

to the voice that now sounded. There was nothing to allay the violence with which it pierced me. Powerless, I suffered, seeing that it obliterated my consciousness of time, my firm resolve, my sense of duty. And just as the medium obeys the voice that takes possession of him from beyond the grave, I submitted to the first proposal that came my way through the telephone.

Butterfly Hunt

Apart from occasional trips during the summer months, we stayed, each year before school resumed for me, in various summer residences in the environs of Berlin. I was reminded of these, for a long time afterward, by the spacious cabinet on the wall of my boyhood room containing the beginnings of a butterfly collection, whose oldest specimens had been captured in the garden of the Brauhausberg.⁹ Cabbage butterflies with ruffled edgings, brimstone butterflies with superbright wings, vividly brought back the ardors of the hunt, which so often had lured me away from well-kept garden paths into a wilderness, where I stood powerless before the conspiring elements—wind and scents, foliage and sun—that were bound to govern the flight of the butterflies.

They would flutter toward a blossom, hover over it. My butterfly net upraised, I stood waiting only for the

spell that the flowers seemed to cast on the pair of wings to have finished its work, when all of a sudden the delicate body would glide off sideways with a gentle buffeting of the air, to cast its shadow—motionless as before—over another flower, which just as suddenly it would leave without touching. When in this way a vaneasa or sphinx moth (which I should have been able to overtake easily) made a fool of me through its hesitations, vacillations, and delays, I would gladly have been dissolved into light and air, merely in order to approach my prey unnoticed and be able to subdue it. And so close to fulfillment was this desire of mine, that every quiver or palpitation of the wings I burned for grazed me with its puff or ripple. Between us, now, the old law of the hunt took hold: the more I strove to conform, in all the fibers of my being, to the animal—the more butterfly-like I became in my heart and soul—the more this butterfly itself, in everything it did, took on the color of human volition; and in the end, it was as if its capture was the price I had to pay to regain my human existence. Once this was achieved, however, it was a laborious way back from the theater of my successes in the field to the campsite, where ether, cotton wadding, pins with colored heads, and tweezers lay ready in my specimen box. And what a state the hunting ground was in when I left! Grass was flattened, flowers trampled underfoot; the hunter him-

self, holding his own body cheap, had flung it heedlessly after his butterfly net. And borne aloft—over so much destruction, clumsiness, and violence—in a fold of this net, trembling and yet full of charm, was the terrified butterfly. On that laborious way back, the spirit of the doomed creature entered into the hunter. From the foreign language in which the butterfly and the flowers had come to an understanding before his eyes, he now derived some precepts. His lust for blood had diminished; his confidence was grown all the greater.

The air in which this butterfly once hovered is today wholly imbued with a word—one that has not reached my ears or crossed my lips for decades. This word has retained that unfathomable reserve which childhood names possess for the adult. Long-kept silence, long concealment, has transfigured them. Thus, through air teeming with butterflies vibrates the word "Brauhausberg," which is to say, "Brewery Hill." It was on the Brauhausberg, near Potsdam, that we had our summer residence. But the name has lost all heaviness, contains nothing more of any brewery, and is, at most, a bluemisted hill that rose up every summer to give lodging to my parents and me. And that is why the Potsdam of my childhood lies in air so blue, as though all its butterflies—its mourning cloaks and admirals, peacocks and auroras—were scattered over one of those glistening Limoges enamels, on

which the ramparts and battlements of Jerusalem stand out against a dark blue ground.¹⁰

Tiergarten

Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires some schooling. Street names must speak to the urban wanderer like the snapping of dry twigs,

The goldfish pond in the Tiergarten, Berlin, early twentieth century

