

Pedagogical Eros in Modernity: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Jakob and Herr
Benjamenta in Robert Walser's *Jakob von Gunten: Ein Tagebuch*

John Forrest Finch

- Honors Thesis -

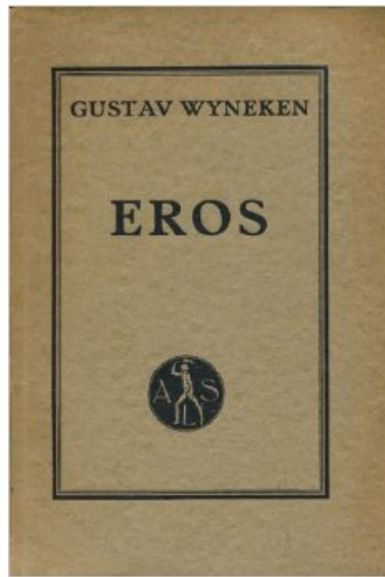
The Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

- Spring 2015 -

This project was supported by the Dunlevie Honors Undergraduate Research Fund
administered by Honors Carolina.

Approved by:



Gustav Wyneken's text on pedagogical Eros, *EROS* (1921)

I would like to thank Dr. Priscilla Layne-Kopf for her attention, effort, encouragement, and help throughout this entire project. From its inception over coffee in Kreuzberg, Berlin, to its subsequent completion over a year later in Chapel Hill, Dr. Layne-Kopf provided me with a degree of intellectual support that not only made this thesis possible, but gave me the confidence to continue my scholastic endeavors in graduate school.

I would also like to thank Mary Grayson Brook, my fellow UNC Germanist, for always being a great person with whom to learn, think, and converse.

Introduction

1-4

Chapter One: Social Norms Pertaining to Homosexuality and Pederasty in the Early 20th Century

Sexuality in Early 20th Century Europe

5-7

Homosexuality in Early 20th Century Germany

7-9

Gustav Wyneken, Sexuality, and Pedagogy

9-12

Gustav Wyneken, Walter Benjamin, and Robert Walser's Jakob von Gunten

13-14

Chapter Two: Human Nature in the Big City

15-16

The Großstadt as Emblematic of Modernity

16-19

Leisure, Nature, and the Human Experience in an Urban Context

19-21

Boredom as Natural Leisure

21-25

Anti-Modern Boredom Inclines Jakob to Transgress Social Norms

25-28

Boredom, Yearning, and Homosexuality as Spiritual Ailments

28-30

Idleness in the Institute Benjamenta as a Garden of Behavior

30-33

From an Investigation of Modernity to an Analysis of the Institute Benjamenta

33-34

Chapter Three: The Benjamentian Pedagogy and the Relationship Between Herr Benjamenta and Jakob von Gunten

34-35

<i>The Institute: A Paradoxical School of Autodidactism</i>	35-37
<i>The Paradoxical Effect of the Institute on Jakob's Personality</i>	37-38
<i>Personal and Social Subordination at the Institute through Ritualized Attire</i>	38-40
<i>The Benjamentian Pedagogy as Ritual</i>	40-44
<i>Space and Ritual Pedagogy within the Institute Benjamenta</i>	44-46
<i>Suspension of Gender through Attire in Ritualized Chores</i>	46-50
<u>Chapter Four: Conclusion</u>	50-51
<i>The Intimacy of Jakob and Herr Benjamenta's Relationship</i>	51-54
<i>The Benjamentian Pedagogy as a Relationship with Herr Benjamenta Himself</i>	54-56
<i>The Lord-Bondsman Dialectic in Herr Benjamenta and Jakob's Relationship</i>	57-60
<i>Jakob and Herr Benjamenta's Relationship as Pederasty</i>	60-65
<i>Walter Benjamin's Theorization Applied to Authentic Pedagogical Relationships</i>	65-68
<i>Gustav Wyneken's Pedagogical Eros as a Pre-Modern Pedagogical Relationship</i>	69-70
<i>An Escape from Modern Culture as the Only Way to Pedagogical Eros</i>	70-75
<u>Epilogue</u>	75-78

Introduction

This thesis argues that in Robert Walser's novel *Jakob von Gunten: Ein Tagebuch* (1909) a relationship of pedagogical Eros, or pederasty as redefined by the early 20th Century pedagogue Gustav Wyneken, arises between the protagonist, Jakob von Gunten, and the principal of his school, Herr Benjamenta. Ultimately, this literary project claims that Robert Walser's novel *Jakob von Gunten* suggests that for people living in urban environments in modernity, capital-oriented norms and commercial lifestyle marginalize natural human behaviors – namely real boredom – and thereby inhibit and diminish their natural ability to form certain intimate interpersonal relationships. More simply put, this project will first make observations about life in the 20th Century, analyze them in terms of how they make certain types of relationships' existence hard to come by, and then apply these analyses to the relationship between the characters Herr Benjamenta and Jakob von Gunten. This work then explores the dynamic between Herr Benjamenta and Jakob and investigates whether or not its existence in modern times is feasible.

Because of the new standard of aesthetic experience in industrial capitalist society, which directly influences the norms of pedagogical experiences, this investigation then posits that Herr Benjamenta and Jakob von Gunten begin to experience Gustav Wyneken's pre-modern concept of pedagogical Eros with one another, but that it is marginalized to such an extent by modern norms that its existence is ultimately not tolerated. As Walter Benjamin examined how the normalization of a daily onslaught of media in industrial capitalist society degrades man's ability to form authentic relationships with works of art, this project applies this theory to the relationship between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta in *Jakob von Gunten* to demonstrate that homo-social intergenerational pedagogical relationships are marginalized because of everyday

modern social norms. Just as the social conditions of an industrially productive society marginalize authentic aesthetic experiences, so too are uniquely intimate intergenerational educational relationships marginalized by these conditions insofar that they no longer are permitted to exist in the 20th Century because they are contrary to modern thought. While authentic aesthetic experiences, especially experiences of real boredom, were hard to come by in the early 20th Century, this work argues that the Institute Benjamenta creates a special space in which a pedagogy of idleness and ritualistic, almost occult, activities are performed in an ever increasingly rushed, mechanized, and artificialized world.

In order to propose such a complex argument, the first chapter of this thesis begins with an elucidation of the historical context in which Robert Walser wrote *Jakob von Gunten*, which examines Western sexual norms in the early 20th Century and the history of the reform pedagogical movement through Gustav Wyneken's scandal. It is noted that Gustav Wyneken and Walter Benjamin worked together in the early 20th Century, before Walter Benjamin's theory is then engaged in fourth chapter in this thesis.

Following the first chapter, the second chapter then draws connections between the effects on life inside the big city and one's potential to experience real boredom in daily urban life. The ways that urban life modifies human activity and denies people access to real natural spaces where human behavior can unfold are analyzed in order to show that natural human behavior, and thus real boredom, is suppressed in a modern urban environment. Through the examination of the suppression of human nature in urban spaces this chapter argues that the experience of natural boredom, something different from modern leisure, is marginalized in the early 20th Century, whereby the intellectual idleness that potentiates spiritual yearning for sexual exploration is excluded from everyday interpersonal experiences. Using "Boredom," Kracauer's

essay on the effects of an industrial-capitalist lifestyle on one's potential to rouse oneself into real boredom, this section proposes that boredom is the font of creative, passionate, and experimental desires. After it examines the ways in which life in the city alters the natural human experience, this second chapter further suggests that lengths of time in which real boredom is experienced in *Jakob von Gunten* incite Jakob to passionately transgress sexual norms.

Moreover, the third chapter of this project expounds on the ways in which the Institute Benjamenta causes Jakob von Gunten and his comrades to seek out normatively transgressive experiences. The pedagogy of the Institute is considered as a ritualistic methodology based on experience and action, not content, which facilitates taboo interpersonal experience. The space of the Institute Benjamenta is analyzed in terms of its paradoxical nature as a school where nothing is taught and that encourages autodidacticism and blind obedience. Furthermore, the paradoxical effect of the Institute on Jakob's personality, specifically through its use of female attire in ritualized experiences, is examined inasmuch as it causes Jakob to seek gratification through his personal subordination. This chapter then argues that through an atmosphere of untainted, natural idleness, these ritualistic experiences function to suspend gender norms and to allow for pre-modern interpersonal experiences to arise.

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, the nature of the relationship between Herr Benjamenta and Jakob von Gunten is analyzed in terms of its similarities to the Lord-Bondsman dialectic. Thereafter, this section compares this relationship to Greek pederasty as elaborated on by Plato in *Symposium*. Finally, this relational dynamic is defined within the framework of Gustav Wyneken's translation of pederasty into his defense of modern pedagogical Eros and his own pedagogical practices. To demonstrate the theoretical, not only social, difficulty of reifying a relationship of pedagogical Eros in modern times, this section employs Walter Benjamin's

theory on works of art in the age of their mechanical reproduction to conclude that just as social norms under industrial capitalism marginalize the opportunity for a person to have an authentic experience with a work of art, so too do these norms marginalize the opportunities, especially the spaces, in which an older man can realize an intimate, edifying, spiritual, and potentially physical relationship with a pubescent boy. Through a final comparison of Wyneken's occupational failure and public defeat with the bleak ending of this novel, this work conclusively argues that Robert Walser indeed understood pedagogical Eros as a natural human phenomenon, although one marginalized to such an extent in modern times that it will never again be socially sanctioned.

To begin this tedious literary and historical investigation, though, the first chapter of this thesis establishes notions of sexual norms in early 20th Century Germany and shows how homosexuality was treated by Germanic society. Gustav Wyneken's notions of sexuality and pedagogy in his theory of pedagogical Eros are initially examined, so as explain his conception of intimate, male-male, intergenerational pedagogical relationships in early 20th Century Germany. The latter sections of the succeeding first chapter then propose that Robert Walser thematizes the same archetypal relationship of male-male, intergenerational pedagogical love in *Jakob von Gunten* that Gustav Wyneken unsuccessfully defended in his defense of pedagogical Eros, *Eros*. Ultimately, this project suggests that Walser does not judge pedagogical Eros as good or bad through his fictitious novel *Jakob von Gunten*, but that he does make it clear that such a relationship, one so disengaged with modernity, cannot exist under early 20th Century social conditions.

Chapter One: Social Norms Pertaining to Homosexuality and Pederasty in the Early 20th Century

Sexuality in Early 20th Century Europe

In Germany up until the latter part of the 20th Century, sexualities perceived as deviant had been hushed and muted, even demonized, since the latter part of the 17th Century. With the dawn of the Industrial Age, capitalism coupled with conservative Christian dogma determined right and wrong in terms of sexuality as it chiseled away at a “common frankness” in talk of anatomy and sensuality that existed in pre-modern, pre-industrial times (Foucault 3). According to Michel Foucault, in pre-modern social settings sexuality was freely and unabashedly discussed and deviant sexualities were seen as inevitable social phenomena that were incorporated into the community (3). As the Victorian Age and industrialism increased urbanization and sharpened the boundaries of sexuality, only sex aimed at procreation was sanctioned. The Industrial Age suppressed sex for its preservation as a practical social exercise, and thereby made it into a hidden practice of the nuptial household not to be frankly discussed. Since the advent of the Victorian era in the 17th Century, only a single locus of sexuality has been totally permitted in the public eye: the fertile, legal, sequestered center of the heterosexual household - the nuptial bed (Foucault 3).

The intersection of Victorian sexual sanctimony with the growth of industrial capitalism made sex not only an activity of moral, but also of productive value. As the focus of modern life became efficient and regimented production, sex, a naturally productive occupation, fell under the determination of industrial thought. Sex was equated to the production of human capital, and it therefore needed streamlining in an industrially productive world. Sexualities that were divisive, though, needed to be eliminated or made profitable, hence the birth of the modern brothel and mental asylum (Foucault 4). Any other form of love was considered a wasteful

expenditure of energy. As industrial capitalism extracted subjectivity and passion out of sexuality, it made what was once considered passionate interpersonal experience into a mere social statistic.

As society saw sexuality as a mode of production instead of as part of the human condition, governments created mechanisms for policing sexuality within the private and public spheres. The primary mean by which modern society repressed sexuality was the new tendency to turn sexuality into discourse, to take it out of the realm of emotion and into an academic, sterile space where it could be analyzed, controlled, and corrected (Foucault 33). By translating sexuality into words, the moment of sexual transgression was taken from the act itself to the initial “stirrings of desire” (Foucault 20). Thoughts, preceding their deeds, became forbidden. The underlying goal of the modern transformation of sex into words was to “expel from reality the forms of sexuality not amenable to the strict economy of production,” i.e. to identify and correct all deviant sexual behaviors that do not produce laborers (Foucault 36). Sexualities that did not benefit society according to the terms of industrialism needed corrective criminal or psychiatric attention.

The discursive explosion of sexuality in the 18th and 19th Centuries caused sex to fall under the scrutiny of not only civil and canonical codes, but also of scientific and pedagogical discourses. As sexuality became categorical and measurable, the dimensions of ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ were imposed on it. Sex came under the discursive scrutiny of a regime of scientific rationality and Christian morality, as categories of sexual experience outside those of the lawful, heterosexual couple were deemed “contrary to nature” and pathological (Foucault 38). Because nature is a universal and scientific law, transgressions against nature became contrary to society’s rational, universal laws (Foucault 38). Infractions against normal sexuality, or “against

the laws” of Christianity, or her subject nature, qualified as infractions against the holy institution of matrimony and the social principals on which society is based (Foucault 38). In modern times, prohibitions on sexual activities acquired a juridical nature.

Homosexuality in Early 20th Century Germany

The 1871 adoption of Paragraph 175 into the Prussian Criminal Code defined male-male sexuality as “pathological...[yet] natural urge” and it effectively illegalized any homosexual relations (Dickinson 155). Now that sexualities were categorized by the German state into “licit and illicit,” defined peripheral sexualities appeared for the first time in public discourse as something not to be condemned, but managed and cured “for the greater good of all” (Foucault 24). Sex was something that needed to be accounted for and carefully administered, not experienced. The modern tendency to turn sexuality into discourse made sexuality a component of identity, and it marginalized male-male sexuality to a delineated social cohort: the homosexuals. Homosexuality now became equivalent to an immoral fatigue: An inert sexual identity that renders no new workers. German society’s laws subjected sex to the rules of industrial production, and anyone who was not procreating was counterproductive to social progress. Homosexuality was a spiritual disease, but also a social malaise. Not only was homosexuality seen as a legally defined pathological libidinal perversion, but also as a sinister, spiritual boredom that inhibited procreation and the expansion of commercial society.

As society in the 20th Century became more scientific and commercialized, “medicine made a forceful entry into the pleasures of the couple” (Foucault 41). Peripheral sexualities, especially “instinctual disturbances” such as same-sex feelings, were to be classified and treated (Foucault 41). In the last quarter of the 19th Century, German-Viennese psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing concluded in his *Textbook of Forensic Psychopathology* (1875) that the origins of

homosexuality were rooted mostly in “moral depravity,” but also in a natural “perversion of the sex drive,” caused by a neurological disease (Dickinson 153). While most scientists toward the turn of the century began to see homosexuality as something both pathological and natural, the gay rights activist Magnus Hirschfeld was the first person to advocate for the repeal of Paragraph 175 in “explicitly” medical-scientific terms, as he argued that homosexuality was indeed natural, but not pathological (Dickinson 157).

Although Krafft-Ebing had already declared homosexuality an in-born trait, Hirschfeld was the first theorist to expound upon homosexuality without taking a critical, moralistic stance. Hirschfeld outlined three central themes in the defense of homosexuality in his work *Sappho and Sokrates* (1896): the “authenticity and irrevocability of sexual identity” as an “inborn and unchanging characteristic,” the essential hermaphroditism of all humans, and the existence of an “endless variety” of sexual variations (Dickinson 158). Furthermore, in his 1912 book *The Natural Laws of Love* Hirschfeld claimed that the natural spectrum of sexualities had been veiled and demonized for the past two thousand years as European civilization steeped in the “anti-hedonist exaggerations” of Christianity (Dickinson 160).

Hirschfeld argued against Paragraph 175 with the pretense that the only “legitimate foundation of social order” is the recognition of individual rights, implying that each man has his own unique, in-born conception of love and sexuality (Dickinson 159). Hirschfeld was an advocate for social recognition of homosexuality, as he sought to explain it in only humanist and not pathological terms; however, Hirschfeld he did not explicitly extend this advocacy to highly controversial areas of homosexuality, like pederasty. On the other hand, the pedagogue Gustav Wyneken was a strong proponent of pederasty in early 20th Century Germany who went so far as

to defend this stance by defining his own conception of pederast love, known as pedagogical Eros, and claiming that its integration into the state concept would greatly improve society.

