Janosch Schobin
Zeiten der Einsamkeit.
Erkundungen eines universellen Gefühls

Janosch Schobin
In Times of Loneliness.
Explorations of a universal feeling

Translated by David Burnett
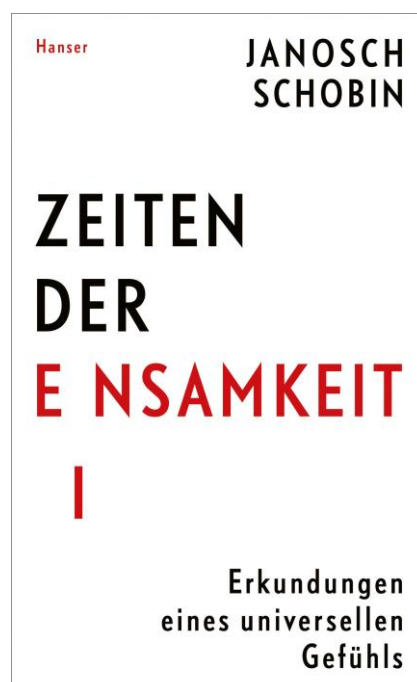
By Way of Introduction:

A Brief History of Modern Loneliness

Man is an animal capable of loneliness.[1] *Homo sapiens* feels it, it pains and entices him, he seeks it out and shuns it, cultivates it as a privilege and inflicts it as a punishment. As a raw sensation, this feeling of deficiency, both a lack *of* connection and of something lacking *in* our connections with others, is at first glance one of the more bitter experiences of human existence. But no taste is more complex than bitterness. The following categorizations are therefore surely too crude. They brazenly address different forms of aloneness and grade their dominance in a variety of socio-historical contexts. The implied hypothesis that a certain kind of loneliness is typical of a certain era should be taken with a grain of salt. In the worst case the brief history of the types of modern loneliness that follows is a kind of curiosity cabinet; in the best case it gathers some essential variations on loneliness in somewhat caricatured form.

The ambivalences of solitude

Being alone was evidently long considered a "good." Scholars roughly distinguish between "positive" and "negative" forms of aloneness.[2] Many of them, however, consider positive loneliness a categorical error resulting from linguistic ambiguity, namely when the word is used to refer to the pleasure of self-imposed solitude.[3] The only thing positive loneliness has in common with the painful feeling of lacking connection with others is the literal meaning of being cut off from others: physically in the one sense, emotionally in the other. A look at the history of loneliness, however, shows that it's not that simple. In the Early Modern period, the positive aspects of being alone were not so easy to find. In the early seventeenth century, Francis Bacon cited the Latin saying *Magna civitas, magna solitude* – "Great city, great

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[1] I wrote the following history of loneliness on a couple of afternoons together with Heinz Bude as a preparatory course for students of sociology and social work. The life stories of lonely people can be better understood with some knowledge of the history of loneliness, or at least of the historically changing interpretations of it. The latter are presented here in lieu of an introduction.

[2] Maike Luhmann, Johannes Bohn, Jana Holtmann, Tobias Koch, Michael Eid, "I'm Lonely, Can't You Tell? Convergent Validity of Self- and Informant Ratings of Loneliness," *Journal of Research in Personality* 61 (2016), 50–60.

[3] Jenny de Jong Gierveld, "A Review of Loneliness: Concept and Definitions, Determinants and Consequences. *Reviews in Clinical Gerontology* 8, 1 (1998), 73–80.

solitude."[4] He observed how in urban metropolises – Paris and London were about the size of middling towns nowadays – the organic cohesion of society declines. Friends live scattered, neighborhoods no longer offer the fellowship and social roots they used to, and the system of social solidarity held together by familial obligations grows fragile. Admittedly, this was not all bad in Bacon's view. It is due to authors like him that we often suppose a positive view of loneliness prevailed in the Early Modern period. For the father of the scientific method, the problem was less the suffering caused from a loss of collective ties than an ambivalent, sometimes dangerous desire for solitude. This could be traced back to his personality. Bacon was considered a difficult, highly ambitious and cold-hearted individual in his day, one who only cared about the opinions of his fellow human beings to the extent that they were useful to him.[5] The big city offered him greater independence from the antipathy of his contemporaries. In this regard, the *magna solitude* of the metropolis was indeed an advantage for him. And Francis Bacon was no exception. For the social elite of the seventeenth century, the idea of a solitary existence was attractive not least of all because a voluntary withdrawal from social relations allowed them to rid themselves of the menial duties and worldly matters that only held them back from the exalted state of a virtuoso life.

