Critique of Journalistic Reason:
Language and History in Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Thomas Vandeputte, hereby declare that the content of this thesis is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____ Date: 20/9/2017

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the significance of a theme that recurs throughout the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin but has remained largely overlooked: their preoccupation with journalism. I aim to show that the numerous reflections on journalism that punctuate their writings cannot be separated from their philosophy 'proper'. On the contrary: as I will argue, this preoccupation plays a pivotal role in the philosophical work of each of these thinkers – in particular their reflections on the philosophy of history. This pivotal role is best understood by examining the theme of journalism in the context of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin's inquiries into the conditions and possibilities of historical experience. For each of the three thinkers discussed here, the structure of our experience of history is crystallised in an exemplary manner in the figures of the journalist and the newspaper reader. To understand the conditions under which historical experience becomes possible, so their reflections on the topic suggest, would require a study of journalism and its language, its subjective types and figures, its characteristic sense of time. As such, the figure of journalism will play a distinctly ambivalent role: for Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin alike, it will mark both the site of the breakdown of historical experience and of its possible renewal. Each of the thinkers discussed here will understand journalism as the exemplary expression of a collapse of the main categories of the philosophy of history after Hegel. At the same time, however, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin will treat journalism as a site from which a new experience of history may be wrested. As I will show, the images of market criers and angelic messengers, errant reports and rumours, pamphlets and ephemera that are scattered throughout their work can be seen to harbour the elements of a new conception of historical time and experience.

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Abbreviations

All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated. The footnotes provide references to the existing English translations whenever these are available.

Kant

Ak *Gesammelte Schriften* (facsimile of the standard "Akademie" edition published by the Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1902–), 29 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968–).

AP *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, tr. and ed. Robert B. Louden (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

CF *The Conflict of the Faculties*, tr. Mary J. Gregor (New York, NY: Abaris Books, 1979).

CJ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, tr. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

CPrR *Critique of Practical Reason*, in Kant, *Practical Philosophy,* tr. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

RR *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, tr. George di Giovanni, in Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Hegel

GW *Werke*, 20 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

PhH *The Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956).

PS *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

PhR *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, tr. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Kierkegaard

SV *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, I–XIV, ed. A. B. Drachman, J.L. Heiberg, and H.O. Lange (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1901–06).

Pap. *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer,* ed. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, and E. Torsting (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909–48).

CA *The Concept of Anxiety*, tr. Reidar Thomte and Albert A. Anderson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).

CI *The Concept of Irony*, tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

CUP *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* tr. D.F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941).

EO *Either/Or,* 2 vols., tr. D.F. and L.M. Swenson and D.W. Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959).

EPW *Early Polemical Writings*, ed. and tr. Julia Watkin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

JN *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, ed. Niels Jorgen Cappelorn et. al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011–).

JP *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978). The numbers listed in these references are to entries.

PF/JC *Philosophical Fragments* and *Johannes Climacus*, tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

TA *Two Ages: A Literary Review*, ed. and tr. Howard. V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

PR/WS *Prefaces / Writing Sampler*, ed. and tr. Todd W. Nichol (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Nietzsche

KSA *Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1988).

KSB *Sämtliche Briefe: Kritische Studienausgabe in 8 Bänden*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1986).

BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. J. Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

BT *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, tr. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

D *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

DR 'Description of Ancient Rhetoric', in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language,* tr. Sander L. Gilman et. al., 2–194 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

EH/TI *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols,* tr. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

FE 'On the Future of Our Educational Institutions' in: *Anti-Education: On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2015).

FL 'Fragments sur le langage' ['Fragments on Language'], tr. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, in *Poétique* 5, 99–142.

GM *On the Genealogy of* Morality, tr. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

GS *The Gay Science,* tr. J. Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

HH *Human, All Too Human: A Book for free Spirits,* tr. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

OL 'On the Origin of Language', in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language,* tr. Sander L. Gilman et. al., 209–212 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

TL 'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense' in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language,* tr. Sander L. Gilman, 246–257 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

UM *Untimely Meditations*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, tr. Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Benjamin

GS *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972–91).

B *Briefe*, 2 ed. Theodor Adorno and Gerschom Scholem, vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978).

AJ 'Announcement of the Journal *Angelus Novus*', in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, 292–296.

AP *The Arcades Project*, tr. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

CB *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940*, ed. Gerschom Scholem and T. W. Adorno, tr. M. R. Jacobson and E. M Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

DC 'The Destructive Character', in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, 541–542.

EW *Early Writings 1910–1917*, ed. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

KK 'Karl Kraus', in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, 433–457.

LS 'The Life of Students', in *Early Writings*, 197–210.

MB 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 313–355.

O *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, tr. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998).

OLS 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, 62–74.

SW *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, tr. Edmund Jephcott et al., 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

TH 'Thoughts on Gerhart Hauptmann's Festival Play', in *Early Writings*, 120–25.

Other

N Hamann, Johann Georg. *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Josef Nadler. 6 vols. (Vienna: Im Verlag Herder, 1949–1957).

S Kraus, Karl. *Schriften*, ed. Christian Wagenknecht, 20 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1994).

Introduction

> The *newspaper reading* of the early morning (*das* Zeitungslesen *des Morgens früh*) is a kind of realistic morning prayer (*Morgensegen*). One orients one's attitude towards the world either through God or through that which the world is. The former gives as much security (*Sicherheit*) as the latter, in that one knows where one stands (*wie man daran sei*).
> — Hegel, *Jena Aphorisms*[1]

'The *newspaper reading* of the early morning' – with these words a certain trope is, perhaps for the first time, introduced into the philosophical tradition: its preoccupation with journalism. The comparison between newspaper reading and the morning prayer appears in the margins of Hegel's writings, amongst the miscellaneous fragments, notes and reflections collected in his notebooks of the Jena years – texts written before the publication of any of his major books and only published posthumously in a local newspaper in the 1840s.[2] Also the form in which this comparison is elaborated – that of an aphorism – may seem to suggest that it bears no relation to Hegel's systematic writings.[3] But even though it is consigned to this apparently marginal place, the scene of newspaper reading is presented here with a distinct emphasis. Set in italics and placed at the start of the first sentence, the word *Zeitungslesen* suggests that it is invested with a special significance: that this word and the scene of reading it evokes mean something more than its reader may initially assume. The emphasis on this scene is brought out only further by the resonance between the two compounds around which the aphorism is organised, *Zeitungslesen* and *Morgensegen*, both of which are composed of the same amount of syllables, similar in sound and metre, and only the slightest step removed from rhyme. If this play of emphasis and resonance suggests anything, it is that this remark is not just a pithy reflection on the accidental resemblance of two all too familiar scenes from everyday life at the start of the nineteenth century – that there is more at stake in this aphorism than the provision of a witty observation that exists at a safe remove from Hegel's philosophical work of those same years. In their emphatic introduction, the scenes juxtaposed here rather seem to serve as two of those 'abbreviations' (*Abkürzungen*) in which, as Hegel writes later, thought shows itself to be the 'most powerful epitomist': scenes in which thought compresses the insights it has reached, albeit not in a language of concepts but one of figures and images.[4]

[1] GW 2: 547.
[2] The aphorism was published by Rosenkranz in 1842, together with other excerpts from the notebooks that were spread across different issues of the *Königsberger Literaturblatt*.
[3] For an account of the complex role of aphorisms in Hegel's philosophical writings, especially the prefaces, see Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Hegel's Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit*, 14–19.
[4] GW 12: 16; PhH, 5.

If it is possible to understand the comparison of the scenes of reading and praying presented in Hegel's notebooks as an *Abkürzung* in this sense, this is because these two scenes, taken together, epitomise the conception of history in which the planned introduction to his philosophical system – the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – would culminate. In order to grasp the precise philosophical significance with which the scene of *Zeitungslesen* is endowed in this aphorism, one would first need to turn to the scene to which it is juxtaposed: that of the Lutheran *Morgensegen*. As is well known, religious experience plays a decisive role in Hegel's philosophical writings of the preceding years, especially in their account of the absolute.[5] In the *Systemfragment* of 1800, Hegel had argued that the absolute – or what is there called 'infinite life' – must remain strictly inaccessible to reflective thought and its inherent opposition of subject and object.[6] Even though reflection is destined to strive for the 'elevation of the finite into the infinite life', such elevation could only be accomplished in the domain of religion. In religious experience, the subject renounces its own absoluteness and instead takes hold of the absolute, which precedes both subject and object as their common source. History and nature are both grasped as manifestations of the absolute; but insofar as this absolute remains strictly separated from its reflected image in consciousness, it does not have a historical character itself – it knows no development. The juxtaposition of the morning prayer and newspaper reading in Hegel's Jena notebooks draws on this earlier understanding of religious experience but also points to a shifted conception of the absolute. This shift is suggested by the prayer that is supposed to capture religion's privileged relation to the absolute: the Lutheran *Morgensegen*. As an exemplary expression of what Hegel refers to in the *Phenomenology* as 'manifest religion', this morning prayer is oriented towards a God that becomes incarnate in the world it has created and, after having sacrificed itself, is resurrected as holy spirit.[7] If the Lutheran prayer orients itself towards the absolute, it is an absolute being that has entered the world and actualises itself in space, time and history. To say the morning prayer is thus, for Hegel, to take hold of the absolute as the holy spirit that is at work in time and history – and to grasp oneself as a moment in its development. More than any other prayer, it is the *Morgensegen*, undertaken at the dawn of every new day, that most acutely exemplifies the relation to this absolute being, which Hegel describes in the *Phenomenology* as 'the spirit who dwells in his community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected (*in ihr täglich stirbt und auferstehe*)'.[8] Insofar as it is grasped as spirit, the absolute being of the

[5] GW 1: 422. A detailed account of Hegel's development in Frankfurt and Jena can be found in Dieter Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext*, 9–40 and Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*, 277–305.
[6] GW 1: 422–23.
[7] GW 3: 545–73; PS §748–87. For an analysis of Hegel's understanding of religion in the early writings and the *Phenomenology*, see Jean Hyppolite, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of History*, 1–19 and *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 529–72.
[8] GW 3: 571; PS §784.

Morgensegen is no longer merely an absolute that manifests itself in history while remaining separate from it: instead, history turns out to be the movement of alienation and reconciliation by which the absolute realises itself in the world, day after day.

A *Zeitungslesen* that is comparable to the *Morgensegen* in this precise sense is thus not a newspaper reading in the familiar sense. A 'newspaper reading of the early morning' that may be compared to the morning prayer cannot be satisfied with the inventory of accidental occurrences that is offered to it on a daily basis: it would have to be a reading that is oriented towards the absolute. Only insofar as it is oriented towards the absolute could this reading find the same *Sicherheit*, the same security that the morning prayer finds in its orientation towards God. But rather than representing this absolute being as a God that may dwell in the world but is still other to it, the reading that Hegel conjures up here would discover the absolute in the being of the world itself – in 'that which the world is' (*was die Welt ist*).[9] Like the *Morgensegen*, such reading puts its faith in the absolute as a spirit that is at work in the world; but rather than apprehending the absolute as a holy spirit, the faith of this reader is perhaps closer to what Hegel calls a 'faith in the world spirit' (*Glauben an der Weltgeist*) – a term that appears in the introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy of the same years.[10] What distinguishes this 'faith in the world spirit' from its religious counterpart is captured by the laconic phrase with which Hegel here characterises this credo: *es geht vernünftig zu* – things go about rationally.[11] A newspaper reading that can be called a 'realistic morning prayer' would be a reading that has discovered the absolute spirit that 'dies every day, and is daily resurrected' to be nothing but the movement by which reason unfolds itself in the real. The task of the newspaper reader would be to recover this movement from the inventory of accidental occurrences that confronts him – to read the newspaper as the report of the movement by which the absolute moves outside itself and returns to itself, day after day.

Written in the years directly preceding the publication of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is difficult not read the aphorism from the Jena notebooks as a condensed expression of the speculative identity of the ideal and the real that will organise Hegel's philosophical system and the conception of history that underpins it.[12] The juxtaposition of newspaper reading and

[9] GW 2: 547.
[10] GW 18: 38.
[11] Ibid.
[12] An alternative reading is provided in Rebecca Comay's study *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*. In one of the footnotes of the book, Comay suggests that the aphorism may be read in light of Fichte's characterisation of the print medium as the 'most intimate means of connecting spirit and spirit' – a means of communication that would facilitate the collective isolation on which the possibility of an abstract and egalitarian *Publikum* is predicated. See *Mourning Sickness*, 165n.

Morgensegen would then not only anticipate one of Hegel's famous later formulations of this identity, the proposition that 'the task of philosophy is to comprehend *that which is*, because that *which is*, is reason'; that this comprehension is captured here as a *Zeitunglesen* also evokes the counterpart of this proposition: the claim that philosophy is 'its time, apprehended in thoughts' (*ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt*).[13] Despite its apparently marginal place, the aphorism would then capture the thought around which Hegel's philosophical system is organised. But while many of the other aphorisms in the notebooks return in the preface to the book that was conceived to be the introduction to this system – the *Phenomenology* – the comparison between newspaper reader and morning prayer remains curiously absent. Despite the continued importance that Hegel attached to images of daybreak, the scene of reading that is conjured up here, that of the *Zeitungslesen des Morgens früh*, will not return in any of his published writings. Is this a mere coincidence – or did Hegel suspect that this scene would work against the system it is supposed to epitomise?[14] Did he sense that there something in this scene of reading that undermines the immanent movement of the concept – the same movement that is supposed to guarantee the possibility for an identification of the real and the rational, of divine providence and historical development? Does this comparison pose a danger to the system – the danger that it would render the speculative identity that it ought to exemplify into a laughing matter? Does the scene evoked here not present a lapse of the most serious of matters – the comprehension of history as the unfolding of spirit – into mere jest?

'The *newspaper reading* of the early morning' – before Hegel explicitly introduces this scene of reading into the philosophical tradition, it already makes a more modest appearance in a brief but important text by Kant that was itself originally written to be published in a newspaper: the essay 'A Renewed Question: Is Humankind Constantly Progressing?'[15] The figure of the newspaper reader plays a decisive role in Kant's response to the question that is raised in the title of the essay: whether there is a secure ground to hope that the *menschliche Geschlecht* continually approaches its moral destination – or whether history is, as Kant points out in the first sections of the text, a mere *Possenspiel*, a farce without a final goal or progression towards it.[16] Despite the fact that this question is raised in a seemingly marginal piece of writing, an occasional piece that appears to be no more than an appendix to the

[13] GW 7: 26; PhR, 15. On the relation between these two propositions, both of which are found in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, see Joachim Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*, 39–43.
[14] For a detailed analysis of the motif of reading in Hegel and its status as a 'fissure in the absolute', see Werner Hamacher, *Pleroma: Reading in Hegel*, esp. 1–81 and 206–32.
[15] Kant intended to publish the essay in the *Berliner Blätter*, but the publication was rejected by the *Stadtpräsident* and ended up being included in *The Conflict of the Faculties*. See: Gerd Irrlitz, 'Der Streit der Fakultäten', in *Kant Handbuch*, 435–39.
[16] Ak 7: 82; CF, 147.

Kantian system, it stands in a close relation to a problem which is of fundamental importance to the critical enterprise: the problem of the possibility of history.[17] Like his other writings of the early 1790s, Kant's essay on progress is an attempt to elaborate the consequences of a thought that had remained latent in the first two *Critiques*: that the realisation of the supreme end of practical and theoretical reason, the 'highest good' (*das höchste Gut*), cannot be restricted to the realm of personal morality alone but must extend to the creation of a moral community – a community whose realisation, ultimately, requires the reshaping of the empirical world in accordance with the demands of morality.[18] The moral duty that is expressed in Kant's final formulation of the moral imperative – 'Act to promote the highest good' – thus implies a task can only be developed through a concrete development in time that extends beyond the individual and must encompass the *Menschengeschlecht* in its entirety. Such a task could be called *historical* in the precise sense of the word: because it first opens up history as the realm of its operation and future fulfilment.

In the essay on historical progress, Kant is not only concerned with the manifestation of this imperative – that is to say, how the task to realise the highest good is given to the human *Geschlecht* – but also with the conditions under which it can be effective. If the historical imperative is to make an effective claim on a rational being endowed with freedom, it must not only manifest itself as a 'fact' of moral consciousness: in order for this imperative to express a duty, there must also be ground to expect that it is *possible* for the individual to contribute to its realisation. This is where the question of progress comes into play: for if history would indeed be a *Possenspiel*, which Kant describes here as a play in which good and evil, moral lawfulness and lawlessness effectively neutralise one another, there would be no way for the individual to ensure that its actions are not merely a Sisyphean effort.[19] If the historical imperative is to maintain its purchase on the subject addressed by it – if there is, in other words, to be history at all – the individual must have grounds to expect that humanity progresses towards its final moral end: for it is only in the secure expectation of progress that each human being finds itself subjected to the duty to contribute to humanity's advancement towards its ultimate destination. If Kant's 'historical imperative' is not to collapse, there must be a ground to hope that history progresses towards the better. But as the essay on progress and the other historico-philosophical reflections of the early 1790s never cease to point out, securing such a ground and predicting the future course of this history raises serious

[17] For a discussion of this problem and its integration in the architectonic of Kant's system, see Emile Fackenheim, 'Kant's Concept of History', 381–98 and especially Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, 3–80.
[18] See Ak 5: 45–46; CPrR, 64–65.
[19] Ak 7: 83; CF, 147.

difficulties insofar as it concerns a moral history. Since the subject of such a history – a subject famously described by Kant in the opening sections of the essay as a 'diviner who creates and contrives the event he announces in advance'[20] – must be a rational being endowed with freedom, it is not possible to find this ground a posteriori by identifying the rules and regularities of prior experience. Because the one who 'creates and contrives' this moral history is also a finite being – a being that, as Kant had shown in the sections on 'radical evil' in the *Religion*, not only finds itself addressed by the moral law but also possesses an 'innate' and 'inextirpable' propensity towards evil[21] – there is no way to decide a priori whether it will tend to obey the moral law or not, no basis to expect whether it 'finds itself on the good (though narrow) path of constant progress (*Fortschritt*) from the bad to the better'.[22]

It is in the context of this problem, which is laid out in the first half of the essay, that the figure of the newspaper reader will make its appearance. The introduction of this figure is, not by chance, staged in a passage of the text that is concerned with the encounter with an historical occurrence – perhaps the historical occurrence par excellence – that Kant simply refers to as the 'event of our time' (*Begebenheit unserer Zeit*): the French Revolution.[23] In an unexpected move, however, the essay does not concern itself with the event of the Revolution itself to substantiate the hypothesis that history is continually advancing toward the better. Instead, it turns to its 'spectators' (*Zuschauer*) who do not directly participate in this event but see it taking place from a distance: spectators whose model is certainly not found in the onlookers of the events in the streets of Paris but rather in the newspaper readers who, from across the Rhine, witness the unfolding of a spectacle without personal or partisan self-interest and allow their partiality to 'betray itself in the open' (*sich öffentlich verrat*). If the display of this affective participation with the Revolution demonstrates that there are grounds to expect a moral tendency in the human *Geschlecht*, this is because the 'mode of thinking' (*Denkungsart*) that allows this participation to betray itself must belong to a 'moral disposition' (*moralische Anlage*):

> The revolution of a gifted people which we have seen going on in our day may succeed or founder; it may be filled with misery and atrocities to the point that a sensible human being, were he boldly to hope to execute it successfully the second time, would never resolve to make the experiment at such cost – this revolution, I say, nevertheless finds in the minds of all

[20] Ak 7: 80–81; CF, 141–43.
[21] Ak 6: 51; RR, 58.
[22] Ak 6: 48; RR, 54–55.
[23] Ak 7: 85; CF, 153. For a broader discussion of the fraught relation between German philosophy and the French revolution, see Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx* and Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 8–54.

> spectators (*den Gemüter aller Zuschauer*) – who are not implicated in the game (*Spiel*) themselves – a wishful *participation* (*Teilnehmung*) that borders closely on enthusiasm (*die Nahe an Enthusiasmus grenzt*), the very expression of which is fraught with danger; this participation, therefore, can have no other cause than a moral predisposition in humankind.[24]

Not the revolution itself, but the participation that this event finds in the *Gemüter* of its spectators thus intimates the moral disposition in which Kant will find the ground for the slow but uninterrupted progress of humankind towards its moral destination. The name that Kant reserves for this participation is 'enthusiasm' – a state of the *Gemüt* that is here initially described as a 'wishful participation' (*Teilnehmung dem Wunsche nach*). If enthusiasm is an affective participation 'after the wish', this wish is not to be mistaken for an empirical desire; much rather, it must be understood in the precise sense in which Kant had conceived of the wish in the *Religion*, the book that he had finished right before his reflection on the revolution. In the third chapter of the book Kant had identified the idea of the kingdom of God with the highest good as the final goal of practical and theoretical reason – and as in the case of Hegel, the relation of reason to its supreme end is here associated with a prayer: 'The wish of all the well-disposed is thus: "that the kingdom of God come, that his will be done on earth (*auf Erden geschehe*)"; but what preparations must they make in order that this wish come to pass among them (*mit ihnen geschehe*)?'[25] This conception of the wish informs Kant's account of enthusiasm, of which he writes in the essay that it is 'directed only toward what is ideal and indeed purely moral.'[26] Enthusiasm begins as a 'wishful participation' but cannot be reduced to it: for Kant, it designates that state of the *Gemüt* in which the realisation of this pure, moral ideal in the empirical world is not only wished for but held to be possible. That the spectators who witness this event unfolding without being implicated in it express their 'sympathy with the players on one side (*Teilnehmung der Spielenden auf einer Seite*) against those on the other' is at first the expression of a mere wish: the as yet unfounded desire that the 'play of great transformations (*Spiel großer Umwandlungen*)' is not the *Possenspiel* evoked in the first half of the essay but a progression of humankind towards its moral destination.[27] Yet it is precisely the expression of this unfounded wish by the spectators of the French Revolution that, in Kant's reading, turns out to provide the ground for the expectation of its realisation. Insofar as this wishful participation is 'universal', felt without exception by every human

[24] Ak 7: 85; CF, 153.

[25] Ak 6: 101; RR, 111. For a discussion of this 'wish' in the context of the second *Critique* and the *Religion* see Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy,* 41–56 and 277–78.

[26] Ak 7: 86; CF, 155. A more detailed analysis of Kant's concept of enthusiasm and its relation to his critical writings can be found in Jean-François Lyotard, *Enthusiasm: The Kantian Critique of History* and Peter Fenves, *A Peculiar Fate: Metaphysics and World History in Kant*, 258–89.

[27] Ak 7: 85; CF, 153.

being; insofar as it is 'unselfish', *uneigennützig*; and, most importantly, insofar as the spectators of the revolution even endanger themselves in expressing this feeling, it will turn out not to be a mere wish at all. For if this wishful participation is an incentive that is in itself sufficient to determine the power of choice, if it can outweigh even the natural disposition towards self-preservation, its universal expression points not only to a moral 'constitution' (*Beschaffenheit*) but also to the 'capacity' (*Vermögen*) of humanity to reach it.[28] The wishful reader who encounters the universal, dangerous expression of this wish on the pages of the newspaper thus discovers that there is reason to expect that humankind is capable of reaching its destination. The feeling of enthusiasm is the medium of this discovery: it is the initially groundless wish for the realisation of the moral idea that, by its sheer force, provides the ground to expect its realisation and opens up the possibility for the individual to contribute to the progression of humankind towards its final goal.

But even though Kant's account of this 'wishful participation' with the French Revolution is unmistakably modelled on a newspaper reader, the imagery he employs in the essay derives almost without exception from the sphere of the theatre: the passage will not speak of readers, but draw on a vocabulary of spectators and actors, of the stage and the play, of the unfolding of history as a *Spiel* of great revolutions. But through this imagery, the essay alludes to a quite different mode of experience – an experience of reading and writing captured in the images of newspaper readers feverishly devouring the latest news, of reporters and journalists frantically scribbling down commentaries, of rumour and gossip reverberating within the crowd.[29] In earlier drafts of the 'Renewed Question', the figure of the newspaper reader is still explicitly presented as the model of the spectators whose enthusiasm will provide a ground for historical progress. The participation of the 'mere spectators' (*bloße Zuschauer*) with the French Revolution is here said to find its characteristic expression in a 'warm desire for newspapers' (*heisse Begierde nach Zeitungen*) – newspapers whose sole purpose would be to provide the 'material for the most interesting […] conversations'.[30] This addition is important, for it suggests that this desire for newspapers does not serve any empirical interest: this *Begierde* does not stem from the reader's natural drives, nor is it merely an intellectual desire for the advancement of this reader's own insights. These readers desire their newspapers only as the material for the 'most interesting' (*den interessantesten*) conversations – that is to say, those conversations that are concerned only with what Kant had referred to, in the second *Critique*,

[28] Ak 7: 84; CF, 151.

[29] On the relation between Kant's account of the French revolution and the 'newspaper fever' (*Zeitungsfieber*) of the 1790s – a term introduced by Goethe in 'Die Reise der Söhne Megaprazons' – see Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 52–54.

[30] Ak 19: 604. Fenves offers an alternative reading of this passage in *A Peculiar Fate*, 252–53.

as the 'supreme interest' of reason.[31] This is why Kant, in his draft for the essay of 1793, will add that even a 'reasoning, enlightened' (*räsonnierenden aufgeklärten*) being feels this desire: this *Begierde* does not originate in the human being qua natural being but expresses a purely rational interest, which is unselfish and completely independent of anything outside of reason itself.[32] The feverish desire for news about this 'game of great revolutions' turns out to be the expression of a need that emerges from a conversation of the most interesting kind, a wish that originates from a *Räsonnieren* in pursuit of its supreme interest – the realisation of the highest good. Not only the ragged phenomenal expression of the revolution but also the *Zeitungsfieber* that accompanies it are thus salvaged and put to work in a history that advances towards its moral destination.

Kant had made a similar argument in that other study of a world-historical event that took place earlier in Kant's lifetime and that was, like the French Revolution, inseparable from the endless commentary, rumour and chatter it incited amongst its contemporaries: the Lisbon Earthquake. Like the *factum brutum* of the French Revolution, an event that is, by the time Kant discusses it in the 'Renewed Question', incontrovertibly stained by the suffering and atrocities of the preceding years, the 1755 earthquake makes itself felt as a world-historical occurrence in front of which the whole conceptual apparatus supporting the belief in progress threatens to collapse. As in his later text on the Revolution, the study of the earthquake is written as a newspaper article; and also here, Kant's attempt to neutralise the brute facticity of this event is accompanied by a parallel attempt to curtail its experience – an experience that is, once again, figured in the newspaper reader. 'Great occurrences that concern the fate of all human beings,' so Kant begins his first article, 'rightfully incite that renowned desire for novelty (*diejenige ruhmreiche Neubegierde*), which awakens in response to everything exceptional and tends to be accompanied by the question as to what caused it.'[33] Not only are we presented here with the attempt to curtail the destabilising effects of the earthquake on a certain conception of history, to purge natural catastrophe of moral significance; but the other tremor that takes place in response to it, the 'inciting' or 'stirring' (*Erregung*) of the 'desire for novelty' is consigned to its rightful limits and secured for the purpose of methodical questioning, observation and reasoning. Like Kant's later article on the French Revolution, his earlier article on the earthquake does not merely ward off the threat posed by this *Begebenheit* – the tremor on the scene of world history and the tremor within the reader – but aims to extract opportunity from the wreckage, interpreting the experience of these occurrences as the

[31] Cf. the section 'On Assent from a Need of Pure Reason' in Ak 5: 142–46; CPrR, 179–84. On the highest good as the 'supreme interest of reason', see Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, 14–22.
[32] Ak 19: 604.
[33] Ak 1: 419.

sign of a disposition that can guarantee the consistent progression of humankind towards its supreme end.[34]

Despite its central role in the early draft, the 'desire for newspapers' of the spectators of the revolution will disappear from the final, published version of the essay, together with the reference to the 'most interesting conversation'. In the published version, the figure of the newspaper reader unmistakably provides the central model for the key passage on the spectators and their affective participation with the 'event of our time' – but all direct references to this figure have now been removed. At certain points in the text, the description of the spectators still contains traces of the mode of reading and writing on which it is modelled: when Kant speaks of the Revolution as an event unfolding 'in our days' (*in unsere Tagen*), this wording bears the mark of an experience whose rhythm is dictated by the daily news; when he explains how the mode of thinking of the spectators 'betrays itself *in the open*' (*sich öffentlich verrat*) this does not evoke the space of the theatre but rather that of *Öffentlichkeit*, of publishing and publicity; and when he claims that these spectators have a disposition that 'lets their participation become loud' (*laut werden läßt*) the words he uses to describe this self-publishing recall the German idiom for erupting rumours – *laut werdende Gerüchte*.[35] Apart from these traces, however, the published version of the text no longer contains any explicit reference to a 'warm desire for newspapers' – even if this desire had already been integrated into the Kantian system by interpreting it as a need that arises from that 'most interesting conversation' by which reason sets itself its highest goal.