Gustav Wyneken, Sexuality, and Pedagogy

In 1906 Gustav Wyneken participated in founding the Wickersdorf Freie Schulegemeinde on the edge of the Thüringen Forest, a radical reform school that aimed to revitalize German education through a retreat into nature and an invocation of Classical pedagogical traditions. The pedagogy of the Wickersdorf Community during its early decades contrasted with the rigid, Protestant atmosphere of Wihelminian boarding schools, and it is no surprise that controversy ensued from Wickersdorf's experimental educational style. Coming out of the *Landerziehung Bewegung*, Wyneken strove to revive Greek traditions of pedagogical relationships in his Wickersdorfian iteration of an *Internat*.¹ He called for a return to natural settings and a withdrawal from modern standards of socialization; he especially considered nudity integral to a fulfilling education. The teachers at Wickersdorf, too, were supposed to form intimate relationships with their pupils through which they would rear students into a higher world of aesthetic knowledge, just like how men in pre-modern pederast relationships elevated their pupils to a higher plane of intellectual understanding.

Through the Wickersdorf Community Wyneken reintroduced a loving, intimate bond between a leader and his pupil as an educational principle and he successfully led this experimental pedagogical community from 1906 to 1914 before his scandalous 1920 ousting on the accusations of sexual misconduct. At Wickersdorf, Wyneken realized his pedagogical vision of a non-authoritarian, “self-educating” community in which intimate friendships between pupils

¹ The *Landerziehung Bewegung* was a radical reform pedagogical movement in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries in Germany dedicated to reinventing socialization and education in *Landerziehungsheime* throughout the countryside.

and their teachers laid the groundwork for self-actualization and an aesthetic rearing (Thijs 50). Citing the state, the traditional school, and the nuclear family as incapable of providing an adequate aesthetic and intellectual education, Wyneken drew inspiration from Greek antiquity. He specifically drew from Plato's Symposium, in which Plato proclaimed love between an older man and a younger boy as a virtuous fundament of pedagogy, to support his beliefs (Thijs 51). After his arraignment for sexual abuse, Wyneken published Eros in 1921 in order to argue for his innocence on the ground that pedagogical love was a non-sexual expression of a natural, didactic, inter-generational, male-male interpersonal dynamic that has existed throughout history. Accused of pedophilia and homosexuality, he discursively defended his intimate relationship toward his male pupils as natural, mutually inspirational, loving, and non-sexual, although predicated on an attraction to human beauty. He named this modern conception of an intimate relational dynamic between an instructor and a student "pedagogical Eros."

In Eros, Gustav Wyneken makes a "practical and ethical" argument for Paiderastia, which he distinguished as inherently different from pederasty, because Paiderastia – or pedagogical Eros – is innately Platonic, while pederasty *always* involves sexual consummation (Wyneken 25). Wyneken believed that pedagogical Eros existed in every historical context, but its expression was contingent upon social norms and was formed within boundaries set by those norms. He understood laws as merely "a system of words" arranged by society that "exist independently of a living reality" – he saw that social norms of interpersonal conduct were just a historical construct (Wyneken 40-41). Laws change depending on their respective historical era and the social values of that time, yet human nature and the natural desire to express pedagogical Eros do not change.

Wyneken argued that in antique Greek society the legality of Paiderastia signified the “flourishing and unfolding of [their] culture,” as the Greeks institutionalized this natural phenomenon in the state concept of their “knightly” society in order to better it (Wyneken 8). Because the Greeks recognized and embraced this “psychic given” of the human condition instead of banning it, they increased the welfare of their men and their society (13). Only since the advent of Christian morality was Paiderastia labeled as aberrant and immoral. Wyneken defended Paiderastia following this historical proof, as he emphasized the spiritual rather than sexual dimension of pedagogical Eros: “Eros is not an expression of the sex drive” (12). While theoretically dividing libidinal love and Eros, with libido as a corporeal feeling and Eros as a spiritual one, Wyneken equated the sex drive to an insatiable desire to enjoy and consume and Eros to the desire “to gift and to create” (24). Unlike in sexual intercourse, in Eros the “actual deed is done in the heart, not with the body” (47). Wyneken did not equate feelings with actions. To him, any feeling of love could never be absolutely socially aberrant, since it is a product of the heart and not a deed that is physically committed.

When attacked for supporting homoerotic intimacy, Wyneken dismissed this phenomenon between teachers and pupils as a consequence of the atmosphere of camaraderie that the school engendered (48). Wyneken used Plato’s conception of Paiderastia to explain the emergence of the relational dynamic of pedagogical Eros in his academy. While the boy represents beauty, fertility, and creativity, the man is ugly, old, and no longer capable of self-expression – he is bored with life. A mutual attraction arises between them, by which the older man, who is “pregnant” with ideas, seeks to stoke inspiration in the mind of the younger man, while the younger man, invigorated by his yearning youthfulness, is attracted to the success and knowledge of his older counterpart (Wyneken 50). The older men are loving leaders, the

Führertum, while the youths, the *Jüngertum*, are adoring, subordinated recipients of edifying attention who “transfer [their] novel powers gained in puberty” into a spiritual relationship with the older men (Wyneken 63).

Wyneken sought to reinstate the formation of intimate teacher-student relations as a fundament of a fulfilling aesthetic education. His goal was to transcend and redraw the boundaries of modern inter-generational pedagogical relationships. Wyneken wanted to “re-invent” society not through words and discourse, but through offering a new foundation of a love that “cannot be schematically judged” (Wyneken 43). By accepting and embracing the “creative deed,” the cultivation of inter-generational, Platonic, homosocial relationships, Wyneken believed that European culture could be reinvigorated (42). Wyneken opposed any notion that intimate inter-generational, homosocial relations were perverse, unproductive, and pathological. He classified the specific homosocial, inter-generational intimacy of pedagogical Eros as a non-sexual, passionate, educational, imitative, and healthy pedagogical technique. Though pedagogical Eros is not procreative in a literal sense, Wyneken saw this intimate dynamic as man wanting to “procreate himself and advance his life” in the future of a pure, noble youth (54).

Wyneken posited the social and spiritual benefits of relationships formed out of pedagogical Eros as he advocated for its re-institutionalization in society as an essentially Platonic, rather than sexual, relationship. The total absence of sexual intercourse in pedagogical Eros differentiates this form of love from Antique pederasty and is the single aspect through which Wyneken hoped to redeem this historically “archetypal phenomenon” in early 20th Century German culture (49). Wyneken’s eventual expulsion from the Wickersdorf Community on the repeated charges of sexual misconduct evidences, though, that his pedagogy was not socially accepted or integrated, and was instead marginalized to the point that his career was ruined.

Gustav Wyneken, Walter Benjamin, and Robert Walser's Jakob von Gunten

In the early 20th Century, Walter Benjamin worked under Gustav Wyneken at the Wickersdorf Free School Community and was influenced by Wyneken's writing as well as the atmosphere of openness and camaraderie present in his institution. In fact, some of Walter Benjamin's first literary works were first published in the Wickersdorf newspaper, "Der Anfang," which was dedicated to Wyneken's thoughts on the education of youth (Moser 139). As Petra Moser points out in her essay "Nah am Tabu und darüber hinaus," Benjamin came across as a glowing, decisive champion of the youth movement in these texts (139). However, in 1915 Benjamin broke off all correspondence with Wyneken after he published a justification of the First World War, which Benjamin strongly opposed (Moser 148). Benjamin, as Petra Moser notes, went on to become a correspondent and friend of Robert Walser's in the 1920s and 30s, while Gustav Wyneken became a fixture on the margin of German political and pedagogical discourses (150).

In her work Nah am Tabu: Experimentelle Selbsterfahrung und erotischer Eigensinn in Robert Walser's "Jakob von Gunten", Dr. Petra Moser, a professor at the Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich, investigates the homoerotic, inter-generational pedagogical dynamic between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta through extensive consideration of the novel's historical context as well as through literary analysis. Although she examines the sexual and social aspects of the relation between Herr Benjamenta and Jakob in her project, only in the final essay of her work does she mention Walter Benjamin's connection to this educational movement. While this thesis draws on Dr. Moser's conclusions about *Jakob von Gunten* throughout its duration, it seeks to go beyond Walter Benjamin's historical association to the Wickerdorf Community and

actually bring his theory on modern aesthetics from The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction into conversation with Petra Moser's analysis of Jakob and Herr Benjamenta's relationship.

This project agrees with Dr. Moser's investigation of subtle homoerotic tensions in Herr Benjamenta and Jakob's relationship, yet it additionally argues that such homoerotic student-teacher dynamics are marginalized to the point of institutional and public nonexistence in modern times due to new social norms. The unusually intimate teacher-pupil relationship between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta is considered like a work of art and is analyzed in terms of its chance to authentically arise in the early 20th Century, despite strict social boundaries and the increasing rarity of authentic aesthetic experiences because of industrial-capitalist social norms. Defining the relationship between the Herr Benjamenta and Jakob as that of Gustav Wyneken's un-modern concept of pedagogical Eros, this work finds that the unsuccessful establishment of such relationships in both the Wickersdorf Community and in the Institute Benjamenta is attributable to the new social norms that capital-oriented thinking imposes on interpersonal relationships, the experiences of media and art, and education in early 20th Century Germany. As Walter Benjamin mused on pre-modern nature of Robert Walser's characters that lends them a "ganz ungewöhnliches Geschick" and "ganz ungewöhnlichen Adel," my thesis will investigate this peculiar quality in Jakob von Gunten's personality as well as in Herr Benjamenta's relationship with him (Benjamin, *Illuminationen* 3). However, it further claims that this pre-modern, and as Walter Benjamin said himself, "Epicurean," quality is what causes the characters' feelings for each other and their potential interpersonal experience with one another to be marginalized because they clash with early 20th Century norms (Benjamin 3).

Chapter Two: Human Nature in the Big City

This chapter intends to more precisely define what the social norms of 20th Century modernity are pursuant to the ways Jakob von Gunten describes the Prussian *Großstadt* in which the Institute Benjamenta resides. The commercial rush and hustle of city life and the way by which it excludes boredom from everyday experience, along with Jakob's observations about the dearth of nature in the big city, are examined so as to contrast modern, urban life with unspoiled, pre-modern human existence. The urban spaces in which big city life is performed in an urban setting are analyzed along with the urban spaces to which nature is sequestered. This investigation hopes to show how the experience of daily life in the modern *Großstadt* marginalizes nature, which prevents experiences of true boredom and thereby suppresses human behavior, especially with reference to sexual experimentation. Taking this into account, this chapter examines how the unsuppressed boredom that the Institute Benjamenta affords its pupils functions to suspend modern social norms and to spark desires to transcend social boundaries.

Using Kracauer's work on the marginalization of experiences of real boredom in a modern, urban environment, "Boredom," this chapter claims that the Institute Benjamenta differs from the big city insofar as it allows real boredom to flourish. This flourishing of boredom allows interpersonal connections to be made without the pressure of modern norms, namely the distractions of urban existence and the modern tendency to put feelings into discourse (Foucault 17). Moreover, this chapter seeks to show how human nature is modified in the big city not only to exclude the experience of real boredom, but also to homogenize human behavior. Ultimately, I contrast the Institute Benjamenta, a sort of pre-modern, idle space, with the *Großstadt*, a symbol of modern living. In the Institute's pre-modern, idle space, human behavior can flourish and

unfold because the idle atmosphere it facilitates not only suspends early 20th Century social norms and thereby allows taboo relationships to arise, but because it actually provokes these relationships itself.

The Großstadt as Emblematic of Modernity

The contributory, time-dependent aspects of life in an industrial society characterize the human experience in the big city. People feel that they should rush and constantly engage in productive activity so as to produce more capital. Modern city life, defined by demographic density and constant human interaction and observation, causes a stark division between public and private spaces as well as a marginalization or elimination of nature, too. Public parks and private gardens are the only urban instances of natural space and the only public spaces dedicated to leisure and recreation. Public parks and private gardens, themselves artificial results of urbanization, are intended as places of utility, though, not as spaces of boredom or meditation. Parks are supposedly places in which laborers could convince themselves they had experienced nature, relaxation, or recreation, when really parks were just another urban space with a capitalist purpose: To please the laboring population so that it will keep producing capital. As modern industrial capitalist society uses parks to placate workers, streets became the only common public site of socialization, commerce, and transportation. Streets are a locality ubiquitous with the rush of urban life in Jakob's diary.

In his diary, Jakob's implies that streets are not only the stage of the hustle and bustle of city life, but even an artificial ecosystem in which human behavior is modified, streamlined, and consequently anonymized. Jakob characterizes the big city streets by their "Geschiebe und Gedränge," their "Rasseln und Prasseln," and the way in which their hustle and bustle mimics

life in an anthill (41). While new streams of humans and vehicles constantly flow into the streets and omnibuses “humpeln wie große, ungeschlachte Käfer vorüber,” Jakob remarks that the street imposes an equalizing anonymity onto all of its denizens as one neither knows from whence these human masses come or to where they are going (41-41). Regarding this blanket of anonymity that the city lays on the streets, Jakob asks himself “Was ist man eigentlich in dieser Flut, in diesem bunten, nicht endenwollenden Strom von Menschen?” to which he replies with an observation on the uniform appearance and behavior that pedestrians exhibit (43).

The small presence of nature in the urban routine, as well as the urban routine and its thought process, homogenize city dwellers in their appearance and behavior. When the streams of people walk in the light of the setting sun, their faces are “rötlich angezärtelt und gemalt,” but when it is gray and rainy outside, then all the people pass like “Traumfiguren rasch unter dem trüben Flor dahin, etwas suchend, und wie es scheint, fast nie etwas Schönes und Rechtes findend” (43). Disappointment is a quality of life under an urban routine, as Jakob notes that people are searching but never finding answers in this unnatural environment. As the individuality and spiritual yearning inherent to the human experience are distorted and diminished by the big city experience, Jakob feels that not only is anonymity indicative of the city’s aesthetic, but that an insatiable material yearning is provoked by the city, as everyone seems to be facelessly striving and working toward some worldly goal, which is often money and leisure. Unlike urbanites, the uniformed students of the Institute may also be homogenized in their attire and behavior, but their homogenized activity strives to serve the Benjaminian institution and rather than some ambiguous ideal of modern success. Jakob implies that the human experience in the big city is incomplete and unsatisfying, because the answers to everyone’s *Sehnsucht* lie outside of the endeavors of capital-oriented thought, which limits

everyone's potential to fully experience life. Nature's scarcity in this environment, too, leads to modified interactions with the world on the part of city dwellers that also function to streamline daily human experience.

Jakob asserts that a certain profit-oriented thinking characterizes the people in the streets of the big city and defines the human experience in this environment. When he remarks that "die Hast, das Sehnen, die Qual und die Unruhe" glimmer in the eyes of city dwellers, he concludes that in the city "sehnt sich nach Reichtümern und fabelhaften Glücksgütern" (43). The ambitions and aspirations of city denizens, not only their behaviors and appearances, seem to be altered by their urban, industrial environment. Jakob, who admits he likes the big city, remarks that the density of the city rears its inhabitants toward humility as it causes them to compare themselves to one another: "Der Prahlhans wird vielleicht etwas bescheidener und nachdenklicher, wenn er all die Kräfte, die sich schaffend zeigen, erblickt" (52). However, Jakob also remarks on a second didactic result of urban socialization, that is, that it drives burghers to hasten to work and to occupy their thoughts. Jakob elucidates on the feelings this drive toward occupation and business causes:

Während man zaudernd steht, sind schon Hunderte, ist bereits hunderterlei einem am Kopf und Blick vorübergegangen, das beweist einem so recht deutlich, welch ein Versäumer und träger Verschieber man ist. Man hat es hier allgemein eilig, weil man jeden Augenblick der Meinung ist, es sei hübsch, etwas erkämpfen und erhaschen zu gehen (53)

When someone does not participate in this hasty atmosphere of production, then believes himself a failure and a procrastinator. Time acquires value in the city, and he who does not spend his time in some sanctioned pursuit is wasting not only his time and money, but also his life. The only people in the city who seem to be happy are those who have visibly earned it: "Wer sich hier freut, der scheint es stets sauer und rechtschaffen durch Arbeit und Mühe verdient zu haben" (54). The wealthy, those who have earned the surplus of their own (or others') labor, are the only

people who can afford to escape from the urban-industrial hustle and bustle and retreat into spaces of leisure, such as their private gardens. Jakob's commentary on the "Großstadtgetriebe" stands in contrast to his life in the Institute, though, over which an idle atmosphere reigns. Furthermore, the Institute's contrast to the city points to an alternative existence to modern urban life, one in which time and leisure acquire different social values and in which people are not so removed from real nature and an unmodified human experience (55).

Leisure, Nature, and the Human Experience in an Urban Context

Leisure and pleasure were part of urban Prussian social culture in early 20th Century, but these activities were largely reserved for the wealthy. Socially sanctioned unproductive activity, or leisure, was highly priced, and the spaces in which one could experience leisure, especially natural spaces - parks and gardens - became increasingly inaccessible on socioeconomic grounds. In his observation of city life, Jakob draws a connection between one's access to leisure/nature and one's social status, juxtaposing the gardens of the rich, which "so still und verloren hinter den zierlichen Gittern liegen," with the city's commercial traffic that runs next to them as if "es nie Landschaften oder Träumereien im Leben gegeben hätte" (54). In Jakob's observations of city life, only those who have wealth can afford to enjoy leisure and natural spaces as well as the daydreams and musings that these places evoke. Modern social conditions in the big city commoditize nature and leisure and their respective social spaces, which offer opportunities of boredom and daydreaming, and thereby make them accessible only to a certain social cohorts. Contrived nature becomes a scarce commodity in an artificial and constructed living environment.

