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The Witkacy – Cornelius Correspondence, or how to Cure Gout with Transcendental Philosophy

That we can so easily consider our own body as one of the objects of the external world depends on the quality of the sense of sight. When we close our eyes and only [apprehend] ourselves and objects through the sense of touch, we immediately feel an immense bodily difference between ourselves and the outside world... *I am my body* and not a unity of personality which is accidentally connected with this "complex of qualities."¹

Witkacy addressed these words to the German philosopher Hans Cornelius in the context of their epistolary debate which lasted from 1935 to 1939. For

¹ S. I. Witkiewicz: letter to Hans Cornelius, June 25, 1936. Reprinted as item no. 100 [in:] H. Kunstmann: *Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy) im Briefwechsel mit dem deutschen Philosophen Hans Cornelius* (The Correspondence Between S. I. Witkiewicz and the German Philosopher Hans Cornelius), Teil I, Part I, "Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie" 1977, No. 39, p. 60–156. Teil II, Part II: *ibidem*, No. 40, 1978, p. 150–213; citation from Part I, p. 105.

Witkacy, as for Schopenhauer, reflection about the human body was a necessary element of ontological inquiry. No philosophy could correctly characterize reality, Witkacy believed, if its descriptions of the body were inadequate. And he was convinced that Cornelius drastically underestimated the body's special importance for philosophy. This would not have mattered if Cornelius were a logical positivist, a pragmatist, or any other stripe of philosopher whose work Witkacy could dismiss as immature reductionism. In Witkacy's estimation, however, Cornelius' philosophical system was among the best in Europe, and it deserved careful scrutiny and criticism. This conviction inspired him to write to Cornelius and his letter started a friendship which soon became deeply empathetic and affectionate, a friendship which contrasted strongly with the political crisis that was quickly enveloping Europe. As Witkacy and Cornelius wrote about philosophy, art, and their personal lives, Europe was collapsing under the expansionist politics of Nazi Germany.

Their quixotic friendship first received scholarly attention in the 1970's when Heinrich Kunstmann discovered more than one hundred letters from Witkacy in the Cornelius archive in Munich.² Kunstmann edited and published the letters in 1977, and within a year a number of them were translated into Polish.³ Since most of Witkacy's personal papers were destroyed during World War II, Kunstmann's discovery was greeted with great enthusiasm and the letters became an important biographical source.⁴ The scholarly analyses of the correspondence itself, however, remained relatively cursory. Without access to Cornelius' replies to Witkacy, scholars could only give general descriptions of what seemed to have mattered to the two thinkers, but they could not reconstruct the dialogue between them. Above all, the letters came to symbolize the purity of intellectual kinship, extended like a

² H. Kunstmann: introduction, *Briefwechsel*, Part I, p. 60–68.

³ Idem: *Nieznane Listy Witkacego* (Witkacy's Unknown Letters), "Przegląd Humanistyczny" 1979, nr 6, p. 133–136; S. I. Witkiewicz: *Listy do Hansa Corneliusa* (Letters to Hans Cornelius), "Przegląd Humanistyczny" 1979, nr 6, p. 137–157. Continued in "Przegląd Humanistyczny" 1980, nr 2, p. 87–112, all three translated by J. Dalecki and W. Kleman: *Listy St. I. Witkiewicza do Hansa Corneliusa* (S. I. Witkiewicz's Letters to Hans Cornelius), "Twórczość" 1979, nr 35 (4), p. 113–123, translated by H. Opoczyńska; S. I. Witkiewicz, *Listy do Hansa Corneliusa* (Letters to Hans Cornelius), "Dialog" 1978, nr 5, p. 90–100, translated by S. Morawski.

⁴ See for example J. Degler: *Witkacego portret wielokrotny: szkice i materiały do biografii (1918–1939)* (Witkacy, a Multifaceted Portrait: Sketches and Materials for a Biography (1918–1939)), Warszawa 2009; A. Micińska: *Istnienie poszczególne, S. I. Witkiewicz* (A Particular Existence – S. I. Witkiewicz), ed. J. Degler, Wrocław 2003; and D. Gerould: *The Witkiewicz Reader*, Evanston 1992.

fragile bridge over the abyss of the increasingly menacing German-Polish politics of the late 1930s.⁵

In what follows I seek to provide a new perspective on the Witkacy–Cornelius correspondence by drawing on archival materials which were not considered in previous studies.⁶ On the one hand, Cornelius' papers and copies of some of his letters and postcards to Witkacy allow for a much fuller reconstruction of their philosophical arguments than has been possible so far. On the other, they reveal that while Witkacy and Cornelius hardly ever explicitly mentioned politics, a political dimension was by no means absent from their friendship. In the present context I will limit myself to two themes which are particularly interesting and significant. I will first explore how Witkacy and Cornelius treated the body in their philosophical and personal discussions, and I will then briefly analyze the political elements in the correspondence and in Cornelius' memory of the friendship during World War II.