Even though these references have been removed, Kant has not abandoned his initial model for the 'affective participation' in the French Revolution. Throughout the essay, it is clear that the description of the *bloße Zuschauer* and their encounter with the 'game of great revolutions' is modelled entirely on the figure of the newspaper reader and the experience of history exemplified by it. The very possibility of the central metaphor of the theatre, the play and the spectator is predicated precisely on this experience: only for the newspaper reader has it become possible to speak of world history as something that appears as a drama unfolding in the present; only for a newspaper reader has it become possible to relate to history not just as a game of great revolutions, but one that 'can be *seen* unfolding (*vor sich gehen sehen*) in our days'.[36] And only for the newspaper reader, not the onlooker in the streets of Paris, does it

[34] For a discussion of this transformation and its relation to Kant's analytic of the sublime, see Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 31–35. A detailed discussion of Kant's natural-historical writings can be found in *A Peculiar Fate*, 13–82.
[35] Ak 7: 85; CF, 153.
[36] Ak 7: 85; CF, 153; my emphasis.

become possible to relate to this drama as a spectator who looks at the stage 'without selfishness' and 'without the least intention of assisting' – both aspects of these spectators that are crucial if their wishful participation is to be understood as a pure enthusiasm.[37] Indeed, the very distinction between *Zuschauer* and *Anschauer* rests on the assumption that these spectators are not immediately affected by the *Begebenheit*; that they do not see the event that is given to them as an object of intuition but relate to it as readers. It is only the reader immersed in the daily papers who could be portrayed as a spectator that is defined at the same time by a constitutive absence from the stage of world history and by a sense of proximity that borders on presence.[38] The figure of the newspaper reader is constantly alluded to in this vocabulary, together with the scenes of reading, writing and conversation that accompanied it in the earlier drafts of the essay – but only indirectly, avoiding all direct reference. In doing so, the theatrical imagery employed by Kant not only evokes but also conceals a scene of reading. In the passages of the essay on the Revolution, experience is consistently transposed from the sphere of reading and writing to the sphere of seeing and thinking. The reader turns into a *Zuschauer*, the event is seen rather than read about, construed as an 'event before the eye' (*Eräugnen*) rather than an encounter with a text, while the participation (*Teilnehmung*) of the spectators takes the place of an imparting (*Mitteilung*). The newspaper reader is transformed into a figure that conforms to the abstract concept of an enlightened *Leserwelt* that had made its appearance earlier in Kant's writings.[39] The literal reading that is captured in the early draft of the essay as an 'impatient, warm desire for newspapers' is idealised and abstracted to the point where it becomes almost indistinguishable from seeing, just as the movement of the 'most interesting conversation' that gave rise to this desire is turned into an inner movement of thought.

This transformation of the figure of the newspaper reader and the removal of direct references to reading, writing and conversation from the published version of the essay is striking – especially since Kant certainly understood *Zeitungen* and *Zeitschriften* to be the exemplary site of his own experience of the 'great game of revolutions' unfolding in his time. In a letter to Fichte, written in the year in which the *Conflict of the Faculties* was prepared for publication, Kant portrays himself as a thinker whose communication with the world only becomes possible through the *Blätter* delivered on a daily basis to his study. 'For the last year and a half, my poor health and frailties of age have forced me to give up all my lecturing. Now

[37] Ak 7: 87; CF, 157.

[38] For a detailed discussion of the distinction between *zuschauen* and *anschauen* in an earlier draft of the essay see Peter Fenves, *A Peculiar Fate*, 244–55.

[39] Kant already sets up a relation between the 'progress of enlightenment' and the *Leserwelt* in his earlier essay 'What is Enlightenment?'. See Ak 8: 37.

and then I still send news of my existence (*gebe ich Nachricht von meiner Existenz*) through the channel of the *Berliner Monatsschrift* and recently also through the *Berliner Blätter,* which I do as a means of preservation, agitating the little life force I have left.'[40] But despite the awareness that both the news of the *Begebenheiten* of the world and the news that is issued by Kant himself depend on *Schrifte* and *Blätter*, all direct reference to reading, writing and conversation are actively kept out of the essay on progress that will finally be published in that same year. The same question that was asked about the absence of the scene of *Zeitungslesen* from Hegel's systematic writings thus arises with regards to its concealment in Kant's reflections on history. Is there something about the figure of the newspaper reader that threatens to undermine the attempt to find the grounds for a conception of history that progresses consistently towards its destination? What made it necessary for Kant to purge the experience of history exemplified by this figure from its linguistic dimension – to turn a reader into a spectator and conversation into mode of thought?

A provisional response to these questions can be found in a text that Kant wrote between the early drafts of his essay on progress and its publication several years later: the *Anthropology* – and in particular the theory of 'conversation' (*Unterredung*) that is found in the concluding sections to its first part. Here, at a safe remove from world-historical questions, Kant will allow himself an analysis of the movement of dinner-table conversations that spiral around the occurrences of the day. Any such conversation has its natural point of departure in the 'novelties of the day' (*die Neuigkeiten des Tages*) – novelties which are 'first domestic, then from elsewhere, having flowed in through private letters and newspapers'.[41] The conversation around such novelties follows three stages: those of 'narration' (*Erzählung*), 'reasoning' (*Räsonnieren*) and 'jest' (*Schertz*).[42] Nothing could be more different from the slow but uninterrupted progress towards the supreme end of reason that is described in the 'Renewed Question' than the movement of *Unterredung*: a movement in which reason elevates itself from the empirical world only to prepare its ineluctable lapse into jest. 'The conversation,' Kant writes, 'naturally falls down into the mere play of wit (*das bloße Spiel des Witzes*).'[43] Not the constancy of advancement towards a final goal but precisely the fateful lapse into jest describes the dramatic movement of *Unterredung*: a lapse that Kant, in the *Critique of Judgement*, presents precisely as an unforeseen fall into nothingness, a 'sudden transformation

[40] Kant, Letter to Fichte, December 1797?, in *Correspondence*, 544. For a discussion of Kant's reflections on the aged body – the body that has outlived its moral purpose – and its relation to moral and historical teleology, see Comay, 'Hypochondria and its Discontents', 54–57.
[41] Ak 7: 280; AP, 181.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

of a suspenseful expectation into nothing (*einer gespannten Erwartung in nichts*)'.[44] What corresponds to this nothingness is the collapse, in the 'news of the day', of all distinctions between the important and the trivial, the great and the small. In the *Neuigkeiten des Tages*, world-historical occurrences here enter into the fabric of *Alltag* and become virtually indistinguishable from it; conversations about the 'revolution of a gifted people' exist in seamless continuity with those about the most mundane occurrences and ultimately, as Kant writes, the most elementary form of news – bad weather. Weather talk is, as Kant points out on various occasions in the *Anthropology*, the beginning and the end of all *Unterredung*.[45]

Perhaps Kant's reluctance to introduce the figure of the newspaper reader into his historico-philosophical reflections of the 1790s may be understood in connection to these passages from the *Anthropology*, which stem from the same years as his essay on the 'renewed question' as to whether humanity can hope for a constant progress towards its moral destination. The substitution of a scene of reading and writing by one of seeing and thinking in Kant's account of the 'participation' in the French Revolution might derive from the suspicion that there is something about the linguistic character of this experience that undermines his attempts to find a secure ground for the expectation of progress. Perhaps Kant realised that the *Mitteilung* of the 'game of great revolutions' does not just provide the condition of possibility for the *Teilnahme* which will, in turn, provide the ground for a steady progression towards the supreme end of practical and theoretical reason; perhaps he sensed that the same *Mitteilung* which renders this participation possible also harbours an element that undermines the teleological conception of history that it is supposed to sustain. As the theory of *Unterredung* in the *Anthropology* suggests, Kant's removal of the references to the 'warm desire' for newspapers and conversation may be no accident; instead it might point to the suspicion that there is something about the linguistic dimension of reason that never ceases to threaten its ascension to lofty heights with a lapse into jest. Maybe the disappearance of the figure of the newspaper reader from Hegel's work may be understood in this light. As in the case of Kant, Hegel initially invests this figure with a central significance in his philosophy of history: even if the scene of reading the newspaper conjured up in the Jena notebooks no longer discloses history as the realm in which an ultimately unreachable idea is constantly approached, but rather exemplifies the discovery that history is nothing but the rational development of the real towards its immanent telos – a development that is completed only in its full comprehension. And as in the case of Kant, Hegel will omit the scene of newspaper reading from his systematic writings after it has made an appearance in his notebooks. Is this disappearance perhaps driven by the same suspicion that Kant had articulated in his later writings – the

[44] Ak 5: 332; CJ, 203.

[45] See for instance the recommendation to begin conversations with weather talk on Ak 7: 176; AP, 69.

suspicion that there is something about this scene and its irreducible linguistic dimension that threatens to ridicule the same teleological conception of history that it ought to exemplify? What happens to the unfolding of spirit in time when it turns out to be nothing but the unfolding of the newspaper?

'The *newspaper reading* of the early morning…': this dissertation will examine how the figure that is here expressly introduced into the sphere of philosophy will resurface in the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin – three thinkers who, each in their own way, may be understood to write 'after' Hegel. The writings of each of these three thinkers are punctuated by images of messengers, reporters and newspaper readers, scenes of announcements and proclamations, reflections on rumour, chatter and the talk of the day – but the significance of these dispersed remarks and passages has nevertheless remained largely overlooked or misunderstood. This study will start from a simple premise: that the recurrent concern with journalism which marks the work of each of these three thinkers can be neither separated from their philosophy 'proper', nor treated as a supplementary application or extension. Quite the contrary: as I will attempt to show, this preoccupation will play a pivotal role in their philosophical work – in particular their reflections on language and history. Examining this role will require a particular mode of reading: one that understands philosophical thought to unfold not merely in a language of concepts and propositions but just as much in a language of figures and images, scenes and types. This figural language would not be understood as an 'application' or 'illustration' of thoughts that have already been formulated: a philosophical reading of the images of journalists and newspaper readers scattered through the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin would attempt to grasp how their thought is articulated in and through these images in the first place. Such a reading would attempt to disclose how such images, even where they are ostensibly presented as illustrations, at some points exceed and outdo the concepts to which they are never mere appendices.

The special significance of the figure of journalism in the context of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin's philosophical reflections on history hinges on its exemplary status. Journalism is treated here as the exemplary expression of a specific experience of time and history – a specific mode of perceiving and comprehending history that is thought to be characteristic of the epoch in which they are writing. In different ways, all three will examine the newspaper as a form in which the *Geschichtsbetrachtung* and *Geschichtsauffassung* of their epoch – and perhaps our own – are crystallised and thrown into the starkest possible relief, a form where they become available for inspection and susceptible to scrutiny. 'To seize the essence of history,' Benjamin writes in a hyperbolic proposition that magnifies the exemplary status of

journalism to an extreme, 'it suffices to compare Herodotus and the morning newspaper.'[46] All the characteristic features of modern historical experience, everything in and through which history in our time differentiates itself from its ancient counterpart, here figured by Herodotus the 'first' historian, are here seen to be concentrated in the form of the newspaper. It is this exemplary status of the newspaper, its status as *typos*, that will endow the figure of journalism with its pivotal role in any philosophical inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of historical experience. Any attempt to grasp how historical experience is constituted today – and *geschichtliche Erfahrung* is meant here in the twofold sense in which Benjamin uses the term: not only as the experience of history but also, in the strict sense, as that experience in and through which history becomes possible in the first place – any attempt to grasp the constitution of historical experience in this sense would require a study of journalism: a study of its language, its characteristic sense of space and time, its concepts and categories, its subjective types and figures.

'Historical experience' (*geschichtliche Erfahrung*): the term does not just describe a certain experience *of* history, nor does it merely emphasise that experience – and certainly also the experience of history – has a fundamentally historical character. The term is also used here in another, stricter sense: as the name for that experience in which the possibility of history first opens up.[47] This experience is not historical in the sense that it is considered as an effect of the temporal succession of moments or epochs; much rather, historical experience would be that experience in which time and history first become *possible*. For Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin alike, such an experience would be incommensurable with any conception of history as a progressive actualisation of possible experiences within linear time. On the contrary: historical experience would have to break down the generality of forms of knowledge and interrupt the uniformity of the temporal continuum. Experience could only be called historical in the strict sense when it relates itself to another experience – when it exposes itself to a non-conceptual and imperceptible other that cannot take place in the present but must be assigned to a time that is yet to come.[48] The attempt to formulate a theory of historical experience in this strict sense returns in the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin alike – and in each

[46] GS V: 60; AP, 14.

[47] Benjamin uses the term *geschichtliche Erfahrung* precisely in this double sense. See, for instance, the introduction to the last version of *Berlin Childhood*, where Benjamin writes: 'I believe it possible that a fate expressly theirs is held in reserve for such images. [...] Perhaps the images of my metropolitan childhood are capable, at their core, of preforming later historical experience (*spätere geschichtliche Erfahrung zu präformieren*).' (GS VII: 387; SW IV: 344). We will return to this concept in more detail in the third chapter of this study.

[48] I draw here on several of the discussions on the relation between experience, history and language that will play an important role throughout this study: Hamacher, 'Disgregation of the Will', 145–48; 'Intensive Languages', 489–99; Fenves, *Chatter*, 1–28; Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 1–7.

case, it is this attempt that will drive their recurrent preoccupation with journalism. It is, moreover, only because the problem of the *possibility* of history propels their writings of journalism that they can be called a critique of journalistic reason. Such a critique would not concern itself with the possibility of a priori representations of 'objects as such' (*Gegenstände überhaupt*), the problem that Kant set out to examine in the first *Critique*. Much rather, it would be concerned with the problem of the possibility of *Geschichte überhaupt* – of 'history as such'. To pose this problem as one that concerns *journalistic* reason means, first of all, to treat it as a problem that is tied to a specific historical moment. Instead of treating this possibility as a timeless given it would ask: how is history possible – in our time? What are the conditions under which history can occur – today? These questions already suggest that the significance of journalism in the context of this critique has a double character. That the engagement with the problem of possibility of history after Hegel will unfold as a philosophical critique of the journalistic suggests, on the one hand, that journalism exemplifies the conditions under which the possibility of history first assumes its problematic character; but on the other, it also points to the fact that, for each of the thinkers discussed here, this possibility can only be retrieved from the experience of which journalism is the emblematic expression.

To treat journalism as the figure of a certain experience of time and history means to emphatically present this experience as one constituted in language. To treat the journalist and the newspaper reader as privileged figures of historical experience means, in turn, to grasp this experience before anything else in scenes of reading and writing. The experience that is captured in these scenes is not so much communicated by means of language but, rather, an experience that first comes into being in language. This much is suggested by Benjamin's description of the newspaper as a 'form of imparting' (*Form der Mitteilung*) – an expression which already appears in different variants in the work of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.[49] A 'form of imparting': it is no accident that this phrase resonates with the Kantian forms of thought and intuition. Just as Kant's forms precede all possible experience, so the newspaper is treated here as if it were an a priori form that not only limits and structures a certain experience of history, but also provides the conditions under which this experience becomes possible in the first place. Also on other occasions, Benjamin will speak of the language of journalism in terms that evoke the transcendental forms of experience – for instance when he writes in the *Arcades Project* that the feuilleton is, from its birth, accompanied by a certain 'feeling of space

[49] GS I: 611; MB, 316. Kierkegaard writes for instance in one of his journals: 'But what does the daily press (*Journal-Pressen*) do? […] One complains that on occasion a single untrue article appears in a newspaper (*Blad*) – oh, what a trifle; no, its essential form of its imparting (*Meddelelses væsentlige Form*) is entirely a falsum.' (SV VIII: A 134; NB2, 26).

and time (*Raum- und Zeitgefühl*)'.[50] Propositions like this place the figure of journalism at the heart of a project that is undertaken in different ways by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin alike: the attempt to recast the Kantian concept of experience from the standpoint of its linguistic constitution. Yet it is Karl Kraus who has formulated this in unsurpassed hyperbole in one of his aphorisms: 'Time and space have become forms of cognition of the journalistic subject' (*Zeit und Raum sind Erkenntnisformen des journalistischen Subjekts geworden*).[51] In the figures of the journalist and the newspaper reader, the Kantian a priori appears as if it were a fact of language.[52]

In this light it hardly comes as a surprise that Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin will each reserve a special place for the study of the language of journalism. In different ways, their treatment of journalism will involve what Benjamin calls, in his essay on Karl Kraus, a 'philology of the newspapers (*Philologie der Journale*)'.[53] Such a philology would involve the most meticulous scrutiny of the language of the newspapers: of the fact and the opinion, of the announcement and the rumour, of gossip and chatter. To conceive of this scrutiny as a philology implies a specific treatment of language: one that is attentive to its specific historical dimension. If Benjamin's description of the newspaper as a *Form der Mitteilung* recalls the Kantian forms of intuition, it does so through a figure that calls into question any rendering of these forms as eternal and timeless. Not only is the newspaper, in its sheer ephemerality, a figure that must instil scepticism with regards to the stability and permanence of any form of experience: the experience figured by the journalist and the newspaper reader is also emphatically historically determined in the sense that it cannot be separated from *this* time, that it stands in the closest relation to *this* epoch. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin will each take the language of journalism to be exemplary of the condition of language in the epoch in which they are writing and, conversely, the language in which this epoch – if it is possible to speak of one – first assumes a definite shape. It is, once again, Benjamin who articulates this in an exemplary manner when he writes that journalism is only adequately grasped as 'the expression […] of the changed function of language (*der veränderten Funktion der Sprache*)' – that is, the changed function of language today, in the moment in which he is writing.[54]

But the experience of history that is exemplified by the writing of the journalist and the reading of the newspaper does not only have an inherently linguistic character; it also has a

[50] GS V: 679; AP, S 2,1.
[51] S VIII: 77.
[52] This expression is borrowed from Lacoue-Labarthe, who introduces it in his essay on Nietzsche's early reflections on language, 'The Detour', in *The Subject of Philosophy*, 14–36.
[53] GS II: 349; KK, 443.
[54] GS II: 337; KK, 435.

distinct temporal structure. As the following chapters will show, the recurrent preoccupation with journalism in the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin is closely related to their respective attempts to think time within and against the philosophical tradition – in particular its tendency to prioritise the present.[55] In different ways, each of the three thinkers discussed here call into question conceptions of time as a homogeneous continuum in which past and future are reduced to different modalities of the present. What Kant and Hegel share with one another – despite their differences and the tensions in their work – is their failure to rid themselves from a conception of time as just such a continuum, where the past is thought as a present that has already passed and the future as a present that is yet to come. Such a conception of time may be used to describe the time of mechanical change; but as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin will each point out in different ways, it is not the time of history. In their critique of traditional conceptions of time, journalism plays a double role. On the one hand, the newspaper is understood as a hyperbolic example of the imposition of the time of mechanical change onto history: on the pages of the newspaper, the time of history is represented as an inexorable succession of dates, reported one after another, ordered in a homogeneous continuum. On the other hand, the figures of the newspaper reader and the journalist harbour the germs of a different conception of time: one in which time does not precede experience as an empty form but is produced precisely in and as the moment of reading and writing. Time is here no longer thought as a homogeneous continuum but, rather, as a collision of different times in a 'now' that can no longer be thought as a point on a line. The attempt to think this 'now' is at the heart of the concepts that will provide the focal point for the three chapters that comprise this dissertation: Kierkegaard's 'instant' (*det Øieblik*), Nietzsche's 'untimeliness' (*das Unzeitgemässe*) and Benjamin's 'actuality' (*Aktualität*). The significance of the figure of journalism in the work of each of these thinkers can only be grasped in relation to these concepts, just as any exposition of these concepts must be accompanied by an interpretation of this figure. As we will see, these three concepts do not only play a crucial role in the attempts of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin to rethink how the time of history is constituted; they are also central to their respective endeavours to rethink philosophical thought itself. The 'instant', the 'untimely', the 'actual': each of these concepts marks a renewed attempt to conceive of philosophy in terms of a singular relation between thought and its time. As such, these three concepts may be understood as distinct attempts to radicalise and recast the proposition advanced by Hegel: the proposition that philosophy is 'its time, apprehended in thoughts' (*ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt*).[56]

[55] On this 'exorbitant privilige of the present', see Derrida's commentary on the conceptions of time of Aristotle, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger in '*Ousia* and *Grammē*: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*', in *Margins of Philosophy*, 31–67.
[56] GW 7: 26; PhR, 15.

Chapter 1: Kierkegaard

> Nothing, nothing at all happens without passing through the journalist.
> — Kierkegaard, *Writing Sampler,* Sample No. 9

Hegel begins his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* with the presentation of three figures, juxtaposed and arranged in successive order: the chronicler, the historian and the philosopher of history.[1] These figures do not only capture three specific modes of historical observation – Hegel speaks of them as the three most basic 'ways of observing history' (*Arten der Geschichte zu betrachten*) – but also mark the three distinct moments towards its full comprehension. While the chronicler restricts himself to the particular occurrence when writing the 'original history' of an age to which he immediately belongs, the historian attempts to write a history as a whole, reflecting on the historical life of epochs that are not his own; the philosopher of history, finally, marks the sublation of both modes of observation into the full comprehension of world history, history in its totality, as the progressive development of the concept. 'The only thought that philosophy brings with it,' Hegel proposes in the introduction to the lectures, 'is the simple thought of reason, that reason governs the world, that also world history has taken its course rationally (*daß es also auch in der Weltgeschichte vernünftig zugegangen sei*).'[2] Under the thoughtful gaze of the philosopher, world history shows itself to be nothing but a 'stage' (*ein Schauplatz*) for the progressive unfolding of the *logos*.[3]

To the three *dramatis personae* that together summarise Hegel's account of the comprehension of history, Kierkegaard counterposes another figure: the journalist. The significance of this figure, grasped in its relation to the Hegelian philosophy of history, will be the focal point of this chapter. If the journalist is understood here as an addition to a cast of characters that seems complete in itself, a sequential staging of three figures that seems to have already arrived at a conclusion, this is because Kierkegaard will reserve a specific role for this figure: namely to enact a parody of the idea of history that finds its culmination in Hegel's philosopher of history. On the pages of the newspaper – and this is the thought that will be elaborated in the following examination of Kierkegaard's preoccupation with journalism – every conception of history as a progressive movement towards an immanent end must turn into a *parody of itself*. For Kierkegaard, journalism will mark the dissolution of history conceived as a logical development of the concept and mock the categories on which it rests – not least that of the

[1] GW 12: 11–28; PhH, 1–16.
[2] GW 12: 22; PhH, 9.
[3] GW 12: 75; PhH, 54. On *logos* and history in Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history, see for instance Jean Hyppolite, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of History*, 20–34 and Joachim Ritter, 'Hegel and the French Revolution', 183–233.

logos itself, which will lead a strange afterlife in the language of the newspapers. But this parodic repetition of the Hegelian philosophy does not only enact a comic conclusion; as we will see, it also provides the starting point for Kierkegaard's attempts to articulate his own conception of historical time and experience.[4]

To approach Kierkegaard's preoccupation with journalism in this way – that is to say, to understand the journalist as a figure with a special significance in the context of the critique of 'philosophy' insofar as it is supposed to have come to a culmination in the Hegelian system – means to diverge from the standard interpretations of the theme and its position within his corpus. Even though the continued importance of the theme for Kierkegaard has often been noted, most commentators tend to interpret this interest in narrowly biographical terms – a tendency that does not come as a surprise if one takes into account the reception of his writings, which has been consistently burdened by an obsession with the empirical facts of his life.[5] In the rare cases where the theme is seriously addressed, it tends to be overshadowed by its relation to the *Corsair* affair of the mid-1840s, Kierkegaard's polemic against the local press that emerged out of a confrontation with a satirical newspaper.[6] Consequently, the countless hyperbolic attacks on journalists scattered throughout the journals and published writings of those years – a hyperbole that is perhaps best exemplified by Kierkegaard's remark that 'the "journalist" is the epitome of the deepest apostasis of the race from God'[7] – are often mistaken for the mere expression of a personal feud with a local newspaper. In its emphasis on empirical facts, the biographical reading of Kierkegaard's polemical portrayals of journalists is the pendant of an equally reductive historicist reading, which mistakes the significance of his preoccupation with journalism for a commentary on the political life of Copenhagen in the early nineteenth century.[8] There is, indeed, no doubt that the medium of Kierkegaard's thought is experience – albeit not of the empiricist or positivist kind – and that it is determined to think only what had become concretised in it. But any reading of his work that would overlook how

[4] For a discussion of the complicated relation to Hegel in the early writings, see Jean Wahl, *Études kierkegaardiennes*, 86–158. The most thorough analysis of the problem of language and its role in Kierkegaard's engagement with the 'whole newer development' can be found in Peter Fenves' *Chatter: Language and History in Kierkegaard*.

[5] On the problem of biography and the empirical-genetic interpretations of the relation between 'philosophy' and 'life' in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, see the preliminary remarks of Jacques Derrida's 'Otobiographies', in *The Ear of the Other*, 3–7.

[6] Cf. for instance the entry on journalism in the index to Emanuel Hirsch's German translation of Kierkegaard's collected writings in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 37; Howard and Edna Hong's historical introduction to the relevant volume in the standard English edition of Kierkegaard's collected writings, *The Corsair Affair*, vii–xxxviii.

[7] Pap. X 2 A 314; JP 2162.

[8] Cf. Julia Watkin's introduction to the standard English translation of the *Early Polemical Writings* (EPW, vii–xxxvi) and the *Writing Sampler* and (WS, vii–xvii).

this experience is transfigured or, to use Kierkegaard's own term, 'transubstantiated' (*Erfaringens Transsubstantiation*) in thought and writing would miss the philosophical significance of his ongoing preoccupation with journalism.[9]

Rather than being constructed through empirical procedures, the journalists, editors, reporters and 'absolute trumpeters' of historical progress that populate Kierkegaard's writings are perhaps closer to the *Gestalten*, the shapes or figures of consciousness that play a crucial role throughout Hegel's philosophical work, especially in the dramatic play of personae staged in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Like the *Gestalten* called to the stage here, Kierkegaard's figures are no mere illustrations, but a necessary moment in the presentation of thought – a manifestation without which thought would have nothing to think.[10] They hover between the sensible and the ideal, the abstract and the concrete, the individual and the generic – but always in a more hyperbolic manner than their Hegelian counterpart. Kierkegaard constructs his cast of characters out of historical material that seems most trivial and contingent, least worthy of the idealisations of philosophy: he derives his personae from local newspaper articles rather than great novels, from small-town gossip rather than the canon of philosophical thought. In doing so, these figures exaggerate the dramaturgical elements that remain largely implicit in their Hegelian counterpart: the *dramatis personae* in his writings – and the journalist may serve here as their exemplary protagonist – will consistently enter his work as actors on a stage, overtly performing their work of personification and presentation. In this exaggerated form, however, Kierkegaard's figures unmistakably begin to resist the classical rhetorical determination of figuration that still dominates Hegel's *Gestalten*.[11] If the latter are ultimately reduced to the status of representation, separated from and subordinated to the presentation of the concept, the figures in Kierkegaard's work always seem to resist their designated function as well as the economy of externalisation and return that depends on it.[12] Whether it is the hyperbolically portrayed journalists or the personifications of abstract concepts that are followed through *ad absurdum*, there is a sense in which these figures are always at the point of tearing themselves loose from the explicit, literal meaning that they are supposedly meant to convey and, instead, lead a life of their own.

In their impulse to lead a life of their own, Kierkegaard's figures anticipate the reflections on language and history that will be elaborated in the texts that provide the main focus of this chapter: the 'early writings', all written before the commencement of Kierkegaard's self-

[9] SV XIII: 68; EPW, 76.

[10] For a detailed analysis of the role of *Gestalt* in the (re)presentation of thought, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'The Unpresentable', in *The Subject of Philosophy*, 116–57.

[11] This claim is elaborated by Lacoue-Labarthe in 'The Unpresentable', 148–49.

[12] On the problem of reappropriation and reinternalisation in Hegel, see Hamacher, *Pleroma*, 1–80.

proclaimed 'activity as a writer' (*Forfatter-Virksomhed*).[13] The theme of journalism recurs throughout these texts, which encompass the three newspaper articles of 1836 in which Kierkegaard engaged in a sustained series of attacks on contemporary journalists and newspaper editors; the unfinished draft for an important unpublished polemical article that was written in the same year; the book review *From the Papers of One Still Living* of 1838; the unfinished comic drama *The Comprehensive Debate Between Everything and Everything* of the same period; and finally the diaries that Kierkegaard began to keep in those years and would come to refer to as his 'journals' (*Journaler*). In each of these texts, which have hardly received serious consideration, the theme of journalism surfaces in the context of an ongoing polemic against his time – or what Kierkegaard will later call 'the age' (*Tiden*) – which takes reporters, feuilletonists, editors, newspaper articles, phrases and headlines as its privileged target. That none of these texts are included in the 'writerly activity' proper as it was strictly defined and delineated by Kierkegaard in his later writings is not surprising if one appreciates that the boundaries of this activity are intimately connected with the form of the book. Whenever the theme of journalism resurfaces in Kierkegaard's later writings, this will happen in texts that cannot be reduced to the book form, or exist in its margins: whether it is his countless prefaces, the book review *A Literary Review* and the brief essay 'The Present Time' (*Nytiden*) lodged into it, the unpublished *Writing Sampler,* whose pseudonymous author is the journalist A.B.C.D.E.F. Rosenblad, or the broadsheet that Kierkegaard published in the last years of his life, *The Instant*. That the theme of journalism consistently makes an appearance in these writings is no coincidence: for there is a sense in which all of these writings can be said to have an eminently journalistic character in and of themselves.