This trend was a secularization of the Christian notion of solitude that can be traced back to at least the twelfth century.[6] In somewhat simplified terms, the experience of solitude in the Christian tradition is a process with three stages: purification, enlightenment, and proof of God's grace. The classic model is depicted in *The Life of Antony* by Athanasius,[7] the story of Saint Anthony of Egypt in which the saint goes out into the desert, overcomes demons, performs miracles and presages his own death. The underlying motif of the Christian "three-stage theory" of solitude is the imitation of the life of Christ.[8] Christ goes into the desert to withstand the temptations of the devil and try to get closer to God, then returns to the civilization and reveals the Word and deeds of the living God. At the end of His earthly

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[4] Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon, Volume 1: Essays / Of Friendship* (2015) – Online at https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=The_Works_of_Francis_Bacon,_Volume_1/Essays/Of_Friendship&oldid=5464440, retrieved October 7, 2024).

[5] Anthony M. Quinton, Baron Quinton, Peter Michael Urbach, Kathleen Marguerite Lea, "Francis Bacon" in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, online at https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francis-Bacon-Viscount-Saint-Alban (retrieved February 22, 2024).

[6] Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955).

[7] Athanasius, *Vita Antonii. Leben des Antonius* (Freiburg: Herder, 2018).

[8] Moshe Barasch, "Einsamkeit als Charisma," in *Einsamkeit. Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation IV.*, eds. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann (Munich: Fink, 2000). 153–172.

existence, He suffers in the Garden of Gethsemane for the sins of humanity and learns that the time has come for Him to die for them. Structurally, this motif underlies the secularized versions of Christian solitude as well. The misunderstanding of "positive" loneliness often begins here.

At this juncture it is important to distinguish between the social value and the psychological content of an experience. Just because something feels good does not necessarily mean it is desirable or socially acceptable. A hit of heroin feels good, for sure, and yet most parents wouldn't advise their children to use it. It would likewise be a considerable misunderstanding to refer to the religious and spiritual kind of willful solitude as positive. It might be more appropriate to speak of a "dignified loneliness." Neither the devil's temptations nor the grace of foreseeing the moment of one's death are "pleasant" in a hedonic sense. Christian solitude is a fearsome experience of sacred solemnity. This explains its positive interpretations. The secular appropriation and translation of the Christian version in the form of scholarly reclusiveness eventually gave rise to the impression that voluntary and dignified solitude was a positive experience of loneliness.[9] The origin of this misunderstanding is exemplified in the figure of Michel de Montaigne. A member of the rising class of the administrative nobility, Montaigne was in his day considered good-humored and cheerful, unlike Bacon. In his influential essay "On Solitude," the experience of being alone is given a positive spin: withdrawal into one's study, conversations with the dead, blissful repose in the self.[10] Montaigne had spent a large part of his life as a political official in the service of others. In his twilight years there remained for him "a small remnant of life" (*ce bout de vie*) which only belonged to him.[11] He understands solitude as a privilege earned through his many services rendered to the world. This is the prerogative of his class, withdrawing socially and putting an end to his social obligations – an expression of heightened personal autonomy which resonates today in the emphasis placed on the notion of positive loneliness by the educated middle classes. By interpretating solitude as a privilege, Montaigne lends expression to the self-awareness of a class of professional scholars whose knowledge and expertise was both indispensable and dangerous for the states of the Early Modern period undergoing a gradual process of bureaucratic rationalization. Thus, positive loneliness initially consisted of the secularization of a practice of autonomous isolation which in some

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[9] Fay Bound Alberti, "This 'Modern Epidemic': Loneliness as an Emotion Cluster and a Neglected Subject in the History of Emotions," *Emotion Review* 10, no. 3 (2018), 242.