When Witkacy first wrote to Cornelius, it was after more than thirty years of studying his works.⁷ Although this first letter is missing, from Cornelius' reply from April 19th 1935, we know that Witkacy expressed great

⁵ For the most recent analysis which idealizes the friendship as a symbolic triumph of rationality over divisive political forces see A. Jonas: *Mit Dir nur in der Ferne... Der Briefwechsel zwischen Stanisław Igancy Witkiewicz und Hans Cornelius (1935–1939)* (With Nothing but you in the Distance [...] the Correspondence between S. I. Witkiewicz and H. Cornelius, 1935–1939), "Zbliżenia, Polska–Niemcy" 1994, nr 3, p. 33–43.

⁶ The documents which are included in this analysis but which were not published by Kunstmann seem to have been added to the Cornelius archive after Kunstmann had consulted it. Kunstmann found and published a carbon copy of one of Cornelius' letters to Witkacy and his letter to Czesława Oknińska; he was aware that Jan Leszczyński might have preserved some letters from Cornelius to Witkacy but did not have access to these (see his introduction to the correspondence, as cited above). The materials I consulted are photocopies of postcards and letters from Cornelius to Witkacy, which seem to have been sent from the library of the Polish Academy of Science in Kraków. There are 7 letters and 17 postcards written between April 19, 1935 and September 15, 1938. The envelope in which they were placed includes an order slip (No. 42, dated April 10, 1976), which indicates that Mrs. Zofia Leszczyńska requested that a microfilm of the letters be made at the PAN library in Kraków. No information is provided about how or when the envelope with photocopies was sent to Munich. I also use a carbon copy of Cornelius' letter to Witkacy (Box 19), which is undated and which was not published by Kunstmann. Its content and Witkacy's responses suggest that it most likely comes from October 1936. Finally, I use Cornelius' correspondence with the General Command of the German Army in Berlin (March 1943), Boxes 13 and 21.

⁷ Based on Witkacy's correspondence with his father, Kunstmann suggests that Witkacy started reading Cornelius with the *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Introduction to Philosophy, 1901), see Kunstmann, "Przegląd Humanistyczny" 1979, nr 6, p. 134.

respect and admiration for Cornelius and introduced himself as his student. He also immediately announced, however, that he was “15%” his opponent.⁸ Cornelius did not succeed in attracting many students or followers in Germany, and he was thrilled to hear from a Polish admirer. His enthusiastic reply invited further discussion and in the weeks and months that followed their letters became friendly and direct. Enjoying both the intimacy and the distance of written correspondence, they wrote frankly about their personal lives, discussed their artistic interests (both shared a passion for painting), and gave each other books and photographs. When Witkacy sent Cornelius one of his novels, he added that he was quite pleased that Cornelius was unable to read this “terrible” book.⁹ Cornelius, for his part, was already studying Polish, and in the next letter he warned Witkacy: “but only wait, sir, I will procure a Polish dictionary, and then woe to you! Then I will read it!!!”¹⁰ It was not until May 1936, however, that Witkacy finally wrote the all-important “philosophical letter” which he had been promising Cornelius from the very start.¹¹ In this outpouring of passionate arguments, Witkacy attempted to explain to his “master” (as he often called Cornelius) how his philosophy was flawed.

Between 1901 and 1934 Cornelius published several treatises in which he put forward the principles of a system which he called ‘transcendental idealism.’¹² His goal was to overcome the limitations of both idealist and materialist philosophies and propose a new epistemological framework. His primary focus was on the mind’s representations of the world, but he did not believe that reality was reducible to mental images. Critical of Bishop Berkeley and inspired by Kant, Cornelius defined objects as “ever-present laws,” which the mind deduces from the stream of constantly changing perceptions. Like Kant, he believed that objects have mind-independent existence.

⁸ Postcard from Cornelius to Witkacy, April 19, 1935, Ana 352, Box 19.

⁹ Witkacy to Cornelius, November 1935, *Briefwechsel*, item, No. 10, p. 80. Kunstmann suggests that the “terrible” book in question was *Insatiability*.