This journalistic character is especially clear in the case of Kierkegaard's early writings, which can be read as a work of journalism even when they are not written with a view to being published in newspapers or circulated as ephemera. Whether they take the form of a comic play or a philosophical reflection, all of these texts are written in response to an 'occasion' (*Anledning*) that is, without exception, provided by the occurrences of the day.[14] Just as the pages of the diary are for Kierkegaard a place where thoughts can 'emerge with the umbilical cord of their first mood intact', so the philosophical elements of the polemical articles appear

[13] See: 'On My Work as an Author', in *The Point of View,* 1–20. Kierkegaard here has his 'activity as a writer' commence with the publication of his first pseudonymous book, *Either/Or*. The term 'early writings' will be used in this chapter to refer to Kierkegaard's work before the commencement of his authorship 'proper', encompassing also the dissertation.

[14] In the early writings, Kierkegaard already uses the word 'occasion' as a technical term that refers to the irreducibly contingent dimension of history that cannot be absorbed into the immanent development of the concept. For a detailed discussion of his use of the concept in *A Literary Review: Two Ages*, a text that in many ways returns to concerns of the early writings, see Peter Fenves' *Chatter*, 191–98.

together with the invariably ephemeral and fleeting occasion that prompted them.[15] This particular relation to the 'occasion' characterises Kierkegaard's newspaper articles as much as his unfinished comic drama, the extensive unpublished fragments in his diaries as much as his book review of 1838. Not only are these texts permeated by the short-lived novelties, current events, recently published texts or the latest gossip that occasioned them; they are also conceived as interventions into the talk of the day – that peculiar amalgam of chatter, gossip and rumour that, for Kierkegaard, was exemplified by the newspaper. If Kierkegaard's early writings seem to have grown old in a way that others have not, if they seem more distant to us than his books, this is probably due to this profoundly journalistic character and their intimate relation to the moment in which they are written. In order to grasp the peculiar topicality of these texts today, it would be necessary to unpack how these texts are inextricably bound to the occurrences of the day without ever being reducible to their occasion. This would require us not only to trace Kierkegaard's consistent attempts to weave philosophical reflections into these occasional writings, in particular an early critique of the philosophy of history; it would also require us to examine how this journalistic writing may be read as a historico-philosophical work after the philosophy of history – a work that emerges out of the attempt to capture an experience of language and history that Kierkegaard thought to be specific to his time.

Morning observations

The central theme of Kierkegaard's first newspaper article, the *Morning Observations*, is the familiar historico-philosophical trope that is already alluded to by its title: the announcement of the new day. The ostensible occasion for the article is the repeated appearance of this trope in the long newspaper article on the freedom of the press that Kierkegaard will subject to meticulous scrutiny. In characteristic hyperbole, the whole conceit of Kierkegaard's initial article and the protracted polemic that it will unleash revolves around three words that are lifted from his opponent's observations on the age and cited in a footnote: 'it is dawn' (*det er Morgendæmring*).[16] That precisely this phrase provides the occasion for Kierkegaard's article is no accident, just as it is no accident that this phrase is lifted from an article whose observations on the age focus on the historical significance of journalism: for there is a sense in which this phrase has a special relation to the figure of the journalist itself. 'These people call themselves after the day: *jour*nalists,' Kierkegaard writes in a later note;[17] but if journalism is defined by its relation to the *jour,* the day, if it calls itself after this relation and thereby

[15] Pap. II A 118; DD: 28.
[16] SV XIII, 9; EPW, 6.
[17] Pap. XI 1 A 342; NB 31: 14.

captures its singular character in this name, the title of Kierkegaard's first article further specifies this relation to the *jour* by presenting it as a displaced relation, that is to say, the relation to a day that is not yet present, a day that has not yet begun. If the proposition *det er Morgendæmring* may be taken to exemplify the writing of the journalist, if this writing can be characterised in summary form as a *Morgenbetragtning,* then this is because all journalism is a writing at dawn, at the break of day – a writing that exists between a day that has already passed and a day that is yet to begin. Only this exemplary status could legitimise the excessive importance that Kierkegaard attaches to the declaration 'it is dawn' that is lodged into an insignificant newspaper article; only the fact that every journalistic observation is a morning observation could give the title of the article its full significance.

But this relation to dawn does not just characterise the writing of the journalist; it also determines the special affinity between this figure and the philosopher of history. Journalism manifests itself most clearly as a repetition of the philosophy of history exactly where its thinking and writing shows itself to be a thinking and writing that is caught between two days, a 'morning observation' oriented towards a day that is yet to begin. The occurrence of the tiny proposition 'it is dawn' can provide the occasion for Kierkegaard's *Morning Observations* precisely because it recalls another declaration at daybreak – a declaration whose most famous iteration is found in a dense paragraph in the preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a paragraph that twists and turns through various metaphors in order to culminate in the image of sunrise (*Aufgang*):

> It is not difficult to see that our time is a time of birth and of transition into a new period (*eine Zeit der Geburt und des Übergangs zu einer neuen Periode*). Spirit has now broken with the world that it has hitherto existed in and represented (*der bisherigen Welt seines Daseins und Vorstellens gebrochen*) and stands at the point to submerge it into the past. Indeed, spirit is never at rest but is to be grasped in an always progressive movement (*in immer fortschreitender Bewegung*). But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative progression – a qualitative leap – and the child is now born, so the spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only indicated by isolated symptoms: the frivolity and boredom which unsettle the existing, the indeterminate presentiment of something unknown (*die unbestimmte Ahnung eines Unbekannten*) are the heralds that something other is approaching. This gradual crumbling, that does not alter the physiognomy of the whole, is interrupted by a sunrise (*wird durch den Aufgang unterbrochen*) which, in a flash, puts in place the form of the new world (*das Gebilde der neuen Welt hinstellt*).[18]

[18] GW 3: 18–19; PS, 6–7.

The image of sunrise marks the conclusion of this dense passage at the same time as it returns to its beginning. The *Aufgang* that is proclaimed in the last sentence of the paragraph recalls the *Übergang* of its first sentence: it is presented both as the end and as the completion of the 'time of transition' which had been announced only shortly before. This 'time of transition' is introduced at a specific moment, namely the moment in which Hegel attempts to characterise the time in which this preface is written. What is evoked here is not merely a formal notion of time – the conception of time as the 'existent concept' that is introduced earlier in the preface[19] – but a time that is empirically and historically determined: what Hegel describes here as 'our time' (*unsere Zeit*).[20] Insofar as it is conceived as a time of transition, this time has little to do with an 'age' in the familiar sense of the word; if Hegel's descriptions of this time deserve to be called 'morning observations' this is because they recall the time of dawn, a time caught between two days or ages – one that has already passed and one that has yet to begin. Spirit has already broken away from the world of its *Dasein* and the world of its *Vorstellen*, from itself insofar as it has come to know itself and from the object of its knowledge; but despite this dissociation from a world that is now at the point of being determined as the past, the 'form of the new world' has not yet emerged.[21] Spirit may have already dissociated itself from the old, but the new world has yet to break forth. But even though this new world is described emphatically as an 'unknown', and even though its entrance is portrayed as a 'leap' and an 'interruption', the image of *Aufgang* suggests that the transition of spirit and the world that it is about to discover are far from indeterminate. As a repetition and completion of the *Übergang* that is declared at the start of the paragraph, the *Aufgang* refers not only the image of sunrise but the rise of spirit itself; this *Aufgang* in which the transition finds its end and completion evokes to elevation of the *Aufhebung*, to the ascension of spirit to a higher state. But the sublation that is captured here in the image of sunrise has a more specific historical determination: for what is announced in this preface, which follows the fiction of every foreword by positioning itself before the text that has already been written, is nothing but the elevation of spirit towards its ultimate and final goal, the sublation par excellence, namely the *Aufgang* of spirit to the state of complete and total illumination for which Hegel reserves the name 'absolute knowledge'. Hegel's morning observations do not just capture the time of historical transition in the general sense, a time of transition that could serve as the paradigm of the time of history itself; they also describe the specific transition by which spirit comes into its own and its history is concluded.[22] Not only does the transition announced here proceed

[19] See GW 3: 45–46; PS, §46.

[20] For an extensive discussion of the 'preface' and its specific position in the context of Hegel's philosophical work see Jacques Derrida, 'Outwork, Prefacing', in *Dissemination*, 1–59.

[21] GW 3: 18–19; PS, 6–7.

[22] Hegel's announcement of an *Aufgang* echoes the claim on the first pages of the *Phenomenology* that 'now is the time for philosophy to be elevated to the status of a science'. (GW 3: 14; PS, §5).

according to an already given schema; also the outcome towards which it is directed – an outcome that is described only a sentence before as 'an unknown' of which only a 'vague foreboding' can be sensed – has already been comprehended by the philosopher at the time of its announcement. When the sunrise is declared in the final sentence, it is declared with absolute certainty, in the present tense, as if it had already happened.

Only when it is read against the background of this announcement does it become clear why Kierkegaard has the anonymous author of the *Morning Observations* attribute such significance to his encounter with the apparently innocuous declaration 'it is dawn' in a local newspaper.[23] Kierkegaard takes the recurrent appearance of this trope in this newspaper article, which refers elsewhere to the 'dawn of the life and freedom of the people', as an occasion to stage a scene in which the philosopher's announcement of sunrise is ardently repeated on the pages of the newspaper – but not without being reconfigured in the process.[24] In a language suffused with images and metaphors, the first sentences of the *Morning Observations* conjure up the scene of a town at the break of day, populated by journalists and newspaper readers, organised around a tower watchman and a chattering crowd, its atmosphere filled with errant reports and announcements. Kierkegaard's anonymous author writes:

> It is not the first time (*det er ikke første Gang*) that the *Copenhagen Mail*, probably because it is on friendly terms with the tower watchman of political life, has communicated to us that it has not yet become day but still continues to be dawn (*ikke var blevet Dag vedblev stadigt at være Morgendæmring*). We have to some extent been confirmed in this observation through incessantly hearing the political cockcrow of the *Copenhagen Mail*. It is probably also this dawn that has given the *Copenhagen Mail* the occasion (*Anledning*) for producing a great number of farces (*Possen*) and journalistic conjuring tricks (*journalistiske Taskenspillerkunster*).[25]

The scene evoked in these opening sentences repeats the time of transition that is captured in the preface to the *Phenomenology*. Central to the scene is a communication (*Meddelelse*), an announcement that is made by the newspaper and that situates itself in the same time as Hegel's morning observations: the announcement that 'it has not yet become day but still continues to be dawn'. But even though this announcement seems to be situated in the same time as the announcement of the philosopher – *Morgendæmring*, dawn as the metaphor for a time of transition that finds its end and completion in the sunrise – this time is here structured

[23] A recurrent problem of the (already sparse) interpretations of the early writings is the tendency to treat these texts as if they were written in Kierkegaard's 'own' voice. Gillian Rose makes a persuasive claim against this possibility – even in the texts signed by 'Kierkegaard' – in *The Broken Middle*, 3–10.
[24] See EPW, 135.
[25] SV XIII: 9; EPW, 6.

in a wholly different manner. This much is already suggested by the opening words of the article, which point out that 'it is not the first time' (*det er ikke første Gang*) that the newspaper has made this announcement. That the image of dawn is repeated again and again in the announcements of the newspaper causes its meaning to shift: instead of an imminent sunrise, the proposition 'it is dawn' comes to designate a repeated deferral. Each time that dawn is proclaimed and sunrise is announced, this deferral repeats itself. In an ironic inversion, every announcement of the arrival of the new day comes to mean that 'it has not yet become day' (*ikke var blevet Dag*); likewise, the dawn that is declared by the newspaper must appear with every repetition of the trope as an endlessly protracted dawn, the dawn before an ever-deferred sunrise – and thus the proposition 'it is dawn' is paraphrased by the author of the *Morning Observations* into the declaration that 'it still continues to be dawn' (*stadigt at være Morgendæmring*). The dawn that Kierkegaard evokes at the start of his early writings is thus a dawn that does not merely continue but 'still' continues – a dawn that continues to continue, that continues yet again. This image of an ever-prolonged dawn and an ever-deferred sunrise is reiterated in one of the central images in the opening paragraph: the reference to the 'incessant (*idelig*) cockcrow' of the newspapers – a cockcrow that, as yet another instance of the announcement, is *idelig*, incessant in the sense that it never ceases to repeat itself. Like the philosopher's announcement in the preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology*, this cockcrow is situated in the moment of dawn, the space between the day has passed and the day that is yet to begin; but in the incessant repetition of this announcement its relation to the *Aufgang* has been reconfigured. If the dawn evoked at the start of the *Morning Observations* is the image of a transition, this would be a transition that never quite comes to a conclusion; a suspended transition figured by the ever-renewed deferral of a day that never breaks.

Contradictions out of work

But the suspended movement that is evoked at the start of the *Morning Observations* does not only have a temporal character: it is interwoven with another suspension that Kierkegaard associates with journalism and which has a linguistic character. In the early newspaper articles, Kierkegaard's attempts to portray this suspension crystallise around the category of contradiction (*Modsigelse*).[26] When the anonymous author of the *Morning Observations* refers to the announcement of which he understands the newspaper to be the exemplary site, the 'communication' that 'it has not yet become day but still continues to be dawn', he appends an extensive footnote to this announcement – a footnote that presents an inventory of

[26] For an analysis of the role of contradiction in the 'objectless' dialectic of Kierkegaard's later writings, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, 30-32. For a critique of Adorno's treatment of the problem of language in Kierkegaard, see Fenves, 'Image and Chatter: Adorno's Construction of Kierkegaard', 100–114.

contradictory propositions regarding the time in which the newspaper under scrutiny is written, lifted from pages of the *Copenhagen Mail* and served up as evidence:

> The observer to whom the *Copenhagen Mail* has appealed is, so it seems, not entirely reliable (*paalidelig*), for otherwise one would probably not find such confusion in his utterances (*Forvirring i hans Udsagn*): 'It is dawn', p. 169, col. 2, line 9 up; 'The rays of truth dispel their vague phantoms', p. 170, col. 2, line 6 down. – 'Life is in its early childhood', p. 169, col. 2, line 13 up; 'the universal faintheartedness matched hardly at all the universal reforming spirit one otherwise regards as the salient feature of our time', p. 170, col. 1, line 4 down.)[27]

In his second newspaper article, *On the Polemic of the Fatherland*, which picks apart the responses of local newspapers to his first polemical piece, Kierkegaard refers once more to this footnote and its list of contradictory propositions. In a passage that reflects on the occasion for his first polemical piece, he writes:

> An odd criterion must surely be used for such a piece to be considered 'well written', a piece in which, without seeking or hunting, one can produce an assembly of contradictions (*Assemblee af Modsigelser*) that look in amazement at one another without comprehending how they have come together, a display of contradictions (*Udstilling af Modsigelser*) that is still conveniently on view in the *Copenhagen Flying Mail*, no. 76.[28]

That the category of 'contradiction' (*Modsigelse*) is introduced in the context of Kierkegaard's portrayal of an endlessly prolonged dawn may be understood against the background of Hegel's account of historical movement, which reserves an important role for this category. The 'unfolding of spirit in time' is for Hegel essentially a movement of contradiction, *Widerspruch* – the exact cognate of the Danish *Modsigelse*.[29] Contradiction is not a negative criterion of truth: taken in isolation, any finite concept and any finite thing involves a contradiction – and it is precisely the impulse to overcome this contradiction that sets spirit into motion. Contradiction is a category of logic in the specific Hegelian sense of the word: logic understood not in the formal sense but as the *logos* that pertains both to the subjective and objective manifestations of the concept. Contradiction propels both the immanent movement of thought and of being, of the concept and of substance with which it will find itself to be identical. This is articulated most rigorously and rigidly in the lesser *Logic*, where the relation between movement and contradiction is summarised in a formula: 'What moves the world as such is contradiction' (*Was überhaupt die Welt bewegt, das ist der*

[27] SV XIII: 9; EPW, 6.
[28] SV XIII: 20; EPW, 15.
[29] 'World history is […] the unfolding (*Auslegung*) of spirit in time.' (GW 12: 96–97; LPH, 72).

Widerspruch).[30] The *überhaupt* must be understood here in the dual sense of the word: contradiction is not only that which moves the world in general; it is also that by which there is properly historical movement at all – contradiction is that which propels the movement of the concept in the first place and guides it towards the absolute.

In order to better understand the role of contradiction in the suspended dawn conjured up in the *Morning Observations* it is important to underline the linguistic character of Hegel's concept of contradiction. That thought and language are inextricably interwoven in the *Widerspruch* – as in the *logos* itself, as the unity of word and reason – is already implied in the term, which presupposes a relation between a *Sprechen* and a *Widersprechen*, the alternation of a *dictio* and a *contradictio*, a saying and a saying-against. The concept of contradiction is indeed closely related to the problem of manifestation, the *Aussage* or externalisation of thought in language that is followed (and accomplished beforehand) by the moment of return, of reinternalisation without loss.[31] In the *Differenzschrift*, the concept surfaces in the context of a discussion of the complications that arise in thinking of the absolute, precisely insofar as this thinking must also involve a 'saying'.[32] Contradiction is here claimed to emerge necessarily whenever the absolute is spoken of, whenever it is captured in the form of a *Satz*, a proposition or sentence. Every propositional sentence on the absolute, conceived as an identity of the subjective and the objective, must immediately split itself into two: a proposition of identity which must be accompanied by one of non-identity if the unity it posits is not to remain abstract. The *Satz* must therefore double itself, turn into *zwei Sätze* – and it is these two sentences that begin to speak to and against one another, inaugurating a conversation that will unfold out of and through a mutual *widersprechen*.[33] As soon as there is talk of the absolute, every sentence must split in two and enter into a conversation with itself; the task of the thinker is merely to immerse himself in this conversation and follow its immanent development.

This conversation between contradictory sentences is further elaborated in Hegel's famous analysis of the speculative proposition in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which demonstrates how a 'dialectical movement' emerges out of the contradictions that inhere in the formal-grammatical structure of the propositional sentence itself.[34] If any formal proposition on the absolute – Hegel uses the example 'God is being' – must distinguish between a subject

[30] GW 8: 247.
[31] On the problem of manifestation and appropriation, see Lacoue-Labarthe, 'The Unpresentable', 143–45.
[32] GW 2: 37–38.
[33] 'This sentence contradicts the previous one.' (GW 2: 38). It is noteworthy that Hegel does not initially introduce the concept of contradiction as a noun, but as a verb whose subject is the *Satz* itself: for the sentences themselves inaugurate a movement of contradiction that is immanent to the *logos*.
[34] GW 3: 57–60; PS §60–62.

and predicate, the separation on which it relies must dissolve insofar as the subject of a proposition on the absolute here encounters its substance rather than something accidental. The grammatical subject thus loses itself in the predicate. When it has realised this loss, thought – which is still operating according to the grammatical schema of subject and predicate – is thrown back unto the subject and forced to return to it. But in returning to the subject of the sentence, this subject can no longer be thought as the bearer of accidents which may be predicated of it. The subject ceases to be an independent, objectively underlying substance but instead reveals itself to be cosubstantial with its predicate, which is no longer accidental but essential. This subject is no longer a grammatical subject: it has discovered that it is united with the substance that is predicated of it as a moment of itself. But this discovery requires its expression in new sentences, which in turn need to be expressed in others – and it is precisely this constantly renewed production of new sentences that Hegel describes here as a 'dialectical movement' (*dialektische Bewegung*). In this movement, the immobile, fixed subject of the formal-grammatical sentence dissolves; the subject turns out to be a divided whole whose liveliness consists in the dialogue and dialectical sentences engendered in and from this division.[35] The monological structure of the grammatical sentence thus gives rise to a conversation that will not unfold in fixed terms, but produces ever-new concepts as it learns to speak about itself; it does not play out between pre-established interlocutors, but changes its interlocutors while progressively unfolding. In this turning back on itself, a specific kind of teleology emerges, which has little to do with a teleology that derives from a stable and independent substance that puts everything in proper order, an absolute speaker that would guide the conversation towards its telos. Much rather, the movement of this conversation is the immanent movement of language conceived as *logos*: it is the movement of language as it learns to speak about itself, criticise itself and carry itself towards its own fulfilment.[36] Contradiction does not just propel this conversation of the *logos* with and about itself; it also guarantees that it is guided towards its necessary conclusion.

When Kierkegaard claims that the occasion for his *Morning Observations* was the flagrant 'display of contradictions' on the pages of a local newspaper, this must be understood in light of the role that Hegel reserved for the contradiction in his account of the immanent development of the concept. That Kierkegaard's reference to these contradictions is not without irony and must be approached with care is already suggested by the excessive precision of the extensive footnote appended to the first paragraph of the article, which is supposed to expose the contradictions that supposedly permeate the newspaper article under

[35] On the relation between the speculative proposition and the formal-grammatical sentence, see Hamacher, *Pleroma*, 5–7 and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, 75–101.

[36] Here I draw on Peter Fenves' account of the movement of *logos* and the suspension of teleology in his study *"Chatter"*, 1–8.

consideration. The evidence is presented here with a meticulous precision that recalls the orthographic complaints of a discontented newspaper reader: a neat list, supported by page numbers and bibliographic references, that seems to be provided by a fastidious reader who insists on standards of correctness and proper usage:

> "It is dawn", p. 169, col. 2, line 9 up; "The rays of truth dispel their vague phantoms", p. 170, col. 2, line 6 down. – "Life is in its early childhood", p. 169, col. 2, line 13 up; "the universal faintheartedness matched hardly at all the universal reforming spirit one otherwise regards as the salient feature of our time", p. 170, col. 1, line 4 down.)[37]

There is something excessive about this list, which seems to be out of proportion with regards to the seemingly trivial inconsistencies in the newspaper article that Kierkegaard's anonymous author cites from. More importantly, there is a sense in which the evidence listed in the footnote, despite its emphasis on correctness and propriety, seems to be the result of a faulty reading of the text – a reading that somehow misunderstands the ostensible intentions of its author. The contradictory phrases cited here and examined with regard to their logical consistency are, without exception, rhetorical figures; the fragments of text that are accused of breaching the law of non-contradiction are not logical propositions but images and tropes, metaphors and metonyms. The evidence served up in the footnote concerns the coincidence of the assertion that 'it is dawn' (*det er Morgendæmring*) in one sentence with a reference to 'rays of truth' (*Sandhedens Straaler*) in another; the assertion that 'life is in its early childhood (*Livet er i sin første Barndom*)' in one and the 'spirit of reform' (*reformatoriske Aand*) typical of the age in another. On both occasions, a sentence that seems to be easily identifiable as a rhetorical figure, a mere illustration of conceptual content, is treated by this reader as if it were a logical proposition that can be probed for its consistency. While Kierkegaard's author, the complaining newspaper reader, claims to detect a confusion in the utterances of this tower watchman, the contradictions he presents in this footnote evoke a certain confusion themselves: a confusion that affects the classical separation between logic and rhetoric, between concept and representation. In applying the principle of non-contradiction to rhetorical figures, the accusation of a flagrant 'display of contradiction' thus turns out to be based on a misreading – a misunderstanding of figures that could have been understood to represent an argumentative content that may well have been formally consistent if they had only been adequately identified as such, if their proper meaning had only been correctly deciphered. This confusion of the logical and the rhetorical and of the literal and the figural is only further exacerbated by the list of citations provided by this anonymous author. In the case of both of the contradictions identified here, the author cites and isolates rhetorical figures to

[37] SV XIII: 9; EPW, 6.

the point that their structure resembles that of a logical concatenation of subject and predicate: 'it is dawn', 'life is in its early childhood'. Lifted out of the text and removed from their context, it becomes uncertain whether the appropriate reading of phrases like these would be of a literal or a figurative kind; it has become impossible to decide whether these descriptions refer to a person or an epoch, to a day or an age. The excessively meticulous reading performed here does not merely ridicule the flowery language of the newspapers, as most commentators have held; rather, it takes the language of the newspaper as an occasion to ridicule the very possibility of distinguishing with absolute certainty between conceptual content and rhetorical ornament – and with it the possibility of deciding on *a* meaning or even a controlled polysemy of meanings.[38]

Unreliability of words

This uncertainty with regard to the figural or literal status of these sentences is summarised in the suspicion that leads Kierkegaard's anonymous author to present this display of contradictions in the first place: the suspicion that the observations of the tower watchman are 'not entirely reliable' (*ikke ganske paalidelig*).[39] If this 'unreliability' is demonstrated by the list of citations in the footnote, it is not merely the accidental unreliability of a tower watchman whose observations may be correct or incorrect; instead, it is the structural unreliability that is at work in every *Udsage*, every thought insofar as it must externalise itself in language. Language is unreliable in the sense that words, utterances, have a way of saying things which are not at all what the speaker had intended them to say. The demonstration that is undertaken in the footnote inadvertently provides evidence for this more profound and more dangerous unreliability through its own misunderstanding of the propositions cited here – a misunderstanding that is, above all else, a *misreading*, a reading that fails to distinguish between literal and figural meaning, between concept and trope. Against its ostensible intentions, the demonstration of unreliability suggests that it might well be impossible to ever find a reliable basis for such distinctions. The list of citations in the footnote may be taken as a model for the mode of reading that is at the centre of all of Kierkegaard's early newspaper articles. Throughout these newspaper articles, Kierkegaard will attempt to consistently read his opponents' words in such a way that they come to mean the opposite of what they were obviously intended to say; to lay bare places in the text where words can be made to say something entirely different from their supposedly manifest meaning, where figural language can be read literally and vice versa, where the most insignificant can be mistaken for the most

[38] Several years later, in the dissertation that marks the end of his 'early writings', Kierkegaard will of course call this undecidability by its familiar name: irony. For a discussion of the theory of irony from Schlegel to Kierkegaard, see Paul De Man, 'The Concept of Irony', in *Aesthetic Ideology*, 163–84.
[39] SV XIII: 9; EPW, 6.

significant – up to the point where not a single word or sentence can be relied upon to do its work.[40] Unwittingly – at least in appearance – the orthographic complaints of Kierkegaard's anonymous author, who insists on standards of correctness and propriety, demonstrate precisely that there is no reliable way to set up such a standard. In his suggestion that 'an odd standard (*en egen Maalestok*) must surely be used for such a piece to be considered "well written" (*velskrevet*)' – that is to say, written according to the highest orthographic standards – he inadvertently points to this impossibility: if his inventory of contradictions lifted from this text suggests anything, it is that every such *Maalestok* must be odd, in the sense that there is no standard that could ever be reliable. 'What is unclearly said (*uklart Udtalte*) is what is unclearly thought (*uklart Tænkte*),' Kierkegaard's anonymous author writes in the second newspaper article.[41] But rather than insisting on the proper usage of words, this quote takes on a different significance when read in light of the suspicion of a structural unreliability of language. If what is said unclearly is thought unclearly, and if nothing that is said can be sufficiently secured against the risk of being misunderstood, if nothing that is said can ever be sufficiently clear, then there is no thought that can secure the possibility of being correctly understood.

The contradictions that Kierkegaard's anonymous author ostensibly complains about thus turn out to be incompatibilities between figurative expressions – a 'mere matter of style', as his polemical opponents will later retort, rather than genuine inconsistencies in the logical argument 'proper'. But out of this complaint another disjunction emerges, a disjunction that is more fundamental than the one between incompatible propositions: the irreducible disjunction between what is meant and what is said, between *logos* and *lexis*, between what a certain statement means and the way in which the statement is meant to mean.[42] This disjunction affects not only any conversation between already established subjects, but also the conversation through which the concept is supposed to realise its immanent development. If the immanent movement of thought involves a necessary moment of manifestation, that is to say, the *Aussage* of conceptual content in language, then this manifestation – without which there would be nothing to think – also exposes the necessary development of the *logos* to the contingent relations of the *lexis*. It is no accident that Kierkegaard's exposition of the unreliability of the *Udsagen* of the newspaper crystallises around the category of contradiction,

[40] The condition that is brought about in the mode of reading that is practiced in the early newspaper articles is, in this sense, closely related to the 'permanent parabasis' described by Friedrich Schlegel, an undoing of the semantic function of language that is able to take place at all times. See Friedrich Schlegel, 'Zur Philosophie', Fragment 668, in *Kritische Ausgabe*, Vol. 18, 85.

[41] SV XIII: 20; EPW, 15.

[42] On the difference between *logos* and *lexis*, *voulour dire* and *dire*, *das Gemeinte* and *Art des Meinens*, see Paul De Man's lecture on Walter Benjamin's theory of translation, '"Conclusions" on Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"', 26–29.

as the propelling agent of conceptual 'development'.[43] As the reference to a 'display' (*Udstilling*) of contradictions in the newspaper already suggests, the contradictions presented here are anything but the propelling agents; they are, rather, described as if they were objects in a market stall – inert, laying side by side, indifferent to one another. What makes this display particularly 'striking' (*paafaldende*) is precisely that apparently contradictory sentences are brought together without ever contradicting one another in the strict sense of the word, without ever participating in the self-propelling conversation between *Spruch* and *Widerspruch*. '"It is dawn", p. 169, col. 2, line 9 up; "The rays of truth dispel their vague phantoms", p. 170, col. 2, line 6 down'[44] – the propositions gathered here may contradict one another and yet it would be absurd to even attempt to reconcile or sublate them. Rather than resulting from logical inconsistencies between concepts and propositions, the contradictions presented here result from contingent relations between rhetorical figures; if the page numbers included here show anything, it is precisely that these relations emerge not from the sequential movement of the argument but rather play out between metaphors and images in the most disparate places of the text. The logician who immerses himself in these contradictions and attempts to sublate them is led astray: for these contradictions do not emerge out of the 'self-generating, self-developing, self-returning path' that guides the immanent movement of the concept in Hegel's account:[45] rather, they develop out of the contingent relationships that are necessarily introduced over the course of its presentation.