Aside from modifying and conditioning the behavior of the masses and restricting public access to leisure by commoditizing access to nature, Jakob remarks, furthermore, that an absence

of nature characterizes the experience of life in the big city: “Eins ist wahr, die Natur fehlt hier. Nun, das, was hier ist, ist eben einmal Großstadt” (19). The *Großstadt* tramples natural and authentic leisure spaces, as it removes actual natural spaces from this locus of “Industrie-Reichtum,” whereby it fashions an artificial living environment in which the human experience is diminished to respect a capitalist mindset (54). The way in which people are brought together in a modern urban setting is unique, in that the demographic density felt in this space contributes to its artificiality. In a truly natural, pre-modern setting, human contact is more rare and more cherished. Pre-modern interpersonal contact was not taken for granted, as it is more personal and not limited to the spectacle of anonymously observing others on the street while being observed yourself.

Because of the modern social expectation that everyone is to either consume or produce constantly in this space, an urban setting subjects people to increased surveillance from one another and from the news media as well as to increased input of information and imagery from other people and by these same media. Information and imagery thereby become commodities in urban areas as their consumption, production, reproduction, and sale not only creates one-time profit, but also supports a profit-driven system of information exchange that perpetuates content production. As newspapers, photography, advertising, and industrial means of production bring far-off faces, ideas, and places into close range in the city, the urbanite becomes trapped in this ecosystem of content transaction that bombards him with reproductions (Kracauer 333). While streets, factories, and parks morph the landscape and marginalize real natural spaces, experiencing artificial reproductions of nature is made simpler in the city, too, as imagery of nature is produced in or flows into this space and as the rich erect gardens and parks as surrogate natural spaces. Besides households, privately owned gardens, and parks to some extent, become

the only spaces spared from the pervasive social surveillance created by news media, technology, and population density. Although these social spaces are natural areas, they are nevertheless reconstructions of nature that do not offer the same degree of privacy and interpersonal freedom that a society grown in a natural landscape would enjoy.

Jakob finds the city's extraction of nature from the daily human experience bearable, but nevertheless unholy. Nature, something which he equates with God, is distant and holy to the city dweller: "Die Natur ist mir schon als ganz klein als etwas Himmlisch-Entferntes vorgekommen. So kann ich die Natur entbehren. Muß man denn nicht auch Gott entbehren?" (45). Jakob's questioning implies that one's closeness to real nature offers him a divine experience of which the *Großstadt* deprives modern people. Modern industrial society lacks true spaces of nature and therefore God, or pure creativity, because it reduces intellectual creativity to profit-oriented thinking, and because it diminishes sexuality, sexual creativity, to an activity aimed at the reproduction of a labor force. As modern, urban life subordinates nature and thereby subjugates the innate human creativity potentially experienced in authentic natural spaces to the productive social aims of industrial capitalism, the real natural spaces in which humans should have the privacy and freedom to create, think, and commune with the divine are eliminated.

Boredom as Natural Leisure

As the conditions of modernity in the 20th Century marginalized private, natural spaces of creative freedom, so too was leisure, or socially-sanctioned boredom, marginalized and made inaccessible to average people. Judging by Jakob's stream-of-consciousness prose, it seems Jakob is able to daydream and ruminate all he wants. His thoughts do not align with capital-driven thinking, either. He does not count himself among the homogenous, urban masses, since he writes his diary entries from an observatory position and he denotes his thoughts and presence

as distinct from the activity of the urban masses. Jakob opines that even such a common experience as riding an elevator to the top floor of a building is “nett,” which fits well into his uncommon attitude of “Gedankenlosigkeiten” (25). He wonders to himself, “Ob das andern Menschen auch so geht?” (25). Unlike normal urbanites, Jakob finds uniqueness in everyday human experiences – even modern technological experiences that most people take for granted.

As he observes his surroundings in a way that others him from the uniform habits of the urban masses, Jakob, midway through this work, envisages an alternative to his modern reality while remarking on the sage nobleness in his class peer Kraus. He imagines the Old Testament world of “Das alte patriarchalische Zeitalter mit seinen mysteriösen Sitten und Landschaftsgegenden” where men grew older in a “natürlichem Reichtum” that was measured in their landholding and years of age, not artificial, material wealth (93). In Jakob’s edenic, alternate reality, wealth is gained through working with nature, not through manipulating a capitalist system. In this other world, moral and social paradigms are so different to the point that they are mysterious in comparison to those of the 20th Century.

Jakob implies that in this pre-modern, non-capitalist society there were different ideals of worldly success due to its “mysterious” social conventions, namely, that success was measured in a man’s ability to attain leisure, and thereby experience a richer interpersonal life, despite being in a harsher but more natural landscape. Creativity was requisite to attain such success, however, the paradigm of human creativity was different in this pre-modern reality since its social norms were not determined by capital-oriented thinking. In comparison to the yearning masses on the busy streets that do not seem to be finding what they are longing after, this alternate reality is a place where people successfully satisfy their yearnings. Instead of in terms of capital accumulation, worldly success was measured in the experiences one created. Because

they are uninhibited by the conditions of modern life that regulate human behavior and ambition, people in this pre-modern world desire experiences, not things.

In Jakob's imagination of a pre-modern society, not only did people understand worldly success completely differently, but humans also understood servitude differently. Jakob asserts that because Antique "Sitten und Gebräuche und Anschauungen" were "so zarter und feiner" servitude – or slavery – was an entirely different experience (94). When a boy was sold into slavery his social status did not decrease, but in fact improved, as his master would rear him to be a "schwerreichen, redlichen und feinen Mann" (94). Unlike in the 20th Century, in pre-modernity, servitude was an opportunity to be reared into a higher class as one gained status through his initial social subordination. Subordination was desirable. Servitude, formerly, was didactic and intimate as slaves held close relationships to their masters. This reference to a time and place where enslavement led to social mobility alludes to the aspect of the Greek tradition of pederasty whereby young boys selected by older men as companions came to inherit the men's social statuses.

Jakob concludes his thoughts on servitude by remarking that there are actually many slaves in modern times, even if "modernen, hochmütig-fix und fertigen Menschen" do not notice (94). In modernity, an official institution of enslavement no longer exists; however, Jakob opines that in the 20th Century everyone is dominated by an "ärgerlichen, peitscheschwingenden, unfeinen Weltgedanken" (94). This global thought that enslaves everyone in the 20th Century is the normalization of capital-oriented thinking caused by the onslaught of goods, media, and information. The pervasive drive to produce, consume, and reproduce is inescapable. In pre-modern times, individual humans subordinated other individuals in a didactic, dignifying

manner, but in the 20th Century, a merciless, global economic system subordinates all of human life to generate monetary profit.

As Jakob images of a pre-modern social context lacking industrial capitalism and therefore capital-oriented social norms, he shifts the early 20th Century, European paradigms of servitude, success, and creativity back to their Antique conceptions. Rather than through someone's ability to creatively manipulate and exploit a constructed social system, someone's success was determined by his or her ability in life to experience a spiritual state from which he or she could nurture and express his or her intellect. This pre-modern experiential state was boredom, an "extraordinary, radical" mental state that transcends mere leisurely activity (Kracauer 331). Kracauer asserts in his essay "Boredom" that everyone in the early 20th Century has time for leisure activity, though few have the "opportunity to rouse [themselves] into real boredom" (332). Real boredom requires solitude, patience, meditation, and concentration, whereas leisure activity is based off of the temporarily gratifying consumption of media and products.

Radical boredom is a state toward which someone must strive, because it requires one to disconnect from "the hustle and bustle" into which industrial capitalist society pushes people (Kracauer 331). "Real Boredom" is a mentality whereby one reunites with his own mind by doing nothing. Even though a modern person may want to do nothing and thereby find his own thoughts and, thus, his self, "the world makes sure that one does not find himself" (Kracauer 332). Kracauer argued that in the 20th Century advertisement, motion pictures, and radio put people in "a state of permanent receptivity," that is, media and its mass reproduction and dissemination constantly distract people from their own thoughts (332). As humans are constantly impregnated with information, no one has time left for his own peace of mind.

Despite how objectively boring the news might be, the social condition of 20th Century modernity that people are to constantly consume media for enjoyment, even when they do not want to, makes it so that one is not even granted the “modest right to personal boredom” (Kracauer 333). This pressure to not only work and to think, but also to consume, is inherent to the character of the *Großstadt* as it categorizes leisure activity as an opportunity for consumption. Boredom, though, unlike leisure activity, is not a commoditized experience in modernity, but rather a marginalized, taboo mental state. It is a way of thinking that is entirely un-modern and contrarian to modern life. Through real boredom, one receives a type of “guarantee” that, despite the onslaught of media and material in the modern world, one is “still in control of one’s own existence” (334). Boredom is true freedom from capital-oriented thinking and a space in which one takes the reigns of his own experience of life. While boredom provides positive freedom to experience life, it also affords someone negative freedom, the freedom to escape from the sociocultural norms engendered by industrial capitalism and entrenched in modern life.

Anti-Modern Boredom Inclines Jakob to Transgress Social Norms

In Jakob von Gunten’s diary, boredom is an enjoyment that he says he experiences both outside and inside of the Institute Benjamenta. Outside of the Institute, Jakob and his peer Schilinski enjoy strolling “müßig” on the “belebtesten” streets of the *Großstadt* (Walser 24). Jakob and his friend’s “Müßiggang” in the same space in which the hustle and bustle of modern city life takes place contrasts with this urban commotion (Walser 25). Their strolling, a leisure activity that involves no consumption of media or goods, resembles real boredom especially in that is a time when the characters spend with themselves and during which they take no account of the society around them. Walter Benjamin theorized on this experience of distractedly

strolling in urban space, calling it *Flânerie*. As Benjamin stated, “only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands,” he implies that the Flaneur can recapture the urban space controlled by architects, planners, commercial life, and modern distractions (Dobson 4). Walking becomes an un-modern activity in the city, as urbanites, in contrast, become accustomed to the “intoxication” of mass transit (Dobson 4). On their walks, Jakob and Schilinski stroll upstream against a river of people absorbed in their livelihoods, occupations, entertainments, and socioeconomic statuses while they “reap experience from this activity” as they surrender themselves not to the intoxication of commercialism, but to the idle observation of the intoxication of the masses as they perform their commercial lifestyles on the city’s streets (Dobson 5).

Besides the busy streets, another space in which Jakob passes his time is in the city’s park where he idles in a recreational sort of “müßig” state that also resembles the experience of real boredom. Jakob remarks early in his diary: “Manchmal sitze ich ganz allein bis in die spätere Nacht müßig auf einer Bank im öffentlichen Park” (36). Jakob uses the only other public space in the city besides the streets to spend time by himself, forget the pressures of an urban life, and idle late into the night. By placing himself, someone who forgets time, in urban public spaces, especially in streets, Jakob contrasts his idleness with the commotion of modernity surrounding him. When Jakob spends time in parks, his natural idleness seems to conform to the natural aesthetic of the park. It is important to note, though, that parks are state-provided, public amenities that artificially attempt to bring nature into the cityscape. Although parks try to provide a natural experience and a space for leisure, or boredom, for everyone, they are nevertheless a modern concept and a product of urbanization. They are a locale of falsified natural respite in a landscape of industry and density that the state offers urbanites to ‘consume’

for their leisure. Interestingly, Jakob claims later in his diary that without parks he can “gar nicht existieren” as he expresses his thankfulness that there are still places where “der Gedanke und Glaube ans Schöne noch nicht ganz ausgestorben ist” (165). Jakob is thankful for the social space that parks provide. Although they are insufficient relative to real nature, Jakob understands parks as a symbol of hope for the reunion of humans with their natural capacity for boredom and their ability to experience life.

Another way in which Jakob experiences boredom in the city, besides spending his time idly in parks, is by smoking cigarettes, which just like parks are something he declares he cannot live without. Jakob muses, “Ich kann ohne Uhr, aber nicht ohne Tabak leben” (57-58). This juxtaposition of time and cigarettes is noteworthy, since cigarettes are a product that produces no other effect than the buzz one gets when he consumes it. Cigarettes consume their users’ time while their users consume them. Although a cigarette provides a moment close to real boredom, Jakob seems to like cigarettes solely because they are a good waste of time, albeit a “schändlich” one (58). Both cigarettes and parks are good consumptions of time that almost equal boredom, however, they are nevertheless modern commodities. Boredom should not be understood as a product or as a waste of time like cigarettes and parks, but rather as an escape from time by which one “flirts with ideas” and “surrenders” himself to boredom (Kracauer 334). While Jakob avidly visits parks, he also smokes and lounges in his bedroom with his peer Schacht where they surrender themselves to boredom. For Schacht and Jakob, it seems a mutual “Müßiggang” thematizes their whole relationship (Walser 11).

Jakob comments that both he and Schacht enjoy doing “Vorschriften-Kränkende” things in order to break the idleness of their daily routine (9). They smoke cigarettes together in bed with their shoes and uniforms still on, and they even light candles and watch them burn, both of

which are activities forbidden by the school's Vorschriften. Their breaking the Vorschriften seems to precipitate from the school's hazy, idle atmosphere. Infringing upon prescribed rules is the only activity that arises from their "Müßiggang." Jakob remarks that along with Schacht's inclination to break the Institute's rules, he also possesses a "feinsinnige Unzufriedenheit, d. h. die Sehnsucht nach etwas Schönerem und Höherem" (10). This subtle dissatisfaction and yearning for beauty characterize Schacht against the urban masses that Jakob defines by the gleams of "die Hast, das Sehnen, die Qual und die Unruhe" in their eyes (43). Schacht, though, has a different existential yearning, something nobly distant from the material desires and distractions of the urban masses. Schacht's fine dissatisfaction and yearning are, in fact, un-modern, as they set him apart from the capital-oriented aspirations of modern people. Schacht's differentiating quality sets him against the current of the 20th Century, as he does not care for consumption, material things, and daily life, but instead yearns for some higher aesthetic experience that modern city life cannot offer.

Boredom, Yearning, and Homosexuality as Spiritual Ailments

Through Jakob's idle times with Schacht, he describes his personality as un-modern because of the subtle spiritual yearning and artistic disposition endemic to his character, but he also implies Schacht has another spiritual quality that reveals itself through the boys' "Müßiggang," namely, his homosexuality. Schacht's subtle dissatisfaction lends a feminine quality to his already girlish appearance. Jakob describes his yearning, trouble-making friend as a lanky, "kränklichen, eigensinnigen Mädchen" who is made more effeminate by his inclination to pout and sulk (9). Jakob characterizes this fine yearning inside Schacht as something inherently female, a longing that could imply a willingness to be subordinated, which is an inclination that modern society attributes to femininity. Moreover, Jakob says he enjoys listening

to Schacht sulk and complain because he likes being his confidant and getting to express compassion for this sickly looking friend. Schacht's yearning, feminine disposition leads Jakob to hazard that Schacht is even of a "Künstlernatur" (10). Jakob sees great aesthetic potential in Schacht's personality, despite his sickly quality, and he definitively remarks: "Schacht hat Seele" (10). Schacht's yearning, effeminate soul is his greatest asset and gives him unrealized creative potential.

Jakob's observation of a sickliness and subtle yearning in Schacht's personality is supported by Schacht's confiding in Jakob that he is indeed sick with a "nicht ganz anständiges Leiden" (10). Schacht pressingly bids Jakob not to tell anyone of his ailment. This illness is something that can neither be cured nor publicized. Subsequently, Jakob asks him what this illness really is, which embarrasses and offends Schacht, who calls Jakob "schamlos" for asking such a question (10). This indecent affliction comes across as being of a spiritual rather than a physical nature, especially since Jakob's request for Schacht to show him the "Gegenstand der Erkrankung," a gesture of sexual innuendo, irritates rather than comforts the yearning boy (10). The object of Schacht's ailment cannot be seen, though, but only felt; it is his taboo homosexual inclination. Jakob, nevertheless, admires Schacht because of the noble, didactic quality of his presence and he sees him as a "Bereicherung [s]eines Daseins" (11).

Jakob's description of Schacht as a feminine, sulky, and artistically disposed boy with a subtle spiritual yearning assigns him an un-modern quality, while also alluding to his homosexuality. Schacht's confession of having an indecent, shameful spiritual affliction corroborates this allusion. As the "müßig" boredom of the Institut Benjamenta inclines Jakob and Schacht to break the school's mandates that regulate their behavior, this idle atmosphere also provokes sexual experimentation between Jakob and Schacht. After Jakob mentions Schacht's

confession of his indecent “Leiden,” Jakob muses on Schacht’s affinity for him and that he once even “wagte” to draw Schacht’s hand to his side while they lay in bed together (11). By taking Schacht’s hand, Jakob dared to transgress the social norm that men are not to be intimate with one another. Jakob understands that this action as a daring experience of trying to transgress usual interpersonal boundaries. The idle, inert atmosphere of the Institute engenders moments like this, as the “Müßiggang” of this homosocial space potentiates such experimentation in interpersonal relationships.