¹⁰ Cornelius to Witkacy, November 4, 1935, Ana 352, Box 19, emphasis in the original. For Cornelius’ remarks that he has started studying Polish with the book Witkacy sent him see his letter from August 5, 1935, Ana 352, Box 19.

¹¹ Witkacy to Cornelius, two-part letter, part I sent on May 21, 1936, part II sent on June 25, 1936. Both appear as a single item in *Briefwechsel*, item, No. 25, p. 99–108.

¹² The most important of these were *Psychologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft* (Psychology as an Empirical Science) Leipzig 1897, *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Introduction to Philosophy), Leipzig and Berlin 1901, and *Grundlagen der Erkenntnistheorie, Transcendentale Systematik* (Foundations of Epistemology, Transcendental Systematics), Munich 1916. Later publications were shorter versions of earlier works, see for example *Das philosophische System von Hans Cornelius. Eigene Gesamtdarstellung* (The Philosophical System of Hans Cornelius in his own Overview), Berlin 1934.

Unlike Kant, however, he did not think that the mind's intrinsic structure is what governs the processes of perception. Cornelius claimed instead that the mind apprehends objects by extracting regularities which belong intrinsically to the objects themselves. He attempted to explain this in a variety of ways, one of which was an example of an observer walking around a book. At first the book appears as a "complex of qualities" – it has a specific shape, colour, texture, and so on. Some of these qualities change, however, as the observer looks at the book from different vantage points. From one angle the book might appear as a large flat rectangle, from another as a long and narrow one, from yet another as a parallelogram. Such images have no mind-independent existence, Cornelius argued, but this makes them neither illusory nor infinitely variable. They change predictably and the observer quickly learns what to expect with each step. Cornelius therefore claimed that the real book, the "book in itself" is the invisible source of this predictable variability – it is the objective law according to which the book's qualities must change in an observer's mind.¹³ To the mind the book thus appears as a lawfully organized "complex of qualities," in itself the book is an ever-present law which cannot be directly perceived by the human senses.

Witkacy found this unsatisfying – he agreed neither with Cornelius' definition of objects, nor with the consequences this definition had for theories of the self. In his two-part letter from May and June 1936, Witkacy told Cornelius that philosophy should strive, above all, to describe the world as it is, without any preliminary attempts to eliminate complexity. He argued that one must both respect the irreducible dualism of existence, and differentiate the body from all other types of objects. The notion that objects are "complexes of qualities" or "laws of regular correlation" (depending on how one thinks of them) was unacceptable to Witkacy because it could not describe the human body. Because one always experiences the body both from within and from without, he argued, one can never describe it exhaustively in either materialist or idealist terms. One cannot think of the body as nothing but a "complex of qualities," and the idea of an "ever-present law" is much too ambiguous. Purely materialist descriptions, Witkacy pointed out, necessarily neglect the body's inner life, they cannot account for the sense of 'inner touch' which informs the mind about pain, hunger, pleasure, or exhaustion.¹⁴ Conversely, idealist philosophies, even those as sophisticated as Cornelius', ignore the body's self-subsistent existence in the world. Mental representations of the body, Witkacy claimed, are not images of an ephemeral "complex

¹³ H. Cornelius: *Eigene Gesamtdarstellung*, op. cit., p. 26–27.

¹⁴ For an excellent analysis of the history of the concept of "inner touch" see D. Heller-Roazen: *The inner touch: archaeology of a sensation*, New York 2007.

of qualities” but arrows which point to something real, something immediately and undeniably present, something which exists independently of the mind. To call that something an abstract law is to betray the commitment to remain true to the richness of reality.¹⁵

By the mid-1930s Witkacy was working on his ‘biological monadology,’ an original and imaginative, if not a particularly verifiable, system of ontological claims.¹⁶ In his letter to Cornelius, he interspersed critique with his own findings and expected Cornelius to grasp the truth of his statements. Reality, he wrote, consists of an irreducible multiplicity of “Particular Existences,” or living monads, each of which has independent existence, it subsists “in itself.” Each person is a Particular Existence, but monadology does not end there. All that appears to be inanimate matter is actually a composite of vast numbers of infinitesimal monads. Unity of consciousness, just like sounds and colors, has a scale of intensity, and the tiny monads have self-awareness and self-unity appropriate to their simple structures. Each is thus endowed not only with a body but also with a primitive personality.¹⁷ One can only imagine Cornelius’s surprise when Witkacy told him that biological monadology was a direct outgrowth of his transcendental idealism.¹⁸ Witkacy’s letter was effectively a plea for Cornelius to further articulate the truths already inherent in his philosophy.