The inoperative character of the contradictions that Kierkegaard's author finds on the pages of the newspaper is highlighted in another image that he offers in the same passage: the image of a suspended conversation, an 'assembly of contradictions (*Assemblee af Modsigelser*) that look at one another without comprehending how they have ended up in each other's company (*komne i Selskab sammen*)'.[46] The relation between the contradictory utterances cited in the footnote is here presented in the image of a conversational setting: a gathering of personified contradictions that, insofar as this gathering takes place under the sign of an 'assembly', would have to be understood as a conversation directed towards a common purpose. In the scene conjured up by Kierkegaard, however, the conversation through which this assembly is supposed to unfold fails to begin: in this mute prosopopoeia of contradictions, the same contradictions that for Hegel act as the propelling agent that set a dialectic in its motion are portrayed as if they merely stand opposite one another, speechless and immobile – 'without comprehending (*begribe*) how they have ended up in each other's company'. But if the contradictions listed in this footnote do not 'comprehend' what brought them together, this is

[43] SV XIII: 20; EPW, 15.
[44] SV XIII: 9; EPW, 6.
[45] GW 3: 61; PS, §65.
[46] SV XIII: 20; EPW, 15.

precisely because what brought them together is incomprehensible from the standpoint of the concept. It is not the necessary development of the concept that has yielded these contradictions and placed them in opposition to one another; it is the mere contingency to which logical presentation is exposed insofar as it has an irreducible linguistic character. The mute 'assembly' presented here was never called for by the propositions that attend it, nor by the immanent movement of the concept – it is a gathering that has been convened by language itself. Kierkegaard's anonymous author summarises this in the second polemical article when he points out that the evidence presented here is proof of a 'complete lack of any logic' (*fuldkomne Mangel paa al logisk*) in the phrases cited here.[47]

Confusion

The language of journalism which is at once portrayed and performed in Kierkegaard's early newspaper articles is thus a language in which contradictions cease to be at work and the *logos* no longer propel itself forward. In their scrutiny of the local newspapers, these articles point to a dimension of language that is not reducible to its semantic or referential function: just as there would be something in language that thwarts every attempt to reduce the word to a vehicle of the concept, so there would be something in its movement that resists the immanent development of the *logos* through a sequence of contradictions. In these newspaper articles, Kierkegaard reserves a special name for this resistance and its tendency to suspend the immanent movement of the concept: *Forvirring* – 'confusion'. But even though the term surfaces at key moments in these texts – most notably in the claim that the aim of the *Morning Observations* was to 'draw attention to a striking confusion' encountered on the pages of the newspapers[48] – it will be elaborated elsewhere in Kierkegaard's early writings: in the unfinished draft for a newspaper article that was written in the same year as the polemical articles but which remained unpublished. This important article, which we will refer to as the 'polemical fragment', places the concept of confusion at the centre of a warning that is proclaimed at the start of the article, an announcement of an exceptionally dangerous threat that unfolds in a long, protracted sentence:

> In this instant (*for Øieblikket*), people are afraid of nothing so much as the total bankruptcy which seems to threaten Europe; meanwhile they forget the much more dangerous and apparently inevitable spiritual bankruptcy that stands at the door – a linguistic confusion (*Sprogforvirring*) which is far more dangerous than the old Babylonian (symbolical) one, far more dangerous than the confusion of nations and dialects following from the Babylonian attempt of the middle ages, namely a confusion within languages themselves (*en Forvirring*

[47] Ibid.
[48] SV XIII: 20; EPW, 15.

> *nemlig i Sprogene selv*), a rebellion more dangerous than all others, namely a rebellion of words (*Ordenes Oprør*) that, torn loose from human dominion (*Menneskets Herredømme*), as it were rush upon one another in despair, and out of this chaos the human being reaches into a sort of grab bag (*Lykkepose*), taking hold of whatever word arises first in order to express his supposed thoughts.[49]

As in the case of the published newspaper articles, the opening sentence of this unfinished fragment ties its reflections on language to the occurrences of the day. The *Sprogforvirring* that is announced by Kierkegaard's author as a 'spiritual bankruptcy' (*Fallit i aandelig Henseende*) is introduced as the pendant of another bankruptcy of which there was much talk at the time: the threatening depletion of the Danish treasury. Kierkegaard's author does not hesitate to draw an analogy between the sphere of finance, of money and speculation on the one hand, and the sphere of language on the other. Just as the treasury is threatened by a complete draining of its resources, Kierkegaard's author argues, so there is the threat of a bankruptcy of language, an 'apparently inevitable' bankruptcy that would involve the draining of language from that which is supposed to breathe life into the letter: spirit. It is through the announcement of this 'spiritual bankruptcy' that this dramatic warning arrives at its true topic: the threat of a *Sprogforvirring*, a linguistic confusion. This confusion is placed in relation to the exemplary account of such confusion, the Babylonian confusion of tongues, at the same time as it is distinguished from it: for the confusion that is at stake here, the confusion that is characteristic of 'this instant', of the time in which this article is written, is not restricted to the fragmentation of a single human language into multiple ones, or even the fragmentation of these languages into dialects. The confusion that erupts in this moment is not the confusion *between* languages but a confusion within 'languages themselves' (*i Sprogene selv*) – a confusion that is, in other words, at work within human language *as such*.

How Kierkegaard understands this *Sprogforvirring* and its relation to the story of Babel can only be understood in light of the work of a thinker whose reflections on language are a crucial point of reference throughout the early writings: Hamann. The Babylonic confusion of tongues is a recurrent trope in Hamann's work, where it is tied directly to his analysis of the divisions and disjunctions that mark human language after the fall. The analysis of these disjunctions begins from the assertion of the irreducibly linguistic character of reason. For Hamann, language precedes reason as well as the world that corresponds to it; it is the medium in which thoughts and things can first manifest themselves. 'Without word, no reason – no world.'[50]

[49] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.

[50] Hamann, 'Biblische Betrachtungen', in *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 1, 322, 8f. A discussion of Hamann's engagement with the problem of the relation between reason and language is provided in Oswald Bayer's study *A Contemporary in Dissent*, 156–70.

Even though reason is inseparable from language, their relation is far from harmonious: human language after the fall is characterised by the broken unity of reason and language – a disjunction between words, thoughts and things that Hamann describes as an 'eternal dispute', a dispute that could never be settled or resolved within history.[51] It is this disjunction that is captured in Hamann's famous definition of speech as *Übersetzung*, a translation or literally transposition between spheres that are not merely different but ultimately incommensurable. 'To speak is to translate (*reden ist übersetzen*),' Hamann writes, 'from an angelic language into a human language, that is to say, thoughts into words – things into names – images into signs.'[52] The same disjunctions that separate distinct human languages would traverse the *logos* itself and divide the unity of reason and language from within. Speaking is a laborious and painful process in which thoughts and things show themselves to be shut off from the word, the only medium in which they could manifest themselves to the fallen human being. This understanding of language as translation is of crucial importance to Kierkegaard, who writes in an early note that it is precisely the 'eye for the incommensurable' that distinguishes Christianity from philosophy. In this note, Hamann serves here as the model of a writer who maintains this relation to the incommensurable – a writer who 'lives in fullness (*i Fylden*) and therefore feels how much is always left over, even if he has expressed himself with all felicity (hence this disinclination to write).'[53] The language of a fallen humanity is a language in which the world can never manifest itself in its fullness; it is a language that must fall short even when everything has been said, that must leave something unsaid even when one has expressed oneself in 'the most felicitous manner'. If this writer 'lives in fullness' this is a fullness that must remain inaccessible to him insofar as it can manifest itself only in language; it is a fullness that can only be 'felt' insofar as it involves a transposition between ultimately incommensurable spheres.

The *locus classicus* of this account of fallen language is, of course, the story of the Tower of Babel.[54] Genesis reports how a fallen humanity, still in some proximity to its original harmony ('of one language and of one speech'), undertook to erect a tower high enough to reach the heavens, only for this project to be thwarted by a fragmentation of their language into multiple tongues. The story recounts both the effort of a fallen humanity towards its ideal accomplishment and the failure of that effort as it is brought about by a structural division that stamps its language after the fall. When Kierkegaard's author compares the *Sprogforvirring* that characterises his time to the confusion described in Genesis while immediately

[51] Ibid.

[52] Hamann, 'Aesthetica in Nuce', in *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 2, 199, 4.

[53] Pap. II A 138; DD: 37.

[54] For an account of Babel as the figure not only of 'the inadequation of one tongue to another' but 'of language to itself and to meaning', see Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', in *Acts of Religion*, 104–33.

distinguishing between the two, claiming that this confusion is not only 'far more dangerous than the old Babylonian (symbolical) one' but also 'far more dangerous than the confusion of nations and dialects following from the Babylonian attempt of the middle ages', this is effectively nothing but an extension of the story of confusion on the basis of Hamann's insight that all speech of a fallen humanity has the structure of an *übersetzen*. That the *Sprogforvirring* announced by the author of his unpublished newspaper article is 'more dangerous' than the confusion arising from the disjunction between languages or dialects would mean that it is more profound, that it concerns the most basic structure of language and affects even the language that one would call one's own. Like its Babylonian counterpart, such a confusion would not threaten language from without; rather, it would erupt from within an already divided and disjointed fallen language.

Kierkegaard's author defines this 'most dangerous' confusion as a 'rebellion of words' (*Ordenes Oprør*). This confusion that arises out of the basic structure of the language of a fallen humanity is conceived as a *røre*, a movement of stirring and disturbing that would seem to spring from words themselves. What is disturbed by this movement is summarised in an image that captures the role assigned to language after the fall: the 'human dominion' (*Menneskets Herredømme*) of words, a relation of dominion that humanity will never cease to set up over language.[55] When Kierkegaard characterises the relation between human beings and language in these terms, he again refers to a familiar motif in the work of Hamann: the thought that human language after the fall is characterised before anything else by the reduction to its semantic function. The 'dominion' of words by human beings refers to the reduction of language to a means of communication. After the fall, words are supposed to communicate something – that is to say, *something else*, something other than themselves and outside of themselves. It is also in this way that language is characterised in the account of the construction of the Tower of Babel in Genesis. Here language appears first and foremost as an instrument that serves intentional activity ('let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven'; 'let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly') just as the shattering of the unity of human language not only completes the separation of a fallen humanity from paradise but also disturbs the function that it will assign to the word as a carrier of the concept ('and the lord said, [...] let us go down and confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech').[56] When Kierkegaard's author describes this instrumental character in terms of a 'dominion', this recalls Hamann's references to the *Knechtsgestalt* of words.[57] Words shaped like servants are words that are put to work as means towards an end that is not their

[55] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.

[56] Genesis 11: 1–9. Derrida undertakes a close reading of the text in its relation to the problem of translation and incommensurability in 'Tours de Babel', 104–108.

[57] Hamann, Brief an Lindner, 9 August 1759, in *Briefe* I, 394.

own, an end imposed on him from outside. Like the servant, the word is made to carry something that is external to itself: it is turned into a mere means, an instrument to carry concepts and refer to things to which it has no intrinsic relation. And just as the ideal servant undertakes his tasks without ever being noticed, so the instrument of language is supposed to be wielded with such control and efficacy that it would disappear entirely after it has accomplished its task, dissolving completely into the things of which it speaks. Supposed to – for this instrumental conception of language would have failed to take into account that there is something in language that resists the disappearance of words after they have completed the task assigned to them.

Loquacity of language

The *Sprogforvirring* for which the author of Kierkegaard's unfinished newspaper warns may thus be understood as the name for a structural resistance of language to its semantic function. The linguistic confusion that is described here as a 'rebellion of words' against their 'dominion' by human beings would concern a resistance that is at work within fallen language – language reduced to a means of signification, an instrument that is supposed to be controlled by a speaker. This resistance is, if we take the description of this rebellion seriously, a disturbance that arises out of language itself – an *Oprør* that emerges out of an impulse in words that resists their reduction to a carrier of the concept. Kierkegaard refers to this impulse in a marginal note to the opening paragraph of his unpublished newspaper article: 'One speaks (*man taler*) after the association of ideas – the *Selbstsucht* of words (*Ordenes Selbstsucht*).'[58] What drives this rebellion of words is not the 'intention' of the speaker or the 'drive' of the concept to overcome contradictions – the *Trieb* that propels the Hegelian dialectic[59] – but rather some impulse in words themselves. The specific sense of the German *Selbstsucht*, which is left untranslated in the original Danish, is not exhausted by its usual translation as an 'egoism'. When Kierkegaard speaks of the *Selbstsucht* of words this must be understood in the double sense of the word: as an urge (*Sucht*) of words themselves, an impulse that has an affinity with a searching (*suchen*) – but rather than being directed to anything outside of themselves this impulse of words would also be directed only towards words themselves. Words 'themselves', *selbst*: that is to say, words stripped from their semantic function or conceptual content. What stirs these words into motion would not be the 'drive' of the concept but an impulse that is at work within language as such, an impulse that must disturb any purpose or intention imposed on it from the outside. Even though this motif of *Selbstsucht* and its relation to the 'association of ideas' are not elaborated here, they both return in another journal entry written in the same period. Kierkegaard writes here:

[58] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.
[59] GW 3: 13; PS, §3.

> There are people who speak after associations of ideas, but far underneath this one finds a standpoint that I would like to call the *Selbstsucht* of words, where one word pulls another with it (*river det andet med sig*), where words, that often come together, search one another (*søge hverandre*), more or less like words in a lexicon would do as soon as they would come alive.[60]

When Kierkegaard speaks of the *Selbstsucht* of words as a viewpoint that is to be placed 'far below' the 'association of ideas', this should be taken less as a normative assertion than as a reference to a most basic viewpoint. The mode of speaking it designates could not be further removed from one where language is made to function as a vehicle of communication. If speaking after the 'association of ideas' refers to a movement of speech where what is said is not determined by the intention of an already established subject, but rather follows the habitual groupings of ideas, so *Ordenes Selbstsucht* names a mode of speech that propels itself onward even though it has been entirely dissociated itself from the sphere of thought – whether it is the immanent development of the concept or the intention of a speaker. In the *Selbstsucht* of words, one word drags the other along, without regard for the intentions of a speaking subject; the subject is not constituted before the act of speaking; the subject is an impersonal 'one' (*man*) which is here said to speak 'after' (*efter*) this impulse within language itself. This impulse of words would exceed any possible conceptual determination, any meaning that could be fixed in a lexicon; language would follow its own 'logic', if it is still possible to use this term: a logic of loquacity, where language would continue to speak even when it has ceased to fulfil its semantic function.[61]

The announcement of a threatening *Sprogforvirring* in Kierkegaard's unpublished newspaper article thus distinguishes between two distinct dimensions of language that cannot be reduced to one another. On the one hand, there is the word in its relation to the concept, the word as the carrier of a determinate meaning; on the other, there is the word in its relation to other words, a *Selbstsucht* of words that is irreducible to their semantic function. This double relation is evoked towards the end of the protracted opening sentence of the article, where Kierkegaard's author specifies the *Ordenes Oprør* as 'a rebellion of words that, in despair, as it were rush towards one another'.[62] This 'despair' (*Fortvivlen*) of words may be read literally: if words are *fortvivled*, the cognate of the German *verzweifelt*, this is because the confusion at work in language disrupts every simple unity between word and concept: words find themselves torn between two different, irreconcilable relations. The word still refers to a concept, but no longer

[60] Pap. II A 583; FF, 34.
[61] One is reminded here of Kierkegaard's later remark, in the reading of Genesis in *The Concept of Anxiety*, that 'the speaker is language'. For a discussion of this remark, see Fenves, *Chatter*, 77-84.
[62] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.

simply that; it also enters into another relation, a relation that plays out not between word and concept but amongst words, words that 'rush towards one another' (*styrte ind paa hverandre*), that is to say, words are driven by an impulse that cannot be controlled by an intention. The image that Kierkegaard's author appends to the end of his warning – 'and out of this chaos the human being reaches into a sort of grab bag (*Lykkepose*), taking hold of whatever word arises first in order to express his supposed thoughts'[63] – may be read as an attempt to capture what it would mean to speak under the condition of this double, *fortvivlede* character of words. Against the image of a speaker who is in complete control over every word uttered, Kierkegaard conjures up an image of a speech where the speaker does nothing but reach inside a grab bag, a *Lykkepose* – a term that, like the German *Glückssäckel*, points to the sheer arbitrariness of whatever word arises out of it. If the speaker chooses words, this is a choice that is predicated on an 'arising' of words that is arbitrary in the sense that it does not obey pre-established intentions or the laws of conceptual development – only the *Selbstsucht* of words themselves. Under the conditions of this rebellion, any manifestation of thought would be merely the 'expression of a supposed thought (*formeentlige Tanker*)'; thoughts that, insofar as they first manifest themselves in language, can at best be 'supposedly' attributed to a speaker insofar as they are always predicated on this arbitrary play between words.

If the movement of history can be understood on the model of a conversation, then this would have little to do with the conversation of a *logos* that learns to speak about itself, that criticises itself and guides itself towards its own immanent fulfilment. The very support that would render such a conversation possible – the 'words' whose resistance to conceptual determination is already exposed in the *Morning Observations* – would never cease to disturb this conversation. The 'confusion' that is always already at work in language throws the orderly movement of the concept into disarray, the *Selbstsucht* of words pulls thought away from that 'self-generating, self-developing path' by which the concept returns into itself. Any conversation through which the concept could be brought to its immanent fulfilment would constantly be interrupted by another conversation: a conversation that is not propelled forward by the drive of the *logos* to overcome the contradictions that inhere in all finite things or thoughts, but only by the impulse of language to continue speaking – even if it has nothing to say.[64] Of the various images and scenes scattered throughout Kierkegaard's unfinished newspaper article, at least one evokes this conversation through a parodic repetition of the Hegelian dialectic. Halfway through the main fragment, precisely at the point where the text returns to the diagnosis of the time with which it had started – the time that he had claimed to

[63] Ibid.

[64] Cf. Hamacher's formulation of the aporia that traverses semantic theories of language: 'At the end of every semantic theory of language and its truth stands the aporetic verdict: language does not speak; it has nothing to say, only itself or its disappearance.' (*Premises*, 338)

be characterised precisely by the threat of the 'most dangerous' confusion – Kierkegaard writes:

> A phenomenon has now arisen which has much in common with the well-known dispute (*bekjendte Disput*) between the Catholic and the Protestant who each persuaded the other (*overbeviste hinanden*), for the utterly vague and indeterminate meaning of words (*völlig vage og ubestemte Betydning af Ordene*) has made it all too easy to persuade one another. The polemic [...] has therefore become as superfluous as bland.[65]

The 'well-known dispute' to which Kierkegaard's author here refers is the dispute evoked in a story by Hebel, *The Conversion*. This story tells of two brothers – one a Catholic and one a Protestant – who each lamented the fact that they would not meet in the same heaven. In order to reconcile their differences, the two brothers arrange a meeting where both of them would attempt to convince the other of the truth of their own position – only to find out, when they wrote one another weeks later, that they had both succeeded in converting one another. Having reversed their positions, the brothers once again angrily accuse one another of being bent on perdition: the dispute must continue. 'Afterwards everything was again as it was beforehand,' Hebel writes – 'only a little worse' (*also war nachher wieder wie vorher, höchstens ein wenig schlimmer*).[66] The 'well-known dispute' that Kierkegaard alludes to is thus a conversation that never reaches a conclusion: a conversation whose movement through contradictory positions does not lead to a reconciliation but only lapses back into its initial condition. This return to its initial condition is by no means a return by which this dispute comes into its own, a return that would coincide with an overcoming of the contradictions that had propelled this dispute. As the final sentence of the story emphasises, this return is a regression: a lapse back into the same condition from which it had started – a condition that may be marked by a certain displacement but certainly no improvement.

When Kierkegaard evokes this 'well-known dispute' that is fated to repeat itself he frames it in linguistic terms: what makes this conversation possible and even necessary is here claimed to be 'the completely vague and indeterminate meaning of words' (*aldeles vage og ubestemte Betydning af Ordene*).[67] The structural resistance of words towards conceptual determination is here portrayed *in extremis*, pushed to the point where the word is completely and fully indeterminate, utterly devoid of conceptual content or a referential function. It is this indeterminacy, which threatens the significance of every word and every sentence, dissolving the conceptual disjunction with which this dispute begins and making it impossible for any

[65] Ibid.
[66] Hebel, 'Die Bekehrung', in *Schätzkastlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes*, 276.
[67] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.

conversation to come to a conclusion. No sentence could ever be a final sentence, no word could be a final word – a word of which the meaning could be securely and conclusively fixed. Even in the moment that a supposedly conclusive sentence is first pronounced, its stability is already threatened by an uncertainty. If all words are unreliable in the sense in which Kierkegaard already sought to expose in the *Morning Observations*, if it is impossible to distinguish with complete certainty between the proper and the improper, it would be equally impossible to distinguish between logic and rhetoric, syllogism and wordplay. If the 'well-known dispute' captures this indeterminacy of words in an exemplary manner, this is because it shows that under the condition of the 'vague and indeterminate meaning of words' nothing could guarantee that the conversation out of which this concluding sentence issued was led by logical necessity rather than rhetorical 'persuasion' (*overbeviste*) – the word that Kierkegaard uses to characterise the dispute. If the *logos* is supposed to bring about its immanent fulfilment through a conversation, there could be no sufficient grounds on which to decide where it had come to an end. Under such conditions, every dispute – and above all the polemic, the dispute par excellence – has become 'useless and bland' (*unyttig som vammel*). Bland, because no conceptual distinction could ever be secured against this indeterminacy; useless, for there is no possible condition under which the outcome of a polemic could ever be settled, no dispute that could ever be brought to a conclusion.

Hastværks-Pressen

Once driven to its extreme, the 'confusion' that disturbs the semantic function of language thus amounts to a strange combination of idleness and movement. At this extreme point, words no longer convey a determinate meaning: the concept has, to use an expression that Kierkegaard uses throughout the unfinished article, 'evaporated' (*forflygtiget*).[68] What is left of language once the concept has evaporated is the mere word: a word that no longer fulfils the function assigned to it by a speaker and ceases to serve as a vehicle for the concept. But even though language ceases to operate in this state of utter confusion it nevertheless continues to be spoken; even without a speaker or the immanent tendency of the concept towards the overcoming of contradictions, words continue to be driven forward by their own *Selbstsucht*, language itself continues to speak. Just as the *Morning Observations* took the language of the newspapers as a privileged site of the linguistic confusion in which every contradiction must become inoperative, so Kierkegaard's unpublished article turns to the sphere of journalism to provide an image of this language that drives itself on. Towards the end of this extensive fragment, in its final paragraphs, Kierkegaard's anonymous author writes:

[68] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.

> In everything one can detect the invention that is so characteristic of the age (*Tidsalderen*): the rapid printing press (*Hastværks-Pressen*) – even in the curious reflectiveness (*Reflexion*) that has entered our age, with the effect that it, while constantly limiting its expressions through reflection, never really gets to say something. This curious verbosity (*Vidtløftighed*) has also suppressed the usage of sayings (*Ordsprog*) which save so much time and talk (*Tid og Tale*) and has instead encouraged the emergence of a sort of oratorical chatter (*oratorisk Passiar*), which has indeed even taken over our meals (*Maaltider*).[69]

Nothing thus better characterises this time, 'the age', than the intervention that was at the heart of the production of newspapers at the time this fragment was written: the so-called *Hastværks-Pressen*, the rapid printing press of which descriptions and images circulated on the pages of newspapers in the first decades of the early nineteenth century. While the manual Gutenberg press had a special relation to the book form, this recent invention owed its name – *Hastværk* literally means 'hasty work' – to its role in the production of newspapers and other journalistic ephemera. In contrast to the different types of printing presses that preceded it, the invention that is 'so characteristic of the age' was a mechanic press, driven by pressure cylinders. The *Hastværks-Pressen*, in other words, provides the image of an automaton: a machine that moves itself, no longer in need of a subject that operates it, spitting out pages and pages full of text. This machine prints words on the page in the absence of a speaking subject or even a subject who reproduces this speech by operating the press; words are inscribed, that is to say, printed on sheets of paper, without a speaker whose presence would endow these words with their original meaning. The words that are spat out by this automaton have an irreducible exteriority, one that exceeds the exteriority characteristic of the scene of writing or even the scene of printing. The machine therefore anticipates the image of a 'talking machine' (*Talemaskine*) to which Kierkegaard refers later in his work – a machine 'could say the same thing that spirit had said, but does not say it by virtue of spirit'.[70] In its production of words in the absence of a speaker, the *Hastværks-Pressen* not only brings to the fore the exteriority of words, emphasising the dimension of language that is devoid of all conceptual content or referential function; it also conjures up the image of speech that continues even in the absence of a speaker, of words that continue to be uttered without spirit, of language that propels itself onwards even though it no longer functions as a vehicle for concept or meaning. If this invention can be detected 'in everything', this is not because of the speed of its production or because of its name, which is easily mistaken to suggest the insipid critique of the 'hasty

[69] Ibid.

[70] The image of the talking machine is introduced in the section on 'spiritlessness' of *The Concept of Anxiety*: 'Spiritlessness can say exactly the same thing that the richest spirit has said, but it does not say it by virtue of spirit. Man qualified as spiritless has become a talking machine, and there is nothing to prevent him from repeating by rote a philosophical rigmarole, a confession of faith, or a political recitation.' (SV IV: 364; CA, 95).

times' that had already become a worn-out cliché in the early nineteenth century; this machine owes its all-pervasive character to the image it conjures up, namely an image of language as something that speaks and moves by itself.

Because of this 'automatic', self-moving character of language, all speech risks falling prey to a 'curious verbosity' (*Vidtløftigkeit*).[71] The speech of language is a verbosity par excellence: for the tendency of the verbose speaker to use more words than necessary in order to convey a meaning is driven to an extreme in the speech of language, which speaks in words that are utterly devoid of referentiality or conceptuality. If the 'saying' (*Ordsprog*) says a lot in the least amount of words and 'saves time and talk' because it is saturated with meaning, the verbose speech of language expends time and talk without ever saying anything, without conveying any meaning. If no speaker – even spirit – could bring language fully under control, if this verbosity always plays out in language, then every utterance risks becoming *Vidtløftig* – the cognate of the German *Weitläufig* – in the sense that it never moves straight, could never determine its meaning with complete efficiency. All speech, even the conversation through which the *logos* learns to speak about itself, is marred by this verbosity and must risk ending up in 'oratorical chatter' (*oratorisk Passiar*). Such chatter is oratorical in the sense that it has nothing to do with logic and can never brought under its control of the concept; it plays out in the relationship between signs, while their respective meaning has become of secondary importance. This movement of language – the *Selbstsucht* of words – always draws the movement of the concept off its course, leads it astray, keeps it from reaching a conclusion. This verbosity affects not only the presentation of the concept, the moment where the concept must externalise itself in order to appear for itself, the moment of writing that must be marred by the impossibility to ever say what is thought with complete efficiency; it must also affect the moment where this is taken back up into the concept, the moment of reading or appropriation – and it is for this reason that Kierkegaard will claim that this verbosity has even 'taken over our meals' (*Maaltider*).[72]

If this 'oratorical chatter' is characteristic of the time in which the author of Kierkegaard's unfinished article is writing, this is because it stands in a special relation to what Kierkegaard calls the 'whole newer development' – the 'development' of philosophical thought that spans from Kant to Hegel. This chatter does not just affect the speculative philosophy, in which this development finds its conclusion; it is first brought to light by the *Reflexionsphilosophie* from which this development had originated – but not without corroding the foundations that it had

[71] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.
[72] For a detailed analysis of the role of 'reading' in Hegel and its intimate relation to the figure of eating, see Hamacher, *Pleroma*, 1–80.

set up to secure itself from it. For this reason Kierkegaard points out that the image of the rapid printing press, the image of language that speaks of itself without a speaker, is already manifest in 'the curious reflectiveness (*Reflexion*) that has entered our age'. It is in the *Reflexionsphilosophie* that the conversation begins by which speech is first supposed to learn to speak about itself, for it is here that it discovers that its reference to particular things relied on a naïve faith in their independent subsistence.[73] Instead speech will refer to the speaking self; but because this reference to the self requires a reference to things from which it distinguishes itself, it can never secure its distinctness. In this speaking about the one who speaks, language is emptied to such an extent that it no longer refers to the things determined in speech; its referential function is suspended altogether. Before speculative thought has attempted to find a ground in pure conceptual language, the *Reflexionsphilosophie* has already amounted to empty talk, a language utterly devoid of its referentiality – the price that speech has to pay for being secured is that it 'never really gets to say something' (*egenlig ikke faaer sagt Noget*).[74]

If the 'age' to which Kierkegaard refers is defined by this development, the moment in which the unpublished newspaper article is written – the 'instant' with which its opening paragraph began – is located *after* the conclusion of this development in the speculative philosophy of Hegel. If the *Hastværks-Pressen* presents an image of the ineluctable conclusion of the 'whole newer development' – a development that is itself supposed to be the final stage of the development of spirit where the concept comes into its own – this would be a conclusion of a strange kind: a conclusion that does not quite manage to come to an end, an end that does not quite manage to conclude. That nothing better characterises the age than this recent invention may indeed be due to the fact that it offers a specific image of movement: driven by a mechanism of pressure cylinders, the *Hastværks-Pressen* presents before anything else a spectacle of turning wheels and rotating cylinders, an image of an endless spinning on the spot. Yet it is the word that was used to describe the workings of this machinery – the *Eisenbahnbewegung* – that draws out the concrete historical form of this movement without an end. In its entire machinery, the operations of the *Hastværks-Pressen* resembles the movement of the train, Kierkegaard's preferred allegory of the self-propelling spirit that progresses along the 'systematic world-historical railroad'; but if this printing press resembles the movement of a locomotive, it is that of a locomotion at a standstill, caught on the spot even if its machinery is running at full speed.