Just as Walter Benjamin stated in his work *The Arcades Project* that “whoever embraces idleness falls under her power,” in this case, the boys seemed to have embraced idleness and succumbed to the intoxication of boredom (Dobson 7). This intoxication is a state in which the boys indeed ruminate on their relationships, but also chance to experiment with interpersonal experiences, especially in taboo ways. Benjamin also characterized idleness by an openness to immediate experiences. Immediate experiences are “product[s] of chance,” since they are not experience as the product of work, but rather unintended receptions of experience as the product of idleness. The Institute’s atmosphere of idleness, which stands in stark opposition to the hustle and bustle of the modern world outside of the school, creates a space for intoxicating, chance experiences of passion in interpersonal relations.

Idleness in the Institute Benjamenta as a Garden of Behavior

The Institute Benjamenta’s boredom and idleness facilitate the passionate, taboo interpersonal relationships that are initiated inside of its walls. In Kracauer’s essay “Boredom,” he posits that one can experience a sort of “unearthly” bliss if only he or she first has the necessary patience to experience real, legitimate boredom (334). From this elevated state that real boredom evokes, one’s soul swells “in ecstasy” and he is able to finally name that which he

has “always lacked,” his “great *passion*” (334). Kracauer understands real boredom as a spiritually creative state through which a person can disconnect from the distractions of the modern world and thereby discover his “passion.” In Jakob von Gunten’s diary, it appears that the bored, un-modern atmosphere inside of the Institute spurs homoerotic interpersonal passions, like the one between Schacht and Jakob. These interpersonal relationships borne out of boredom contradict early 20th Century social norms in that they are literally illegal by Paragraph 175 of the Prussian legal code as well as de facto socially marginalized, since they are non-procreative and therefore do not contribute to the population of industrial laborers. They are likewise pre-modern in that they are purely spiritual relationships that have the potential to allow for an intellectual creativity to thrive that modern daily routine stifles. Jakob and Schacht’s relationship is predicated neither on human procreation nor on commerce, but rather on human creativity. As heterosexual relationships forged in the hustle and bustle of the modern city aim to reproduce the human population, this homosexual relationship borne out of the atmosphere of inertia in the Institute Benjamenta aims to explore potential interpersonal experiences that are otherwise marginalized in early 20th Century society.

As the big city, which is representative of modern life in the 20th Century, sequesters, prunes, and hinders nature, so too is the human experience regulated and surveyed by modern social norms and tendencies. Sexual inclinations that do not conform to modern norms become pathological and unspeakable; hence, Schacht could not explicitly say to Jakob what his “Leiden” really is. The hustle and bustle of the Prussian city, with the trampling feet and yearning, hopeless eyes of the masses, regulates which relationships can be formed inside its space. For unhampered human experience to take place and for human nature to flourish unhindered, a space that suspends the norms of a modern urban context is needed. For the

passions that can sprout out of a fertile, patient boredom to come into being, a fantastic, un-modern space in which boredom is permitted and encouraged is requisite.

Jakob remarks halfway through his diary that there are three gardens at the Institute Benjamenta: an “unbesorgt” und bedraggled garden behind the schoolhouse in which nature grows wild; the Institute’s real garden that the students are mysteriously “verboten” to enter; and finally, the garden of the boys’ behavior, in which they may frolic and revel when they do what they are told (101-102). The first garden, uncultivated and unkempt, is uncultured nature, a feral space that Jakob is sorry he cannot care for. It does not flourish as Jakob would like, as it is not cared for at all. The second garden, the school’s garden, a forbidden space, reinforces the notion that the modern city sequesters and prunes nature, making it accessible only to a few privileged people. This forbidden garden also creates a space of temptation and secrecy, as it offers a natural, possibly unspoiled space whose inaccessibility tempts people who enjoy breaking rules, like Schacht and Jakob. The potential interpersonal experiences in this forbidden garden are apples of temptation. This final garden, which exists only in the boys’ imaginations and into which they are encouraged to enter by the Institute’s textbook, is a garden of the boys’ behaviors. Here, the boy’s good behavior as per the Institute’s pedagogy is a “blühender Garten” (105). Human behavior is something organic, growing, and evolving in this space. Human nature needs a natural space of real boredom in which it can escape from the pressure of everyday social norms and behave according to its own innate whim. In the garden of behavior, Jakob can patiently cultivate his behavior and thereby find his passion. In this idle but creative space, that is, Jakob can experiment with interpersonal experience and rediscover his human nature without modernity imposing its social norms on his behavior.

The Institute Benjamenta is this idle but creative garden of behavior. It is an empty space

where one can escape from early 20th Century social norms and allow his behavior, his boredom, and his desires to flourish unabated. The Institute is like a “Treibhaus” in which desires grow unhampered and eventually surpass the boundaries of traditional gender roles (Moser 17). While this garden of behavior suspends the norms that deter the formation of pre-modern types of relationships, it’s very nature, a quality of real boredom, functions to potentiate such relationships in of itself. The Institute’s garden of behavior is an opportunity for passionate experiences of human nature to happen that are otherwise marginalized to such an extent in 20th Century German society that they are never expressed.

From a Investigation of Modernity to an Analysis of the Institute Benjamenta

While this chapter focused on modern social norms and the ways in which they create urban spaces devoid of nature and therefore of real boredom, the rest of this thesis concentrates on the space of the Institute Benjamenta. The following sections will expound on the way in which the unusual Benjamentian pedagogy functions inside this homosocial environment to suspend modern norms, especially gender roles, and thereby potentiate socially taboo interpersonal experiences and relationships.

As the succeeding chapters argue that this school creates a space in which pre-modern or anti-modern interpersonal relationships can be experienced, the relationship between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta is brought into question. This male-male, intergenerational relational dynamic is examined in terms of its internal power relations and sexual undertones to argue that it is an attempt at pedagogical Eros, what is essentially pederasty formally redefined by Gustav Wyneken in 1921. Ultimately, using Walter Benjamin’s work on the conditions of authentic aesthetic experience in the modern world, this literary project posits that just as the aura of a work of art and, thus, man’s relationship to a work of art is marginalized by its technical

reproduction, so too is the potential for an intimate pedagogical relationship between a man and a boy likewise marginalized by new norms pertaining to aesthetic experiences in modern times.

Chapter Three:

The Benjamentian Pedagogy and the Relationship Between Herr Benjamenta and Jakob von Gunten

To understand the relationship formed by Jakob von Gunten with Herr Benjamenta in this novel, it is necessary to first examine Jakob's intention for enrolling himself at a *Dienerschule* and then the space in which these bonds are created. This chapter seeks to analyze how the layout of the Institute Benjamenta contributes to the intimate relationships formed inside its walls as well as to the nature of its bizarre methodology. Through an analysis of the pedagogy performed inside this building, this chapter argues that the Institute offers a pre-modern, essentially autodidactic aesthetic pedagogy based on cult ritual through which the Institute's students are personally and socially subordinated. Furthermore, the aspects of sadomasochism, homoerotic subordination, and self-experimentation in this male-male, intergenerational pedagogy are considered as integral to the aesthetic of the Benjamentian institution as well.

In order to examine how the Institute Benjamenta creates a pre-modern pedagogical situation in which interpersonal relationships of pedagogical Eros potentially arise, this section first analyzes Jakob's background and his paradoxical intentions for enrolling at this school. The paradoxical nature of this teacher-less and curriculum-less school is analyzed as well, which emphasizes how this school's atmosphere, along with Jakob's intentions, contradicts modern educational ideals and aspirations. The gratifying effect of the subordination that this school inculcates in Jakob is also considered, so as to highlight the aspects of personal and social

subordination that this school achieves through mandated attire during the school's ritualized lessons and chores. Ultimately, this section argues that the Institute Benjamenta is a homosocial space in which an un-modern desire for edifying subordination can be cultured and played out, which may lead to pederastic interpersonal relations.

The Institute: A Paradoxical School of Autodidacticism

The Benjamenta Institute is a male *Dienerschule*, or a *Knabenschule*, where the Benjamenta siblings rear boys to be obedient servants. Jakob has run away from his moderately wealthy family in a mid-sized, pastoral town in order to enroll in this school and create a new future for himself. The school resides in a "größtstädtischem Hinterhaus" accessible through a stairwell whose meagerness appalls the noble-born Jakob von Gunten upon his arrival (Walser 6). Jakob, who initially seems displeased at the state of the school, speaks contradictorily of the Institute and of his intentions in enrolling himself (74 Naguib). Jakob attends this school not to learn any content or subject matter, but rather in order "[sich] selbst zu erziehen, oder [sich] auf eine künftige Selbsterziehung vorzubereiten" (Walser 83). Jakob intends to acquire a methodology and the preparation for the experience of self-rearing, rather than to be reared, informed, or taught by others.

Jakob introduces the notion of self-education, or autodidacticism, as part of his plan to escape his bourgeois parents and the socio-educational determinism of his ancestry. Instead of being determined by his ancestry, Jakob wants "gänzlich von aller hochmütigen Tradition abzufallen. Er will, daß das Leben ihn erziehe, nicht erbliche oder irgend adlige Grundsätze" (59). Jakob's autodidactic declarations oppose 19th and 20th Century societal notions of occupational inheritance, in that the only education or social status that Jakob understands as worth attaining are ones he has forged for himself. His aspirations of autodidacticism contrast with

typical 20th Century conceptions of education, too, since this form of pedagogy shuns institutional oversight or formal arrangements with instructors. Humans could rear themselves before society developed myriad codes, institutions, and jobs for human education. Autodidactism, unlike modern pedantry, requisites individualism and self-discipline predicated on intensive self-regulation, which further distances this methodology from modern modes of learning in which education is predicated on the external didactic regulation and instruction of pupils. In Antiquity, autodidactism was a common mode of life-long learning, and Grecian *gymnasia* tolerated and even encouraged this practice without stifling it through regulation. Like a Greek *gymnasium*, The Institute Benjamenta only regulates its students through the *Vorschriften* and there are no formal teachers overseeing the self-guided learning inside its walls, other than the Siblings Benjamenta, of course.

The principal of the Benjamenta Institute is the sequestered Herr Benjamenta, who quietly reads behind his office desk. The director of the school's daily routine and the only active teacher at the school, though, is the mysterious sister of the principal, Lisa Benjamenta. Under the administration of the Benjamenta siblings, an inertial atmosphere reigns over the teachers and students in this institution. Among the pupils and instructors no sense of camaraderie or community exists. It appears that at the school no real teachers are even operative: "die Herren Erzieher und Lehrer schlafen, oder sie sind tot, oder nur scheintot, oder sie sind versteinert" (3). The notion of typical teachers and academic instruction within this space is absurd from the beginning. In contrast to the strict, rigid academic environment of an actual Prussian *Internat*, Robert Walser mocks the roles of modern teachers who specialize in subject matters by establishing this school as an academy without real instructors, a set curriculum, or a general plan. Walser hereby constructs an unrealistic learning environment, one devoid of any modern

conceptions of teacher-student relationships, which alludes to the potentially pre-modern quality of this place. While Jakob's observations establish that there are no typical instructors at work in this school, they also imply that the students here learn in an unconventional way distant from modern educational standards in its resemblance to autodidacticism.

The Paradoxical Effect of the Institute on Jakob's Personality

Early on, Jakob suggests not only his own paradoxical socio-educational aspirations but the mystical effect of this pedagogical institution on him as well:

Seit ich im Institut Benjamenta bin, habe ich es bereits fertiggebracht, mir zum Rätsel zu werden. Auch mich hat eine ganze merkwürdige vorher nie gekannte Zufriedenheit angesteckt. Ich gehorche leidlich gut...(1)

Jakob implies that the school has managed to help him somehow become a puzzle or mystery, even to himself, since a strange satisfaction has infected him. This infectious satisfaction is the fact that he can, due to the Institute's rearing, obey tolerably well. Mysteriously, Jakob has found satisfaction in his subordination during his time at the school. Normally, in the case of someone who runs away from home, he does so to seek freedom from social constraints and conformity. However, in Jakob's case, he recognizes the paradoxical nature of his desire to run away from home so as to experience subordination, which is why he calls himself a mystery.

Presumably, Jakob's character is between the ages of fourteen and seventeen upon matriculation, since he is not a young boy yet still not a grown man. Having turned his back on his family and inheritance, Jakob intends to learn by throwing himself into the "niedrige, nichtssagende Dunkel" of servitude (182). Jakob's intention to learn how to be "eine kugelrunde Null im späteren Leben" underscores the unusual nature of the Benjamentian pedagogy, since someone normally enrolls at a school in order to achieve social mobility, rather than social subordination, through his education (3). Jakob's character, though, is a desirous and paradoxical

figure that has run away from home not to chase freedom, social status, or knowledge, but to realize gratifying personal subordination through enrollment at the Institute Benjamenta. Jakob's intentions do not align with the modern stereotype of a runaway boy, because he is not running toward worldly success, but away from it.

This puzzling desire to find gratification in obedience gives Jakob's intention in enrolling at this school a masochistic undertone from the beginning. Jakob wants to realize satisfaction in his own subordination, but the thematization of this satisfaction as something infectious indicates from the beginning, too, that Jakob understands something socially aberrant and abnormal in his desires. A modern, middle-class boy should seek independence, freedom, and social mobility, not an education in servitude. Jakob thematizes his desire to be obedient as pathological because it contradicts the modern expectation of man's adolescence as a time of rebellion and independence. The pathology of these desires lies in the fact that they contradict 20th Century, normative social stereotypes. In this diary, Jakob recounts his exploration of this strange desire to be reared and subordinated by Herr Benjamenta, which just like a disease, increasingly consumes his character as the narrative progresses and as he discovers that he is more than a mere student to his principal.

Personal and Social Subordination at the Institute through Ritualized Attire

At the Benjamenta Institute a group of students, the "Eleven," who resemble each other in their total "Armut und Abhängigkeit," are taught nothing but "Geduld und Gehorsam" through an unusual pedagogy (1-2). A main component of this extraordinary education is that the students, each of whom Jakob describes as so small in demeanor and social status he is almost a "Nichtswürdigkeit," are required to dress in uniform (2). While the uniform behavior and hopeless yearning of the urban masses anonymize and equalize these people, Jakob and his

comrades' uniforms likewise anonymizes them, however, the urban masses' fruitless yearning for worldly success does not characterize them. Because the boys are so small that they "macht sich durchaus vom Leben keine Hoffnungen," they have no ambitions or hopes for life under industrial capitalism (59). Jakob contrasts himself with the urban masses not through his attire, but through the fact that he does not buy into the modern notions of production, success, and profit that industrial society imposes onto people's attitudes and hopes, which is what his uniform represents.

Jakob finds the requirement to wear uniforms pleasant and he notes that wearing uniforms paradoxically both "erniedrigt und erhebt" the pupils (3). Because the boys look like indentured or unfree people in their uniforms, they are debased. But because the uniforms set the students apart from people in the big city who wear "höchsteigenden," yet "zerissenen und schmutzigen" clothes, they give the boys an outstandingly handsome and noble quality (3). While the urban masses exhibit uniformity because of their streamlined behavior and capital-oriented way of thinking, the uniformity of the Benjamentian students is rooted in their subordinated, anti-modern way of thinking that does not aspire to capitalist success. The uniform conveys a clear message of social status: it shows that its wearer is a subordinated person and not putting on airs of aristocracy, but is indeed in the service of someone more important than himself.

Mandated attire is reminiscent of specific clothing required by institutionalized social rituals, too, like the sartorial standards for weddings, courtrooms, and college graduations that signify the participants' complacency in their different power roles in their respective ceremonies. For Jakob, there is honesty and humility in wearing something that outwardly denotes his status. Jakob garners a pleasant ability to perceive himself against other people in the

big city through his uniform, since it visibly makes him a subordinated yet honorable person.

The experience of wearing it is pleasant for Jakob because he “nie recht wußte, was er anziehen sollte” (3). Jakob enjoys not having to think about his attire. Being subject to the sartorial mandate of the Institute is more pleasant to him than having to think of his own ensemble himself. Early on in the narrative it is clear that Jakob, instead of ruling and thinking for himself, paradoxically prefers the pleasure of submitting to powers greater than himself.

The ritual of wearing uniforms changes the boys’ personalities insofar that they perceive themselves in a larger social hierarchy and thus find comfort and security in this sartorial tradition. The wearing of uniforms not only represents an awareness of social hierarchy in the school, but their implementation also harkens back to clothing’s original use value as personal adornment out of veneration for an unseen spiritual authority in the service of rituals (Benjamin 5). These uniforms have semiotic value in that they communicate a social message, but they also are connected to a long social tradition of using clothing for its aesthetic value and not only as bodily protection. The requirement to wear certain outfits for certain ceremonies is an ancient socio-historical tradition that exists today. Because of the uniforms’ outward signification that the boys are socially subordinated individuals who participate in the longstanding traditions of servitude as well as of ritual dress, their use corroborates the submissive and pre-modern thematic of the Benjamentian pedagogy.

