Reflections

santly rages the great decisive battle between town and coun-
try. It is nowhere more bitter than between Marseilles and
the Provençal landscape. It is the hand-to-hand fight of tele-
graph poles against Agaves, barbed wire against thorny palms,
the miasmas of stinking corridors against the damp gloom
under the plane trees in brooding squares, short-winded out-
side staircases against the mighty hills. The long rue de Lyon
is the powder conduit that Marseilles has dug in the landscape
in order, in Saint-Lazare, Saint-Antoine, Arenç, Septèmes, to
blow it up, burying it in the shell splinters of every national
and commercial language. Alimentation Moderne, rue de
Jamaïque, Comptoir de la Limite, Savon Abat-Jour, Minoterie
de la Campagne, Bar du Gaz, Bar Facultatif—and over all this
the dust that here conglomerates out of sea salt, chalk, and
mica, and whose bitterness persists longer in the mouths of
those who have pitted themselves against the city than the
splendor of sun and sea in the eyes of its admirers.

Hashish in Marseilles

Preliminary remark: One of the first signs that hashish is be-
ingning to take effect "is a dull feeling of foreboding; some-
thing strange, ineluctable is approaching . . . images and chains
of images, long-submerged memories appear, whole scenes
and situations are experienced; at first they arouse interest,
now and then enjoyment, and finally, when there is no turn-
ing away from them, weariness and torment. By everything that
happens, and by what he says and does, the subject is surprised
and overwhelmed. His laughter, all his utterances happen to
him like outward events. He also attains experiences that ap-
proach inspiration, illumination.... Space can expand, the
ground tilt steeply, atmospheric sensations occur: vapor, an
opaque heaviness of the air; colors grow brighter, more lumi-
nous; objects more beautiful, or else lumpy and threatening.
. . . All this does not occur in a continuous development;
rather, it is typified by a continual alternation of dreaming
and waking states, a constant and finally exhausting oscilla-
tion between totally different worlds of consciousness; in the
middle of a sentence these transitions can take place.... All this
the subject reports in a form that usually diverges very
widely from the norm. Connections become difficult to per-
ceive, owing to the frequently sudden rupture of all memory
of past events, thought is not formed into words, the situation
can become so compulsively hilarious that the hashish eater
for minutes on end is capable of nothing except laughing....
The memory of the intoxication is surprisingly clear." "It is
curious that hashish poisoning has not yet been expe-
imentally studied. The most admirable description of the hashish
trance is by Baudelaire (Les paradis artificiels)." From Joël
and Pränkel, “Der Haschisch-Rausch,” *Klinische Wo-chen-

Marseilles, July 29. At seven o’clock in the evening, after long
hesitation, I took hashish. During the day I had been in Aix.
With the absolute certainty, in this city of hundreds of thou-
sands where no one knows me, of not being disturbed, I lie on
the bed. And yet I am disturbed, by a little child crying. I
think three-quarters of an hour have already passed. But it is
only twenty minutes... So I lie on the bed, reading and
smoking. Opposite me always this view of the belly of Mar-
seilles. The street I have so often seen is like a knife cut.

At last I left the hotel, the effects seeming nonexistent or
so weak that the precaution of staying at home was unneces-
sary. My first port of call was the café on the corner of Canne-
bière and Cours Belsunce. Seen from the harbor, the one on
the right, therefore not my usual café. What now? Only a
certain benevolence, the expectation of being received kindly
by people. The feeling of loneliness is very quickly lost. My
walking stick begins to give me a special pleasure. One be-
comes so tender, fears that a shadow falling on the paper
might hurt it. The nausea disappears. One reads the notices
on the urinals. It would not surprise me if this or that person
came up to me. But when no one does I am not disappointed,
either. However, it is too noisy for me here.

Now the hashish eater’s demands on time and space come
into force. As is known, these are absolutely regal. Versailles,
for one who has taken hashish, is not too large, or eternity
too long. Against the background of these immense dimen-
sions of inner experience, of absolute duration and immeas-
urable space, a wonderful, beatific humor dwells all the more
fondly on the contingencies of the world of space and time. I
feel this humor infinitely when I am told at the Restaurant
Basso that the hot kitchen has just been closed, while I have
just sat down to feast into eternity. Afterward, despite this,
the feeling that all this is indeed bright, frequented, animated,
and will remain so. I must note how I found my seat. What
mattered to me was the view of the old port that one got
from the upper floors. Walking past below, I had spied an
empty table on the balcony of the second story. Yet in the
end I only reached the first. Most of the window tables were
occupied, so I went up to a very large one that had just been
vacated. As I was sitting down, however, the disproportion of
seating myself at so large a table caused me such shame that
I walked across the entire floor to the opposite end to sit at a
smaller table that became visible to me only as I reached it.