[73] Peter Fenves offers an analysis of the relation between Kierkegaard's concept of 'chatter' and the 'newer development' that spans from Kant to Hegel in the introductory chapter to his *Chatter*, 14–18.
[74] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.

In its resemblance to a train that is running on the spot, the automatic printing press presents a peculiar image of the age in which the 'whole newer development' – and, with it, the entire history of the unfolding of spirit – is supposed to have come to a conclusion. The spirit has come into its own, the concept has fully comprehended itself; and yet words continue to be spoken, language continues to lead a life of its own. The name that Kierkegaard reserves for this stage that follows the conclusion of a development – a 'stage' that no longer deserves to be called as such, insofar as it is no longer part of the 'development' that precedes it – is of course *parody*. 'Every development usually ends with a parodying of itself and such a parody is an assurance that this development has outlived itself (*overlevet sig selv*),' Kierkegaard writes in his dissertation.[75] What 'outlives' the development par excellence, namely the immanent development of the concept, is that which exceeds its 'logic': language as such, empty language, without meaning or a qualified speaker. The newspaper would be the emblematic site of this 'outliving', a site where the *logos* lives on after it has come into its own. The conclusion presented in this image is marked neither by pleromatic presence nor by a definite absence: the development of the *logos* ends in a ghostly presence, where speech continues even though there is nothing left to say. This image of the 'age' anticipates a passage that will be included in the second part of *Either/Or*: 'Our whole time (*tiden*) is at once comic and tragic – tragic because it is perishing (*gaaer under*), comic because it persists (*bestaaer*). If it were possible to imagine that an inanimate body could still perform the usual functions for a little while it would be comic and tragic in the same way.'[76] The persistence of which Kierkegaard speaks here is comic only to the extent that it persists despite perishing, to the extent that it persists after perishing: that the age is tragic and comic at the same time would mean that its tragic elements are ultimately absorbed into a comedy. In the 'inanimate body' that is described here we see the image of an empty, purely self-referential language whose appearance Kierkegaard finds to be so characteristic of the age: a language of words that keeps being spoken even when spirit no longer breathes life into it, a language that is ultimately devoid of concept or meaning. The 'spiritual bankruptcy' announced by the author of Kierkegaard's unfinished newspaper article is perhaps nothing but the ghostly life that is conjured up here in a dramatic form: the life of an inanimate word that somehow still continues to perform its old functions in the absence of a speaker to animate it.[77]

Deficiency and redemption

The *Sprogforvirring* which the author of Kierkegaard's unfinished newspaper article warns against in the strongest possible terms is thus the name for a structural deficiency – a

[75] SV XIII: 214; CI, 128.
[76] SV II: 18; EO2, 19.
[77] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.

deficiency that is at work in all human thought and knowing insofar as these have a necessarily linguistic character. The disavowal of this deficiency is precisely what characterises 'philosophy' in the sense in which Kierkegaard uses the word in his early writings, that is to say, philosophy insofar as it has been brought to a completion in the Hegelian system. Already in a diary entry written in 1835, the year before the publication of his early newspaper articles, Kierkegaard describes the 'chasm' between philosophy and Christianity in terms of their relation to this deficiency: 'Christianity stipulates that human cognition is deficient (*mangelfuld*) due to sin, which is then rectified in Christianity. The philosopher tries qua man to account for matters of God and the world.'[78] The suspicion that guides Kierkegaard's reflections on language in the early writings is that this defectiveness does not merely affect the relation between thought and the world. The confusion that is thematised throughout these writings and exposed time and again by his practice of misreading points to a deficiency that is more unsettling than the misrelation between thought and world: namely a misrelation at work within the *logos* itself. Hamann's well-known but enigmatic proposition on this misrelation – 'not only the entire ability to think rests on language [...] but language is also the *crux of the misunderstanding of reason with itself*'[79] – is always in the background of Kierkegaard's early writings. As these texts never cease to expose, thought can never be secured against the 'confusion' that is at work in it precisely insofar as it has an irreducibly linguistic dimension – a dimension that can never be fully brought under the control of the concept. Not only is it impossible to capture the world in a single syllogism, as Kierkegaard already claims in one of the early diary fragments;[80] every proposition, syllogism and systematic construct is disturbed by an impulse in and of the same language that renders it possible in the first place.

The deficiency that stamps human language after the fall is pushed to an extreme in the language of journalism: for it is in Kierkegaard's hyperbolic portrayals of the 'oratorical chatter' of the newspapers that language shows itself to be not merely an unreliable carrier of meaning but ultimately meaningless. Precisely at this extreme point, however, fallen language calls with most intensity for relief from this deficiency, or what Kierkegaard will refer to elsewhere in the fragment from 1835 as an 'urge towards redemption (*Trang til Forløsning*)'.[81] This urge is not an intention, it does not point to a goal that can in any way be positively posited; it indicates an intensity that emerges from a lack. This intensity corresponds to the

[78] Pap. I A 94; AA, 13.
[79] Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 3, 286.
[80] Pap. II A 138; DD, 37. Kierkegaard writes here with reference to Hamann: 'Nor [...] can the humorist ever really become a systematiser, for he regards every system as a renewed attempt in the familiar Blicherian manner to blow up the whole world with a single syllogism, whereas he himself has an eye for the incommensurable (*det Incommensurable*), which the philosopher can never account for (*beregne*) and therefore must despise.'
[81] Pap. I A 94; AA, 13.

term Kierkegaard uses to designate the 'deficiency' of human thought and knowledge after the fall, *Mangelfuldhed*, which literally designates a fullness of lack, a lack that charges what is affected by it. Exposing the defective character of fallen language is such a crucial aspect of the early writings because it is only out of this deficiency that the necessity of its reparation first arises.[82]

In this light it becomes possible to understand an otherwise obscure remark that Kierkegaard makes towards the end of the fragment of the polemical fragment which had begun to warn against the threat of an all-pervasive confusion of tongues: the assertion that journalism has a special relationship to the concept of 'redemption'. After having discussed a number of concepts that threaten to be dissolved in the confusion that is at work in all language after the fall, Kierkegaard's author concludes:

> And I still have not even mentioned the concept which has not only been made nebulous (*forflygtiget*) like the others but has indeed been profaned: the concept of redemption (*Begrebet Forløsning*) – a concept which journalism in particular has adopted with a certain preference (*Forkærlighed*) and is now attributed to everyone, from the greatest hero of freedom all the way down to the baker or butcher, who bring redemption to their neighbourhood insofar as they sell their wares a tiny bit cheaper than others.[83]

The concept of redemption would have a special place in the language of journalism precisely because it is in journalism that the 'confusion of tongues' that affects all language after the fall is pushed to an extreme. Nowhere is this confusion more pronounced, more ironically evident than in the concept that is supposed to signify the relief from sin and the renewal of paradise in an unforeseeable and unknowable future. The evaporation of the concept of redemption, the 'profanation' of precisely that concept which Kierkegaard in his diary entry of 1835 had considered 'one of the most essential features of Christianity', is driven to a ridiculous extreme in his portrayal of its application in the language of journalism. Not only is the concept applied here within the sphere of world history as it is captured in the figure of the 'hero of freedom' (*Frihedshelt*) and thus stripped of its status as a limit concept, a concept that, in the last instance, designates precisely the end of historical development and points to a future that must remain inaccessible from within the sphere of history; in this application, the radical discontinuity that the concept is supposed to designate gives way to a description of the most incremental, quantitative change – wares that are sold a 'tiny bit cheaper' than before. In the

[82] '[P]hilosophy from this point of view would not even serve as a transition to Christianity [...] and the whole idea of an impulse towards redemption would have to enter man from quite another side; that is, it would first of all have to be felt and then known. [...] Christianity stipulates the defectiveness of human cognition due to sin, which is then rectified in Christianity.' (Pap. I A 94; AA, 13).
[83] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.

erasure of these distinguishing characteristics, the concept of redemption ceases to have a determinate meaning: once the concept has 'evaporated' entirely, what is left of it is a mere word. But even though this word – *Forløsning* – would no longer be able to bring that of which it speaks to conceptual determination; it would, as a mere word, still harbour an indeterminate *Trang* to mean something; the word would still point to a meaning that is as yet outstanding.

Retrieval of words

In the same unpublished newspaper article where Kierkegaard has his anonymous author warn against an all-pervasive confusion, there is one passage that refers – obliquely, in passing – to the possibility of a redemption of language, the possibility of a retrieval of a lost fullness of words. Towards the end of this fragment, Kierkegaard's author raises the question of what is to be done in the light of this threatening confusion, how this dangerous loquacity of language can be kept at bay, in order to provide the following response:

> Undoubtedly it would be best if one could bring to silence the jingling clocks of our time (*Tidens Sangklokke*); but because this will probably not succeed, we can at least join our financial men by shouting to the people: savings, energetic and bold savings (*Besparelser*)! [...] Besides this we could wish (*ønske*) that forcefully equipped men will make their appearance, who would win back (*gjenvandt*) the lost force and meaning of words (*Ordenes tabte Kraft og Betydning*), like Luther has won back the concept of faith for his time (*gjenvandt for sin Tid Begrebet Tro*).[84]

The response begins from an extreme. Confusion would be brought to a halt when there is no more speech, when *Tidens Sangklokke* would be brought to silence. But that this silence is 'probably' not going to happen, that we cannot count on it or take it into account, is because the ringing of these clocks is not merely bound to the *Tid* as the 'age' – it is not merely the conversation of a particular epoch that would need to be silenced – but to *Tid* in the sense of time itself. As long as time passes, language will continue to be spoken and continue to speak. The only available option thus seems to be a compromise. What remains is the task to be sparing in speaking, according to an economy that would resemble that of the 'financial men' in the crisis evoked at the beginning of the letter; to cut back one's speech, to speak efficiently, to never say more than is strictly necessary.[85] But such sparing speech could never secure itself

[84] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.

[85] In a journal fragment from the same period, Kierkegaard referred to Hamann as an example of such 'sparing' use of language. 'Just as Socrates left no books, Hamann left only as much as the modern period's rage for writing (*den nyere Tids Skrivesyge*) made relatively necessary, and furthermore only occasional pieces (*Leilighedsskrifter*).' (Pap. II A 138; DD, 37).

from the confusion that is at work in all language; it could never guarantee that it does not say too much or nothing at all, and it would still be stamped by the defective economy that is thematised throughout the early writings. It is certainly no accident that the exhortation that Kierkegaard's author uses here – 'savings, energetic and bold savings' – is recited directly from a newspaper article on the financial crisis published shortly before and hovers between literal and figural meaning. As soon as this exhortation has been uttered, speech has already exposed itself to the loquacity of words, has already begun to say more than it was meant to say, has already been confronted by the impossibility of ever adequately conveying meaning, without remainder. It is within this defective economy that Kierkegaard's author introduces another possibility – the possibility of 'winning back the lost force and meaning of words'. Like the insistence on a certain efficiency of speech in the previous sentence, this phrase seems to insist on the retrieval of a proper meaning – a meaning that words originally possessed but that has now been lost. If speaking 'sparingly' is impossible because words always say more than what they are meant to say, an adequate economy of speech could only be established if the meaning of words could be determined without ambiguity. On this reading, the example that Kierkegaard's author provides would suggest that the model for such retrieval of meaning is a return to scripture, a primal text in which a proper meaning is fixed once and for all.

But like the orthographic complaints that punctuate Kierkegaard's newspaper articles of the time, this remark is not without irony. This is not only intimated by the reference to the odd authority that would suppress the rebellion of words, the 'forcefully equipped men' who would retrieve and stabilise a lost meaning – an image that evokes the many references to a policing of language that will return in Kierkegaard's later writings. Such a rescue operation already carries its own impossibility within itself, insofar as the confusion it attempts to suppress precedes all intentional activity. More than this image it is, however, the reference to Luther's undertaking that destabilises the call for a retrieval of the 'lost force and meaning' of words and suggests the possibility of a different reading. For if Luther contributed anything to retrieval of the lost meaning of a word – faith, *Tro* – it is precisely that it is not reducible to a concept: insofar as faith is precisely what escapes understanding and communicability, it must retain a resistance to conceptuality. If the word 'faith' would have lost a certain 'force and meaning', this is not the loss of strict conceptual delimitation but rather a loss that is inherent in the reduction of faith to a concept – a loss that is inherent in conceptuality itself. Insofar as Luther precisely uncovered the resistance of the concept of faith to every attempt at conceptual clarification, the example provided by Kierkegaard's author unwittingly reverses the ostensible meaning of the preceding sentence. The retrieval of the 'lost force and meaning' of words would not involve the unambiguous determination and permanent fixation of meaning but rather a retrieval of that which never ceases to be lost in language insofar as it is irreducibly conceptual. What is retrieved here is something in language that precedes the imposition of

conceptuality and can never be reduced to it. Such retrieval would therefore also have to remain inaccessible from within conceptual language: it would be a retrieval that cannot be represented as a determinate occurrence and brought about through intentional activity; it can only be intimated as an indeterminate possibility that may be 'wished' for.

Kierkegaard does not elaborate this schema of loss and retrieval in the unpublished polemical fragment. But the outlines of such a schema are provided by Hamann's previously discussed conception of speech as translation. When Hamann describes speech as a 'translation from an angelic to human tongue', this translation is not to be mistaken for the conscious activity of an already constituted speaker – the translator – who translates one already understandable language into another. The angelic language first becomes manifest in its transposition into a human language – but only as a language that is already lost. There is no access to this purely spiritual language prior to its translation into a language of words. Thought first manifests itself in the *Knechtsgestalt* of human language: before it is spoken the thought is, as Hamann writes elsewhere, an 'invisible embryo'.[86] Only in speech does the thought become visible; but it does so only by having already been translated, transformed into a word, that is, something other than itself. The word simultaneously reveals the thought and conceals it; it is an *Offenbarung* that at the same time denies access to what is revealed. The thought is not made present in language; it manifests itself only as something that is irreducibly anterior to speech. If speech is a transposition from an angelic into a human tongue, this means that it is stamped by a structural loss: the thought first becomes manifest in the word, but in doing so it will have already been lost.

Kierkegaard alludes to this anteriority on one occasion in the polemical fragment. In the margins of the same unfinished fragment that referred to a 'lost force and meaning of words' he adds the following note: 'Just as there are certain people who smooth out every little wrinkle in a sheet of paper (*Ujævnhed i Papiret*) with an instinctive vigor (*instinctmæssig Heftighed*), so are there people who blurt out a name as soon as they hear it.'[87] The image presented here may be read in relation to Hamann's conception of speech as *Übersetzung*, where the transposition of an angelic into a human tongue returns as an interplay of hearing a name and blurting it out. The 'certain people' (*visse Mennesker*) of which Kierkegaard's author speaks here may be read not as a reference to this or that person but rather to human beings in general, just as the image of hearing and speaking offered here may be read as an attempt to capture a basic structure of human speech. The words used to describe the transposition from hearing to speaking, *instinctmæssig* and *Heftighed*, suggest that this

[86] Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 2, 176.
[87] Pap. I A 328; CC, 12.

transposition precedes every conscious intention: that a name is blurted out as soon as it is heard is beyond the control of any speaker. As the comparison to the smoothing out of a piece of paper suggests, what is heard and blurted out – the name (*Navn*) – does not remain intact. Just as the wrinkles and creases of a piece of paper are smoothed out in order to secure its evenness and homogeneity, so the singular character of the name would have been effaced when it is blurted out, the name would have turned into a concept. But the speaker is not conscious of the name that has been effaced. Not only is the name blurted out 'instinctively', before the speaker would have become conscious of it; this blurting out also occurs as soon as the name has been heard – *strax*, 'instantaneously'. Before the speaker could have become consciously aware of the name that is heard, the name has already been spoken; the speaker is denied access to the name that was heard, but only hears himself blurting out a name that is always already stripped of its singularity, like a piece of paper whose wrinkles have been smoothed out.

What emerges from Kierkegaard's unpublished newspaper article is a strange economy of speech: to speak is to feel a loss, without ever being able to know what has been lost. The insight that is already at work in Hamann's writings but pushed to its extreme by Kierkegaard in the early writings is that the word that the speaker is left with, the word that is 'blurted out', is, in the end, utterly indeterminate – an empty word that no longer acts as a vehicle of a determinate meaning. But just as little as this word could be reduced to its semantic function, it cannot help to mean or refer. On the one hand, this word points to a thought that has already been lost as soon as it has been spoken and manifests itself only as pure anteriority; on the other hand, it promises the possibility of retrieving this meaning.[88] One feels that one has lost something, but does not know that it is; only in its retrieval – that one can only wish for – will what has been lost make itself known. The *Betydning* whose loss and recovery Kierkegaard alludes to never manifests itself in the present, only in the past and the future – but here it manifests itself as something indeterminate, something that must remain unsayable in the present but intimates itself as the promise of a future that cannot be reduced to any present. It is precisely this promise that will be at the centre of the reflections on time and history that Kierkegaard will elaborate in his writings of the following years – reflections that will play out around the schema of loss and repetition that had surfaced in outline in his early reflections on language and that will crystallise in his concept of the 'instant'.

[88] Szondi touches on the relation between language and time harboured in Kierkegaard's theory of irony in his study of Romantic irony in *Satz und Gegensatz*, 5–18. An alternative account of this relation is provided by Paul de Man in his essay 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in *Blindness and Insight*, 187–228.

The instant

Kierkegaard's reflections on historical time crystallise around a concept to which he allocated a central importance but that retains an enigmatic character: that of the 'instant' (*Øieblik*).[89] That this category stands in a certain relation to his preoccupation with journalism is suggested by its conspicuous appearance in the title of his last published work: the self-published polemical flysheet *The Instant*, of which ten issues appeared until his death in 1855. Both the title of the publication and Kierkegaard's reference to it as a *Blad*, a 'paper' or literally a 'sheet', imply an intimate relation between the writing and time. The writing that is to unfold on its pages – the famous polemic against *det Bestaaende*, which is usually translated as 'the establishment' but is more accurately rendered as 'the existing', for what is attacked here is at bottom what subsists, what claims to maintain itself in its presence[90] – this writing would have an emphatically ephemeral character: it would be a writing that is not meant to endure but instead to enter into a certain relation to the moment in which it is written. And yet, when Kierkegaard announces this paper in an 'extra' (*Følgeblad*) that is appended to its first issue he begins precisely by pointing out that it is in the last instance not concerned with the ephemeral, not with something passing, indeed not with anything pertaining to time as such:

> In my work I have now got so near to the contemporary (*Samtiden*), the instant, that I cannot do without an organ by means of which I can instantly address myself to the contemporary; and this I have called: *The Instant*. [...] I call this organ *The Instant*. Yet it is nothing ephemeral (*noget Ephemert*) that I want, just as it was nothing ephemeral I wanted before; no, it was and is something eternal.[91]

The 'organ' announced here will certainly address ephemeral matters; it will come as close as possible to its own time, the contemporary, and it will do so in a language that accommodates to the 'life of the weekday',[92] a prompt language that will be elaborated in the form of concise articles and pithy observations that are often no longer than a few sentences, gathered under the title 'brief notes'.[93] But this paper will not be concerned with its time in isolation; it will be

[89] The importance of the concept of the instant for Kierkegaard is often noted but only rarely examined in detail. For an attempt at a comprehensive discussion of the role of the concept throughout Kierkegaard's work, see David Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant: On Beginnings*.

[90] The term occurs throughout *The Instant*; in the first issue, for instance, Kierkegaard refers to his polemic as a 'protest against the existing' (*Indsigelse mod det Bestaaende*). (SV XIV: 107). In a newspaper article of 1854 Kierkegaard summarises the single 'thesis' of his polemical endeavour: 'O Luther, you had 95 theses. Terrible! [...] But the matter is even more terrible: there is only one thesis. The Christianity of the New Testament does not exist (*er ikke til*).' (SV XIV: 45).

[91] SV XIV: 115a.

[92] SV XI: B 142.

[93] Cf. SV XIV: 358–63.

concerned only with *Samtiden* insofar as it stands in relation to another time, a time that is no time at all, at least in the sense of a passing time that can be described as ephemeral – a time that Kierkegaard calls 'eternal'. *The Instant* will be the name for a paper concerned with the relation between these two yet to be determined temporal dimensions: the ephemeral and the eternal. All ephemeral matters of which this *Blatt* will speak must appear only in their relation to the eternal. That this relation is not without its complications is suggested by Kierkegaard's choice of words: for as soon as it is measured against the eternal, the ephemeral seems to be reduced to a *noget*, a nothing, without however being replaced by something else – at least not something that has a positive presence, as is indicated by the term that is repeated twice in order to prepare the appearance of the eternal in this passage, a 'wanting' (*villen*): a term that introduces the 'eternal' as something that, despite having been wanted before and being wanted yet again in the moment in which this *Følgeblad* is written, remains outstanding.

In the announcement of *The Instant* one could recognise the outlines of Kierkegaard's programmatic reflections on the *Øieblik* in a book that was published around ten years earlier, *The Concept of Anxiety*, whose central chapter will revolve around a constantly renewed attempt of its pseudonymous author, Vigilius Haufniensis, to define this concept in terms of a relation between *Tiden* and *Evigheden*. When it appears in Haufniensis' treatise, the concept is emphatically related to a problem that remains implicit in the announcement of his paper even though it will motivate the polemic that will unfold on its pages: the problem of the possibility of history.[94] In *The Concept of Anxiety*, the category of the instant is introduced in the context of an examination of historical time – an examination that does not make reference to actual occurrences but is only concerned with the exposure of the field in which the occurrence of history first becomes possible. That Kierkegaard's most intense engagement with the problem of historical time takes place in this book hardly comes as a surprise if one recalls that 'anxiety' (*Angest*) here serves first and foremost as the name for the inherent disquietude of spirit – an 'unrest' (*Urolighed*) that determines its necessarily historical character.[95] The model for this disquietude is provided in the famous first chapter of the book, where Haufniensis interprets the story of the fall as a story of an anxiety to which even Adam and Eve are exposed in their otherwise tranquil satisfaction. Anxiety is here interpreted along the lines of Hamann, who had already spoken of anxiety as an 'impertinent unrest' (*impertinente Unruhe*) that traverses even the bliss of paradise.[96] In Kierkegaard's account, this impertinent unrest is

[94] The relation between historicity, anxiety and language is discussed in detail in Peter Fenves' essay on *The Concept of Anxiety* in *"Chatter"*, 75–84.

[95] See for instance SV IV: 293; CA, 21 and SV IV: 341; CA, 7.

[96] Kierkegaard cites the passage in a footnote to the last page of the book: 'This anxiety in the world is the only proof of our heterogeneity. [...] This impertinent disquiet, this holy hypochondria is perhaps the

set in relation to the problem of the possibility of history. Anxiety is here construed as the unrest that draws spirit out of its dream-like state of 'innocence' and brings about the fall into history. Anxiety names the disquietude that pervades spirit even where it seems to be completely at rest – a disquietude that never ceases to set spirit in motion and thus provides the precondition for the commencement of history itself.

What Kierkegaard calls *Angest* therefore serves as a name – derived from the Christian tradition – for the disquietude that Hegel had discovered to be constitutive of spirit.[97] The implicit polemic with Hegel's understanding of this disquietude will be that it is not restless enough; that it seeks relief from this restlessness in the concept and, first of all, in the conception of time to which its movement gives rise. With this in mind it is not surprising that *The Concept of Anxiety* reserves a special place for the problem of historical time. If time is, for Hegel, precisely the self-manifestation of the concept in its absolute restlessness – a restlessness that is implied in the definition of time as the 'existent concept itself' in the preface to the *Phenomenology*[98] – then Kierkegaard's attempts to rethink this disquietude would have to be accompanied by an alternative conception of time. This alternative conception of time is developed in the middle chapter of the book, where Haufniensis here abandons the account of spirit he has carefully built up around the concept of anxiety and its related concepts of innocence, sin and fall, only in order to begin his exposition once again, from scratch, but now in strictly temporal terms. The analysis of the 'impertinent unrest' that first makes history possible is no longer organised around the concept of spirit but around a temporal concept: that of the *Øieblik* – and the yet to be determined that is indicated by it, the relation between 'time' and 'eternity', or what Haufniensis will call 'the restless disturber'.[99]

Empty time

The pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety* starts his exposition of the instant from a critique of the classical conception of time. Not only is this a conception of time to which Hegel, if we trust Haufniensis' hints, still remains indebted; it is also a conception of time that governs and determines what may be called the ordinary experience of time – an experience of

fire with which we season sacrificial animals in order to preserve us from the putrefaction of the current *seculi*.' (SV IV: 427; CA, 162).

[97] This restlessness is articulated in an exemplary manner in the *Phenomenology*: 'Consciousness [...] is something that goes beyond itself. [...] If it wishes to remain in a state of unthinking inertia, then thought troubles its thoughtlessness, and its own unrest disturbs its inertia.' (GW 3: 75; PS, §80).

[98] 'As for time, it is the existent concept itself.' (GW 3: 45–46; PS, §46). For a detailed discussion of Hegel's concept of time and its relation to the classical Aristotelian notion of time, see Derrida, '*Ousia* and *Grammē*: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*', 31–68; and Hamacher, *Pleroma*, 206–19.

[99] SV IV: 417; CA, 152.

time in which the future is thought in a continuity with the past, the past in a continuity with the future and the present as an intermediary of the two.[100] Haufniensis begins his critique of this classical conception by recalling what he refers to as the 'correct' (*rigtig*) determination of time – that is to say, a definition that may seem to be correct at this point of the exposition but will show itself to have only a partial truth in the temporal experience that will be articulated over the course of the chapter. 'Time, correctly determined, is infinite succession (*uendlige Succession*),' Haufniensis posits – only to add directly that it would be incorrect to assume that this provides a sufficient ground for further determining time in terms of a past, present and future.[101] If it is understood as infinite succession, no ground could ever be found within time itself to distinguish between a present, past and future. Recalling one of the aporias that has haunted discussions of the problem of time throughout the philosophical tradition, Haufniensis points out that such a distinction would seem to require finding a 'foothold' (*Fodfæste*), a point that would provide secure support for this distinction: especially if such a foothold would have to be something present (*Naervarende*), a moment that would act as a dividing point between past, present and future. 'Precisely because every moment (*Moment*), as well as the sum of moments, is a process (a passing by), no moment is present, and in time there is accordingly neither a present nor a past nor a future.'[102] The terms Haufniensis uses here are significant: just as the procession of the *Proces* of time is determined as a passing by, a *Gaaen-forbi*, so the *Moment* invokes the classical 'atom of time' as a now that eludes presence to the extent that it is always on the move. The now, as the form in which time must be given according to the classical conception of time, is also the form in which time can only be given as that which it is not; but if time is given in the now, it has always already vanished, is always already no longer.[103] Insofar as it is impossible to find a foothold in a now, a moment that is present, it would therefore also be impossible to find a secure ground for the distinction between a past, present and a future within time itself.

Whoever nevertheless insists on positing a present, a past and a future from within time can only do so by betraying time – and its infinite succession – by spatialising it. Haufniensis points out that time is not genuinely thought in this spatialisation but merely subjected to *Forestilling*, representation: 'Thinking that this division can be upheld is due to the *spatialisation* of a moment, but this brings the infinite succession to a halt; it is through introducing representation, by allowing time to be represented instead of being thought. But also this is to go about it incorrectly, for the infinite succession of time is an infinitely

[100] Cf. SV IV: 360; CA, 90.
[101] SV IV: 355; CA, 85.
[102] SV IV: 355; CA, 85.
[103] This aporia is already described in Aristotle's account of time in his *Physics*. 'In one sense it has been and is no longer, and in another sense, it will be and is not yet.' *Physics*, 217b.

contentless present (*uendeligt indholdsløst Nærværende*) even for our powers of representation.'[104] The implicit target here is not merely the classical Aristotelian conception of time but above all Hegel's account of the emergence of time-consciousness in the opening section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Haufniensis alludes on several occasions to this section, which provides an exposition of the release of the absolute in time through the dialectic of 'sense-certainty'. In the first paragraphs of this exposition, Hegel demonstrates that the experience of time first becomes possible on the condition that spirit has moved through two stages, which roughly correspond to the two moments that Haufniensis refers to as time 'thought' and time 'represented'. The section famously begins by unfolding the dialectic of the This of which sense-certainty finds itself to be immediately aware – a sensuous This which is, in turn, considered in the 'double shape of its being, as the *Now* and the *Here'*.[105] In this initial stage, no experience of time in general is as yet possible: the immediate self that corresponds to the sensuous This is only certain of a particular Now of which it is immediately aware. When it is asked about the now of which it is immediately certain ('What is the now?') it can only answer by enunciating a determinate time ('The now is the Night'). Before gaining a representation of time, the immediate self will first have to go through the attempt to preserve the truth of this now by writing it down, only to discover that this truth has, as Hegel famously writes, become 'stale' (*schal*) the moment after it has been written down.[106] Writing, which is supposed to preserve the truth of the 'now' – and to demonstrate its permanence and persistence in the process – precisely turns out to expose its untruth. But by being written down, this now also gives itself over to being read. By being inscribed on a surface together with another now, writing has spatialised now-points and thereby rendered it possible for the various nows inscribed on a surface to be compared. In this comparison – which Hegel models on reading – various inscripted nows are contracted into a spatial simultaneity. By comparing these now-points in their simultaneity, sense-certainty comes to the discovery that the particular content of each of these now-points is insubstantial and untrue; it grasps only the universal form of the now. This universal form – the now that persists as a perennial moment – imposes its primacy on the particular now-points sublated in it; as particular nows, however, they still cannot be simultaneous. Only on the condition of its abstract externalisation in space does the experience of time in general first become possible: only on the condition of the

[104] SV IV: 355; CA, 85.