What he received instead of the expected offer to join forces was a very disappointing outline of all the ways in which he had misunderstood Cornelius’s thought. Cornelius’ reply was a letter of a self-assured teacher di-

¹⁵ Witkacy to Cornelius, letter from May 21, 1936 (Part I) and June 15, 1936 (Part II), reprinted in *Briefwechsel*, item, No. 25, p. 99–108. Whereas in the early 1920s Witkacy privileged the body and consciousness equally, between 1934 and 1936 he began to give ontological primacy to the body, for further discussion of this shift see M. Soin: *Filozofia Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza* (The Philosophy of S. I. Witkiewicz), Wrocław 2002.

¹⁶ His most extensive articulation of this system was *Pojęcia i twierdzenia implikowane przez pojęcie istnienia: 1917–1932* (Concepts and Propositions Implied by the Concept of Existence: 1917–1932), Warszawa 1935.

¹⁷ Witkacy discussed these concepts in his May–June 1936 letter to Cornelius, explaining some aspects in detail and only mentioning others, he returned to the themes in later letters, see especially the *Briefwechsel*, item, No. 100 (November 1938), p. 192–194.

¹⁸ Witkacy often emphasized Cornelius’ role in the development of his thought but other influences, which Witkacy did not discuss, might have been very important as well. See, for example Janusz Degler’s discussion of the importance of Witkacy’s stay in Russia during World War I and the popularity of Leibniz’s monadology among Russian intellectuals during that time - editorial note in the most recent critical edition of Witkacy’s *Pojęcia i twierdzenia* (Concepts and Propositions), Warszawa 2002, p. 458–465.

rected at an uncomprehending student. He carefully and patiently restated his own understanding of reality, and emphasized that in his system the body has no special epistemological significance. It is an object given to the mind no differently than any object in space – as a complex of qualities which change in lawful, predictable ways. Touch, Cornelius reminded Witkacy, whether internal or external, gives the mind as much or as little information as all the other senses. It provides nothing but fleeting perceptions which, by themselves, are incapable of pointing to anything that exists beyond the mind. He suggested that Witkacy's remarks about statistics revealed his limited training in the natural sciences, but did not remark about Witkacy's monadology. Nor did he ask about the evolution of Witkacy's thought.¹⁹

Witkacy was immensely disappointed by the accusation of misunderstanding Cornelius' philosophy and with his typical verve proceeded to convince Cornelius that he understood his system quite well because he had "lived through it" for years.²⁰ In the exchange of letters that followed in the fall of 1936 Witkacy's tone ranged from respectful gratitude to emotional outbursts of frustration and subsequent apologies.²¹ The letters did not bring any more mutual understanding or conceptual clarification. In October 1937, Witkacy invited Cornelius to come to Poland and they enjoyed long walks in the foothills of the Tatra Mountains. Even their conversations and the fluidity of the spoken word, however, seem not to have helped them to come any closer to comprehending each other's most fundamental premises. Their letters from 1938 and 1939 still resounded with frustration and accusations of misinterpretation. Cornelius maintained that his system effectively overcame the traps of idealism and believed that Witkacy never truly understood his theory of objects. Witkacy remained convinced that Cornelius made the cardinal mistake of neglecting the unique epistemological priority of the body.²²

¹⁹ Cornelius to Witkacy, undated carbon copy of a letter, most likely written in October 1936. Bavarian State Library in Munich, Ana 352, Box 19.

²⁰ Witkacy to Cornelius, letter from November 5, 1936, item, No. 41 in the *Briefwechsel*, p. 127.

²¹ See Witkacy to Cornelius, *Briefwechsel*: item, No. 28 p. 109, item, No. 32, p. 112, and items, No. 36–46, p. 117–134. See also Cornelius to Witkacy, postcard July 16, 1936, Ana 352, Box 19.

²² Cornelius' report about his lectures and meetings in Poland appears in the *Briefwechsel* as item, No. 68, and in Polish in "Twórczość", nr 30, 1974, p. 72–79. For further philosophical exchanges between Witkacy and Cornelius *Briefwechsel*, items, No. 51, 70, 73, 76, 80, 83, 100, and 102 (the last item is Cornelius' letter to Witkacy, the others are Witkacy's letters to Cornelius).