But the meal came later. First, the little bar on the harbor.
I was again just on the point of retreating in confusion, for
a concert, indeed a brass band, seemed to be playing there.
I only just managed to explain to myself that it was nothing
more than the blaring of car horns. On the way to the Vieux
Port I already had this wonderful lightness and sureness of step
that transformed the stony, unarticulated earth of the great
square that I was crossing into the surface of a country road
along which I strode at night like an energetic hiker. For at
this time I was still avoiding the Cannebîre, not yet quite
sure of my regulatory functions. In that little harbor bar the
hashish then began to exert its canonical magic with a primitive
sharpness that I had scarcely felt until then. For it made
me into a physiognomist, or at least a contemplator of physiog-
nomies, and I underwent something unique in my experience:
I positively fixed my gaze on the faces that I had around me,
which were, in part, of remarkable coarseness or ugliness.
Faces that I would normally have avoided for a twofold rea-
son: I should neither have wished to attract their gaze nor
endured their brutality. It was a very advanced post, this
harbor tavern. (I believe it was the farthest accessible to me
without danger, a circumstance I had gauged, in the trance,
with the same accuracy with which, when utterly weary, one
is able to fill a glass exactly to the brim without spilling a
drop, as one can never do with sharp senses.) It was still sufi-
ciently far from rue Bouterie, yet no bourgeois sat there; at
the most, besides the true port proletariat, a few petit-bourgeois families from the neighborhood. I now suddenly understood how, to a painter—had it not happened to Rembrandt and many others?—ugliness could appear as the true reservoir of beauty, better than any treasure cask, a jagged mountain with all the inner gold of beauty gleaming from the wrinkles, glances, features. I especially remember a boundlessly animal and vulgar male face in which the “line of renunciation” struck me with sudden violence. It was above all men’s faces that had begun to interest me. Now began the game, to be long maintained, of recognizing someone I knew in every face; often I knew the name, often not; the deception vanished as deceptions vanish in dreams: not in shame and compromise, but peacefully and amiably, like a being who has performed his service. Under these circumstances there was no question of loneliness. Was I my own company? Surely not so undisguisedly. I doubt whether that would have made me so happy. More likely this: I became my own most skillful, fond, shameless procurer, gratifying myself with the ambiguous assurance of one who knows from profound study the wishes of his employer. Then it began to take half an eternity until the waiter reappeared. Or, rather, I could not wait for him to appear. I went into the barroom and paid at the counter. Whether tips are usual in such taverns I do not know. But under other circumstances I should have given something in any case. Under hashish yesterday, however, I was on the stingy side; for fear of attracting attention by extravagance, I succeeded in making myself really conspicuous.

Similarly at Basso’s. First I ordered a dozen oysters. The man wanted me to order the next course at the same time. I named some local dish. He came back with the news that none was left. I then pointed to a place in the menu in the vicinity of this dish, and was on the point of ordering each item, one after another, but then the name of the one above it caught my attention, and so on, until I finally reached the top of the list.

This was not just from greed, however, but from an extreme politeness toward the dishes that I did not wish to offend by a refusal. In short, I came to a stop at a pâté de Lyon. Lion paste, I thought with a witty smile, when it lay clean on a plate before me, and then, contemptuously: This tender rabbit or chicken meat—whatever it may be. To my lionish hunger it would not have seemed inappropriate to satisfy itself on a lion. Moreover, I had tacitly decided that as soon as I had finished at Basso’s (it was about half past ten) I should go elsewhere and dine a second time.

But first, back to the walk to Basso’s. I strolled along the quay and read one after another the names of the boats tied up there. As I did so an incomprehensible gaiety came over me, and I smiled in turn at all the Christian names of France. The love promised to these boats by their names seemed wonderfully beautiful and touching to me. Only one of them, Aero II, which reminded me of aerial warfare, I passed by without cordiality, exactly as, in the bar that I had just left, my gaze had been obliged to pass over certain excessively deformed countenances.

Upstairs at Basso’s, when I looked down, the old games began again. The square in front of the harbor was my palette, on which imagination mixed the qualities of the place, trying them out now this way, now that, without concern for the result, like a painter daydreaming on his palette. I hesitated before taking wine. It was a half bottle of Cassis. A piece of ice was floating in the glass. Yet it went excellently with my drug. I had chosen my seat on account of the open window, through which I could look down on the dark square. And as I did so from time to time, I noticed that it had a tendency to change with everyone who stepped onto it, as if it formed a figure about him that, clearly, had nothing to do with the square as he saw it but, rather, with the view that the great portrait painters of the seventeenth century, in accordance with the character of the dignitary whom they placed before a
colonnade or a window, threw into a relief by this colonnade, this window. Later I noted as I looked down, “From century to century things grow more estranged.”