[10] Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, *Essais*, eds. André Gide and Pierre Michel (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

[11] Ibid., 344 ff.

respects resembled religious contemplation and whose joys were justified by its sacred solemnity. Yet the positive experience of solitude was far from being a true pleasure. On the contrary: the focus of Montaigne's meditations in the isolation of his study make unmistakably clear that – as in the case of Christian solitude – it was not about pleasure at all, but a matter of utmost seriousness. Retreating into the scholar's study allows the scholar to reflect on the ultimate questions and face the fleetingness of human life. Montaigne is concerned with the unsettling process of preparing for separation from our loved ones as well as for our own deaths. He engages with the great minds of antiquity, giving them a deep reading and thereby seeking a conversation about what matters most in life. The positive loneliness of the present day has retained from this sacred solemnity of the past the notion that it is less a passive experience than one that is actively engaged in. It is often distinguished from negative loneliness in terms of the autonomy it involves, being considered positive because the individual voluntarily seeks it out and can put an end to it any time he wants.[12] It is therefore considered capable of elevating an individual, belonging as it does to the preconditions of "reflexive freedom"[13] in modern societies. This explains the misunderstanding that it is associated with pleasurable states – and is hence unburdensome, indeed something completely different from negative loneliness. This was never the case.

The discovery of negative loneliness

The more the Christian context for interpreting solitude as an imitation of Christ splintered in the Early Modern era, the more diverse the experience of aloneness became. As early as the seventeenth century, the positive understanding of solitude was gradually accompanied by a growing negative one. Alongside dignified solitude, a new vocabulary emerged for undignified forms of loneliness. This is particularly evident in the English language, which unlike German, Spanish and French has terms for both the positive and negative experience of being alone. Shakespeare is one of the first to use "lonely," the quintessential negative English word for aloneness. For him it does not have a clearly negative connotation but a more ambivalent meaning. In *Coriolanus*, which premiered in December 1609, a dragon is characterized as "lonely," being particularly feared because he doesn't show himself.[14] In the

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[12] Gierveld, "A Review of Loneliness," 73.

[13] Axel Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit: Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit*, 2nd edition, (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011).

[14] William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

cultivated English of the sixteenth century, "lonely" is primarily the attribute for a powerful being who lives independently and isolates himself from others, having nothing in common with ordinary mortals, who is admired and feared but himself despises other people. Lurking behind this image is the venerable Aristotle, whom Shakespeare answers: Man outside the collective is neither god nor animal, nor is he human; he is something else entirely, a kind of mythical in-between creature. Shakespeare is beginning to formulate a negative notion of solitude, the often ambivalent and usually positively connoted concepts of aloneness now ordering themselves into two competing camps in the English language. A new semantic field emerges, reserved entirely for describing negative experiences of being alone. By the late eighteenth century, the connotation of "lonely" and the related term "lonesome" was becoming ever darker. In the seminal sixth edition of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, "loneliness" is defined as "solitude; want of company."[15] The purblind, half-deaf, ample and big-boned Johnson was living what he was writing about. His contemporaries Sir Joshua Reynolds and James Boswell described the father of the modern English dictionary as a man who was terrified of being alone, since he constantly reproached himself about his past: "The great business of his life (he said) was to escape from himself; this disposition he considered as the disease of his mind, which nothing cured but company."[16] Loneliness was the horror that arose when no one was there to talk to. So great was his fear of being alone that his friends sometimes had to see him home late at night. "Solitude" gave the influential scholar such an awful sense of "loneliness" that he always took pains to avoid it. The antidote Johnson prescribed was "company." Apart from in a military context, the word also had a social meaning: "company" are people you can talk to and have a good time with.[17] "Loneliness" means the kind of solitude that sociologist Robert S. Weiss later referred to as social isolation: the subjective lack of good and rewarding relationships to stimulate and distract a person.[18] Weiss distinguishes between social and emotional isolation, the latter resulting from a lack of emotionally satisfying relationships with partners, family members and close friends. This meaning of the word had not yet developed in Johnson's day. Nevertheless, Johnson's negative interpretation of the word

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[15] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words Are Deduced from Their Originals, Explained in Their Different Meanings and Authorized by the Names of the Writers in Whose Works They Are Found*, 6th ed. (London, 1785). 60.