[105] GW 3: 84; PS, §95.

[106] GW 3: 84; PS, §95. Hegel introduces the model of writing by proposing a peculiar 'experiment': 'In order to test the truth of this sensuous certainty a simple experiment is all that is required. We write this truth down; a truth cannot be lost by writing it down; anymore than it can be lost by our perceiving it. When we look again *now, today,* at the written truth, we shall have to say that it has become stale.'

spatialisation and contraction of now-points, here modelled on a reading of writing, can time be conceived in terms of the non-simultaneity of its moments and the persistence of its form.[107]

Haufniensis' reference to an 'infinitely contentless present' (*uendeligt indholdsløst*) may be read in reference to this universal now that emerges out of the comparison of particular now-points.[108] Time is represented but only at the cost of reducing it to an empty form – a form that is taken to stand outside of time insofar as it maintains its own presence despite the infinite vanishing of its content. What exactly is implied in this emptiness is illustrated by Haufniensis in the following sentences, which evoke a seemingly innocent example:

> The Indian people tell the story of a line of kings (*Kongerække*) who ruled for 70,000 years. About the kings one knows nothing, not even their names (so I presume). If we would take this as an example of time, then these 70,000 years are an infinite vanishing (*uendeligt Forsvinden*) for thought, but for representation it expands, spatialises itself into the illusory view of an infinitely contentless nothing (*uendeligt indholdsløst Intet*).[109]

This story offers an image of time as a sequence – a *Række*, a row or line – in which the infinite, endless perishing of particular now-points is absorbed into the constancy and persistence of a universal but empty form. That the names of the individual kings in this sequence of hereditary rulers are said to remain unknown – 'that one knows nothing of these kings, not even their names (so I presume)' – would point to the price that is paid for establishing this continuum. As an empty form, this continuum would have nothing but an accidental relation to the particular nows that it absorbs: time is reduced to an empty form indifferent to its content. That this 'example of time' (*Exempel paa Tiden*) exemplifies not only a classical conception of time, but also the one that underpins the 'whole newer development', is suggested by the fact that this story is not merely told by Haufniensis but retold, recited from the pages of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* and mobilised against its author. In the passage from which Kierkegaard cites this story, Hegel introduces this story as an example of a time in which history proper fails to take place because of the inaccuracy with which history is written – an epoch that fails to become an epoch in the strict sense of the word, passed time without history:

> Indian writings indicate epochs and great numbers that are often of astronomical size and even more often are completely arbitrary. It says of kings that they ruled for 70,000 years or more;

[107] For a detailed discussion of the role of writing and reading in the dialectic of sense-certainty and Hegel's account of time consciousness, see Hamacher, *Pleroma*, 206–19.
[108] SV IV: 355; CA, 85.
[109] SV IV: 355; CA, 85.

> Brahma, the first figure in cosmogony, who created himself, was said to have lived for 20,000 million years, et cetera. [...] It would be ridiculous to take writings like these for something historical (*es würde lächerlich sein, dergleichen für etwas Geschichtliches zu nehmen*).[110]

The small adjustments Haufniensis makes to the story – the replacement of the 'kings' by a *Kongerække*, which implies not only the line of time but also the succession in the sense of a seemingly inexorable succession of hereditary rulers; the additional remark on the 'unknown names' of these kings – repurpose it and tear the story away from the illustrative function that it fulfils for Hegel. But when Haufniensis recites this story and presents it as an 'example of time' represented as continuum, the story still carries the charge that it was supposed to have in Hegel: that it would be *lächerlich* to take the time of this epoch as *etwas Geschichtliches*. Time spatialised and represented in this way might allow one to distinguish a past, present and a future; it might lend itself to being measured and calculated, to serve as a homogeneous medium in which the movement of daily existence can be reckoned and organised; but the time exemplified here is not the time of history. In stabilising the empty form of the now as an 'infinitely contentless present', this conception of time might have provided a first refuge against the work of time, an initial relief against time in its passing dimension, something permanent that can withstand its infinite vanishing. But in doing so, it will have already relinquished the relation through which history in the strict sense of the word first becomes possible and the division between past and future can first acquire its significance – the relation between time as a pure, unrelieved 'passing' (*forbigangne Tid*) and the possibility of the restoration of its 'fullness' (*Tidens Fylde*).[111] As Haufniensis will continue to demonstrate, the emptiness of the time that is reduced to a continuum is also the emptiness of a time that no longer bears a relation to the possibility of its fulfilment.

Doubled now

Haufniensis thus returns to his claim that time itself – that is to say, time correctly thought as infinite succession, the time that passes – provides no 'foothold' for positing a past, present and a future. To posit a past, present and future by resorting to a spatial representation of time would fall short of thinking the past, present and future in their heterogeneity, insofar as the future is conceived as a mere continuity with the past. This represented time might provide a basis for anticipation and prediction; but it has nothing to do with the time of history. Time represented as a continuum of now-points is not historical time; but neither could the time prior to this representation, the time that is correctly determined as an infinite passing-by, deserve this name by itself. History – and this is the central thought of Haufniensis' reflections

[110] GW 12: 204; PhH, 163.
[111] Cf. SV IV: 357; CA, 87 and SV IV: 360; CA, 90.

on historical time – could only ever emerge out of a relation between 'passing time' and another time – a time that is absolutely different, incommensurable to the time that passes. This differential relation would precede any distinction between past, present and future; indeed these distinctions could only ever emerge out of this relation between two absolutely different times.

The 'instant' (*Øieblik*) must be understood first and foremost as the name that Kierkegaard reserves for this relation between two incommensurable times. 'History first begins with the instant (*først i Øieblikket begynder Historien*),' Haufniensis writes in *The Concept of Anxiety*.[112] The possibility of history first opens up in the instant: that is to say, spirit is first permeated by the restlessness that will constitute it as spirit when passing time enters into a relation to another time. To the extent that this other time would have to be absolutely different from time correctly determined as the time that passes, this other time could no longer be called time at all – least of all by the pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety*, who never ceases to insist on the strictest conceptual distinctions. For this other time, absolutely different from the time that passes, Haufniensis therefore reserves the name 'eternity' (*Evigheden*).[113] Haufniensis will therefore consistently define the instant as a relation between 'time' and 'eternity' – a relation that is for the first time defined directly towards the end of the section in the form of a proposition that is in fact a constellation of figural expressions:

> The instant is that ambiguity (*Tvetydige*) in which time and eternity touch (*berøre*) each other; with this the concept of temporality (*Timelighed*) is posited whereby time constantly cuts off eternity (*afskærer*) and eternity constantly permeates (*gjennemtrænger*) time.[114]

To understand what is at stake in this definition of the *Øieblik* it is first necessary to specify what 'eternity' means in the context of Haufniensis' discussion of the problem of time. When Haufniensis defines the instant as a relation between the temporal and the eternal, he draws on the tradition of thinking eternity that revolves around the distinction between *aeternitas* and *sempernitas*, together with the different relations between the eternal and the temporal implied in both concepts. Haufniensis will never cease to reiterate the irreducible difference between the two times that enter into relation in the instant: he will write that time and eternity are 'incommensurable' (*inkommensurabelt*) with one another, thus emphasising the inadequacy of any conception of the eternal in terms of the temporal, that is to say, in terms of time thought

[112] SV IV: 359; CA, 89.
[113] SV IV: 356; CA, 86.
[114] SV IV: 359; CA, 89.

as a passing by.[115] In doing so he distances himself from every understanding of eternity as *sempernitas*, which reduces eternity to everlasting duration in time and thereby thinks it according to a temporal measure. Instead, Haufniensis' concept of eternity draws on doctrines of divine timelessness – in particular that of Boethius, with whose texts Kierkegaard was intensely preoccupied in the period that he worked on *The Concept of Anxiety* and the *Philosophical Fragments*.[116] Boethius distinguishes the everlasting duration that could be found in the world – or at least represented in terms of temporal existence – from the *aeternitas* that is only enjoyed by God. The distinction he draws between time and eternity revolves around two different conceptions of the 'now': time is constituted by the *nunc fluens*, the now that flows or passes – an expression that is close to Haufniensis' reference to time as a 'passing-by' (*Gaaen-forbi*) – whereas eternity is constituted by the *nunc stans*, a now that 'stands'.[117] In contrast to a conception of eternal life as a life that, despite its everlasting duration, is nevertheless still spread out through time, the *nunc stans* proposes a conception of eternity in which all of life is gathered in a single now. This divine now is strictly atemporal: in contrast to the now that belongs to finite temporal existence, it does not pass. Only such a now, in which the whole of temporal existence is gathered, would do right to divine *perfectio*, which would be irreconcilable with the necessarily fragmented, divided character of temporal existence. This is captured in the following passage from the *Consolation of Philosophy*:

> For whatever lives in time proceeds as something present from the past into the future, and there is nothing placed in time that can embrace the whole extent (*spatium*) of its life equally. Indeed, it does not yet apprehend tomorrow but it has already lost yesterday, and even in the life of today you live no more fully than in a mobile, transitory moment. [...] Whatever includes and possesses the whole fullness of illimitable life (*interminabilis vitae plenitudinem*) at once, and is such that nothing future is absent from it and nothing past has flowed away, only this is rightly judged to be eternal, and of this it is necessary both that being in full possession of itself be always present to itself and that it have the infinity of mobile time present to it (*infinitatem mobilis temporis habere praesentem*).[118]

Haufniensis' account of time and eternity draws directly on Boethius' doctrine of the *nunc stans*. If passing time is to enter into a relation to another time in order for history to 'begin', this other time, the time of eternity, is defined as a 'present' (*Nærværende*) – but one that must be distinguished rigorously from any temporal present. 'The eternal is the present and the

[115] 'The eternal, even though it is incommensurable with time, nevertheless preserves its commerce with time.' SV IV: 359; CA, 89.

[116] See for instance the references to Boethius' account of the divine foreknowledge of the future in various notebook entries of 1843–44, especially Pap. IV C 62 and Pap. V B 15: 8.

[117] Boethius, *De Trinitate*, c. iv. 'Nunc fluens facit tempus, nunc stans facit aeternitum.'

[118] Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, 430.

present is fullness (*Fylde*),' Haufniensis writes. 'It was in this sense that the Latinist said of the deity that he is *praesens* (*praesentes dii*).'[119] The present of eternity has no past or future, since it gathers all of time within itself and restores the unity of what was scattered in time: 'The instant signifies the present as a something that has no past (*Forbigangent*) and no future (*Tilkommende*), for it is just in this that the imperfection of the sensuous life lies. The eternal, too, signifies the present, which has no past and no future, and this is the perfection of the eternal (*Eviges Fuldkommenhed*).'[120] The conception of eternity that Haufniensis introduces is thus, on the one hand, strictly distinguished from time: eternity is defined not as everlasting duration within time but rather as the relief of temporal existence from that which determines it as temporal in the first place: its successive character. Haufniensis will indeed refer to eternity as 'the present in terms of sublated succession' (*ophævede Succession*).[121] At the same time as the two are strictly distinguished, they are however placed in a definite relation: eternity is nothing but time brought to its *Fuldkommenhed*, a state of perfection and completion in which time is released from the successive order. 'The concept on which everything turns in Christianity, that which made all things new, is the fullness of time (*Tidens Fylde*).'[122] Eternity is, in other words, not a negative abstraction of time, non-time; it is a plenitude that never ceases to be divided and torn apart as long as time passes.[123]

Just as Kierkegaard, in his early writings, attempts to expose the structural 'deficiency' that stamps human language and turns every word into a call for the retrieval of a lost and inaccessible state of perfection, so the distinction between time and eternity in *The Concept of Anxiety* is an attempt to draw out a deficiency that would make every passing moment call for the recovery of a presence it had always already lost. What Haufniensis calls 'temporality' (*Timelighed*) – the differentiation of past and future with which history first begins – could only emerge out of the relation between 'time' conceived in terms of the imperfection of inexorable succession and 'eternity' conceived in terms of the perfection of a restored plenitude. Haufniensis will emphasise this doubled character of historical time when he refers to the instant in terms that recall the distinction between the *nunc fluens* and *nunc stans*: as the relation between the 'atom of time' (*Tidens Atom*) and the 'atom of eternity' (*Evighedens Atom*).[124] Temporality emerges not as the relation between different but commensurable 'atoms of time', the comparison of at least two now-points whose sublation into a universal now was presented in Hegel's account of the development of time consciousness in the *Phenomenology*.

[119] SV IV: 356; CA, 86.
[120] SV IV: 356–57; CA, 87.
[121] SV IV: 356; CA, 86.
[122] SV IV: 90; CA, 90.
[123] For a brief but insightful discussion of the eternal in Hegel, see Derrida, '*Ousia* and *Grammē*', 45–46.
[124] SV IV: 358; CA, 88.

If temporality emerges out of a relation between two atoms, it is the relation between the atom of time and an atom that is incommensurable to it and that does not lend itself to comparison and sublation. Before the passing moment is brought into a relation to another, every atom of time has already entered into a relation to that atom in which all of time would be gathered and released from the order of succession. Every passing moment would refer negatively to this state, would express this need through its sheer imperfection, the *Mangelfuldhed* or 'fullness of lack' that Kierkegaard sought to lay bare in human language. But every atom of time would also – comically, accidentally – harbour a positive reference to the atom of eternity: the structure of the *nunc fluens*, which 'has no past or future' in the sense that it is separated and divided from every other moment, would prefigure the structure of an as yet outstanding *nunc stans*, which has no past and future because all of time would be gathered into it.

What Haufniensis calls 'temporality' therefore emerges not out of the comparison between two 'atoms of time' – the now-points out of which the 'sensory life' produces its representation of time in general – but rather out of a relation between two atoms that belong to two different, ultimately incommensurable times. The temporal structure that emerges out of this relation is suggested by the name that *The Concept of Anxiety* reserves for this doubled now in which history first begins: *Øieblik*. When Haufniensis' deliberations on time and eternity lead him to the category of the 'instant' he directly loses himself in a reflection on its status as a 'figurative expression' (*billedligt Udtryk*). In a crucial passage he writes: 'When Ingeborg looks out over the sea after Frithiof, this is an image of the figurative expression's meaning. [...] A glance (*Blik*) is a designation of time, but mark well, of time in the fateful conflict (*skjebnesvangre Conflikt*) when it is touched by eternity.'[125] The *Øieblik* is here read in the sense of the *Øiets Blik*, the glance or blink of an eye as a designation of the shortest period of time, the 'atom of time' that Haufniensis calls the moment. But the *Blik* that this figurative expression evokes is not just any glance: Haufniensis associates it with a scene from *Frithiof's Saga* where one of two main protagonists, Ingeborg, looks out over the sea after her lover Frithiof, who sails out to sea on the orders of the king after being violently separated from her. The *Blik* of Ingeborg marks a certain ambiguity: it combines a sense of loss with the hope for a future restitution. There is no presence in this scene: if the *Blik* is a designation of time, then it designates a time that has already passed; a moment that has already slipped away calls for its recovery.

Interruption

Kierkegaard tends to describe the 'touching' of time and eternity that occurs in the instant in terms of an 'arrest' (*Standse*) of time. In the middle chapter of *The Concept of Anxiety*,

[125] SV IV: 357; CA, 87. For an alternative reading of this passage see the chapter on *The Concept of Anxiety* in Kangas' study *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 185–86.

Haufniensis writes: 'The instant [...] is the first reflection of eternity in time, its first attempt to, as it were, bring time to a halt (*at standse Tiden*).'[126] The instant is here conceived in the literal sense of an *in-stare*, a standing still of time itself. Although this conception of the instant will find its first comprehensive articulation in *The Concept of Anxiety*, it is already anticipated in Kierkegaard's early writings, where it is associated with another figure taken from the sphere of journalism: the polemicist. The work of the polemicist is not exhausted in the victory over one opponent or another; the aim of his attacks is not to have the last word or the final say. Even though the polemicist participates in conversations, his work can only find its fulfilment in their interruption: it is, as Kierkegaard writes in his dissertation about the ancient polemicist par excellence, to 'bring about a pause in the course of history' (*Pause i Historiens Gang*).[127] But this thought of a 'pause' already makes its appearance in one of his earliest extant texts – an extensive fragment that is included in his first numbered journal of 1835, which is especially noteworthy insofar it connects this thought to the notion of a *Blik*, a glance of an eye in which time itself comes to a standstill. In the opening paragraph of this fragment, Kierkegaard refers in passing to 'the one who looks into the course of history (*Historiens Gang*) with Lynceus's glance (*Blik*) and almost dares to stop its hour hand (*stille dens Viser*)'.[128] The *Blik* of Lynceus, the Greek mythological figure known for his piercing vision – a figure who Kierkegaard may have become familiar with through Aristophanes, who uses the expression *oxuteron tou Lunkeōs blepein* ('more sharp-sighted than Lynceus') in one of his plays[129] – anticipates Haufniensis later account of the *Øieblik*. Not only is this *Blik* associated with the instant of the leap insofar as it is presented as a glance that belongs to the one who 'almost dares', who has reached the point where the unapproachable cannot be further approached; just as in Haufniensis' later formulation, the instant marked by this glance is also determined as an instant in which time is brought to a halt. This early fragment and the specific imagery employed in it suggest how to understand this time that would be arrested in the instant. If this is a time whose 'hour hand' may be stopped, then the time that is brought to a stop in this fragment would have to be a time that lends itself to being compared to a clock. Not only would it therefore be a time that is already subjected to representation in the sense described by Haufniensis, a *Forestilling* of time predicated on its spatialisation; as the time of the clock it would also be a mechanical time, a time that can be measured by the continuous, uniform and inexorable movement of its *Viser*, designating every passing now as 'this' now, pointing to a now and rendering it 'present' over the course of a second. This time of the clock, moreover, is associated here with a specific experience of history: the glance described here pierces *Historiens Gang*, the course of history, that is to say, history precisely insofar as it

[126] SV IV: 358; CA, 88.
[127] SV XIII: 279; CI, 198.
[128] Pap. I A 73; AA, 12.
[129] Aristophanes, *Plutus*, 210.

takes its 'course'. What is arrested or brought to a halt in this early fragment is thus a specific representation of history: history represented as a process that unfolds according to its own immanent development.

The time that is 'arrested' in the instant according to Haufniensis may be understood along the same lines as Kierkegaard's early diary fragment. In one of the extensive footnotes that accompany the chapter on time, the pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety* evokes the image of a recent theatre play, indeed a comedy. He writes:

> Once here in Copenhagen there were two actors who probably never thought that their performance could have a deeper significance. They stepped forth onto the stage, placed themselves opposite each other, and then began the mimical representation of one or another passionate conflict. When the mimical development (*Udvikling*) was fully taking its course (*i fuld Gang*) and the spectators' eyes (*Øie*) followed the story (*Historien*) while awaiting what was to follow, they suddenly stopped (*brøde de pludseligen af*) and now remained motionless as though petrified (*forbleve nu urokkeligen forstenede*) in the mimical expression of the instant. The effect of this can be exceedingly comical, for the instant in an accidental way becomes commensurable with the eternal.[130]

Haufniensis' choice of words in the description of this scene is important to note. What is interrupted here is a 'history' (*Historien*), an unfolding narrative described as a 'development' (*Udvikling*) that 'takes its course' (*Gang*) – all concepts that not only echo the interruption of the 'course of history' described in the early fragment but also tie this representation of history to the introduction to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, which deploys exactly these terms.[131] Returning to the motif of conversation that had played an important role in the early writings, the two actors who 'place themselves opposite one another' and engage in 'one or another passionate conflict' perform the dialectic that drives this development. The continuous character of this 'development' is emphasised in Haufniensis' description of the spectators' eyes (*Tilskuerens Øie*) as eyes that 'follow' (*fulgte*) the history unfolding on the stage, and do so while constantly 'awaiting what was to follow (*ventede det Følgende*)'.[132] The view of history that is captured in the scene evoked here is thus one where the spectators' attentive inspection of the development unfolding before their eyes is accompanied by a constant expectation of what is yet to come, joining together what has just happened and what is about to happen. As Kierkegaard's rendering of this constant anticipation as an 'awaiting of

[130] SV IV: 358–59; CA, 88–89.
[131] The third section of the introduction is comprised of three sections –'The principle of development' (*Das Prinzip der Entwicklung*), 'The beginning of history' (*Anfang der Geschichte*) and 'The course of history' (*Gang der Geschichte*). See: LPG, 74–104; PhH, 54–79.
[132] SV IV: 359; CA, 89.

what follows' (*ventede det Følgende*) suggests, the future anticipated here is already preformed: before it has happened, what is yet to come is already construed as something that follows on – and follows from – the immanent development that is playing out before the eyes of the spectators. If there is a future here, it is one that is not conceived as *det Følgende*, that which merely follows from that which it follows on, as if it were the necessary next stage in a logical sequence.[133]

The instant when the actors 'suddenly stopped' (*brøde de pludseligen af*) – the word Haufniensis uses, *afbrøde*, literally means to 'break off' – is precisely the instant in which this temporal continuity is shattered.[134] What interrupts the continuity staged here is not some other, unexpected occurrence; it is the occurrence of the interruption itself. The arrest of time to which Haufniensis refers in his definition of the instant as eternity's 'first attempt, as it were, to bring time to a halt' is here enacted literally in the sudden interruption of the actors' movement.[135] But the real drama of this interruption does not take place on the stage; it happens on the side of the spectators. The sudden interruption of the movement on the stage is accompanied by an interruption of the continuous movement of the spectators' eyes, their attentive following of the development on the stage as the activity that guarantees the continuity between what has passed and what is yet to come. What is interrupted in Haufniensis' anecdote is therefore not merely the movement of the actors, but above all the representational activity of the spectator. In the instant of a sudden interruption, an interruption that could not have been foreseen, the representation of time breaks down: in this interruption, it is first of all the represented 'future' that shatters – that is to say, the future insofar as it is anticipated and foreseen by the spectators as *det Følgende*, that which is expected to follow from what has passed. But if the anticipation of what follows has shattered in this sudden interruption, the ground that was supposed to sustain this anticipation loses its validity as well: with the entrance of the 'sudden' (*pludselige*) interruption, the 'development' that was taking its course only shortly before can no longer maintain its purchase on the future; the past can no longer form the basis for a representation of this future as a time that can be conceived as a mere extension of the time that has passed. Together with the anticipated future, the representation of time in general breaks down in this interruption. If Haufniensis can write that time is 'as it were, brought to a halt' in this instant of interruption, this is because there is no longer a 'future' insofar as it existed in continuity with the past, nor a 'past' insofar as it

[133] Derrida discusses the radically unknowable and unforeseeable character of Kierkegaard's concept of the future in his essay 'Whom to give to (knowing not to know)', 154–74.
[134] Ibid. For a discussion of the occurrence of the notion of interruption in Kierkegaard's early text *On the Papers of One Still Living* see Peter Fenves, *Chatter*, 61–63.
[135] SV IV: 358; CA, 88.

provided the ground for the expectation of a future continuous with it.[136] Not only the past and the future, but also the present founders in this instant, at least insofar as it is comprehended as – to use the expression that Haufniensis uses elsewhere in the same chapter – the 'intermediary (*Mellemliggende*) of the past and the future' conceived in their continuity.[137] Haufniensis' spectator does not only lose the determinate content of recollection and of expectation, is not only deprived of a particular past and a particular future; in this instant, the very possibility of establishing a continuity between past and future founders – and with it, the possibility for the representation of time as an endless sequence of now-points, strung together into a continuous flow.

In the shattering of the continuum, time suddenly manifests itself in a different way; in the instant of interruption, time no longer manifests itself as a homogeneous flow but as the disjunction between the two absolutely heterogeneous times that Haufniensis had described earlier in the section. When the movement of the actors comes to a sudden halt, the past loses its purchase on the future; what is about to happen is suddenly permeated by indeterminacy. Conversely, without the anticipation of a foreseeable future, time manifests itself as a pure passing, where every moment vanishes into nothingness rather than contribute to a cumulative development. The special significance of even the most mundane interruption, of which the comic scene evoked by Haufniensis is nothing but an exemplary instance, is that it offers a glimpse of these two dimensions of time that collide in the 'instant' and reveals them in their absolute disjunction and pure polarity. Passing time manifests itself here as pure, unrelieved vanishing; the time that is yet to come manifests itself in a pure indeterminacy – an indeterminacy that is concentrated only by the need that springs from time in its passing dimension, the need for a recovery of every passing moment. Every interruption thus has the character of a revelation, insofar as it lays bare a structure of time that precedes and exceeds every representation of time – a conflict of two heterogeneous times that could never be integrated into a continuum.

If the interruption can have an 'exceedingly comical effect', as Haufniensis writes in his account of the theatre play, and if this comical effect derives from the fact that 'the instant becomes commensurable with the eternal in an accidental way', this is because the destruction of the future and past is analogous to the eternal conceived as a *nunc stans* – and in this sense it is a 'reflection (*Reflex*) of eternity' in time.[138] But this 'reflection' of eternity, this duplication of it is not identical to the eternity attributed to divine existence: even though it has

[136] SV IV: 358; CA, 88.
[137] SV IV: 357; CA, 87.
[138] SV IV: 355; CA, 85.

a structural resemblance to divine eternity, this 'first reflection' of eternity in time could not be further removed from the divine *praesens*. This is not a now of pleromatic presence, but rather a now that is marked by its specific relation to nothingness, or what Kierkegaard calls in a footnote *to kenon* – the empty.[139] The sudden interruption of the comic play is a figure of a shattered representation of time in which future, past and present all perish and the subject is – at least for an instant – left with nothing. It is this perishing that Kierkegaard has in mind when he juxtaposes, in one and the same footnote, the account of a scene from this recent play with a citation from an ancient text:

> In the New Testament there is a poetic paraphrase of the instant. Paul says that the world will perish *en atomō kai en ripē ophthalmoū* (in a moment and the glance of an eye). By this he also expresses that the instant is commensurable with eternity, precisely because the instant of perishing (*Undergangs-Øieblikket*) expresses eternity at the same instant.[140]

The instant as *Undergangs-Øieblikket* is, then, an instant in which the 'world perishes' in the sense that both the representation of the future and past breaks down, together with the experience of the present as their intermediary: it is the instant in which it has even become impossible to represent time as a continuous flow – if only for an instant. But this instant is not only 'empty' in the sense of a deprivation, an instant in which one is left with nothing; in contrast to the 'infinite contentlessness' of represented time, Kierkegaard conceives of this *Undergang* of the temporal continuum as an emptiness that harbours the promise of another time – an experience of time that has nothing to do with the one that corresponds to the 'course of history' of which Kierkegaard speaks in his early journal or the 'development' of the play evoked in *The Concept of Anxiety*. 'Only now (*først nu*),' Haufniensis writes, 'does the aforementioned division (*Inddeling*) acquire its significance: the present time, the past time, the future time (*den tilkommende Tid*).'[141] Only now, *først nu*, only in *this* now when the continuous flow of time is arrested, can the division between these categories first assume their significance, that is to say, only now can it be an *Inddeling* that does not merely divide up a homogeneous, uniform time but acts as a division in the emphatic sense, namely a division between absolutely different, heterogeneous and incommensurable times. In the breakdown of the representation of time, a different experience of temporality opens up, namely an experience of temporality as the conflict between the time that passes and a time with a wholly different structure, a time that is yet to come.

[139] SV IV: 351; CA, 82. 'Plato conceives of the instant purely abstractly. To orient oneself in its dialectic, one should keep in mind that the instant is nonbeing under the category of time. Nonbeing (*to mē on*, *to kenon* of the Pythagoreans) occupied ancient philosophers as much as it does modern philosophers.'
[140] SV IV: 358; CA, 88.
[141] SV IV: 359; CA, 89.

