homo sovieticus*, and, more ominously, coterminous Nazi formalism, particularly its embrace of eugenics for the re-forming of an ideal millennial society to come while identifying and cataloguing (and, no less crucial, disposing of) its cast-offs.[101] The formal discontent of provincial dreaming for Schulz, then, lies in the fact that while human beings have been gifted with the power to create form, we are innately subjects of and subject to form (demonstrated in the "Nimrod" chapter, the point is conclusively reemphasized at the close of Father's treatise on tailor's dummies). For his part, Father, who in a demiurgic triumph molds himself into the shape of an "aroused dictator" as he expounds on the creation and destruction of forms, can still be made formally to submit to the cathected forms that belong to the semiosphere of forbidden desire embodied by Adela (not only in the broom but also her slippers, as well as various facial expressions and gestures, such as the threatening "tickling finger"—a corporeal pragmatics that seemingly anticipates Leo in Gombrowicz's *Kosmos*).[102] On the level of daily life, Schulz says, not only are we imprisoned within our form, we remain, alas, willing hostages of form: we submit to it, docilely and willingly, due to the ideological "apparatuses" of hegemony, in the interest of social cohesion, or because of the inner mechanisms of shame and repression—which in the end amount to the same thing.[103] While we excel at collecting matter all around us for our private needs, we tend to stop our dreams short precisely

ments of a "forgotten world"—a form of bricolage—anticipates one of the most productive strategies of European writing in the wake of the Holocaust (that is, postmemory work). Goldfarb, introduction to Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, xxi.

99. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 62.

100. Ibid., 106.

101. This is less an echo, actually, than a prophecy: initiated around the period *Crocodiles* was written (1931–33), Nazi social engineering combined two main discourses. The first sought to create in Germans a sense of racial overlordship; the second, to reify in racial undesirables an internalized inferiority. Form, then, would be merely a shell to be filled with content as necessary. This content could be aesthetic in character—it is precisely that for Father-demiurge—but it could also be social or ideological. On the potential of bricolage as a practice of everyday life, see de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xviii–xxi.

102. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 65.

103. Ibid., 70. See Louis Althusser's typology of the repressive functions of ideological state apparatuses, which conceal the contours of authentic reality—of both our desires and specifically our material existence—through various modes of deflection. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London, 1971), 18–21.

at that beguiling moment of material embodiment, the forces of our desires shattering like shards of a broken mirror—back into formal possibility. Yet it is the possibility—the "potential space of a new use," indeed for new life—that counts.[104] Without the hope of permanency of the base, and deprived of the myth of purity, we perform our exegeses of things and forms based on intentionality and tactics (micropolitics), not for enduring affect. Matter, then, awaits the call of form(ing). Indiscriminate matter indeed waits "on the side" (*obok*) as a countersign to the formal (ordering) drive, calling through its very latency to form's artificiality, the possibility of contamination, alternatively embodying and disembodying form—ultimately defamiliarizing form.[105] This dynamic is also not without consequence for a micropolitical reading. For Markowski, for example, it is by exploring this binary that we find the real Schulz, for whom "looseness [or "indiscriminacy" (*rozwiązłość*)] first of all represents a deconstruction of the relations between form and matter, an unmasking of the illusoriness of the dramas which we all act out; thus, a defamiliarization of life itself."[106] In such a reading, the potentiality of form (and of formal play) emerges as a countermeasure against, at the very least, the reign of provincial tedium. My argument, of course, is that it constitutes something more strategic and more concrete.

Special relativity, the fourth and final narratological condition of *The Street of Crocodiles*, implies that the inchoate and uncanny cosmic system nonetheless prevails over the bourgeois time of social organization and can be accessed at any moment as a practice of resistance if not of outright freedom.[107] Seasons—indicated in the headings of nearly each chapter—mark the passage of documentary time. On the immediate level of daily life, it is noted that candles within candelabra "burned shorter," beds were unmade "for days," and apartments were left empty "for months."[108] Time here becomes a muted servant to the dream logic. This logic can sometimes expand beyond solipsistic subjectivity, as when the entire family "forgot" Father, who remained preoccupied with his world-making projects in the attic, for a period of "weeks." Or when Mother, unable to "cope with her dressing," required an entire morning to steady herself for the day ahead. Three temporal "slices" of this inability to exist—or unwillingness to participate—in real time are made manifest in the text (by the interrupting activities of Adela, who cooks and cleans, and by the shop assistants who return to the shop to take their lunch).[109]

The narrator, as a teenager, is enchained by and subjected to the often-disjointed and in any case not entirely transparent logics governing the house-

104. See Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiązłość*, 111.

105. Ibid., 87–88, 96.

106. "Rozwiązłość to przede wszystkim dekonstrukcja relacji między formą i materią, to demaskacja iluzoryczności teatru, w którym wszyscy gramy . . . a przez to także defamiliaryzacja życia." Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiązłość*, 96; see also ibid., 108–13.