[16] James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, vol. 1 (New York: Bigelow, Brown and Co., 1904), 167.

[17] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 428.

[18] Robert S. Weiss, *Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1973).

loneliness as a lack of good company is a marked departure from the meaning of the word in Shakespeare's usage. By the mid-nineteenth century, the use of positive terms such as "solitude" to denote isolation had decreased in favor of the ambivalent word "loneliness," referring both to the experience of abandonment and the lack of love and affection. Lonely now meant lonesome and forlorn – what the Germans would refer to as *mutterseelenallein*, a word that gained increasing currency during the nineteenth century.[19] The German word is certainly more graphic: "mother-soul alone," invoking an intense experience of want when it comes to primary relationships like partners, family and close friends – both a lack of such relationships or a perceived deficiency within them. In this case, social isolation has given way to the emotional kind.

It is not surprising in retrospect that a negative understanding of solitude prevailed in the nineteenth century. The century of the Industrial Revolution brought forth masses of young people looking for their niche in the social fabric. The gains in productivity and wealth made possible by industrialization were being eroded, however, by concomitant demographic expansion.[20] Growing up in poverty in the nineteenth century was the rule rather than the exception. Moreover, life expectancy in Europe only increased across the board starting in about 1870.[21] In the context of a historically unprecedented population explosion, a significant share of people were orphaned in childhood, having to cope with the loss of primary caregivers early in their lives. A report by a catechist in a Hamburg orphanage paints a picture of the loneliness experienced by the many foundlings growing up in emotionally barren orphanages or foster families during the nineteenth century: "Devoid of parents and friends, lonely and alone, unloved, at best tolerated, frequently flung from one corner to another, these innocents, from the moment they are born, often resemble castaways washed up, naked and bare, by a storm wind onto alien, arid soil."[22] Historical studies on infanticide indicate that social stress in families during the nineteenth century was on the rise rather than declining.[23] The killing of one's own children is a good indicator – not only among humans –

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[19] Janosch Schobin, "All The Lonely People? Warum uns moderne Gesellschaften (noch) nicht einsamer machen," *epd-Dokumentation* 23 (2020), 34–53.

[20] Rachel G. Fuchs, *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[21] Max Roser and Hannah Ritchie, "Life Expectancy," in *Our World in Data* (2020).

[22] J. C. Kröger, *Die Waisenfrage. Die Erziehung verwaister und verlassener Kinder in Waisenhäusern und Privatpflege. Aus dem Gesichtspunkt der Humanität und Staatsökonomie nach Tatsachen und eigenen Erfahrungen* (Hamburg: Johan Friedrich Hammerich, 1852), 3.

[23] Roger Sauer, "Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth-century Britain," *Population Studies* 32, no. 1 (1978), 81–93.

of severe psychosocial stress, which in turn causes feelings of loneliness. Urban in-migration only added to this. Young people in nineteenth-century Europe were searching for their place in this world. The bourgeois novel, not least in the form of the bildungsroman, speaks volumes about this: the many Heinrichs and Luciens who are drawn from the provinces to metropolises like Paris, London and Munich in the pursuit of happiness; the countless Denises and Emmas working as salesgirls or school teachers who are left to fend for themselves as they try to find their niche in a harsh class society without losing their honor along the way. The novels of Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, Charles Dickens, Benito Pérez Galdós and many others shed literary light on the sociological finding that the burgeoning metropolises throughout nineteenth-century Europe cannot be explained by endogenous population growth alone. A good part of urbanization resulted from rural exodus.[24] For large groups of people, migration from the country to the city meant severing ties to one's origins and family and a harsh struggle for social advancement and sheer survival that expressed itself in terrible feelings of loneliness for which there was no dignified outlet. Following David Riesman, this can be described as the loneliness of the "inner-directed" social character.[25] Riesman argued that during the phase of explosive population growth a certain character type came to predominate, one marked by a strong inner compass that helped people of that era find their social position in a rapidly changing society. Testimonies of everyday life such as the diaries and letters of migrants and emigrants to their relatives back home show that this moral compass, while perhaps capable of helping these people function in a foreign environment with minimal social-support networks, did not prevent them from being lonely.[26] Experiences of negative loneliness were also part and parcel of the great migrations to the colonies triggered by European poverty in the nineteenth century with its recurrent famines and economic crises. Despite the acceleration provided by steamships and similar technological developments, for most people emigration to the colonies in the nineteenth century meant they would never see their birth families again or, at best, maybe once or twice. Of course, loneliness from a non-European perspective has barely been addressed in colonial history. It is highly unlikely, though, that brutal colonial rule reduced