If we focus only on the philosophical elements of this correspondence we have before us a story of misunderstandings. Witkacy and Cornelius could not find a common language precise enough to transform their exchange of philosophical views into dialogue. They were locked into their own technical terms and their own linguistic spaces. Cornelius never learned Polish well enough to read Witkacy's philosophical texts, and Witkacy's German was anything but precise. He wrote passionately and without much regard for order, he often left his clauses and his sentences incomplete, and more than once made German words out of Polish ones. Sometimes he wrote in sinister depression, sometimes in excited fury, and sometimes he confessed to being half-drunk but pressed on with philosophical arguments nonetheless. As his Polish friends often attested, Witkacy felt the intensity of philosophical questioning to the very core of his being, and this did not always support his efforts to make his claims clear. Cornelius' philosophy, on the other hand, even if expressed in perfect and perfectly detached academic German, was full of conceptual gaps and vague claims which were open to misreading.

It is therefore remarkable that the misapprehensions and frustration did not upset the genuinely warm and caring friendship that developed between the two men. It appears that the very act of conducting an honest and engaged philosophical discussion created a sense of solidarity which was far more important than all the conceptual gaps. A fascinating contrast, moreover, emerges from the letters: whereas Witkacy and Cornelius could not see eye to eye when it came to philosophical treatment of the body, they fully understood each other's struggles with bodily ailments and shared both advice and empathy. Some of the linguistic obstacles which plagued their philosophical discussions were also prominent when they wrote about personal issues but the obstacles did not matter nearly as much. Experiences of the aging and vulnerable body gave Witkacy and Cornelius a shared reference point which brought them as close, if not closer, than their passion for philosophy.

Gout was the worst culprit. At times it made it impossible for Cornelius to type, and it pushed Witkacy to experiment with all kinds of dietary remedies. The two were tireless in exchanging ideas about cures and medicines which might bring relief. Witkacy advised Cornelius to drink salt water, eat pickled vegetables, and abstain from meat. He also described his own attempts to control attacks by abstaining from beer. Cornelius, in turn, provided long lists of mixtures and tinctures and sent Witkacy his short, light-hearted booklet about gout. There were other ailments and other attempts to help. The most humorous perhaps was Cornelius' initiation into the world of Polish folk medicine. When he suffered from bronchitis Witkacy sent him a

package of thick glass cups (bańki) along with detailed instructions for applying this rather unusual instrument of healing. Cornelius was baffled, and when he asked Witkacy for a better explanation he remarked: "it seems that you did not understand my concept of the object quite right, just as I did not correctly understand your instructions concerning the glass cups."²³

The body also appeared in the correspondence as a visual object of great emotional importance and as the unwieldy cause of erotic troubles. As a painter of psychological portraits, Witkacy used painting as a mode of understanding people's personalities. He requested a picture of Cornelius so that he could make his portrait, and when he received the photograph he kept it by his bed. Cornelius likewise expressed joy when he saw a picture of Witkacy on the cover of one of the books Witkacy sent him. He later commented on Witkacy's handsome and expressive features which, he felt, suggested a particularly nice personality.²⁴ Cornelius was Witkacy's senior by twenty two years, and Witkacy treated him not only as a mentor, but also as a father-figure and a most trustworthy friend. He confided in him when his problems with women became overwhelmingly complicated, and shared his fears about the isolation and bitterness that would come with aging. When Witkacy and Czesława Oknińska-Korzeniowska experienced their worst crisis, he asked Cornelius to plead on his behalf and Cornelius obliged.²⁵

Given the context of late 1930s, it is surprising that there seem to have been no exchanges of political views between Witkacy and Cornelius. Aside from Witkacy's occasional statements about his premonition that a global catastrophe was near, there is only one explicit reference to contemporary politics in the preserved correspondence. In a letter from October 9th, 1938, written ten days after the Munich Conference and German annexation of the Sudetenland, Witkacy joked that both his ability to finally turn to the critique of the Vienna Circle and the Munich Agreement succeeded in averting a world catastrophe. He told Cornelius, however, that Hitler "is still the greatest man of our times."²⁶ We do not have Cornelius' response to this remark. We do know that two years earlier, in *Niemyte Dusze* (Unwashed Souls), Witkacy put forward a rather different assessment of Hitler. *Niemyte Dusze*

²³ See, for example, *Briefwechsel*, items, No. 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 19, 23, 31, and 32; Cornelius to Witkacy, letters from September 20 and November 4, 1935, letter from January 29, 1936, postcard from July 16, 1936 (includes the cited quote), postcard from February 22, 1937, and postcard from September 15, 1938, Ana 352, Box 19.