In the temporalisation to which Haufniensis refers here, a privileged role is reserved for this time of what is yet to come, the future as *det Tilkommende*. This is hardly a surprise if one recognises that the sudden arrest of time captured in Haufniensis' story of the interrupted theatre play manifested itself first of all as the shattering of the future insofar as it was foreseen by the spectators. It is in this shattering of a future that is awaited as something that follows from what has preceded it, the future as *det Folgende*, that the possibility of another future first opens up. This other future could not be conceived as one that is defined by the same structure of anticipation and merely directed towards a different object: it would rather be an attempt to think a *tilkommende Tid* in the strict sense of the word, a time that comes from the future rather than flowing into it, a time that arrives *ex futuro* rather than being constituted as an extension of the past *in futuro*.[142] Such a future would exceed any attempt to reduce what is yet to come to what has already been. 'In this division,' Haufniensis therefore continues to write, 'attention is at once drawn to the fact that, in a sense, the future means more than the present and the past, because the future is in a sense the whole of which the past is a part, and the future can in a sense signify the whole. This is because the eternal means first the future, or because the future is the incognito in which the eternal, though incommensurable with time, wants nevertheless to maintain its commerce (*Omgængelse*) with time.'[143] The 'commerce' between the eternal and the temporal – between the 'full' time of the *nunc stans* and the time that merely passes – takes place in the first place through the category of the future. This future is nothing but the medium in which the eternal allows itself to be imparted to the temporal, an oblique and indirect medium that Haufniensis describes as 'incognito' (*det Incognito*). The future is an 'incognito of the eternal' first of all in the sense that the eternal, as the fulfilment of time and therefore its end, can enter temporal existence only as a possibility that is yet to be realised – once it is conceived as the 'fullness of time', the eternal can only ever lie in the future.[144] It is for this reason that Haufniensis will contrast the ancient concept of eternity, which conceives of the eternal as a past that is recollected, with the Christian concept of the fullness of time – a concept that, according to Haufniensis, 'made all things new' – which must manifest itself as a fulfilment that is yet to come.[145] This future must however manifest itself as an 'incognito' in the literal sense: that is to say, the possibility of fulfilled time manifests itself in the future only as a future that must remain unknown. In both *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard will insist on the impossibility of reducing the future to a time that could ever be foreseen or known in advance: the futurity of *det Tilkommende*, what

[142] Cf. for instance Augustine's use of these different expressions of futurity in his *Confessions*, XI 15.20.
[143] SV IV: 359; CA, 89.
[144] SV IV: 360; CA, 90.
[145] Ibid.

is yet to come, lies precisely in its withdrawal from all seeing and knowing. The future is thus marked by an indeterminate determinacy: it is the outstanding promise of the fullness of time, of the fulfilment of all time that passes; and yet it could promise this fulfilment only as an incognito – as a future that, even if it must remain unknowable and unforeseeable, makes an all the more forceful claim on every passing moment. A time that could be called historical – a time in which, as Haufniensis writes, history first 'begins' – would have to be thought as the ever-renewed relation between these two, entirely differently structured times: a time that passes and a time that is yet to come.

The polemicist

The structure of time that is captured in the concept of the instant is anticipated in a figure that already plays an important role in Kierkegaard's early writings: the polemicist. It is certainly no accident that Kierkegaard chose the name *Øieblikket* for the paper in which his final polemic was to unfold. The polemicist captures a special relation between writing and time that is expressed first and foremost in an irresolvable restlessness. 'The polemical striving (*polemiske Stræben*) never finds rest,' Kierkegaard writes in an early reflection on the polemic – 'rest is the very opposite of this kind of writing (*Ro er netop slig Digtens Modsætning*).'[146] In the figure of the polemicist, whose outlines can be constructed on the basis of fragmented remarks found throughout the early writings, the discrepancy between the finite subject and its aspiration towards infinity is pushed to an extreme. Like the poetic ironist, the idea against which the polemicist measures the world exceeds every conceivable actuality and reduces it to nothingness. In his aspiration to rise above everything limited, however, the polemicist can no longer rely on the indifference of the poet; the given actuality renders it impossible to detach himself.[147] For the polemicist, the given actuality has not just lost its validity; it has become a hindrance, something that holds back his aspirations towards infinity. In polemical irony – an irony that, in its extreme and uncompromised form, was what Kierkegaard called 'humour' – the motto *nil admirari*, 'admire nothing', is radicalised into a *foragtet Alt* – 'despise everything'.[148] This motto points to two crucial aspects of what Kierkegaard calls the polemical striving: its purely 'infinite' and 'negative' character. The polemical striving is infinite first of all because it is not restricted to a determinate object: every polemic is ultimately a 'polemic against the world' (*Polemik mod Verden*).[149] There is no doubt that the polemic tendency expresses itself in attacks on particular texts or opponents; but insofar as there is no conceivable actuality that could measure up to the idea, there is no determinate

[146] SV XIII: 374; CI, 306.
[147] See SV XIII: 320; CI, 244.
[148] Pap. II A 102; DD, 18.
[149] SV XIII: 349; CI, 277.

attack in which the polemic could find its fulfilment. The polemic is therefore also *uendelig* in the sense that it cannot come to an end; it could only find its fulfilment in the annihilation of a world that is perceived as an imperfect form, a hindrance to every aspiration to the eternal. The infinite dimension of the polemic is therefore closely related to its negative character. Kierkegaard distinguishes the polemical striving in the strict sense from what he calls the 'positive polemic' (*positiv Polemik*) – a polemic that is undertaken from an already established standpoint that the polemicist aims to secure through his attacks. The polemical striving in the strict sense, however, has no positive content to communicate: since it has no access to the idea, it is not in the position to 'thunder at teachers of false doctrines with the pathos of seriousness'.[150] Every polemic in the strict sense of the word must be a 'negative polemic' (*negativ Polemik*): it does not attack in order to affirm a certain position; rather, it merely undermines the statements of its contemporaries to 'calmly and inflexibly watch them sink down into absolutely nothing'.[151] The polemicist annihilates every given actuality with no intent to put anything in its place. Only in the moment of annihilation does the polemicist glimpse an infinite albeit negative freedom: only in the instant when actuality sinks down into nothingness can the polemicist 'breathe lightly and freely, under the vast horizon intimated by the idea as boundary'.[152] But this freedom is not solely negative; it is also a freedom from which he has to part as soon as he has caught sight of it, if only because the passing of time will have stamped it with finitude the moment after. The polemic must therefore be taken up again at every instant. 'The polemic tendency never finds rest (*finder aldrig Hvile*),' Kierkegaard writes; 'because [it] consists precisely in continually freeing itself by means of a new polemic (*bestandig at frigjøre sig ved en ny Polemik*).' [153]

The polemicist must despise every actuality that does not measure up to the idea, all *Middelmaadighed* in the full sense of the word – a mediocrity that must encompass his own finite existence. 'To attack people – yes, that I like in a certain sense; by nature I am disposed to polemically, that I actually only feel in my element, when I am surrounded by human mediocrity,' Kierkegaard writes in the first issue of *The Instant* – 'but only under one condition: that I am permitted to silently despise it (*taust at foragte*).' But the polemicist can never permit himself this silence; in order to free himself he must take recourse to language. The restlessness of the polemic striving does not merely play out as a relation between self and world, but is already at work within the writing of the polemicist itself. 'Every polemical line (*polemisk Strøg*) continually holds within itself something more (*indeholder bestandig et Mere*), the possibility of rising out over itself (*at gaae ud over sig selv*),' Kierkegaard writes in

[150] SV XIII: 206; CI, 120.
[151] SV XIII: 206n; CI, 120.
[152] SV XIII: 249; CI, 165.
[153] SV XIII: 374; CI, 306.

the same passage.[154] The term that Kierkegaard uses here – *indeholder* – must be read in its distinct ambiguity. That every polemical line holds something more in itself must first of all be read as a failure: the polemical line might free itself from what it destroys, but it never fully achieves the freedom towards which it aspires. In order to free himself, the polemicist must write; but precisely insofar his *Strøg*, his strike at the world, is also a line, a line with a linguistic character, that is to say, a sentence, he has already limited himself and posited something from which he needs to free himself. It is now this line in its linguistic dimension that ties him down, that fails to live up to the 'something more' that the polemicist aspires to; and yet it is this same linguistic dimension that makes this line contain something more than itself and thus intimates the possibility of rising above it. What this line fails to attain – the 'more' in the first sense – manifests itself here precisely in the tendency of every line to say more than what it was meant to say: the 'more' that the polemical line failed to attain manifests in it as the possibility of every line to move out of itself. Polemical writing never finds rest because every polemical line harbours the possibility to say something other than itself, to turn into an *allēgoria* in the strict sense: 'During all this the writer grants neither himself nor the reader any rest, inasmuch as rest is the very opposite of this kind of writing. The only rest he has is the [...] eternity in which he sees the ideal, but this eternity is a nonentity, since it has no time, and therefore the ideal becomes allegory the very next instant (*og derfor bliver Idealet i næste Øieblik Allegori*).'[155]

In its particular restlessness, the polemic harbours an experience of time and history that is profoundly at odds with the one that Kierkegaard understood to be exemplified in Hegel's philosophy – especially where it comes to its relation to the future. This becomes clear in a crucial passage from the section from his dissertation that – certainly not without irony – discusses the 'world-historical validity of irony' in connection to the figure who is considered here as the ancient polemicist par excellence: Socrates. Kierkegaard asks here what it means to speak of this polemicist as a 'historical turning point' (*historisk Vendepunkt*) – a term he will derive from Hegel's descriptions of the world-historical significance of Socrates in his lectures on the history of philosophy – only to turn it against its author. After proposing that such a 'turning point' requires two movements – the forging ahead of the new, the displacement of the old – Kierkegaard will define the polemicist in its relation to another figure that designates a specific relation to two times, present and future, namely the prophet:

> Inasmuch as the new must forge ahead, here we meet the prophetic individual, who catches sight of the new in the distance (*øiner det Nye i det Fjerne*) in dim and undefined contours (*I*

[154] SV XIII: 374; CI, 306.
[155] SV XIII: 374; CI, 306.

> *dunkle og ubestemte Omrids*). The prophetic individual does not possess the future (*eier ikke det Tilkommende*) – he has only a presentiment of it (*han aner det blot*). He cannot lay a claim to it, but he is also lost to the actuality to which he belongs. His relation to it, however, is a peaceful relation (*fredeligt Forhold*).[156]

The 'peaceful relation' that the prophet maintains to his time must compromise his relation to the future. Inasmuch as there is no necessity for the prophet to break with actuality, the future of which he catches sight must always be conceived in continuity with the present. The prophet is lost to his time, but only because he is immersed in his vision of the future. The prophet is immersed in his vision of the future, but this future is a mere extension of a development already unfolding in the present; the new is understood to arise out of the old in an as yet unforeseen but nevertheless immanent development. The exemplary instance of this prophetic individual is perhaps the ancient prophet, a Cassandra who has a vision of a future that is nothing but the necessary destination of a fateful development; but it is certainly no accident that Kierkegaard's description echoes Hegel's announcement of an impending sunrise and the 'indeterminate presentiment' (*unbestimmten Ahnung*) that precedes the new.[157] What both share is an understanding of the new as the result of a development, an outcome that may differ from the old but stands in continuity with it insofar as it is taken to be a consequence. A relation to the new in the strict sense is compromised by this continuity – and this is where the prophet is distinguished from the polemical ironist:

> The old must be displaced (*fortrænges*); the old must be perceived in all its imperfection (*sin hele Ufuldkommenhed*). Here we meet the ironic subject. For the ironical subject, the given actuality has lost its validity entirely; it has become for him an imperfect form that is a hindrance everywhere. But on the other hand, he does not possess the new. He knows only that the present does not match the idea. [...] In one sense this ironist is certainly prophetic, because he is continually pointing to something that is yet to come (*peger bestandig hen paa noget Tilkommende*), but what it is he does not know. He is prophetic, but his position and situation are the reverse of the prophet's. [...] The ironist has stepped out of line with his age, has turned around and faced it. That which is yet to come is hidden from him, lies behind his back, but the actuality he so antagonistically confronts is what he must annihilate (*tilintetgøre*); upon this he focuses his all-consuming gaze (*hans fortærende Blik*).[158]

The polemicist has 'turned his back on the future': he does not have his eye on the future, does not attempt to represent it to himself or to posit it as an aim that is to be positively realised. His gaze is directed towards his own time, the present; but precisely in doing so it becomes

[156] SV XIII: 334; CI, 260.
[157] GW 3: 18–19; PS, 6–7.
[158] SV XIII: 334–35; CI, 260.

possible for a future to open up that is not a mere extension of what is or has been. The present is experienced as an imperfect form that hinders access to the eternal; the eternal must remain inaccessible to him and manifests itself only as a 'pointing' (*peger*) – a continual but indeterminate reference to something still outstanding. The polemicist establishes nothing, because what is to be established lies beyond every conceivable actuality; his work is to prepare for the future, but these preparations have a strictly negative dimension. His work is characterised as 'annihilation' (*tilintetgørelse*), a work that does not aim at positing or establishing anything; if it has a historical dimension, this is not by bringing a development to completion or prefiguring the new through preliminary exercises.

In the purely negative work of the polemicist, it becomes possible to recognise an image of historical transition that appears as the inverse image of the immanent development culminating in an *Aufgang* of the new that Hegel evoked in the preface to the *Phenomenology*. The condition under which the new arrives is not the completion of the development that precedes it but rather the 'displacement' of the old; the future is maintained in its absolute discontinuity from the present. It is in this light that we may understand the important early reflection on the polemic that is advanced towards the end of the fragment on Hamann that Kierkegaard wrote at the same time as his first newspaper articles. In the concluding paragraph of the fragment, Kierkegaard writes:

> I hope that it will be abundantly evident that everyone who in the proper sense is to fulfil a period in history (*udfylde en Periode i Historien*) must always begin polemically (*begynde polemisk*), precisely because a subsequent stage (*følgende Stadium*) is not the pure and simple result of the preceding (*Foregaaende*). [...] Isn't it the case that, just as with a procession (*Procession*) – which is precisely the new that is yet to come (*det Nye, der skal komme*) – there are first men with staffs who make room (*først Stokkemændene gjøre Plads*)?[159]

In its emphatic gesturing towards the 'proper' (*egenlig*) fulfilment of a period in history, the first sentence is not without irony. For the 'fulfilment' that is evoked here would not be a matter of bringing an existing development to completion; as it turns out at the end, it would involve driving it away like a crowd, displacing and deposing what exists in order to make room for the new. If it is nevertheless the fulfilment of a period in the 'proper' sense, this is because the *periodos*, as the time in which a phenomenon takes its course in the sense of turning around its orbit, does not end in a completion that is at the same time a return to itself, but in the parodic repetition that Kierkegaard never ceases to evoke in the early writings: repetition by which a phenomenon comes to an end in the sense that it is emptied of all substance or significance. The new – here initially ironically indicated as the 'subsequent

[159] Pap. I A 340; CC, 25.

stage' (*følgende Stadium*) in a development for which it is mistaken in the 'period' that Kierkegaard tries to bring to its 'fulfilment' – is not a 'pure and simple result'; as it will turn out, it is not a 'result' (*Resultat*) at all, if this term suggests precisely something that arises out of its premises. The new does not follow out of premises; it arrives as if it were a procession – not the forward march of spirit through time, but a *processio*, an emanation of the eternal that, in a shift in register at the end of the sentence, turns out to be awaited like a parade that is yet to arrive. The image of the parade, playing on the double sense of the *Procession* evoked at the beginning of the sentence, implies a sudden inversion of the structure of historical transition that is suggested by the vocabulary of 'stages', 'results' and 'premises'. Rather than the outcome of a continuous development that drives itself forward, this transition must be understood as a collision between 'what came before' (*det Foregaaende*) and 'what is yet to come' (*det Tilkommende*); a transition in which the course of history does not produce the new but obstructs its arrival; a transition that does not involve the work of 'concluding and introducing' that is reserved for the 'absolute trumpeter', a figure that Kierkegaard will evoke elsewhere in his work.[160] Rather, the work involved in this transition is captured in the figure of the polemicist, those 'men with sticks' whose task is to disperse the crowd, to displace the given actuality in order to make room for the arrival of a future that cannot be known or foreseen. That such work may well never come to an end is suggested by the sentence that Kierkegaard appends to the end of the note: 'Naturally, here things depend in turn upon how quickly that which is new follows upon the polemic (*hvor hurtigt det Nye følger ovenpaa Polemiken*) – whether it is the truth, which must be defended for years and years, or merely one or another insignificant modification.'[161]

[160] SV IV: 176; PF, 3.
[161] Pap. I A 340; CC, 25.

Chapter 2: Nietzsche

> Hegel and the newspapers – as opponents (*so wie die Gegner*).
> — Nietzsche, note for the *Untimely Meditations*[1]

'What is precisely most valuable about philosophy,' Nietzsche writes in one of his early notebooks, 'is to constantly teach the counter-doctrine to everything journalistic (*die Gegenlehre alles journalistischen zu lehren*)'.[2] This hyperbolic remark may serve as a point of departure for an examination of the peculiar preoccupation with journalism that runs throughout Nietzsche's work. Especially in the writings of the early 1870s, when Nietzsche was working on the *Untimely Meditations* and his unpublished *Philosophenbuch*, this preoccupation will surface time and again: passages on journalism – consistently written in a hyperbolic register – are scattered throughout Nietzsche's early notebooks, the manuscripts for his Basel lectures and, most notably, the planned series of fourteen *Untimely Meditations*, which Nietzsche intended to conclude with an instalment on 'Newspaper Slavery'.[3] But references to journalists, newspapers, and the press will continue to make their appearance well into his writings of the following decade – especially *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, where acerbic caricatures of the language of the newspapers occur alongside images of an archaic kind of news, of unheard-of messages and rumours of an unknown future.[4]

If Nietzsche's juxtaposition of philosophy and journalism – and their seeming opposition in the definition of philosophy as *Gegenlehre alles journalistischen* – may serve as a point of departure for this chapter, this is first of all because journalism is introduced here emphatically as a *philosophical* theme. Not only does the counterposition of philosophy and journalism suggest that Nietzsche's preoccupation with journalism has a philosophical character; philosophy itself, insofar as it is conceived as a *Gegenlehre*, is defined here in terms of its relation to 'everything journalistic'. The preoccupation with journalism is thus placed at the heart of Nietzsche's attempts to rethink *philosophy itself* – an attempt so central to many of his unpublished writings of the time, in particular his work on the unfinished *Philosophenbuch*. To take the proposition of philosophy as a *Gegenlehre* of 'everything journalistic' seriously, in all its hyperbole, suggests the possibility of a philosophical reading of the theme as it resurfaces throughout Nietzsche's work. Such a reading diverges from the typical interpretations of his preoccupation with journalism, which – in the rare cases where it is addressed at all – tends to be regarded as a concern that may be separated from his

[1] KSA VII: 27[20], Spring–Autumn 1873.
[2] KSA VII: 35[12], Spring–Summer 1874.
[3] KSA VII: 32[4], Early 1874–Spring 1874.
[4] See KSA IV: 63; Z, 35 and KSA IV: 223; Z, 140–41.

philosophy 'proper'.[5] Omissions of the theme are perhaps not surprising, given the tendency to maintain a crude division between Nietzsche's philosophical writings and his so-called 'cultural criticism' or between the later and the earlier, supposedly immature work, of which the interest in journalism may all too easily be understood to be a mere residue.[6] Even in the more careful readings of his work it is only rarely recognised that Nietzsche's continuous preoccupation with 'journalism' can only be adequately grasped if it is, as one of his important interpreters puts it, 'not understood disparagingly' (*nicht abschätzend verstanden*) – that is to say, if it is understood as a preoccupation that is inseparable from his philosophical thought and its most important rubrics.[7]

Such an interpretation of Nietzsche's fragmented notes and remarks on journalism would have to start from an attentiveness to the role of figures in his philosophical work.[8] As in the case of Kierkegaard, the journalists and newspaper readers that populate Nietzsche's writings make their appearance first and foremost as types – but how these types are constituted and what role is reserved for them is, however, specific to Nietzsche's work. Throughout the writings of the 1870s, the journalist will consistently enter the stage as one amongst a crowd of philosophical 'opponents' (*Gegner*).[9] Like the 'historian', the 'scholar', the 'cultural philistine', the 'teacher', the 'servants of the state' or the 'religious ones' – a list that could continue indefinitely – the journalist is a figure that is constituted in and through a relation of struggle and antagonism. Like his other philosophical opponents, Nietzsche consistently treats the journalist as a caricature of itself – a figure that is studied through deliberate exaggeration, that is never described in a disinterested manner but consistently perceived through the lens of a cultivated 'hostility' (*Feindschaft*).[10] 'I never attack people, I treat them as if they were high-intensity magnifying glasses that can illuminate a general, though insidious and barely noticeable, predicament,' Nietzsche writes in a later reflection on his *Untimely Meditations* – and the attacks on journalists scattered through the early writings may be understood precisely

[5] An exception to this widespread tendency among earlier readers of Nietzsche is provided by Martin Heidegger, who underlines the importance of understanding Nietzsche's preoccupation with journalism in relation to the major 'rubrics' of his thought. See especially *Nietzsche*, Vol. 4, 240–43.

[6] A typical case of these two common divisions of Nietzsche's work is provided by Walter Kaufmann's *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*.

[7] See Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. 4, 241. The most important readers of Nietzsche on the other side of the Rhine – especially Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault – are undoubtedly aware of the philosophical significance of Nietzsche's polemic with journalism but never elaborate this as a theme in its own right. See, for instance, Jacques Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, 8–10; Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 137–38 and 153–54; Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 2, 1302.

[8] For a discussion of the role of typology and figurative language in Nietzsche's work, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's study *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, 43–138.

[9] See KSA VII: 27[20], Spring–Autumn 1873.

[10] KSA I: 362; UM III: §3.

as an example of this treatment.[11] But when Nietzsche conceives of philosophy as a *Gegenlehre* of everything journalistic, this is not just an expression of a general philosophical antagonism. The journalist is presented not merely as one amongst a crowd of opponents, an enemy like any other: for Nietzsche, it is that *Gegner* in relation to which philosophy defines *itself*. To consider the journalist as an enemy in the emphatic sense of the word means that its relation to philosophy cannot be reduced to an opposition: *Feindschaft* is the name that Nietzsche reserves for a relation of antagonism that can only assume its characteristic intensity on the condition of a kinship or affinity that is already at work in it. In the third of the *Untimely Meditations* Nietzsche indeed speaks of the *Feindschaft* of Schopenhauer towards his time – that thinker who is treated here as a figure of philosophical thought and who, not accidentally, took what he called *Zeitungsschreiben* to be one of the crucial signs of his time – as 'a hostility that is at bottom directed against that which, though he finds it in himself, is not truly himself'.[12]

The question that is raised by Nietzsche's counterposition of philosophy and journalism may thus be formulated in the following manner: what makes it possible in the first place to present philosophy as a *Gegenlehre* of everything journalistic? What is the affinity between philosophy and journalism that would render this relation of enmity possible? The thought that will guide this chapter is that Nietzsche's preoccupation with journalism is to be understood in the light of a question that can be traced back to Kant and Hegel – a question that we have already seen to surface in the writings of Kierkegaard, but that arguably takes on its full force only in the work of Nietzsche. It is a question that one of Nietzsche's more recent readers has referred to as the 'question of today' (*la question de l'aujourd'hui*): 'What is happening today? What is happening to us right now? What is this "now" in which we all live and which is the site, the point from which I am writing?'[13] It is the fundamental importance of this question in Nietzsche's philosophy that has made it possible to characterise Nietzsche as 'philosopher-journalist' (*philosophe-journaliste*): 'The first philosopher-journalist was Nietzsche. He has introduced the "today" into the field of philosophy. Before him, philosophy knew only of time and eternity. But Nietzsche had an obsession for actuality (*l'actualité*).'[14] This characterisation of Nietzsche as a philosopher-journalist may be accepted only if the conjunction of these two figures is taken to refer not to a harmonious synthesis but to a problem. Nietzsche's counterposition of philosophy and journalism must then be understood not as a refutation of

[11] KSA VI: 274; EH, 'Why I Am So Wise', §7.
[12] KSA I: 362; UM III: §3.
[13] Foucault formulates this question for the first time in a reflection on Nietzsche included in a short article of 1873 titled 'Le monde est un grand asile', included in *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 2, 1302. The formulation of the question cited here is taken from his later lecture series at the Collège de France, *The Government of Self and Others*, 11.
[14] Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 2, 1302.

this characterisation but as an elaboration of it. If philosophy is to define itself in the face of journalism, this is because philosopher and journalist will from now on be concerned with one and the same question. If philosophy is to be understood as a *Gegenlehre* of everything journalistic, this is because it will radicalise this question and go to its root, in a manner that is fundamentally at odds with the mode of thought and experience, of reading and writing of which Nietzsche will take the journalist and newspaper reader to be the exemplary figures. The polemic between philosophy and journalism as it is staged by Nietzsche will therefore not play out around an opposition between the eternal and the temporal: as we will see, the philosopher and the journalist are conceived first and foremost as the exemplary protagonists of a struggle between what is 'timely' (*zeitgemäß*) and 'untimely' (*unzeitgemäß*).

Unzeitungsgemäß

The concept of untimeliness plays an important role throughout Nietzsche's philosophical work, especially in his attempts to rethink the relation between thought and its time. Even if this role is most conspicuous in the writings of the 1870s, where the concept is programmatically introduced in the title of the *Untimely Meditations* – the series of essays that runs as a connecting thread through his early work – it continues to resurface well into his later writings, in particular those of the late 1880s. Rather than merely describing a vague 'unfashionable' or 'unseasonable' character of his early writing, the concept of untimeliness has a precise philosophical significance: it is, as Nietzsche puts it himself, a word that is to be 'understood in the most profound way' (*im tiefsten Verstande genommen*).[15] It makes its first appearance as early as 1869 in a letter to Erwin Rohde, where Nietzsche uses the word in reference to Wagner – a figure who would later serve as one of the two 'untimely types par excellence' (*unzeitgemässe Typen par excellence*) that would be portrayed in the last two of the *Untimely Mediations*. 'A fertile, rich, exhausting life, wholly divergent and unheard-of under average immortals! This is why he stands there, rooted firmly through his own force, with his gaze always over and beyond everything ephemeral, untimely in the most beautiful sense (*unzeitgemäß im schönsten Sinne*)'.[16] The concept returns several years later, after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy* and its implicit break with Schopenhauerian metaphysics, in the period when Nietzsche began working on his *Philosophenbuch*, the unfinished work that was concerned with, amongst other things, the question of whether philosophy was still possible in his time.[17] The significance of the concept of untimeliness may be understood in the light of this question. For Nietzsche, untimeliness is not an accidental attribute of thought, not a characteristic that may or may not be attributed to it: in a yet to be determined sense,

[15] KSA I: 346; UM III: §2.
[16] KSB III: §22, Letter to Erwin Rohde, 17-08-1869.
[17] See KSA VII: 19[330], Summer 1872–Early 1873 for an early plan of the *Untimely Meditations*.

untimeliness is one of its constitutive elements. 'I do not know,' Nietzsche writes in one of the *Untimely Meditations*, 'what sense there would be to philology in our time, if not for the untimeliness that is at work in it' – and the same holds true for philosophy itself.[18]

This is thematised in the writings of the late 1880s, where Nietzsche emphatically returns to the concept. In the retrospective on his work in *Ecce Homo*, the section titled 'Why I Write Such Good Books', Nietzsche no longer refers to the *Untimely Meditations* but simply to his 'untimelies' (*Unzeitgemässen*).[19] Perhaps leaving out that second word in their initial title – *Betrachtungen* – is an attempt to remove all traces of a conception of thinking as distanced and disinterested contemplation or reflection – a conception with which his planned project of thirteen periodical essays emphatically sought to break. But another way to interpret this consistent abbreviation of the title to a single word, the *Unzeitgemässen*, would be that the second word of the title could be omitted by Nietzsche because it was simply superfluous. If it is possible for Nietzsche to refer to his 'untimelies', this is perhaps because there was already something tautological about their initial title: that is to say, if untimeliness is always already at the heart of any thinking in the strict sense of the word. A comparable gesture, including the transformation of untimely from an adjective to a noun, is found in the concluding section of his *Twilight of the Idols*, published as late as 1889 and titled 'Wanderings of an Untimely'.[20] 'An untimely' (*ein Unzeitgemässen*): here this single word is used to characterise the thinker, the writer of this text. What is initially used as an adjective in the title of the *Untimely Meditations* turns into a substantive, no longer naming an attribute of thought but, so the speak, the thinker qua thinker. It is untimeliness that constitutes thought in the first place, in particular that thought which can be called philosophical – the 'philosophising' (*philosophieren*) to which he refers in the subtitle of the same book.[21]

If 'untimeliness' names a relation between thought and its time, it already presents this relation as an exit from another relation that precedes it. For thought to be 'un-timely' (*un-zeitgemäß*) it needs to extract itself from a relation that is 'timely' (*zeitgemäß*) – a word that Nietzsche uses rarely but with the same precision as its counterpart. The concept is to be read literally: un-timeliness as an undoing, an extricating, a breaking away from timeliness. This relation to what is timely (*das Zeitgemässe*), always already implied in the concept of the untimely itself, tends to be overlooked even in most commentaries, even in the rare cases when untimeliness is

[18] KSA I: 247; UM II: Preface.
[19] KSA VI: 316; EH, 'Why I write Such Great Books', 'The Untimelies', §1. For a detailed analysis of Nietsche's later rereading of the *Untimely Meditations* see Sarah Kofman, *Explosion II: Les enfants de Nietzsche*, 133–74.
[20] KSA VI: 111–53; TI, 'Wanderings of an Untimely', §1–51.
[21] The reference is to the full title of the book: *Twilight of the Idols, or how one philosophises with a hammer*. (KSA VI: 55; TI, 1)

taken seriously as a philosophical concept.[22] What risks being missed or, at worst, obfuscated by considering the concept of untimeliness in isolation is precisely that untimeliness, for Nietzsche, is a movement rather than a stable feature, a struggle rather a fixed attribute. Untimeliness, one could say, is the movement by which thought struggles to extract itself from its condition of timeliness. In the occasional reflections on the concept that punctuate the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche elaborates this understanding of thought as a struggle out of its own timeliness. In the third instalment of the series, the essay on Schopenhauer, who figures here as the ideal type of the philosopher, the conception of untimeliness is polemically formulated around the image of the thinker as a 'child of his time' – perhaps not accidentally a phrase that had already made its appearance in Hegel's portrayal of the relation between philosophy and its time in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*.[23] In the vocabulary characteristic of the early writings, Nietzsche writes:

> If it is commonly accepted that every great human being would like to be seen as the true child of its age (*das ächte Kind seiner Zeit*), [...] then a struggle by such a great one *against* his age seems to be only a senseless and destructive attack *on himself*. But this is only seemingly the case: for what he is struggling against in his time is that which prevents him from being great, which means, in his case, being free and entirely himself. From this it follows that his hostility (*seine Feindschaft*) is at bottom directed against [...] the soldering of what is timely to what is untimely in him (*des Zeitgemässen an sein Unzeitgemässes*); and in the end the supposed child of his time proves to be only its *stepchild* (*als Stiefkind derselben*). Thus Schopenhauer strove from his early youth against that false, idle and unworthy mother: his time.[24]

Perhaps the project of the *Untimely Meditations* itself may be understood in analogy to this portrayal of Schopenhauer as a figure in which the struggle of thought out of a condition of timeliness manifests itself in an exemplary manner. What is presented to the reader here are not as much the meditations of a thinker who believes himself to already be untimely, a thinker of thoughts whose untimeliness would have already been established: much rather, it is a series of writings in and through which thought becomes untimely in the first place. Untimeliness, as an exit from a *zeitgemässe* relation to one's time that is in some sense prior to it, is for Nietzsche always already involved in this struggle, this 'striving against' (*streben entgegen*) everything in its own thinking that obeys the laws of its time. That untimeliness is in this sense always already a 'striving against' means not only that thought is conceived as a struggle from the very moment it comes into being, but also that it is always at risk of slipping back into the condition from which it attempts to extricate itself. That thought is only thought insofar as it is

[22] See for instance Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 137–38 and Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, 8–10 or, more recently, Giorgio Agamben, 'What is the Contemporary?', 39–40.
[23] GW 3: 26; PhR, 15.
[24] KSA I: 362; UM III: §3.

untimely means not only that it comes into being through a struggle with its own timeliness; it also means that it is always exposed to the threat of being drawn back into this timeliness.