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[24] Richard Sennett, *Verfall und Ende des öffentlichen Lebens. Die Tyrannei der Intimität* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1987).

[25] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

[26] Trudi Abel, "Needles and Penury in 19th Century London: The Diary of a Poor Quaker Seamstress," *Quaker History* 75, no. 2 (1986), 102. Bryan Hunt, "Letter from Bryan Hunt to John Hunt, January the 24th 1858, Kilkelly, Irland," http://www.jeffsnow.net/kilkelly.html (retrieved December 4, 2021).

the loneliness of indigenous populations. Memoirs such as Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) and abolitionist novels such as Fermín Toro's *La Sibila de los Andes* (1840) bear witness to the terrible loneliness wrought by the slave trade and slavery. And then there's music like the blues, which originated in the Negro spirituals sung on Southern plantations: the appalling loneliness of plantation work and forced labor still resonates today across the centuries through the strains of this music. It is therefore no surprise that interpretations of loneliness grew increasingly negative during the nineteenth century and that language became a vehicle for the articulation of loneliness as a difficult, unpleasant, sometimes frightening and degrading experience.

The solitude of difference

It is not untrue to describe the nineteenth century as the century of the "invention of loneliness."[27] Of course it's something of a stretch. For all the many experiences of negative loneliness, both basic forms of solitude, the dignified kind that is actively sought and the kind that is scorned and suffered, are valid social interpretations. Philip Slater – following Ernst Bloch – compared the loneliness of modern society with a city in which the ruins of the old world continue to exist in the new one, in which skyscrapers stand in the same place as the temples of old. This is a fitting image for loneliness: whereas in the nineteenth century the experiences of undignified loneliness were widely articulated, narratives of a virtuoso form of loneliness were likewise flourishing, one which Richard Sennett aptly referred to as the "solitude of difference."[28] Solitude is surrounded by a complex web of collective interpretations, social practices and institutions, from which individuals can derive a subjective experience of their own singularity. The roots of this development lie in the late Enlightenment and early Romanticism. During this period, the meaning of positive solitude once again changed fundamentally. The intellectual earnestness of preparing for one's own death, which, as Montaigne explains, makes even secular forms of self-imposed solitude sometimes hard to endure, increasingly transformed into the oddly ambivalent experience of being totally different from other human beings. The solitude of difference shares with sacred solitude the figure of the chosen one. The latter was borrowed from the genius cult, which

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[27] Alberti, 242–254

[28] Michel Foucault and Richard Sennett, "Sexuality and Solitude," *London Review of Books*, 3, no. 9 (May 21, 1981), online at https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v03/n09/michel-foucault/sexuality-and-solitude.

segues well with the Christological origin story: the hero standing before the fog desert, feeling within himself the power of the true genius. The reference to the imitation of the living God is replaced here with the belief in one's own creative powers, which are recognizably a kind of God-given grace and not, in good Aristotelean fashion, the result of prolonged practical application. Behind this exaltation of the self always lurks an experience of inferiority akin to insanity, as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe depicts in his verse play *Torquato Tasso* (1790),[29] since it pits the individual against unattainable ideals on the one hand while at the same time preventing his connecting to others as equals. The solitude of difference is not entirely harmless. The genius is always at risk of going unrecognized and running off the rails. In this respect as well, the solitude of difference resembles its Christological archetype. The quest for sacred solitude was long considered risky, being said to harbor a particular risk of losing one's way spiritually. John Cassian, a Christian pioneer of monastic life from the fourth century, warned that retreating into the desert could make a person arrogant.[30] He extols life in the community, because having others watching over you acts as a check on individual pride.