²⁴ See *Briefwechsel*, item, No. 21, and Cornelius to Witkacy letters from August 5, and September 20, 1935.

²⁵ See, for example, *Briefwechsel*, items, No. 49, 50, 54, 67, 86-92, see also Cornelius to Witkacy, letter from November 24, 1937, Ana 352, Box 19.

²⁶ *Briefwechsel*, item, No. 96, p. 189.

was Witkacy's analysis of Polish society, its position in Europe, and its structural problems. It was an attempt to raise individual and collective sense of responsibility among his fellow Poles, and a decisive departure from his earlier credo of abstaining from socio-political engagements. Witkacy devoted much attention to what he saw as a particularly Polish "inferiority complex," and bemoaned the fact that, with all his shortcomings, Piłsudski was the only great man in Poland since the sixteenth century. Regarding the future of Europe, Witkacy confessed that he had once placed high hopes in Hitler's assertive leadership but these hopes were sorely disappointed. Hitler, he argued, failed to carry out a revolution from above and create a just and a radically socialist order, free from both militarism and utopian excesses. Instead of being Europe's benefactor, Witkacy predicted, Hitler would one day find himself running for his life.²⁷

Political views thus seem to have been either bracketed or edited in the Witkacy–Cornelius correspondence but political realities intervened powerfully with the outbreak of World War II. At that point the personal and the political could no longer exist in separate spheres. The fusion of personal and political tragedy in Witkacy's death is well known. In September 1939 German troops invaded Poland, and Witkacy, who was 54, attempted to enlist in the Polish army. He was turned down on account of his age and his failing health, and together with Czesława he joined the refugees who were traveling east. On September 18th, a day after the Soviet invasion, he committed suicide.

The intimately personal and the political came together for Cornelius in a very different way. He learned about Witkacy's death from Jan Leszczyński in January 1940.²⁸ Later that year he wrote to German authorities on behalf of Tadeusz Kotarbiński's son who was interned at a prisoner of war camp close to Cornelius' home town.²⁹ In June 1942, the White Rose student dissidents began their pamphlet campaign at the university in Munich where Cornelius was still a part-time professor. In February 1943, Christoph Probst and Hans and Sophie Scholl were sentenced to death and executed for their activism. Cornelius' two sons were in the German army at the time. A month later, seemingly unprompted, Cornelius wrote to the army command in Berlin with a surprising offer. He reported that during his trip to Poland in 1937 he was told about rich oil deposits near Zakopane, and he wanted to share

²⁷ S. I. Witkiewicz: *Narkotyki. Niemyte Dusze* (Narcotics. Unwashed Souls), Warszawa 2004, footnote on p. 241. Comment about Piłsudski, p. 233.

²⁸ *Briefwechsel*, item, No. 119.

²⁹ Cornelius met Tadeusz Kotarbiński through Witkacy during his trip to Poland. For the Cornelius–Kotarbiński correspondence (1940–1942), see Ana 352, box 20.

this information to support the war effort. When prompted for more details, he wrote that the oil deposit was near the home of his friend who was now deceased, and he provided Witkacy's address and directions to his home. The letter ended with an empathetic "Heil Hitler!"³⁰ Cornelius survived the war, he died in Gräfelfing in 1947.³¹

Abstract

By drawing on archival materials that were previously considered missing, the author examines Witkacy's epistolary friendship with the German philosopher Hans Cornelius, a friendship which lasted from 1935 to 1939. She explores how Witkacy and Cornelius discussed the body as an object of philosophical speculation and personal experience, and then briefly turns to the political elements in the correspondence, and in Cornelius' recollection of the friendship during later years. Witkacy and Cornelius did not find a common language precise enough to transform their exchange of philosophical views into genuine dialogue, but their friendship became more intimate with time. It seems that the process of engaging in honest and passionate philosophical dialogue helped them develop a personal friendship which was more important than their conceptual misunderstandings.

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³⁰ See Ana 352, Box 21 for carbon copies of Cornelius' letters to the army command unit in Berlin, and Box 13 for replies Cornelius received from a Dr. Bentz.

³¹ Some aspects of Cornelius' personal reckoning with how he and other Germans dealt with Nazism and the war can be glimpsed from his personal papers and his open letter to the Americans, Ana 352, Box 28. For an analysis of the Nazification of the German university see H. Sluga: *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany*, Cambridge 1993.