The Benjamentian Pedagogy as Ritual

The pedagogy of the Institute Benjamenta is based on doing and experiencing, not abstract learning or studying. The students’ only assignment is to realize the “Vorschriften” of the Institute, which entail totally submitting their thoughts, actions, and hopes to servitude. The *Vorschriften* include normative mandates, like the requirement that all the food on a student’s

plate be eaten, which seem to have more to do with blind obedience than with servitude. While this education is experientially based, the formal, regulatory routine of life in the school as prescribed by the *Vorschriften* gives it a ritual nature. The students perform rituals, irrespective of any content or subject matter, for the school and its namesake, both of which they should revere. Formulaic, ritualistic activities, like the knocking of the table to initiate a lesson, lend a ceremonial characteristic to the school's instruction, which engenders a reverential attitude toward the Benjamenta name in the students' minds. This venerate ritualism precludes thought. It focuses on the internalization of self-regulation and self-performance, not the indoctrination of values or facts. Through these ritualistic activities, the boys are to avoid the modern tendency to question and think and, instead, they are to exist in the experiences that these rituals create.

At the Institute Benjamenta, the only instruction that is given to the students is a daily, hour-long lesson directed by Fräulein Benjamenta in which "Nichtigkeiten und Lächerlichkeiten" are earnestly repeated without smiling or horseplay. A serious and sober mood characterizes this instruction as the students can barely even laugh. However, they are missing the necessary "Lustigkeit und Lässigkeit" to even do so (4). A routine form is characteristic of this strange Benjamentian instruction, which lends a serious tone to these laughable lessons in servitude. Jakob's implying that these repetitive lessons in service and obedience have a laughable nature is noteworthy, because it indicates a broader commentary on servility in the 20th Century: It is laughable to be a servant, or moreover, to employ a servant. Such behavior is contradictory to the notions of personal independence, workers' emancipation, the automation of daily life, and social equality endemic to modern times.

These laughable but sanctimonious lessons always begins with a certain greeting ceremony: the students rise when the Fräulein appears, they sit once she has seated herself, and

the lesson begins only once she has knocked “gebieterisch” three times on the class table with a small white staff, her magic wand (3). The beginning of class is similar to the beginning of a religious service. During instruction the students either catechize the *Vorschriften* or they read in their only textbook, “Was Bezweckt Benjamenta’s Knabenschule?,” whose title even mocks the content-less, repetitive nature of this pedagogy (4). In fact, the unusual Benjamentian education revolves around the single question “Wie hat sich der Knabe zu benehmen?” and excludes the study of any actual knowledge or concrete pedagogical goal (3). The object of these ritualized activities is hidden to the performers. The repetition of the *Vorschriften* as well as the other repetitive chores that the Institute requisites are pure behavior and lack any clear cause or result, which makes them appear superficially silly or superfluous, although a real methodology is hidden within them.

As the Benjamentian methodology depends on experiential learning and not the acquisition of knowledge, thinking becomes a problematic component of experiencing this pedagogy. For one to be absorbed by the ritual aura of the Institute’s activities, one must give into the feelings of subordination and obedience that they engender. Jakob, who often accuses himself of thinking too much, remarks halfway through his diary that when someone thinks, “so sträubt man sich, und das ist immer so hässlich und Sachen-verderbend” (Walser 110). For the Benjamentian pedagogy to function successfully on its students, they must submit to experiencing things without thinking, to accepting feelings without analyzing them. From this statement, it seems Jakob considers “the human urge to resist as an ugly by-product” of thinking (Cardinal 41). Intellectual, concentrated thought has a spoiling effect on experiences. Jakob’s inclination to escape his thoughts, especially those concerning his feelings, has a markedly pre-modern quality because it contradicts the post-17th Century “discursive explosion” which incited

people to put all their interpersonal feelings, especially ones deemed socially deviant, into words with a new wave of social norms (Foucault 17). Jakob's urge to resist modern, discursive thinking by succumbing to the feeling of an experience is also characteristically pre-modern in that it is reminiscent of the way in which someone experiences aesthetics in a ritual.

These performative pedagogical chores, which will be discussed in the succeeding sections of this work in more depth, take on a gnostic, magical aspect through their unquestioned experience that gives them a pre-modern, ritualistic quality. This mystical quality bears a resemblance to Walter Benjamin's conception of cult rituals as the original context of artwork. The hidden nature of the purposes of the aforementioned ritual activities lends them cult, not exhibitory, value, as the purpose of their performance is invisible (Benjamin 5). These activities are to be experienced and performed, not observed nor even understood. These chores are activities that neither produce nor display an object, but venerate and recognize some object's existence. Since the boys perform their chores in the mysterious service of the Institute Benjamenta, they become ritual experiences that serve the institution of the cult of the Institute Benjamenta. The ritualization of these activities then makes their ritual object, the work of art, or in this case the Benjamentian Institution and its pedagogy, not an item of exhibition and therefore consumption, but an "instrument of magic" (Benjamin 6). The Benjamentian Institution and its pedagogy hereby take on a secretive, magic nature, one which has the potential to create unique experiences, but whose actual display, and therefore explanation, is counteractive to its pre-modern essence. An aura of mystical experience, something "never entirely separated from its ritual function," ultimately characterizes the aesthetic of these activities as inherently pre-modern because the authenticity of these moments lies in their inability to be industrially reproduced (Benjamin 5).

Space and Ritual Pedagogy within the Institute Benjamenta

Among the Institute's seemingly pointless mandates, the nightly ritual of singing a "Gutenachtlied," and the responsibility of cleaning the school's classroom every fortnight, are two routine events that Jakob finds "auffallend" if not "merkwürdig" (37-38). It seems to him that the school must have once enjoyed much more "Ruf und Zuspruch" because of the sanctimony and precision with which the boys carry out these tasks (38). The nightly performance of a reverent evening song also suggests that this Institute was once more respected by its society than it is in the early 20th Century. The song is sung every night around nine o'clock in front of the entrance to the school's secret inner chambers that the Benjamenta siblings inhabit. The pupils assemble themselves in a half circle before the chambers' entrance and sing, at which point the Fräulein appears in a beautiful, white, flowing nightgown on the threshold and commands the boys to silently go to their beds (37). The association of this secret space with the performance of the evening song gives the impression that this song is sung in praise of some mystical Benjamentian power. The Fräulein is the leader and object of this ritual; she is "ein Engel" who Jakob venerates and who even seems dressed for the occasion of her own ritual worship (37). This performance reinforces the venerate way in which they boys treat the Fräulein, though they do not know why they honor her so, and it likewise bolsters the unfounded secrecy and mystery the students attribute to the school's inner chambers.

The location of the school and interior geography of the building lend to the atmosphere of veneration, ritual, and wonder surrounding the Benjamenta siblings and their academy. The Institute's location in a *Hinterhof* contradicts the airs of importance that the principals impose on their school, while also underscoring its atmosphere of secrecy and mystery since it is hidden from the view of the city street. The division of the school's interior into an area suited for the

boys and another for the Benjamenta's, the "inneren Gemächer" plus the "Kontor," makes Jakob curious throughout the novel of what the Benjamenta's could be hiding. This physical division creates a dichotomy of forbidden space and public space that underscores the ritualistic nature of the Institute itself, as ritual activities typically involve a performative area in which rituals are performed, and a hidden area, in which objects of worship whose perceived presence trumps the use value of their public display are held (Benjamin 5). Before Jakob has reached the sequestered inner chambers of the Institute, he wonders to himself what he will see once he finally intrudes into them: "Vielleicht gar nichts Besonderes? O doch, doch. Ich weiß es, es gibt hier irgendwo wunderbare Dinge"(19). Jakob answers his own questioning in this statement as he self-assuredly remarks that there are indeed wondrous things in this space, though he cannot see them, because he feels something special in the aesthetic of this school and its pedagogy. Jakob thinks so not because of the facts he knows about the school, but because of the way he feels in this space.

The withdrawal of the Benjamentas into their chambers and the principal's quiet sequestration in his office both elevate and ennoble the siblings in the eyes of their students. The distance that Jakob perceives between himself and the siblings raises them to godly statuses in his imagination. The Fräulein and Herr must have secrets because of the strange situation of their living space. However, when Jakob finally enters the inner chambers he discovers that "sie enthalten durchaus nichts Geheimnisvolles," only a simple goldfish bowl and some sparse furnishings (164). The siblings' chambers initially represent a gnostic space for Jakob within the school in which the esoteric secrets of this whole Benjamentian experience – or experiment – reside, but once Jakob bridges the distance between himself and this secret space, he discovers that this space's magic lies in its ability to create imaginations, not its actual contents. The non-

fulfillment of Jakob's expectation that there is hidden substance to these rituals is the edifying lesson in this experience. As Jakob learns that behind one ritual merely lies another, he realizes that there is no internal content to this experience, only ritual performance that engenders perceptions of significance. These rituals create conceptual surfaces onto which Jakob projects meaning and significance. Once Jakob overcomes the threshold of the inner chamber, he enters a space in which he uncovers another mysterious ritual surface, though, the distorting reflection of the fishbowl he is to clean. The only actual content in these rituals is that they are a methodology to create perceptions of meaning, but once a perception has been debunked or reified, another ritual that engenders perception lies behind it. All knowledge in the space of the Institution is perception, not concrete fact.

Suspension of Gender through Attire in Ritualized Chores

The chore of cleaning the classroom, which has an adjoining door to the quarters of the Benjamenta siblings, also takes on a ritualistic and ceremonial manner. Besides a photograph of the late Emperor and Queen, the only other "Wandschmuck" in the room is a "Schutzmannssäbel" and its sheath hanging above the door leading to the siblings' inner chambers (38). Every fourteen days this "Dekoration" is taken down in order to be cleaned, which Jakob remarks as an indeed "nette" but "ganze stupide Arbeit" (38). All the students must participate in this "Zimmermädchenarbeit" and they are all required to wear "Schürzen," which make the students appear "komisch" due to their stereotypically feminine connotation (39). Both the singing of the good-night song and the cleaning of school take on ritualistic decorum as they requisite specific attire, attitudes, and actions from their participants. Though these chores have meticulous *Vorschriften*, their content and purpose is not important, nor is the conscious participation of the students. Jakob admits that "was wir tun, tun wir, weil wir tun müssen, aber

warum wir müssen, dass weiß keiner von uns recht” (39). To obey without having to think is the goal of this education.

This “Zimmermädchenarbeit” alienates the boys from their male identities in that they feel emasculated by their work. This activity and its respective attire give the students new identities for the moment, that of *Zimmermädchen*, female maids. The female-gendering that this work causes reflects the broader female-gendering of males in the Benjamentian project, as boys are made to be submissive and servile rather than creative and powerful. This activity temporarily suspends the social norms of gender roles, so that the boys experience the feeling of femininity by means of female-gendered work and dress. The experience of this chore is that of self-inspection and self-experimentation, as the boys observe how they feel “komisch” while they undergo a momentary transformation of sexual identity (Moser 25). This chore puts the boys in a space where they can experience how this activity feels, but not question or discourse on its nature. Though not unpleasant, Jakob finds this work simultaneously ‘nice’ and ‘stupid.’ While Jakob enjoys the experimental self-experience that this work engenders, he is not induced to investigate the implication this could have for potential interpersonal behavior. Jakob prefers to experience this suspension of modern norms in a topically reflective manner, not in an analytical and self-regulatory way. The boys, who are all subjects of the Institution, are dominated by this chore and by the instructress’ command, and are transposed into a mental state in which they can immediately experience femininity.

In the Institute, cleaning is consistently an activity during which Jakob and the other boys experience a flux of gender identity (Moser 25). On one specific “Putztag” the eldest pupil, Tremala, upsets Jakob by attempting to have a homosexual experience with him:

[Tremala] stellte sich leise hinter mich und griff mir mit der abscheulichen Hand (Hände, die das tun, sind roh und abscheulich) nach dem intimen Glied, in der Absicht, mir eine widerliche, an

den Kitzel eines Tieres grenzende Wohltat zu erweisen. Ich drehe mich jäh um und schlage den Verruchten zu Boden. (40)

What seems like an instance of horseplay among boys typical to a locker-room is rather an example of how intensely the aura of these chores suspends sexual norms (Moser 26). While the change in clothing causes the boys to feel feminine, it also incites them to act accordingly different. The self-alienating, observational, feminine aesthetic of this activity removes Tremala from his usual self and incites him to experiment by seeking sexual gratification with another boy.

The thoughtless obedience to the school and total subjection to another gender role in this ritualized chore strips the boys of their own gender identities to such an extent, that aside from Jakob, the other boys become absorbed in the moment. Jakob, who often accuses himself of thinking too much or thinking more than his peers, is unable to surrender to this experience because of his own thoughts. His analysis of this situation precludes and prevents interpersonal experimentation in this moment. As Tremala grasps for Jakob's "intimen Glied," Jakob has been completely re-gendered in Tremala's mind by the performance of this activity. The boys are not supposed to analyze, interpret, or have agency in these activities, but solely perform these ritual cleanings as an exercise in immediate, unquestioned experience. According to Petra Moser, such chores are an opportunity for the boys to submit to the "Medium des Imaginativen" and thereby discover and understand the many "Möglichkeiten menschlicher Beziehungen" (133). This activity is a discovery of interpersonal experience. Tremala, unlike Jakob who only feels strange in these clothes and who is busy observing his feelings, has succumbed to this moment in that he now sees his peers as feminine figures. While the boys experience moments of awkwardness and alienation during cleaning, because they feel transformed by aprons, they also experience feelings of boredom and inertia, as these activities have neither obvious purposes nor products.

Ultimately, these performative activities distort the boys' perception of reality and allow them to experiment with themselves and those around them.

Through the repetitive, content-less chores of the Benjamentian curriculum and because of the lack of teachers at this school, Jakob has the opportunity to experiment with rearing himself. Jakob clarifies his wish "sich von einer Instanz namens Leben erziehen zu lassen" as a desire to actually rear himself, to essentially perform a pedagogical self-experiment on himself (99 Moser): "Das ist es ja: um mich quasi selbst zu erziehen" (Walser 83). Typical socialization in pedagogical environments involves the socially regulated internalization of gender norms and the institutional regulation of sexual and inter-generational behaviors, but the homosocial Benjamentian socialization seems to be a methodology that suspends all norms and leaves only space for feelings to arise. Ultimately, the autodidactic quality of this methodology allows for unguided interpersonal exploration.

The cultish, ritualistic pedagogy that Jakob receives at the Institute is an education charged with sexual and erotic motifs that break from 'normal' or 'acceptable' socialization in the early 20th Century. This pedagogy, through reviving the experience of ritual participation, can momentarily suspend social norms and allow for the participant to be absorbed by the aura of a moment. In these moments of absorption the students surrender to their perceptions of reality, rather than their knowledge of it, like when Tremala perceives Jakob as a girl and therefore makes a sexual advance on him, when he knows Jakob is in fact a boy. Through this pedagogy in which experience is the result of experiment, Jakob himself experiments with sexual norms and experiences changes in his and in his peers' perceptions of gender. Since the boys are subordinated by this ritualistic pedagogy, as they must submit to its sartorial mandates that put their gender identities in flux, a submissive sexual quality characterizes their participation as

well. Because the boys are equally dominated and feminized by their lessons, it seems that their relationship with the Institute, and perhaps with its namesake as well, involves their roleplaying the more submissive partner in an interpersonal power dynamic.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

The fourth chapter of this thesis aims to show how the nature of the Benjamentian pedagogy, endemic to the space of the Institute Benjamenta, facilitates a taboo interpersonal dynamic between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta as it instills a yearning for a satisfying sense of servility in Jakob. Furthermore, this chapter claims that the Benjamentian pedagogy potentiates mysterious moments of interpersonal sexual experimentation in usual daily activities through a ritual atmosphere that suspends gender norms and, thus, promotes the intensification of Jakob and Herr Benjamenta's intimacy. Ultimately, this thesis shows that through the Institute's ritualized pedagogy, an emotional and psychological distance is created between the principal and Jakob that allows for Jakob to perceive Herr Benjamenta as someone powerful and important, even when he may not be. The intersubjective recognition between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta is analyzed in terms of the Hegelian Lord-Bondsman dialectic in order to explain Herr Benjamenta's eventual spiritual dependency on Jakob and the erosion of Jakob's perception of him. Furthermore, this chapter posits that Jakob and Herr Benjamenta's relationship, which is never consummated, is reminiscent of a Classical pederast relational dynamic before it is then compared to the similar concept of pedagogical Eros as proposed by Gustav Wyneken.

Using Walter Benjamin's theory on the state of artwork in the age of its mechanical reproduction, this chapter further claims that at the turn of the 20th Century certain pre-modern pedagogical relationships were pushed out of praxis due to the new kinds of social norms imposed on interpersonal experience in the early 20th Century because of new modes of thought

in daily existence. Just as a work of art with an aura of authenticity is hard to come by in the Modern Age, so are authentic relationships of pedagogical Eros. And just as man's intimate relationship with a work of art is diminished by its mechanical reproduction for resale, so too is the potential intellectual creativity inherent in pedagogical relationships degenerated by the modern expectations for male-male, inter-generational educational relationships. As contemporary artwork increasingly tends to be produced for subsequent reproduction or resale, society shuns intimate pedagogical relationships in favor of industrial-style, profit-based education that understands students as products on a factory line rather than as unique creative potentials with which their instructors can form intimate relationships. Pedagogical Eros, like pederasty, is endemic to the time and space of Antiquity, though. Because of its taboo status by modern pedagogical and interpersonal conventions, it is marginalized and demonized in a modern, Germanic context, as demonstrated in this novel, and is thus not able to fully flourish outside of the walls of the Institute Benjamenta's surreal pedagogical environment.