Here I must observe in general: the solitude of such trances has its dark side. To speak only of the physical aspect, there was a moment in the harbor tavern when a violent pressure in the diaphragm sought relief through humming. And there is no doubt that truly beautiful, illuminating visions were not awakened. On the other hand, solitude works in these states as a filter. What one writes down the following day is more than an enumeration of impressions; in the night the trance cuts itself off from everyday reality with fine, prismatic edges; it forms a kind of figure and is more easily memorable. I should like to say: it shrinks and takes on the form of a flower.

To begin to solve the riddle of the ecstasy of trance, one ought to meditate on Ariadne’s thread. What joy in the mere act of unrolling a ball of thread. And this joy is very deeply related to the joy of trance, as to that of creation. We go forward; but in so doing we not only discover the twists and turns of the cave, but also enjoy this pleasure of discovery against the background of the other, rhythmical bliss of unwinding the thread. The certainty of unrolling an artfully wound skein—is that not the joy of all productivity, at least in prose? And under hashish we are enraptured prose-beings in the highest power.

A deeply submerged feeling of happiness that came over me afterward, on a square off the Canebière where rue Paradis opens onto a park, is more difficult to recall than everything that went before. Fortunately I find on my newspaper the sentence “One should scoop sameness from reality with a spoon.” Several weeks earlier I had noted another, by Johannes V. Jensen, which appeared to say something similar: “Richard was a young man with understanding for everything in the world that was of the same kind.” This sentence had pleased me very much. It enabled me now to confront the political, rational sense it had had for me earlier with the individual, magical meaning of my experience the day before. Whereas Jensen’s sentence amounted, as I had understood it, to saying that things are as we know them to be, thoroughly mechanized and rationalized, the particular being confined today solely to nuances, my new insight was entirely different. For I saw only nuances, yet these were the same. I immersed myself in contemplation of the sidewalk before me, which, through a kind of unguent with which I covered it, could have been, precisely as these very stones, also the sidewalk of Paris. One often speaks of stones instead of bread. These stones were the bread of my imagination, which was suddenly seized by a ravenous hunger to taste what is the same in all places and countries. And yet I thought with immense pride of sitting here in Marseilles in a hashish trance; of who else might be sharing my intoxication this evening, how few. Of how I was incapable of fearing future misfortune, future solitude, for hashish would always remain. The music from a nearby nightclub that I had been following played a part in this stage. G. rode past me in a cab. It happened suddenly, exactly as, earlier, from the shadows of the boat, U. had suddenly detached himself in the form of a harbor loafer and pimp. But there were not only known faces. Here, while I was in the state of deepest trance, two figures—citizens, vagrants, what do I know?—passed me as “Dante and Petrarch.” “All men are brothers.” So began a train of thought that I am no longer able to pursue. But its last link was certainly much less banal than its first and led on perhaps to images of animals.

“Barnabe,” read the sign on a streetcar that stopped briefly at the square where I was sitting. And the sad confused story of Barnabas seemed to me no bad destination for a streetcar going into the outskirts of Marseilles. Something very beautiful was going on around the door of the dance hall. Now and then a Chinese in blue silk trousers and a glowing pink silk jacket stepped outside. He was the doorman. Girls displayed themselves in the doorway. My mood was free of all desire. It was amusing to see a young man with a girl in a white dress com-
ing toward me and to be immediately obliged to think: "She got away from him in there in her shift, and now he is fetching her back. Well, well." I felt flattered by the thought of sitting here in a center of dissipation, and by "here" I did not mean the town but the little, not-very-eventful spot where I found myself. But events took place in such a way that the appearance of things touched me with a magic wand, and I sank into a dream of them. People and things behave at such hours like those little stage sets and people made of elder pith in the glazed tin-foil box, which, when the glass is rubbed, are electrified and fall at every movement into the most unusual relationships.

The music that meanwhile kept rising and falling, I called the rush switches of jazz. I have forgotten on what grounds I permitted myself to mark the beat with my foot. This is against my education, and it did not happen without inner disputation. There were times when the intensity of acoustic impressions blotted out all others. In the little bar, above all, everything was suddenly submerged in the noise of voices, not of streets. What was most peculiar about this din of voices was that it sounded entirely like dialect. The people of Marseilles suddenly did not speak good enough French for me. They were stuck at the level of dialect. The phenomenon of alienation that may be involved in this, which Kraus has formulated in the fine dictum "The more closely you look at a word the more distantly it looks back," appears to extend to the optical. At any rate I find among my notes the surprised comment "How things withstand the gaze."

The trance abated when I crossed the Cannebière and at last turned the corner to have a final ice cream at the little Café des Cours Belsunce. It was not far from the first café of the evening, in which, suddenly, the amorous joy dispensed by the contemplation of some fringes blown by the wind had convinced me that the hashish had begun its work. And when I recall this state I should like to believe that hashish persuades nature to permit us—for less egoistic purposes—that squander-