All in all, the solitude of difference as a positive concept fits well with a society of inner-directed people who want to strike out on their own and need to fight to secure their position in society. It lends dignified meaning to the emotional pain that accompanies the struggle for opportunity. This kind of solitude was a silent companion to the undignified loneliness of all those people in the nineteenth century who were forced to eke out their existence in abject loneliness. The solitude of difference also developed into a template for discredited lifestyles, allowing them to gain a measure of respect. Homosexuality, for example, was a punishable offense almost everywhere in nineteenth-century Europe, being understood as a sickness that had to be treated through isolation in clinics or prisons. The lifestyle of homosexual people had no legitimate place in the social fabric. But they could be talked about as an "open secret"[31] in the language of solitude (and friendship). Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* (published posthumously in 1905),[32] a letter he wrote in prison to his lover Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas as both an indictment and a justification of his own situation, is a good example of how the

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[29] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Torquato Tasso* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2013).

[30] Johannes Cassianus, "Das gemeinsame Leben im Kloster, Buch I –IV," in *Frühes Mönchtum im Abendland*, ed. Karl Suso Frank (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1975), 107–193.

[31] Heinrich Detering, *Das offene Geheimnis. Zur literarischen Produktivität eines Tabus von Winckelmann bis zu Thomas Mann* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002).

[32] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* (Westminster: Random House Publishing Group, 2010).

Christological figure of the extravagant but lonely literary genius can be used to reinterpret a despised lifestyle into a misunderstood but sacred one. The solitude of difference, used as a code to articulate the experiences of homosexuals in a dignified language, nevertheless implies a brutal ambivalence so vividly described by Radclyffe Hall in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928)[33] and which the many Oscars and Marguerites of the nineteenth century had to experience first-hand: that those revealing the truth of a difference that renders a person lonely risk the rejection of those they love and respect. This is one reason, even today, why people with other sexual identities and orientations are more lonely than heterosexual men and women.[34] The solitude of difference is a lonely kind of dignity, which during the nineteenth century was transformed into social respect primarily by anonymous readers of literature. The latter feel the same but also have to remain silent; they know the desperate feeling of being among people they are closest to yet still not being able to openly confess who they are. Conceptually, this is a momentous reinterpretation. This "new" form of positive solitude articulates an experience that has gained a lot of traction in academia and that now heavily defines the current debate about loneliness. European languages were slow to make a clear distinction between loneliness as a psychological state and the place devoid of people in which this experience is made. This situation changes when loneliness as the solitude of difference can actually only be experienced in the company of others. Others are needed – those who cannot be expected to accept the truth or who are too "*sans génie et sans esprit*"[35] (to borrow from Nietzsche, yet another lonely fellow) to grasp it. Loneliness, in the context, becomes a purely internal state, one that is felt particularly acutely in a social setting. Closely linked to this reinterpretation is the notion of the individual who is lonely in bourgeois public life – at a dinner party or on a walk. This idea first gained popularity in Europe during the late eighteenth century, not least of all through Johann Georg Zimmermann's treatise *Solitude*.[36] Zimmermann explicitly defined solitude no longer as the simultaneity of physical remove, active behavior and subjective state but only as a "state of mind" (*Lage der Seele*)[37] which arises when a person mentally isolates himself from his environment. The idea that loneliness was primarily a subjective state of mental disconnect and had to be distinguished from

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[33] Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

[34] Lisette Kuyper and Tineke Fokkema, "Loneliness Among Older Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adults: The Role of Minority Stress," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 39, no. 5 (2010), 1171–1180.

[35] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Zur Genealogie der Moral* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2014), 165.

[36] Johann Georg Zimmermann, *Über die Einsamkeit. Erster Theil* (Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1784).

[37] Ibid., 3.

physical seclusion, i.e., being alone, became common sense in the nineteenth century. Nowadays no public lecture on loneliness could feasibly deny this "fact," and if the speaker fails to assert it – because, say, the issue, in his opinion, is actually much more complicated – then someone from the audience will inevitably bring it up. To put it in somewhat exaggerated terms: every kind of loneliness has now become a solitude of difference.