The Intimacy of Jakob and Herr Benjamenta's Relationship

Toward the end of the novel, Herr Benjamenta and Jakob von Gunten are ultimately brought together for the fantastical and ambiguous conclusion of the diary. Prior to the death of the Fräulein, the principal remained in his "Kontor" while his sister actively carried out the school's ritualistic curriculum, prepared the boys' food, and directed their daily routine. The siblings essentially performed the parental dynamic of an active mother and an absent father. Now that the Fräulein is dead, though, her death rite, a ceremony surrounding her "entseelte" body that Herr Benjamenta and the boys perform, is the final ritualistic chore done in this school. Herr Benjamenta must now take on a more active role in the school.

The figurative distance that Herr Benjamenta engenders between himself and Jakob through his disciplinary, laconic disposition is reinforced by his physical sequestration in his office. Toward the end of the diary, though, the principal finally breaks down the emotional and physical distance between himself and Jakob. Herr Benjamenta's confession of intense affinity for Jakob, his laying of his hand on the boy's shoulder, and his invitation to him to live out the rest of their lives together to do something "kühnes, abenteuerliches, entdeckendes" or even "Feines und Sittsames" breaks down this barrier with the boy, but also insults Jakob (188). But Jakob's insult at the principal's familiarity only delights Herr Benjamenta more. The potential of their relationship, just like the unsure feelings associated with it, are paradoxically both adventurous and restrained, since both men seem unsure about entering into this relationship. Herr Benjamenta admits that he must hold himself back from kissing Jakob because of how delightful he finds him when he is upset (188).

Junge, Knabe, du bist köstlich. Mit dir zusammen in Wüsten oder auf Eisbergen im nördlichen Meere zu leben, das würde mich locken. Komm' her. Ei, der Teufel, fürchte dich doch, bitte, nicht vor mir. Nichts tu' ich dir. Was könnte, was vermöchte ich dir denn anzutun? Dich wertvoll und selten empfinden, sieh, das muß ich, das tu' ich, aber davor brauchst du doch keine Angst zu haben. (187)

While Herr Benjamenta confesses his affection for Jakob, he also hints toward an even more intimate relational dynamic between them, a dynamic that is adventurous and undiscovered. Not only does Herr Benjamenta call Jakob a delectable boy, he even admits his burning desire to experience Jakob's personality in an unusual manner. Herr Benjamenta's calling Jakob delicious and stating he must feel Jakob in a both valuable and peculiar way carries a homoerotic underdone, one that reveals pedophilic desires. Herr Benjamenta *must feel* this boy's personality, which indicates that his affinity for Jakob has become an obsession. Before the announcement of the Fräulein's death interrupts this scene, Jakob declares to the principal "Ich werde mir die Sache, etwa bis morgen, überlegen. Doch glaube ich, daß ich mit ja antworten

werde” (188). Although Herr Benjamenta implies that Jakob obviously feels some fear toward him, it now seems that Jakob is beginning to feel a stronger, more interpersonally binding affection toward Herr Benjamenta.

Leading up to Herr Benjamenta’s confession of affection, the principal and Jakob have a tense and laconic relationship with both erotic and violent elements throughout the story. From the beginning of the diary onward Jakob denotes his intention to become a small “kugelrunde Null,” but he also contrasts this miniscule existence with that of Herr Benjamenta’s: He “ist ein Riese, und wir Zöglinge sind Zwerge gegen diesen Riesen” (15). Jakob understands himself as nothing compared to this violent “Göttliche” (49). Although Jakob sees the Herr as a “Riesen Goliath” he develops an increasing affection toward him throughout the Tagebuch (179). Because Jakob perceives Herr Benjamenta as the opposite of what he wants to be, that is someone great and powerful, he is drawn to this relationship. This opportunity to perform submissiveness in an interpersonal relationship attracts Jakob.

After Jakob asks himself earlier in his diary if the “frivole Instikte” to be “gezüchtigt” at the hands of the Herr live inside him, he remarks how he actually finds the principal pretty (50). The thought escapes him that Herr Benjamenta has “ein herrlicher brauner Bart – was?” But Jakob questions this feeling and then denies himself of it: “Herrlicher brauner Bart? Ich bin ein Dummkopf” (50). Jakob finds the principal alluring and attractive, yet once he questions this inner feeling, he convinces himself that the Herr is only all-powerful and “nichts herrlich, nichts schön” (50). Jakob’s negation of his feelings shows that a pre-established conception of social norms is at work within his own thoughts. A modern person like Jakob should be concerned that when his principal calls him delicious. Prior to even accepting his own perception of Herr

Benjamenta, though, Jakob self-regulates his feelings and contradicts his own experience of Herr Benjamenta by denying that he finds him beautiful.

Thinking, in the sense that Jakob's mind invokes modern social norms to analyze his perception of this interpersonal relationship, has prevented Jakob from feeling a certain way toward Herr Benjamenta. Thought precludes Jakob's experiencing certain emotions. However, as soon as this strange inclination toward Herr Benjamenta crosses his mind, Jakob realizes he is already transgressing the acceptable boundaries of a pedagogical relationship. Jakob feels the weight of social norms upon his immediate feelings, not only his analytic and interpretive thoughts. Just the idea that he has socially deviant feelings toward Herr Benjamenta causes Jakob to not act upon this feeling, but also to deny himself the sheer perception of Herr Benjamenta as someone potentially beautiful. The thought of something, in this case Jakob's strong feeling toward Herr Benjamenta, is just as significant (impermissible) as the actual activity at which it hints.

The Benjamentian Pedagogy as a Relationship with Herr Benjamenta Himself

Shortly after his arrival at the Institute, Jakob requests to be refunded for his enrollment after he is disappointed that there is neither plan nor thought to the school's methods. Jakob approaches Herr Benjamenta about this, who then instructs him to re-enter the office five times until he has done so in a sufficiently "untertänig und höflich" way (16). When Jakob does not get his reimbursement, he feels defeated by the principal in that he resigns himself to staying at the Institute and has already become subject to its normative rules. He feels subjugated by Herr Benjamenta in this defeat, but he also feels affection toward him as a result:

So endete ein Versuch, Revolution zu machen. Seither sind keine störrischen Auftritte mehr vorgekommen. Mein Gott, und geschlagen bin ich schon worden. Er hat mich geschlagen, er, dem ich ein wahrhaft großes Herz zumute, und nicht gemuckt habe ich, nicht gezwinkert habe ich, und es hat mich nicht einmal beleidigt (18)

Early in the novel Jakob establishes a power dynamic with Herr Benjamenta that involves his violent, physical subjection to the will of this “Herkules,” who he fears, but nevertheless suspects of having a heart (15). This quote encapsulates the peculiar emotional transformation that Jakob undergoes at the Institute. Initially, Jakob sought to rebel through demanding something from Herr Benjamenta; yet, this excerpt indicates that Jakob transitions to not only accepting his defeat, but to even enjoying his punishment at the hands of the Herr. From this excerpt of one of his first diary entries, Jakob equates the physical pain he receives from Herr Benjamenta to Herr Benjamenta’s affection for him. By punishing him, Herr Benjamenta gives Jakob a form of passionate, violent recognition that actually gratifies Jakob’s personality.

Midway through the diary, it is noteworthy that when Jakob enters Herr Benjamenta’s office, he no longer mentions the ritual process of knocking. This suggests that Jakob must no longer obey this ritual and therefore, the architectural, physical, and psychological barriers between this man and boy are breaking down as their relationship is becoming more intimate. During this conversation in which Jakob enters Herr Benjamenta’s office preceded by no sort of ritualized performance, Herr Benjamenta demolishes the psycho-emotional barrier between himself and Jakob as he declares that Jakob feels like a “Bruder oder sonst etwas Natürlich-Nahes” to him (132). While the Vorsteher makes his affinity for Jakob clear, he also emphasizes the dominating, violent nature of his attraction as he reminds Jakob that he “könnte [ihn] da an die Wand werfen” (132). The principal departs from all “Vorgesetztengewalt” in order to express his desire to be with Jakob, but he also remarks that he is liable to succumb to violent, feral desires: “Du mußt wissen, mich packen Wildheiten an, und ehe ich mich verhindern kann, sind alle meine Besinnungen geschwunden” (132). As Herr Benjamenta relinquishes his

institutionally ordained, modern authority over Jakob he gives way to more primal, un-modern feelings of violence, affection, and lust.

After exhorting Jakob not to be scared, Herr Benjamenta asks him to become his “kleiner Vertrauter” but then abruptly dismisses him, underscoring his own uncertainty in exploring this relationship with Jakob. As this man cautiously expresses his desire to possess Jakob’s friendship and even his heart, Jakob is unsure how to react to this notion: “Vorläufig behandle ich ihn aber eisig kalt, und wer weiß: ich will vielleicht gar nichts von ihm wissen” (131). Jakob’s use of *vielleicht* highlights his own uncertainty regarding the nature of this relationship, as he is still deciding whether or not he wants to engage in this interpersonal dynamic. Jakob neither tells anyone of nor overthinks this confession of sado-masochistic feelings, though, and he ends this diary entry without drawing any conclusions or hypotheses about this relationship. During this same conversation, Herr Benjamenta implies his own strange, gratifying predilection toward Jakob, as he characterizes it by the way it weakens him. He finds it “prickelnd reizvoll” to lower his guard around Jakob, whose personality he admits leads “zur Lockerung, zur Preisgabe der Würde” (132-133). Herr Benjamenta indicates that he is weakening his role in this interpersonal dynamic by stating that he enjoys behaving “ein wenig schwach und weicher, als gewöhnlich” around Jakob (133). However, he also suggests that Jakob should take up a more powerful role in this relationship as he decries: “Laß mich dir sagen, daß du es verstanden hast, mir Respekt vor dir abzunötigen” (133). Herr Benjamenta’s implication is that from then on, Jakob should demand real respect from the principal as he takes on a more powerful interpersonal role. This is an invitation for Jakob to join Herr Benjamenta in a give-and-take relationship of interpersonal recognition and to abandon the asymmetry of their teacher-pupil relationship.

The Lord-Bondsman Dialectic in Herr Benjamenta and Jakob’s Relationship

Although Jakob initially perceives Herr Benjamenta as a king, he is dethroned in his imagination toward the end of the story. This trajectory from total lordship toward a give-and-take relationship mirrors the Lord-Bondsman dialectic in that an intersubjective, equivocal recognition is realized between the figures. Even when Herr Benjamenta and Jakob are both unsure about committing to this interpersonal relationship, the power-dynamic within their relationship has already shifted. At the beginning of the novel, the principal dominates and controls Jakob's life, but as the story progresses, Herr Benjamenta gradually loses his power over Jakob. Midway through the narrative, Jakob is indeed aware that he is in a sort of possessive, sadistic relationship with an "abgesetzter König" who could crush *his* "jungen armen Wurm" on a whim (133).

However, despite the principal's propensity to be violent, Jakob is still intrigued by this mysterious man and his own feelings toward him. About halfway through the narrative, Jakob begins to realize not only his attraction to Herr Benjamenta, but also Herr Benjamenta's dependency on him. Jakob understands his new position of power in this relationship, as the principal begins to express a sort of spiritual dependency on him. The gradual intensification of this relationship, to the point where Herr Benjamenta verbalizes his desire to be a friend and familiar to his worm of a student, even leads Jakob to experience the sensation of possessing total power over someone else, just as he perceives Herr Benjamenta as having over him. Jakob dreams he is a successful military leader to whom an "ertappter Verräter" has been brought for judgment (135). After initially condemning the man to death, Jakob's imagined self rescinds his sentence on a whim. He takes away the life of this man and then he gives it back, with barely a second thought (134). Jakob is able to imagine being in the position of Herr Benjamenta as the power gap in their relationship dissolves.

As the emotional and physical distance between principal and pupil narrows, Herr Benjamenta suggests that a Hegelian Lord-Bondsman relationship exists between them. At first, this Hegelian relationship implies an “unequal and opposed” power relation between these characters, in that Herr Benjamenta exists as an “independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself,” a powerful principal, while Jakob is a “dependent consciousness whose essential is to simply live or be for another,” a student, a servant (Hegel 31). Herr Benjamenta, though, confesses his peculiar and uncontrollable preference for Jakob and thereby works to break down their unequal power relation even before he officially asked Jakob to be his “kleiner Vertrauter.”

Herr Benjamenta asks Jakob: “Du wirst jetzt mir gegenüber recht frech sein, nicht wahr, Jakob? Nicht wahr, junger Mensch, jetzt, nachdem ich mir vor dir eine Blöße gegeben habe, wirst du's wagen, mich mit Wegwerfung zu behandeln? Und du wirst jetzt trotzen? Ist es so, sage, ist es so?” (Walser 115). Herr Benjamenta begs Jakob to talk back and defy him because he actually wants Jakob to throw his confession of fondness away and to take a sadistic position toward him, reversing their formal power roles, in which the principal was the one who acted violently toward Jakob. After this masochistic invitation for Jakob to inflict a verbal lash upon him, Jakob remains silent out of a sudden awareness of himself and this man. Jakobs fancies this decision to be silent the correct one, stares back at Herr Benjamenta, and muses that Herr Benjamenta now regards and respects him, as he notices how this “riesenhaft” man quietly shakes (116). From this moment on Jakob believes that “etwas Bindendes” exists between them (116). In this silent exchange Jakob realizes how much the principal respects him, but he also realizes that a new plane of attention exists between himself and this man. Jakob observes the principal while the principal observes him: there is equal visual interpersonal recognition.

Likewise, Herr Benjamenta's shaking indicates an instable and tense psycho-spiritual condition that is a result of the increasingly adventurous intimacy between himself and Jakob. It is a physical registry of an inner recognition of this elevated pedagogical homosocial relationship.

This new bond that Jakob feels between himself and the principal is the bondage of their intersubjective recognition by which Herr Benjamenta loses some of his power over Jakob. Just as Jakob The Servant is tied to Herr Benjamenta by his fascination and the Herr's physical subjection of him, so too is Herr Benjamenta bound to Jakob. Herr Benjamenta becomes dependent upon Jakob's independent interpersonal recognition of him as the principal of a dying institution, but moreover, he is dependent upon Jakob's mere perception of him as someone powerful and formidable, when in reality he is neither. Now that Herr Benjamenta has made himself vulnerable to Jakob, he comprehends his dependency upon Jakob's interpersonal power.

Herr Benjamenta, the Lord, exercises total dominion over Jakob whom he can crush in an instant. On the other hand, Jakob, the Bondsman who is subject to his Lord, risks his life in order to defy this man - he has been fresh and rebellious toward Herr Benjamenta despite the man's threats and hits – which correlates with Hegel's concept that a Lord and a Slave present themselves to each other in a "life-and-death struggle" through which "they prove themselves and each other" (Hegel 31). The scene in which Jakob presents of his *Lebenslauf* to Herr Benjamenta is one of many tête-à-tête that correlates to this life-or-death moment of risk in the Lord-Bondsman dialectic. After handing Herr Benjamenta his purposefully fresh and cocky letter of intention, Jakob muses: "Da lies es. Reizt es dich nicht, mir ins Gesicht zu schmeißen?" (Walser 61). Jakob risks his physical security in order to perform his recalcitrant personality before the Herr, who holds a total, arbitrary power over him and could "negate" him for his own enjoyment (Hegel 33). This potentially deadly moment of risk in which Jakob, the Bondsman,

flippantly rebels against Herr Benjamenta, the Lord, indicates that despite his enslavement, Jakob understands he can still exercise free will by choosing to die at the hands of the Lord.

Though a lowly servant, Jakob still believes in his own freedom and independence, which contradicts the Institute Benjamenta's goal of inculcating submissive social and interpersonal obedience. It is through Jakob's constantly risking his own life in order to simply exercise freedom before Herr Benjamenta that Jakob's transcends non-recognition as a student and attains "the truth of this [interpersonal] recognition as an independent consciousness" (Hegel 31). Herr Benjamenta, a consciousness existing for-itself, is now aware he is mediated with himself through his recognition by another independent consciousness. Essentially, Herr Benjamenta grasps that he no longer exists for just himself, but requires Jakob's recognition of him in order to be spiritually fulfilled. Herr Benjamenta suggests this desire to realize a Lord-Bondsman-type relationship with Jakob to such an extent that he not only asks Jakob later in the diary to demand respect from him, but he even confesses to Jakob that he is "fast, fast" dependent on him and that his departure from the Institute would inflict an "unheilbare" wound upon him since he now loves another person "zum erstenmal" in his life (Walser 162).