107. Cf. Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Power," in *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Rabinow and Rose, 26–28.

108. Schulz, *Street of Crocodiles*, 53, 37.

109. Ibid., 52–54. In this section, clearly identifiable markers of class (and with it class privilege, e.g., the prerogative of leisure) appear at last, though Schulz does not insist on bringing them to the fore.

hold. On the other hand, while a master mythologist, he is strangely unable to access the inner time of another subject (here, not only Mother and Father but also Adela); it is the matter before *his* eyes that matters. Accordingly, it is his solipsistic narratological time that irrupts onto the fabric of the text, tearing it into strips of temporality, and in an archetypal strategy of modernist subjective inscription, readers are made to focus on the time signatures of his inner experiencing of the formative dramas of his own consciousness—if they wish to attain something along the lines of a comforting sense of wholeness, that is. The narrator does not in all cases enjoy this kind of comfort or purity. Myth—and thus mythic time—is liable to recur everywhere at any moment, an accomplice to matter itself, ushered in by spellbinding reappearances of various forms of trash.

Envoi

With its supersaturated atmosphere of expressionist potentiality and the thickened spatiotemporal indices of his home town, Schulz's particular province is still spectacular in its uncompromising allegiance to the power of individual creation and his insistence on the district's own second-hand materials. This world—all of it now vanished—continues to haunt Poland's literary spaces, inspiring new continuators of mythopoeic provincial literature.[110]

Tandeta forms a unifying sign for Schulz's poetics. Trash constitutes, compels, animates, and also gives tangible contour to the narrator's dream-thoughts. It is, furthermore, the subject of many of his nightmares. It incorporates both the diurnal (ordering, colonizing, disciplining) and the nocturnal (mystical, uncanny, resisting) forces of everyday life, the latter an inevitable mythopoeic supplement to the former. Janus-faced, the work's symbolic economy reads trash as an icon of the text itself, reproducing its structure. In the hinge or conjunction between the two worlds—and the two types of trash or pollution—lies the force (or libido) propelling the narratives forward.[111]

There is nothing else to work with apart from tandeta out there in the provinces, Schulz avows, and the one great innovation of his literary style is that this does not particularly matter for art. Along with Gombrowicz, then, Schulz is the greatest iconoclast and remaker of form in modern Polish literature. Trash, collected from without and brought back up from the spaces of the unconscious and then ideationally reterritorialized in the space of writing, is here elevated to the status of matter. Matter—divine or merely fallen or quotidian—is what we are called to use for the creation of all our forms, insists Father, a great old artificer himself.[112] The stories that compose *The Street of Crocodiles* are a demonstration of and a patent for this principle in the realm

110. The list of Polish authors who claim Schulz as an inspiration or a direct influence or have attempted narratological experiments in his idiom is long and includes Andrzej Stasiuk, Olga Tokarczuk, and Dorota Masłowska, among others.

111. Cf. Markowski, "Text and Theater," 439.

112. See, for example, Stala, *On the Margins of Reality*, 101–2, though the claim made there is that Father is a cataloguer of an "inverted mimesis," the needs of subjective representation taking (demiurgic) precedence over—and thus creating the categories for—the phenomenal world (or Nature).

of modernist literature. Out in the provinces, Schulz is saying, far from being shamefully avoided, tandeta ought to be assimilated and reworked, reformed, within a new poetics of resistance. It is not irrelevant that this program, once enacted, actually coincides with the pragmatics of the interwar avant-garde, though it is a provincial hallmark that this liberation or resistance was to be achieved through more idiosyncratic, or more personal and local, pathways.

What fault is it of ours that we did not have better materials or grander topographies within which to coordinate our micropolitical tasks, Schulz's narrator demands, in the chapter devoted to the "Street of Crocodiles"—a study of simultaneous agglutination and decomposition that takes on the main commercial thoroughfare, the showpiece of his little provincial town? This state of affairs is something for which we all as readers should be thankful. Polish literature would not have this extraordinary narrative if it weren't for his engaging—and working with, cataloguing, working through—provincial trash in all its manifestations, inner and external.