Jakob and Herr Benjamenta's Relationship as Pederasty

While a Hegelian analysis of Jakob and Herr Benjamenta's relationship elucidates the gradual equalizing of their interpersonal power dynamic, it also suggests a role reversal in their relationship, as the inferior Jakob gains mastery over Herr Benjamenta. Gwendolyn Whittaker remarks in her essay "Programme der Stilbildung und Ihre Subversion" that Jakob and Herr Benjamenta carry the names of the Old Testament father-son duo Jakob and Benjamin, but in reverse order (Whittaker 214). The use of this biblical pair's names suggests that a father-son relationship potentially operates between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta, however, as Whittaker

posits, the reversal of the names alludes to something other than a father-son dynamic (214). The reversal of the biblical names as well as the recession of Herr Benjamenta's power and its gradual transfer to Jakob implies a fragmentization of the father role between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta (Whittaker 215). This fragmentation of the role of the father, the natural rearer, hints at the autodidactic quality of Jakob's experience at the Institute, but it also suggests that a different type of intergenerational, male-male rearing is taking place between these figures, one in which both individuals function to essentially rear each other. The more equal dynamic of this relationship hints at the pre-modern concept of pederasty rather than a pre-modern father-son love relationship.

Pederasty is the socially recognized tradition of an older man, an *erastes*, and a younger boy, an *eromenos*, who enter into an erotic, though maybe not fully sexually consummated, relationship, in which the boy is spiritually and intellectually reared by the man and the man is spiritually and intellectually rejuvenated by the boy. In Plato's Symposium, he characterizes a pederast relational dynamic as a restrained, servile, intellectual, and self-sacrificial interpersonal love in which an older man... "...should behave as lovers do toward their beloved, begging and beseeching in their petitions, and swearing solemn oaths, and sleeping at their doors, and be willing to do slavish services such as no slave would do" (Plato 80). Pederasty is a relationship of intersubjective but also amorous bondage.

In this relationship, the beloved (the boy) rebuffs the older man's affectionate advances and offers, just as Jakob was shocked and taken aback by Herr Benjamenta's first confessions of affection toward him. Plato further expounds upon his conception of boy-love as a relation in which "they (the man and the boy) abstain from all ugly things" and are "ambitious" in intellectual pursuits together (76). This type of love is not lewd, though, but rather graceful,

healthy, and “wholly beautiful,” since according to ancient custom, if a man wants to serve another because “he thinks that the [other] man can make him better in either wisdom or any other part of virtue, then this willing slavery is not ugly...(81).” Pederasty is an intellectual not physical interpersonal attraction, and ideally should avoid lewdness, i.e. sexual intercourse. This ambitious, though restrained attraction that comes close to erotic interaction, inspires the lover to “valor” not only to chance to experience this relationship, but also to valorously defend his beloved and, thus, make him “equal to the born hero” (Plato 77). Both the *erastes* and the *eromenos* in a pederast relationship are heroes to one another. The risk associated with pederasty is more equal, in that it is predicated on mutual valiant self-subjugation for the wellbeing or betterment of each other, not the singular subjugation of one individual at the hands of another.

As this restrained, ideally non-consummated, cerebral interpersonal love that inspires men to valiant deeds unfolds, Plato distinguishes between two types of gratification that can arise in the lover or in the beloved from the other’s adoration: either “healthy” love or “diseased” love (83). However, only a love that gratifies the intellect and spirit is good, whereas a love only aimed at libidinal gratification is “ugly” and inferior in comparison. The healthy or diseased nature of a love is determined by what this love gratifies. Since it is “beautiful to gratify good men” and “ugly to gratify the intemperate,” gratification through one’s self-subordination for another is inherent to a pederastic love (Plato 83). This pre-modern division of love between spiritual and carnal attractions presents itself in Jakob and Herr Benjamenta’s relation. Although Herr Benjamenta never consummates his relationship with Jakob, he admits to his physical desires for him while also speaking to the separate intellectual and spiritual rejuvenation that his love stirs in him.

Jakob's behavior, or rather, the experience of Jakob by Herr Benjamenta, has a revitalizing and stimulating effect on this spiritually fatigued man. While the sun has set on Herr Benjamenta's own youth and Jakob therefore understands himself as a crestfallen king, Jakob conversely embodies the nascent "Prinzip einer Erfahrung, deren Herkunft überirdisch anmutet" (Moser 141). The effect of this inter-generational, homosocial relationship on Herr Benjamenta is characteristic of the positive spiritual-emotional results of an ideal pederast relationship and indicates that such a dynamic is performed here. Herr Benjamenta admits to Jakob that he feels "ganz eingetrocknet" and buried alive in his own office, consumed by the "gefräßigem, raschem Ungeziefer" – the boredom – of his daily routine (196, 200 Walser). Herr Benjamenta even confides in Jakob that prior to their meeting he avoided living: "Unsagbar ist von mir alles dies Wesen, Bewegen und Leben gehaßt und gemieden worden" (196). Herr Benjamenta goes on to express that he feels like Jakob is a heavenly gift because of the boy's rejuvenating effect on him:

Da tratest du ein, frisch, dumm, unartig, frech und blühend, duftend von unverdorbenen Empfindungen, und ganz natürlich schnauzte ich dich mächtig an, aber ich wußte es, so wie ich dich nur sah, daß du ein Prachtbursche seiest, mir, wie es mir vorkam, vom Himmel heruntergefliegen, von einem alleswissenden Gott mir gesandt und geschenkt. Ja, dich brauchte ich gerade, und ich lächelte immer heimlich, wenn du von Zeit zu Zeit zu mir eintratest, um mich mit deinen reizenden Frechheiten und Grobheiten, die mir wie gutgelungene Gemälde erschienen, zu belästigen. O nein, zu betören. (197)

Jakob's fresh reply to Herr Benjamenta subsequent to his confession of adoration even evokes "überströmenden Zärtlichkeit und Lebenslust" in the eyes of the Vorsteher (198). Herr Benjamenta's characterization of Jakob as both unrefined and heaven-sent ascribes a supernatural quality to him. God and real nature, which Jakob already implied as almost the same thing much earlier in his diary, are something Herr Benjamenta perceives in his personality. Jakob is divine, uncorrupted, and fresh: He is a natural specimen of human nature unmodified by his artificial urban environment. While Jakob gets gratification through his subordination by

Herr Benjamenta throughout his diary, now it is Herr Benjamenta who at the end of the diary expresses the gratification he has received from Jakob's attempts to undermine him through cheekiness and uncouthness.

Through experiencing Jakob's unrefined personality in his pursuit of a closer relationship with this boy, Herr Benjamenta re-experiences youth. Herr Benjamenta sees the key to his eternal youth, the rebirth of his lust for life, in his relationship with Jakob, just as ancient Grecian society conceived of the social institution of pederasty as a means by which older men could love, educate, and rear boys to a higher social status, namely citizenship, and initiate them into a higher intellectual existence. Herr Benjamenta is able to relive youth in all its qualities as youth's fresh, unquestioning nature is unknowingly embodied and performed by Jakob; Youth's essence is experienced in the aura of Jakob's personality. Herr Benjamenta's love for Jakob makes him emotionally dependent on the boy and it incites him to equalize their relationship as he is subjugated by his pederast love for this youth.

Throughout the diary, Jakob's physical as well as emotional distance from his principal narrows insofar that the principal ultimately asks Jakob near the end of the diary: "Willst du mit mir gehen, wollen wir zusammenbleiben, zusammen irgend etwas anfangen, etwas unternehmen, wagen, schaffen, wollen wir beide, du der Kleine, ich der Große, zusammen versuchen, wie wir das Leben bestehen? (188)" Both the attraction of this "ausgehungerter, eingesperrter Tiger" toward Jakob and his general praise of youth carry "die Züge homoerotischen Begehren offen auf der Stirn" (Walser 185, Moser 142). Herr Benjamenta denotes himself as the dominant partner and Jakob as the submissive one in this dynamic, which is suggestive of a homoerotic dynamic. As their relationship intensifies, its experimental dimension likewise increases as it nears "den Rand einer geltenden Norm" in that this relationship dissolves the typical student-

teacher dynamic and it moves towards something more intimate and vitalizing, but also taboo (Moser 131). Although this relationship takes place in early 20th Century, strictly Protestant Berlin, its sexual undertones harken back to the Antique pedagogical tradition and institution of pederasty in which interpersonal pedagogical experience was far more intimate than it is in 20th Century education. Perhaps the Institute's situation in a *Hinterhof* makes it easier for such controversial relationships to be performed without the prying eyes on the crowded Prussian streets, since the Prussian public would surely demonize any such potentially homosexual partnership.

Walter Benjamin's Theorization Applied to Authentic Pedagogical Relationships

The male-male, inter-generational relationship with sado-masochistic undertones between the principal and Jakob, in particular, arises out of the cultish atmosphere and the physical layout of the school that support its ritualized pedagogy. Using aesthetic theory posited by Walter Benjamin in 1936 regarding works of art in the age of their mechanical reproducibility, this section of this thesis interprets the relationship between Herr Benjamenta and Jakob as an attempt to realizing a pre-modern form of homosexual love, pedagogical Eros, which can no longer exist because of modern norms.

As Jakob performs the chores, theatrical lessons, and behaviors mandated by the Benjamentas, the continuous ceremony around objects of veneration that these activities entail make them similar to cult rituals. Either the Institute itself, which bears the name of Benjamenta, or the Fräulein herself are the cult object in these rituals. They are the objects that their subjects serve and venerate; art is in their service. In Antiquity, rituals were the activity from which art initially arose. Pre-modern artwork was literally art in the service of rituals (Benjamin 3). Just like a statue of Aphrodite that a worshipper circumambulated, to which a worshipper dedicated

his song, or which a venerator sanctimoniously maintained, the Fräulein – and the name Benjamenta – become occult objects that engender ritual reverence and thus create an aesthetic experience of a pre-modern nature. The activities performed for these works of art, in this case for these individuals, become aesthetic experiences. The pupils who perform these experiences, which serve to essentially propitiate the school's leaders, become enraptured in these moments and thereby elevated to a higher plane of aesthetic experience. Only within the Institute Benjamenta's walls, though, can life be experienced in this primordial aesthetic way.

Original, Antique art objects were tied into a ritual context: they evoked certain internalized behavior from their audience, they required certain dispositions, and they demanded a psychological distance between their presence and that of the observer. An original work of art has an aura, in that it has authenticity: It belongs to a unique place in time and space (Benjamin 3). Original works of art, things that have auras of authenticity, cannot be reproduced because their auras are irreproducible. Contemporaneously, though, mechanical reproduction has emancipated art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. Nowadays, the work of art reproduced is the work of art designed for its reproduction (Benjamin 5).

As the conditions of capitalism in modernity degenerates the nature of the work of art from something with aura to something made simply to be reproduced (and sold), the nature of the relationship between teacher and pupil is also reduced from its original Classical conception to the modern notion that a student is a product of his school. In the Greek social tradition of pederasty, which Gustav Wyneken transposes into a 20th century context as pedagogical Eros by omitting sexual consummation from the definition, a man takes a student into an intimate spiritual union and thereby rears the student toward a higher aesthetic understanding. This spiritual union not only initiates the boy into a new world of aesthetic experience, but also

revitalizes the older man, in that he is able to vicariously live through the boy's fresh experience (Wyneken).

At the Institute Benjamenta, Jakob and the other students are not treated like products of the education industry, but rather as entities with the capacity for experience perception. The chores and lessons which they perform do not lead to material or intellectual results, either, but to immediate experiences and sensations. The Institute Benjamenta differs from a modern school in that it does not produce indoctrinated students, but initiates students into the methodology of pedagogical Eros. The Benjamentian pedagogy neither instills a content-based curriculum nor indoctrinates an ideology, but actually pushes its students into a state of sensory perception that is unhampered by modern conceptions of aesthetics. Jakob leaves the Institute with a novel capacity to experience reality, not a head full of facts. Just as the Institute is not a typical factory that manufactures students, but rather a non-productive site of experience appropriation, so is the relationship between Herr Benjamenta and Jakob an atypical love relationship in that it is not procreative, but spiritually creative. Through the dreams and sensations that the Institute's routine, ritual pedagogy produces in Jakob, Herr Benjamenta appropriates experiences by proxy that he has not been able to realize himself. He can immediately feel, live, and experience through the emergent, excited intellect of his pupil whom he loves.

In modernity, increasing mechanization and burgeoning discursiveness release works of art from their original contexts, which strips them of their auras - the opportunity to immediately and authentically experience them. Under these same conditions, pedagogical relationships have been likewise stripped of their original, authentic natures, as they are no longer understood as unique opportunities for aesthetic and intellectual experience between an older man and a younger boy, but merely as another event of indoctrinating a pupil so that he will be able to

retain, recollect, and reproduce an ideology. The authentic experience of pedagogical relationships, just like the aura of works of art, has been reduced by the modern social tendency to overcome the uniqueness of everyday reality through its mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 4). Though Walter Benjamin does not argue that mechanical reproduction has ruined art in the 20th Century, he does emphasize that mechanical reproduction can be abused in terms of reproducing art, whereby it removes art from a long string of social tradition. In the case of pedagogical Eros, which is not scalable, but a one-to-one interpersonal experience, the industrialization of educational methods and institutions has made schools into sites of production, not spaces of intellectual and aesthetic rearing. The Benjamentian Institution, however, creates a pre-modern circumstance in which its students and its leaders experience everyday reality without the determination of Western, capital-oriented interpersonal norms.

Because a relationship of pedagogical Eros is homo-social and amorous, and therefore non-procreative, it goes against the modern tendency to produce. Only heterosexual relationships, which are sanctioned under capital-oriented thinking, can result in producing new labor. Modernity derides relationships of pedagogical Eros as inappropriate and aberrant because they involve erotic tensions, which are only tolerated in heterosexual relations. Pedagogical Eros, just like authentic art, can only exist when fettered to a certain context. One can only experience authentic pedagogical Eros under the right circumstances, just as one can only experience an authentic work of art when it is bound to a certain position in time and space. The right circumstances for pedagogical Eros to come to fruition are no longer extant, though, as this archetypical relationship was only socially sanctioned under pre-modern social norms.

Gustav Wyneken's Pedagogical Eros as a Pre-Modern Pedagogical Relationship

The relationship between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta, along with the other relationships formed in this unusual boarding school to varying degrees, contains an unique interpersonal dynamic that harkens back to the Classical, pre-modern pedagogical tradition of pederasty, which no longer exists in modern times. Though the relation between Herr Benjamenta and Jakob resembles pederasty, it is never consummated, which aligns it with the concept of pedagogical Eros posited by Gustav Wyneken in 1921. Wyneken asserted that love is not always an expression of the sex drive, especially in the case of pedagogical Eros, which is rather a shy, chaste, and held-back love between a man and a boy (Wyneken 12-19). Instead of being like an erotic relationship, which is based on the desires to consume and to enjoy, Wyneken claims that pedagogical Eros is predicated on the desires to gift and to create (Wyneken 24). In pedagogical Eros, the deed of consummation is done through the heart and mind, rather than with the body (34).

Aside from attempting to remove coitus from his conception of pedagogical Eros, in order to make it acceptable by 20th Century European standards, Wyneken also portrays this pedagogical theory as innately pre-modern. Thus, he argues that this archetypal human phenomenon has always existed, but because of modern norms' codification in laws, which are just static systems of words disconnected from an evolving and vibrant reality, these unchanging laws deem this phenomenon aberrant and marginalize its existence. Because of the specialization of knowledge (the creation of knowledge discourses) and the mechanization of pedagogical praxis in the 20th Century, Wyneken opines that students in pedagogical settings are seen as ends, or essentially as products of their education, rather than as means for experiencing life and creating knowledge for themselves as well as for their instructors (41). Wyneken laments that European society has forgotten how to experience real life because modernity has removed

pedagogical rearing from its natural social tradition of intimate, homosocial, inter-generational affection and displaced it in a factory setting.

Only by means of establishing a new educational order that allows for new opportunities for expressions of love can modern Western society save itself (45). Wyneken ultimately argues that a novel pedagogical tradition must be forged within European society that will, in praxis, unite the mind and the body, the teacher and the student, and thereby revive Modern pedagogy by returning it to its pre-modern standard. For this to happen, a pedagogical methodology whose principles and activities are markedly pre-modern is necessary.

An Escape from Modern Culture as the Only Way to Pedagogical Eros

An escape from modern, European culture is the only way that Jakob and Herr Benjamenta can realize their full interpersonal potential. As the novel closes, the reality of the Institute Benjamenta begins to melt away and dissolve into a fantastical dream. Jakob falls asleep and is “der Wirklichkeit entrückt,” as he slips into a dream in which he and Herr Benjamenta ride off together into “die Wüste” (205, 208). In this paradoxical reality that is “lächerlich und herrlich zugleich” Jakob remarks that it is as if that which one calls “europäische Kultur” has disappeared (205-206). When the principal and the student’s relationship nears its climax, this “libidnöse Konfrontation führt zum Aufbruch ins unabsehbare Jenseits aller abendländlichen tradierten Vernunft” (Moser 125). This breakthrough into a world beyond all traditions of Western reason is not just an escape from Western norms, but also an escape from the societal system, modern industrial capitalism, that has engendered these conditions. Herr Benjamenta states that they have achieved something great in this dream: “Der Kultur entrücken, Jakob. Weißt du, das ist famos” (206). The pedagogue and the pupil, the Lord and his Bondsman, the two lovers Jakob and Benjamenta, transcend modernity to enter this hypnagogic space in which

they can realize a relationship of pedagogical Eros. This dissolution of reality and their entrance into a dream world, though, is not literally Jakob and Herr Benjamenta's sojourn into some foreign land that tolerates homosocial, inter-generational pedagogical relationships because it is devoid of the norms entrenched in interpersonal relationships by capital-oriented thought. Instead, this end is a euphemism for the only way in which these two can escape the norms of early 20th Century Germany: Death.

Because the emotional and spiritual connotations of this type of love were deemed unacceptable by Christian morality in industrial, early 20th Century, German society, no modern precedent exists to support the arising of such intimacy. Gustav Wyneken attempted to advocate for the social institution of pedagogical Eros in 1921, however, his description of this practice lacked clarity and was rife with contradictions. While he insisted that this type of pedagogical love was non-erotic, his advocacy for close emotional relations and nude contact between a pedagogue and his pupil nevertheless gave his pedagogical aspirations sexual undertones. Any sort of erotic connection between a teacher and a student was against the law by early 20th Century, German educational standards and was considered socially perverse as well.

While it was very difficult for Gustav Wyneken to maintain a real academy dedicated to nurturing pedagogical Eros in early 20th Century Germany, the teacher-student dynamic that Jakob forms with Herr Benjamenta in this *Hinterhaus* reaches such a degree of intimacy that is not only socially unusual and taboo, but even becomes entirely out of touch with Wyneken's reality. The Institute, out of which the Benjamenta Siblings do not seem to journey, has a strange insular quality due to its inconspicuous urban location and feeling of disconnection from the world around it. While Jakob never describes the Benjamenta Siblings outside of its walls, he also never relates the school to its contemporary world – even the school's photograph of the

German Imperial couple is not of the current Kaiser in 1909 (Wilhelm II). The insulation of the Institute from the outside world also suggests its total disconnection from 20th Century social norms, which is why it must go out of business. This insular quality also effects the homosocial student population of the Institute, since it explains the incentive for homosexual experimentation between Jakob and Schacht as well as Tremala and Jakob.² However the school's insular, stagnant quality could also have affected the relationship between Herr Benjamenta and his sister and could have cultured sexual tension between them in this isolation, especially since the Institute is indeed an extraordinary space that suspends social norms.

Lisa Benjamenta's final confession to Jakob before her death sheds light on the taboo sexual dynamic that arises between Herr Benjamenta and Jakob. The Fräulein's intimates that the reason she remained unwed was a certain man hesitated to express his love for her and thus caused her heart to die: "Ich spreche zu dir von dem Mann, an den anmutige süße Träume mich glauben, unbedenklich glauben hießen" (183). She never specifies who this man is. The fact that Jakob asks Herr Benjamenta of his personal past throughout the diary in vain corroborates the hypothesis that he could had unrequited feelings toward his sister (188-189). Since Herr Benjamenta never tells Jakob his own Lebenslauf, one can deduce that the principal has an unfulfilled love life. Though this project does not investigate the potentially incestuous relation

² Brandon David Dennis commentary on sexuality in the homo-social setting of German transatlantic sailors' homes between 1884 and 1914 sheds light on the insulated, homo-social situation of the Institute Benjamenta: Like other working-class men of the period, sailors probably were not limited by a strict hetero/homosexual dichotomy...[their] sense of masculinity was less concerned with the object of desire than with being the dominant partner in a sexual encounter (196). Additionally, the homes had an 'aesthetic mission,' defined by the rule that 'the milieu of a place determines the behavior of its occupants.' Without a 'sense of beauty' encompassing order and cleanliness, they could not provide the essential feeling of comfort or *Heimat*. Within the walls of its sailors' homes, the DSM aspired to provide an *ersatz* family for German mariners. Each home was run by a house-father and, usually, a house-mother, who were supposed to act as a loving and disciplining family for the young seaman (192).

between the Benjamenta siblings, it is definitely something that many readers of this novel have perceived.³ Lisa and Herr Benjamenta do indeed come across almost like a married couple, especially since they share sparse sleeping quarters and there is no mention of their lives outside of the school. Jakob sees Herr Benjamenta as a hungry, violent, but gentle tiger, whose only life companion has died. He perceives that this man wants to experience something special, something perhaps criminal, through him:

Außerdem ist er mir ja noch die Erzählung seiner Lebensgeschichte schuldig. Er hat mir das fest versprochen, und ich werde ihn daran zu erinnern wissen. Ja, so kommt er mir vor: noch gar nicht gelebt hat er. Will er sich jetzt etwa an mir ausleben? Nennt er etwa gar Verbrechenausüben Ausleben? (185)

At this point in the plot, “Verbrechenausüben” implies something beyond sado-masochistic interactions: It implies a homosexual relationship between Herr Benjamenta and Jakob. By law in early 20th Century Germany, Herr Benjamenta and Jakob’s relationship was not just illegal because of its age differential, which is never actually specified, but because it was a homosexual companionship. Though both Plato and Gustav Wyneken suggested that relationships of pederasty or pedagogical Eros are ideally non-sexual, both men also implied that a constant sexual tension between the older man and the boy exists in their respective conceptions of male-male intergenerational pedagogical love. This sexual tension intensifies between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta toward the end of the diary. Herr Benjamenta wants to experience the erotic relationships he has never fulfilled in his life through his relationship with Jakob. Within the immediate, self-experimental, idle experience-space that the Institute engenders, Herr Benjamenta wants to realize a relationship of pedagogical Eros that springs from his own

³ The Brother Quay released their first feature-length film in 1996, “Institute Benjamenta, or This Dream People Call Human Life,” in which “their handling of a sexual encounter and a sexual fantasy is unlike anything you’ve seen before,” according to Jeff Vice of the *Deseret Times* (1996). This film paints an image of the Institute as a hazy, obfuscated reality in which language communicates very little and where the characters of the Siblings Benjamenta are portrayed in several scenes charged with incestuous undertones.

unrequited desires. The potential unfulfilled eroticism between the siblings Benjamenta pours over into the tension in Jakob and Herr Benjamenta's increasingly intimate relationship, which is ultimately resolved through their ambiguous union at the story's end.

The story's conclusion blends into a fantastic dream in which the principal and Jakob go off into the unknown together in order to abandon civilization, a world organized by discourse and thought, for a reality of pure experience: "Weg jetzt mit dem Gedankenleben. Ich gehe mit Herrn Benjamenta in die Wüste. Will doch sehen, ob es sich in der Wildnis nicht auch leben, atmen, sein, aufrichtig Gutes wollen und tun und nachts schlafen und träumen läßt. Ach was. Jetzt will ich an gar nichts mehr denken" (208). This ending is hopeful, in that it seems like the protagonists are able to experience a union of pedagogical Eros with one another. However, the ambiguity of their environment, the bleakness of "der Wildnis," and the connotation of death implied by going into "die Wüste" all suggest that this conclusion is not all joyous. The Nirvana, or desert, into which they ultimately enter is not only a space of fulfilled emotional experience, but perhaps also the cessation of life. To immediately and totally experience life through such a relationship as theirs, one of pedagogical Eros, is impossible, since it would be criminal by modern standards to experience all that this entails.

During the early 20th Century, social norms and conditions did not permit pedagogical Eros to publicly or institutionally exist, just as society likewise disapproves of incestuous relationships. Because relationships of pedagogical Eros produce no offspring due to their homosexual nature, they are of no utilitarian value in a modern capital-oriented society (Foucault 3). As Michel Foucault states in "The History of Sexuality," the norms of modern, industrial society only acknowledge "a single locus of sexuality... the parent's bedroom" (3). Thus, modern social norms impose a "triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence" on aberrant

sexualities that expels them from everyday experience (Foucault 5). In order for Jakob and Herr Benjamenta to transcend modern social norms, they must escape from the modern world. Once the Institute ends, death is the only emancipation from these conditions; it is the only hope they have to revert back to primordial, unspoiled feelings and to flee from the social boundaries in which life in an industrialized society embroils interpersonal relationships.

The ritualistic pedagogy of the Institute Benjamenta, an *Internat* more similar in some ways to a Greek temple than a German factory, removes Jakob from his current place and time where aesthetics and the experience of real life are interpreted instead of purely experienced and transports him to a space in which one experiences aesthetics, and relationships, to their full unhindered, pre-modern potentials. For Jakob von Gunten and Herr Benjamenta to create and maintain a relational dynamic of pedagogical Eros they must escape modern conventions, which means they must escape modernity itself. However, modern capitalism's influence on social norms as well on pedagogical methods marginalizes pedagogical Eros as an aberrant type of relational dynamic, something that surely must be sexually consummated and thus immoral. Because it also creates social conditions and economic modes that make its own abolishment impossible (Benjamin 1), Jakob and Herr Benjamenta must ultimately escape reality in order to fulfill their relationship. They must go beyond any modern understanding of interpersonal love to actualize pedagogical Eros. The prognosis for Jakob and the principal at the end of Jakob's diary is bleak, though, since the only place in which they can finally consummate pedagogical Eros seems to be in death.

Epilogue

As this work draws such a dark conclusion, this examination should neither be understood as an argument against modernity, nor as a value judgment of pedagogical Eros as a

good or bad thing. Rather, this is an argument that Robert Walser suggests, through the character of Jakob von Gunten, that humans in the 20th Century should elevate their understanding of daily aesthetic and interpersonal experiences and thereby uncover the ways in which modern social norms limit the human experience through the streamlining of people's behavior and thought. This novel attests to the fact that modern people do not understand all facets of the human condition despite 20th Century advances in social science and the increase of material wealth in the modern world.

This thesis has argued that the Institute Benjamenta creates a space that suspends modern social norms and thereby allows for pre-modern interpersonal experiences to happen, in this case, homosexual experimentation, and especially the pederast relationship between Jakob von Gunten and Herr Benjamenta that resembles the 20th Century concept of pedagogical Eros. Beyond the example of Gustav Wyneken's historical failure to establish an institution in which pedagogical Eros could thrive because of 20th Century social stigmas against homosexuality and pedophilia, it is fascinating to consider the fantastical ending of Jakob's diary that mentions the dissolution of the Institute Benjamenta and perhaps suggests his and Herr Benjamenta's deaths as the result of their relationship. My thesis concludes that between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta a relationship of pedagogical Eros was unrealizable not due to explicit social stigmas against homosexuality and pederasty (like in Wyneken's case), but rather because modern social norms, namely the marginalization of real natural spaces, the erasure of real boredom from daily human experience, and the homogenization of human behavior through capital-oriented thinking, function to eliminate both the spatial and mental opportunities for pre-modern interpersonal relationships to be experienced. Herr Benjamenta and Jakob consent to begin an experiment of

pedagogical Eros with one another in Jakob's diary, however, in the social context of the *Großstadt*, such a relationship cannot be consistently and thoroughly experienced.

As the norm for educational institutions in the 19th and 20th Centuries became systematic factories of learning that produced uniform laborers with no relationships to their instructors, the Institute Benjamenta contradicts this notion because it is a factory of un-learning, a location where relationships are experienced in an autodidactic way, and a space of ritual performance, not production, as students go on to become servants, rather than workers. In the Institute, students are taught to experience aesthetics, not to produce them. Because the Benjamitian pedagogy disengages its students from the social and educational norms of 20th Century society to such an extent, its existence cannot persist. The Institute Benjamenta is so far removed from modern norms, just like the relationships formed inside of it, that they are marginalized to the point of invisibility in modern times. As modern, industrial society uses norms to control "in which circumstances, among which speakers, and within which social relationships" humans can frankly discuss and experience natural human sexuality, the Institute Benjamenta is a space hidden from the city street and opposed to the modern treatment of human sexuality (Foucault 18). Through Jakob von Gunten's character, Robert Walser experiments with potential taboo interpersonal relationships whereby he ultimately critiques the modern experience of life. The examination of Gustav Wyneken's work and his historical context relative to Jakob von Gunten's diary demonstrates, too, that Robert Walser was not the only person in the German space thinking about radical ways to re-conceptualize interpersonal relationships in education at this time, but that real pedagogues actually realized such radical pedagogical projects and were met with controversy and eventually marginalization themselves.

While Walter Benjamin's work was concerned with the experience of the auras of authentic works of art, this project concerned itself with the literary motif of two men experiencing the aura of an authentic pedagogical relationship formed by their spiritual desires rather than by the educational standards of industrial society. As Gustav Wyneken lamented the specialization of knowledge and mechanization of praxis in early 20th Century German pedagogy, Robert Walser portrays an early 20th Century intergenerational homo-social relationship through Jakob's diary that goes against these modern pedagogical trends (Wyneken 41). Although this thesis exclusively examined the relationship between Jakob and Herr Benjamenta in *Jakob von Gunten*, the experiences Jakob has with Fräulein Benjamenta and his other school peers would also make interesting investigations into the aesthetics of interpersonal experiences under modern social norms. While this thesis used Walter Benjamin's theory to investigate the norms of aesthetic experience under the conditions of modern thought and the influence these norms have on one's ability to realize interpersonal experiences of pedagogical Eros in the early 20th Century, it would also be interesting to investigate the ways in which everyday aesthetic experience in the Digital Age has affected new social norms because of increased opportunities for the creation and reproduction of media. I believe, conclusively, that the motif of Jakob von Gunten and Herr Benjamenta's relationship suggests that despite the burgeoning human artifice in an age of ever increasing technical reproduction, humans should not lose sight of authentic, intimate interpersonal and aesthetic experiences.

Sources Cited

Benjamin, Walter. "Robert Walser in: Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schrift 1." 1929. Suhrkamp

Verlag: Frankfurt a.M. 1977. 1-3. Print.

<http://www.mikrogramme.de/e945/e1132/>

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Marxists.org*.

Schocken/Random House, Ed. by Hannah Arendt, 1 Jan. 2008. Web. 16 Feb. 2015. 1-16.

Print. <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.html>

Cardinal, Agnes. "The Problem of Thought." *The Figure of Paradox in the Work of Robert*

Walser. Stuttgart: H.-D. Heinz, 1982. Print.

Dickinson, Edward Ross. *Sex, Freedom, and Power in Imperial Germany, 1880-1914*. New

York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Print. 153-160.

Dobson, Stephen. "Critical Dictionary of Fragments." *The Urban Pedagogy of Walter Benjamin.*

Lessons for the 21st Century: Part Three. New Cross, London: Goldsmiths College, U of

London, 2002. 1-7. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Random House, 1978. Print. 3-41.

Hegel, G. W. F. "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage."

Phenomenology of Spirit. 29-34. Print.

Kracauer, Siegfried, and Thomas Y. Levin. "Fadeaway: Toward the Vanishing Point: *Boredom*."

The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1995. 331-334.

Print.

Moser, Petra. *Nah Am Tabu: Experimentelle Selbsterfahrung Und Erotischer Eigensinn in*

Robert Walsers "Jakob Von Gunten" Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013. Print.

Naguib, Nagi. Robert Walser; Entwurf Einer Bewusstseinsstruktur. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag München, 1970. 74. Print.

Plato, and W.H.D. Rouse. "Symposium." Great Dialogues of Plato. New York: New American Library, 1956. 76-83. Print.

Thijs, Maasen phd (1991) Man-boy Friendships on Trial.; Journal of Homosexuality, 20:1-2, 47-70, DOI: 10.1300/J082v20n01_06. Print. 50-51.

Walser, Robert. Jakob Von Gunten: Ein Tagebuch. Ebook #24176 ed. Project Gutenberg, 2008. 208. Print.

Whittaker, Gwendolyn. "Spiele Mit Der Norm: Programme Der Stilbildung Und Ihre Subversion." Überbürdung - Subversion - Ermächtigung: Die Schule Und Die Literarische Moderne 1880 - 1918. Göttingen, Niedersachsen: V&R Unipress, 2013. 192-223. Print.

Wyneken, Gustav. Eros. Paul Saal Verlag Berlin. 1921.12-42.

Foot-Noted Works Cited

(Footnote 2) Dennis, David Brandon. "Seduction on the Waterfront: German Merchant Sailors, Masculinity and the 'Brücke Zu Heimat' in New York and Buenos Aires, 1884–1914*." German History 29.2 (2011): 175-201. Print.

(Footnote 1) Oelkers, Jürgen. "Eros Und Lichtgestalten: Die Gurus Der Landerziehungsheime *)." Ife.uzh.ch. Universität Zürich Institut Für Erziehungswissenschaft. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

<http://www.ife.uzh.ch/research/emeriti/oelkersjuergen/vortraegeprofoelkers/vortraege2011/BernGurusdef.pdf>

(Footnote 3) Vice, Jeff. "Film Review: Institute Benjamenta." Deseretnews.com. Deseret News, 26 Nov. 1996. Web. 26 Mar. 2015.

Works Consulted

Cardinal, Agnes. *The Figure of Paradox in the Work of Robert Walser*. Stuttgart: H.-D. Heinz, 1982. Print.

Dumain, Ralph. "Thoughts on Autodidacticism." "The Autodidact Project": Article: "" by John W. Osborne. Web. 9 Mar. 2015.
<<http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/osborne1.html>>.