If the philosopher is for Nietzsche a figure of thought in its untimeliness, an untimeliness embodied in the description of the philosopher as an 'untimely one', the journalist appears as a concrete figure of thought in its most extreme condition of timeliness. In one of his early notes, Nietzsche alludes to this relation through a play on words, pointing out that philosophy can never be *zeitungsgemäß*, can never be commensurable with the newspaper.[25] If untimeliness implies an exit from what is timely, *zeitgemäß*, the newspaper would thus seem to figure as a concrete model of this timeliness. The significance that Nietzsche attributed to journalism – and the particular intensity of the poignant attacks that he directed against it – may be understood in this light. The enmity that defines the relation of philosophy towards everything journalistic is the same *Feindschaft* of which Nietzsche speaks in the passage on Schopenhauer: it is an enmity that philosophy, to paraphrase Nietzsche's formulation, directs against all elements within itself that tie it to its time. Before philosophy is philosophy, it is journalism – thought tied to its time, thought that is constrained by the laws of its time. As his pun on what is *zeitgemäß* and what is *zeitungsgemäß* suggests, journalism is for Nietzsche precisely a concrete figure of that relation to its time from which thought is to extract itself if it is to deserve its name in the first place. Perhaps this is also why Nietzsche persistently refers to journalism as a figure of bondage in his early writings. Scattered throughout his texts, we find persistent references to the journalist as a 'slave of the day' (*Sklave des Tages*) or a 'the servant of the moment' (*der Diener des Augenblicks*), as a 'paper slave' (*papierne Sklave*) who is 'ruled by the moment' (*vom Augenblick beherrscht*) or 'put on the chain of the moment' *(an die Kette des Augenblicks gelegt)*.[26] This same choice of words returns in Nietzsche's outlines for the complete series of *Untimely Meditations* and its concluding book on 'newspaper slavery' (*Zeitungs-Sklaverei*).[27] These hyperbolic references to journalism are not to be mistaken for simple mockery: they have a more precise significance, namely to show Nietzsche's attempt to conceive of timeliness as a relation of bondage – a bondage that is, conversely, grasped in historico-temporal terms, as a docile conformity of thought to its time. These images must be read as the complements to the passage on Schopenhauer as an ideal

[25] KSA VII: 30[25], Autumn 1873–Winter 1873–74.

[26] 'The 'journalist, the paper slave of the day'. (KSA I: 130; BT, §20). 'Helpless barbarian, slave of the day, put on the chain of the present moment, and thirsting for something, ever thirsting!' (KSA I: 747, FE, §5). 'In the newspaper (*Journal*) the peculiar educational aims of the present culminate, just as the journalist, the servant of the moment, has stepped into the place of the genius, of the leaders for all time, of the deliverer from the tyranny of the moment.' (KSA I: 671; FE, §1). 'The most important thing about wisdom is that it prevents human beings from being ruled by the moment. It is consequently not newspaperish (*zeitungsgemäss*) [...].' (KSA VII: 30[25], Autumn 1873–Winter 1873–74).

[27] KSA VII: 32[4], Early 1874–Spring 1874.

type of an untimely, where the struggle of thought out of its condition of timeliness is compared to a struggle for freedom, a struggle of thought against that which constrains it.

What is at stake in Nietzsche's depiction of the journalist as a 'slave of the moment' is thus not an attempt to contrast the eternal and the temporal, the permanent and the fleeting, between thought that is defined by its relation to its time and thought that has cut off all relations to the temporal and historical. Instead, two distinct types of relations between thought and its time are at stake here: one that Nietzsche characterises as a relation of submission, and another that comes into being precisely in the struggle against this submission. The journalist is the figure of the former: the figure of thought, language, experience insofar as they are brought in concordance with their time. Philosophical thought is defined not by the simple absence of a relation, but rather by the movement in which it exits from this relation, breaks away from it – a movement that Nietzsche attempts to capture in his depiction of Schopenhauer as a 'child of his time' that transforms into a 'stepchild'. What is at stake in this portrayal of the philosopher is, as in the depictions of journalists, a typological study of thought as a play of forces staged in terms of a timeliness and untimeliness, a force that brings thought in conformity with its time and another that deforms and dissolves this relation. When Nietzsche defines philosophy as the *Gegenlehre* of everything journalistic, this is what he has in mind: that philosophy exists only as a persistent struggle of thought against a timeliness that is always at work in it and always threatens to overpower it. Thought can never claim untimeliness as if it were a fixed property; the moment thought becomes untimely and thereby becomes thought in the first place, it already begins to revert into timeliness. It is timeliness understood in this sense, timeliness as a force that is constantly at work to bring thought in concord with its time, that Nietzsche will examine through his polemical portrayals of the journalist and the newspaper – portrayals in which this play of forces will be grasped first and foremost in terms of language, of reading and writing.

Legislation of language

The struggle between what is *zeitgemäß* and *unzeitgemäß* play an important role in Nietzsche's early reflections on the philosophy of language. In these reflections Nietzsche reserves a special position for the 'language of the newspaper' (*Zeitungssprache*).[28] In the language of the newspapers, Nietzsche detects one of the exemplary – and symptomatic – expressions of the predicament of language in his time.

[28] Cf. KSA I: 222; UM I: §11. 'The fabricators of these newspapers are however […] most accustomed to the slime of this newspaper language (*Zeitungs-Sprache*).'

> The greater part (*Übergewicht*) of what the German person now reads every day undoubtedly comprises the newspapers (*Zeitungen*) together with the journals (*Zeitschriften*) that correspond to them: the language employed here, a ceaseless drip of the same tropes and the same words (*gleicher Wendungen und gleicher Wörter*), imprints itself on his ear, and since he usually does his reading in those hours when his wearied mind is in any case little capable of resistance, his ear for language (*Sprachgehör*) gradually comes to feel at home in this kind of everyday German and is pained when it notices its absence.[29]

Or in a note from the same year: 'He speaks like a human being, who reads the newspapers every day (*er redet wie ein Mensch, der täglich die Zeitungen liest*).'[30] What Nietzsche calls *Zeitungssprache* is thus not limited to the pages of the newspaper itself, nor to the moment of reading; it is here presented as a language that imprints itself on the 'ears' of the newspaper reader as well as his speech, on the senses of the contemporary and his ability to express himself. Throughout the early writings, assertions of its exemplary status of the language of the newspapers are indeed coupled with descriptions that allude to its ubiquitous, all-pervasive character. 'The newspaper, this sticky stratum of communication (*klebrige Vermittlungsschicht*),' he writes in a lecture of 1872, 'now cements the seams between all forms of life, all forms of life, all classes, all arts, and all sciences' – it is, in other words, the figure of a generalised state of language.[31] In attributing this privileged status to the language of the newspapers Nietzsche remains close to Schopenhauer, who already endowed the language of the newspapers with a special significance in the fragmented 'physiognomy of the age' that he attempts to develop in his *Parerga and Paralipomena*.[32] For Schopenhauer it is in *Zeitungslesen* and *Zeitungsschreiben* that the mode of reading and writing specific to our time are thrown into stark relief. Nietzsche will draw on certain elements from Schopenhauer's characterisation of the language of the newspapers, in particular his emphasis on reading and writing – but not without rethinking them in relation to his own philosophy of language, in particular what he refers to in his notes for an unpublished *Untimely Meditation* on 'Reading and Writing' as the 'impoverishment and paling' (*Verarmung und Verblassung*) of language.[33]

What Nietzsche means when he speaks of this 'impoverishment' or 'paling' of language may be understood in the context of his reflections on language of the early 1870s, developed in

[29] KSA I: 222; UM I: §11.

[30] KSA VII: 27[62], Spring–Fall 1873.

[31] KSA I: 671; FE, §1.

[32] 'Just like every human being has a physiognomy […] so ever age has a physiognomy that is no less characteristic. For the spirit of a time is in each case like a sharp wind from the east that blows through everything.' Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena*. Vol. 2, 529-30.

[33] KSA VII: 37[6], Late 1874: 'The impoverishment and paling of language is a symptom of the waning universal soul (*der verkümmerten allgemeinen Seele*).' Cf. also the fourth *Untimely Meditation*: 'Everywhere language is sick, and the oppression of this tremendous sickness now weighs on the whole of human development.' (KSA I: 455; UM IV: §5)

conjunction with the *Untimely Meditations*. As is well known, Nietzsche in these years takes up the critique of conceptuality developed in *The Birth of Tragedy* but continues to elaborate this through a study of rhetoric.[34] Language, and conceptual language, is determined in these years as originarily figurative, as trope: its force resides not in the correspondence of words to things, but rather in what Nietzsche calls its force of 'transposition' (*die Übertragung*) – that is, metaphor. A key passage from 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense' reads:

> To the creator of language (*Sprachbildner*), the 'thing-in-itself' (which would be pure, disinterested truth) is absolutely incomprehensible and not worth seeking. He designates only the relations of things to men, and to express these relations he uses the boldest metaphors. First, he translates a nerve stimulus into an image! That is the first metaphor. Then, the image must be reshaped into a sound! The second metaphor. [...] When we speak of trees, colors, snow, and owers, we believe we know something about the things themselves, although what we have are just metaphors of things, which do not correspond at all to the original entities.[35]

The introduction of language – conceptual language in particular – is conceived as only one moment in the 'metaphorical activity' that is constitutive of human experience. Experience, qua metaphorical activity, is thus considered by Nietzsche as a series of transpositions from one sphere of signs into another – an 'overleaping (*Überspringen*) of spheres'.[36] The description of this transposition as an 'overleaping' points to its irreducibly discontinuous character: even if language enables different spheres of signs to relate to one another, it can never establishes a direct communication. That conceptual language is the product of a metaphorical activity means, in other words, that it results from a transposition between spheres that remain absolutely heterogeneous, with no possibility of adequation.[37]

The introduction of conceptual language in this series of transpositions corresponds to a distinct moment in this metaphorical activity that Nietzsche describes as the 'identification of the non-identical'. As the transposition of the image into the word, the concept marks the transition from the similar to the same, from analogy to unity. 'Every word becomes a concept as soon as it is supposed to serve not merely as a reminder of the unique, absolutely individualized original experience, to which it owes its origin, but at the same time to fit

[34] For a detailed exposition of Nietzsche's study of rhetoric and its impact on his early work, see especially Lacoue-Labarthe, 'The Detour', 14–18; Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, 6–58. On the continued importance of the theory of rhetoric in Nietzsche's later work, see Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 103–33.

[35] KSA I: 879; TL, §1.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Kofman provides a detailed analysis of Nietzsche's critique of conceptuality and his account of the 'metaphorical activity' that precedes it in her essay 'The Forgetting of Metaphor', in *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, 23–39.

countless, more or less similar cases, which, strictly speaking, are never identical, and hence absolutely dissimilar. Every concept originates by the identification of what is non-identical (*Gleichsetzen des Nicht-Gleichen*).'[38] The formation of the concept is thus for Nietzsche necessarily reductive: it is an abstraction that preserves only what is similar, at the cost of discarding individual differences between impressions. But the 'poverty' of conceptual language resides not only in its identification of the non-identical; it is also at work in its designation of impressions that are held in common. For Nietzsche the origin of conceptual language lies in a particular type of neediness: the need of the herd – not the individual – to communicate. Conceptual language develops under the pressure of these needs: it is linked to the urgency and dangers of action. It is the language of a herd that neither has time to be interested in the differences between things nor in the differences that exist amongst themselves. Under the pressure of neediness, conceptual language consigns to concepts average impressions and the evaluations of the greater number; it imposes as a norm the perspective of the herd. Insofar as language is conceptual, a structural uniformity is at work in it: in a note of the early 1870s Nietzsche speaks of a 'uniformity of word and trope' (*Gleichmässigkeit in Wort und Wendung*).[39] The same pressure of neediness in which conceptual language originates also demands for 'the invention of a uniformly valid (*gleichmässig Gültig*) and binding designation of things'.[40]

But even though the language of concepts originates in need, this is not the case for language as such. Conceptual language is for Nietzsche already a decadent language. In his early writings, Nietzsche contrasts the poverty of conceptual language to the richness of an 'original language' – a language that 'was poorer in words':[41]

> 'The more ancient languages were poorer in words, and general concepts were lacking; it was passions, needs, and feelings that were expressed in sonority. It could almost be argued that they were not so much languages of words as languages of feelings; at any rate the feelings formed the sonorities and the words […] and the movement of feeling provided the rhythm. Gradually language became separated from the language of sonorities.'[42]

This ancient 'language of feelings' returns in the *Untimely Meditations*, where it is contrasted to a 'language of thoughts': it is a language that prioritises the tonality and rhythm of speech over words – 'the most defective signs there are' – and prioritises trope over proper meaning. This origin myth, and its corresponding story of a fall, illness and impoverishment of

[38] KSA I: 880; TL, §1.
[39] KSA VII: 37[7], Late 1874.
[40] KSA I: 877; TL, §1.
[41] FL, 133.
[42] Ibid.

language, is not to be mistaken for an historical account in the strict sense: its significance is first and foremost typological. As the description of this language as one that is 'poor' in words – not devoid of words altogether – already suggests, the symbolic spheres that it distinguishes are always already at work in language. The inversion and revaluation that is implied in this myth serves a polemical purpose: by prioritising the language of music and image, it tries to dislodge the concept from its rule over 'proper' meaning.[43]

Despite its 'pale' and 'impoverished' character, however, conceptual language unmistakably exerts a force: in the early writings, Nietzsche will consistently speak of the concept as an 'invention' that now confronts humanity as an alien power. In 'On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense', he compares conceptual language to a *Zwingburg*, a prison fortress from where a city is commanded. 'That drive toward the formation of metaphors, that fundamental drive of human beings, which cannot be discounted for one moment, because that would amount to ignoring man himself, is in truth not overcome and indeed hardly restrained by the fact that out of its diminished products, the concepts, a regular and rigid new world is built up for him as a prison fortress (*als eine Zwingburg*).'[44] Conceptual language is an artificial construct that comes to exert power over its inventor, a mighty architectural construct that comes to constrain its inhabitants. The complement to this image is found in Nietzsche's descriptions of the order of conceptual language as the most delicate of constructions: a 'web of concepts', a building 'light as gossamer, delicate enough to be carried along by the wave, strong enough not to be blown apart by the wind'.[45] These two metaphorical architectures, a delicate, almost transparent web that at the same time acts as a powerful and oppressive force, converge in the passages on the impoverishment of language in the *Untimely Meditations*. 'In our dimly perceived conditions language has everywhere become a power in itself (*eine Gewalt für sich*)', Nietzsche writes here – a power 'which now seizes human beings, as if with ghostly arms (*Gespensterarmen*) and impels them to where they do not really want to go.'[46]

If conceptual language is conceived here as a 'power in itself', this is because it implies the demand for all speech to conform to the 'proper' meaning that is arbitrarily and artificially fixed in it. It represses the individual metaphor as dangerous for the life of the group and, in doing so, hides the metaphorical nature of the concept itself. What Nietzsche calls the 'legislation of language' (*Gesetzgebung der Sprache*)[47] or the 'compulsion of the correct and

[43] For a detailed discussion of the implications of concept and metaphor in the 'proper', see Derrida, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', in *Margins of Philosophy*, 207-272.
[44] KSA I: 887; TL, §2.
[45] Ibid.
[46] KSA I: 455; UM IV: §5.
[47] KSA I: 877; TL, §1.

the conventional' (*die Zwange des Correcten und Conventionellen*)[48] is the suppression of individual metaphor – that is, metaphors of impressions and experiences that resist the uniformity of the concept. This suppression is not the product of accidental historical circumstances: for Nietzsche it is structurally implied by conceptual language. The 'legislation of language' is always already at work in language insofar as it has a conceptual character. 'As soon as human beings seek to come to an understanding with one another,' Nietzsche writes in one of the *Untimely Meditations*, 'they are seized by the madness of general concepts, (*der Wahnsinn der allgemeinen Begriffe*), indeed even by the mere sounds of words.'[49] The origin of conceptuality in neediness continues to make itself in every word that is uttered: insofar as it is conceptual, language harbours an impulse to function ever more smoothly, more accurately, more efficiently. In order for conceptual language to fulfil its function, there must be a legislation of language, a demand that all speech conforms to its laws. Any divergence from these laws immediately threatens the securing of meaning; just as the imposition of the concept is accompanied by the suppression of individual differences, so the legislation of language is accompanied by a violent suppression of 'forbidden metaphors (*verbotenen Metaphern*) and unheard-of conceptual compounds (*unerhörten Begriffsfügungen*)'.[50]

When Nietzsche speaks of the 'tyrannical preponderance (*tyrannisches Übergewicht*)' of words and concepts – the same word he uses to refer to the language of the newspaper – this is meant to emphasise at once the suppression at the heart of conceptual language and its intolerance towards all speech that diverges from the 'proper' meaning it assigns to words. In the sphere of language, the *Zeitgemäßigkeit* from which thought needs to extricate itself in order to become thought in the first place thus takes concrete form in the *Gleichmäßigkeit* of conceptual language and the structural demand for metaphors to conform themselves to it. Just as thinking requires a struggle against the forces that bring thought in conformity with its time, so language needs to struggle against the tendency towards uniformity that is always already at work in it. 'Who wants to promise a future to the German language,' Nietzsche writes, 'must bring about a movement against our current German.'[51] At its most fundamental level, the struggle of thought out of its condition of timeliness *is* this struggle out of a language that binds thought to its time and brings them in conformity.[52]

[48] KSA VII: 37[7], Late 1874.
[49] KSA I: 455; UM IV: §5.
[50] KSA I: 889; TL, §2.
[51] KSA VII: 37[7], Late 1874.
[52] On the relation between uniformity and the opening up of history in Nietzsche's early writings, see Werner Hamacher's essay '"Disgregation of the Will": Nietzsche on the Individual and Individuality', in *Premises*, 143–48.

Zeitungssprache

Nowhere is the structural tendency of language towards *Zeitgemässigkeit* expressed more clearly than in the language of the newspapers – the 'ceaseless drip of the same tropes and the same words' (*dem unaufhörlichen Tropfenfall gleicher Wendungen und gleicher Wörter*) that Nietzsche evoked in the first of the *Untimely Meditations*.[53] As this hyperbolic image suggests, what Nietzsche calls *Zeitungssprache* is to be understood first and foremost as a language in which the uniformity and regularity of conceptual language is driven to an extreme. Not only is the semantic dimension of speech reduced to a simple repetition of the same elements, the same tropes and words; also its musical dimensions, which manifest themselves in their most bare form as rhythm, is here reduced to the homogeneity of a *Tropfenfall*, the release of an excess through a regular dripping.[54] This homogeneity is also thematised in a note that stems from the same year, where Nietzsche writes: 'To write like the entire world writes (*wie alle Welt schreibt*), that is to say, like the newspaper-writers (*die Zeitungsschreiber*). [...] Who will ever write a positive linguistic doctrine of the entire-world-style (*eine positive Sprachlehre des Allerweltsstils*)?'[55] That this *Zeitungsschreiber* writes 'like the entire world writes' does not mean that his language is what Nietzsche, in his notes for a planned *Untimely Meditation* on 'Reading and Writing', calls a 'common language' (*gemeinsame Sprache*).[56] Quite the contrary: that this is a language of *alle Welt* means precisely that it is a language that belongs to no one in particular. The language of the *Zeitungsschreiber* is a caricature of the language to which Nietzsche will refer as the expression of a 'common and overflowing soul' (*gemeinsame und überströmende Seele*); it is a language that is valid only for an average, purely abstract speaker.[57] The question of whether a 'positive doctrine' (*positive Sprachlehre*) of such a language will ever be written is thus not without irony: for the dimension of conceptual language that is exemplified by the writing of the journalist would, insofar as it is a pure abstraction, have no positive reality. In this sense *Zeitungssprache* may be seen as the pendant of another such extreme: the supposedly 'objective' language of science, which Nietzsche evokes throughout the early writings. If the language of science exemplifies the demand for 'correctness' and 'accuracy' inherent in conceptual language, the newspaper exemplifies its inherent tendency towards uniformity – its tendency to turn language into the carrier of average impressions and the evaluations of the greatest number.

[53] KSA I: 222; UM I: §11.

[54] For a discussion of the tension between Nietzsche's theory of the musical aspect of language and its rhetorical origin, see Lacoue-Labarthe, 'The Detour', 30–31.

[55] KSA VII: 27[68], Spring–Autumn 1873.

[56] KSA VII: 37[7], Late 1874.

[57] KSA VII: 37[6], Late 1874. Nietzsche explicitly returns to this point later in his notes on 'for the unfinished *Untimely Meditation*: 'The impoverishment and paling of language is a symptom of the languished general soul [...], even though the great uniformity in word and trope can appear to be the opposite, as the gaining of a common soul.' (KSA VII: 36[7], Late 1874).

Just as the conceptual dimension of language has its origin in a certain *Not* – the need of the herd to survive – so Nietzsche locates the origin of this extreme uniformity of *Zeitungssprache* in a hyperbolic version of this neediness. On the pages of the newspaper, language takes shape under the pressure of a perennial urgency that Nietzsche describes in terms of a demand for utility: 'To make use of the moment (*den Augenblick benutzen*) and, to profit from it (*um von ihm Nutzen zu haben*), to judge it as quickly as possible (*so schnell wie möglich beurtheilen*)' – this is the demand under which the journalist writes.[58] The 'judgement' of the moment at issue here must be taken in the strict epistemological sense: it means to subsume an impression as quickly as possible to a readily available concept. In another note from the early 1870s Nietzsche writes that 'the pernicious essence of the journalist (*das verruchten Wesen des Journalisten*)' consists precisely in 'the hastiest cognition and exploitation of the ephemeral (*hastigste Erkenntnis und Ausnützung des Ephemeren*), yes of the momentary – and nothing but that!'[59] To make use of the fleeting, momentary impression in this sense thus means to reduce it to what is readily available and, in that sense, exhaust it; this *Benutzen* is also an *Ausnutzen*. The 'haste' that drives this conceptual and linguistic operation, and of which the journalist is here presented as the exemplary figure, must not be understood as an accidental subjective disposition but, rather, as the expression of a neediness that Nietzsche thought to be at the origin of language insofar as it has a conceptual dimension. In the hyperbolic haste of the journalist, the writer whose words all stand under the pressure to subsume each moment under already available concepts, Nietzsche sees the caricatural exaggeration of a tendency that is at work in all conceptual language.[60]

That the journalist must complete this operation, this *Benutzen* and *Ausnutzen* of every passing moment, as quickly as possible means that he can only take recourse to already available words and concepts. That there is something mechanical about this writing is suggested by Nietzsche's descriptions of the journalist as a *Zeitungsfabrik-Arbeiter* – a 'newspaper factory worker'. Once again, this description must be read as a caricatural image of the structure of conceptual language. When Nietzsche speaks in his Basel lectures of 1872 of 'the style of our newspaper factory workers, the "careful choice of words" (*gewählten Diktion*) of our writers', the reference to this *gewählte* diction must be understood in the double sense of the word: not merely in the sense of careful, but also in the literal sense of a diction that is merely an activity of choosing, of picking words that are readily available. The image also returns in a well-known passage in the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, where Nietzsche compares the

[58] KSA I: 462; UM IV: §6.

[59] KSA VII: 35[12], Spring–Summer 1874.

[60] This 'haste' is a recurrent trope in Nietzsche's writings of the period, where it is often associated with journalism. In an earlier note, this haste is still characterised in organic terms as an 'unripeness': 'Haste, unripeness, the journalist.' (KSA VII: 8[89], Winter 1870–71–Autumn 1872).

modern subject to a 'lifeless and yet uncannily mobile factory of concepts and words'.[61] This factory-like character is attributed precisely to a subject that 'is suffering from the malady of words and mistrusts every impression of one's own that has not yet been designated with words' (*die noch nicht mit Worten abgestempelt ist*).[62] The writing of the journalist is the opposite of what is called *Sprachbildung* elsewhere in the early writings; it is a writing that mechanically subsumes every moment under already given concepts, that mistrusts every impression that has not yet been 'stamped by words'.

This diction, this choice and use of words, is already alluded to in Nietzsche's note on *Zeitungsschreiben*, which can now be cited in full: 'To write like the whole world writes, that is to say, like the newspaper-writers do, who always take the first, most convenient word.'[63] *Das erste bequemste Wort* – if this word comes first, this is because it is readily available, because it is not formed anew while speaking. If this word is *bequem*, this is because it requires no effort on behalf of the speaker: it is a language that is already given, where words would already have a clearly determined meaning. *Zeitungsschreiben* never loses time because it confines itself to the habitual meaning of metaphors. The journalist submits himself to the legislation of language and makes sure to subsume every impression under already available laws; he does not employ metaphors that are 'unheard-of' (*unerhört*) or 'forbidden' (*verboten*).[64] Because he always uses the first word, *Zeitungsschreiben* is a fluent writing, without pauses or interruptions. The journalist is always ready to give priority to the word that comes first and easiest over the word that expresses his experience more fully. Whatever seeks expression in language – whether it is 'feeling' or 'thought' – is here subjected to the demand not to lose time, to speak instantly and without interruption. Experience has to conform itself to readily available words and metaphors; anything that cannot be expressed in this language of 'first words' is instantly excluded from it. In the *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche characterises the language of the *Zeitungsschreiber* by evoking the image of 'pens that never cease to flow'.[65] This language is characterised by a peculiar virtuosity: there is no thought here that could interrupt the flowing of pens; there is no occurrence that could render the journalist speechless. It is a language that can flow continuously because there is nothing that exceeds or disrupts the concepts whose meaning is already secured in it – a language that maintains its uninterrupted flow only insofar as it expels everything that it cannot directly absorb.

[61] KSA I: 329; UM II: §10.
[62] KSA I: 329; UM II: §10.
[63] KSA VII: 27[68], Spring–Autumn 1873.
[64] KSA I: 889; TL, §2.
[65] 'But their critical pens never cease to flow, for they have lost control of them and instead of directing them are directed by them.' (KSA I: 285; UM II: §5).

Besides standing in a close relation to Nietzsche's critique of conceptuality, the remarks on *Zeitungssprache* of the early 1870s also show the blurring of a distinction between two spheres whose opposition had still animated Nietzsche's first book: the sphere of speaking and hearing on the one hand, and that of writing and reading on the other.[66] In the passage from the first *Untimely Meditation* with which we started this section, Nietzsche begins to speak of the language of the newspapers – the 'ceaseless drip of the same tropes and words' – as a written language that the contemporary 'now reads every day' (*jetzt jeden Tag liest*) and then suddenly shifts to the sphere of spoken language, pointing out that this language now 'imprints itself on his ear' (*prägt sich seinem Ohre ein*).[67] A similar transposition is found in another note of the same year, a note that consists only of a single sentence: 'He speaks like a human being who reads the newspapers on a daily basis' (*Er redet wie ein Mensch, der täglich die Zeitungen liest*).[68] In these remarks, *Zeitungssprache* is portrayed as a language that belongs to the sphere of reading and writing and is subsequently transposed to that of speaking and hearing. There is a distinct ambiguity to these remarks and the transposition they stage. On the one hand, these remarks undoubtedly bear the traces of the prioritisation of speech over writing – a prioritisation that would still inform the interpretation of the appearance of *Leseliteratur* in ancient Greece as a 'sign of degeneration', as it was developed in the course that Nietzsche gave at Basel in the following years. The language of the newspapers is treated as the emblem of a *Sprache* that is abstracted from the dimensions of voice and gesture – a language whose poverty would manifest itself precisely when this paled language is transposed once again into the sphere of speech. To 'speak like someone who reads the newspapers on a daily basis' would mean to speak an impoverished language, a language that has been stripped of the pleromatic fullness that still seems to characterise speech at this point in Nietzsche's work. Yet at the same time as they bear the traces of the prioritisation of speech, these notes unmistakably effect a reversal of this priority. *Zeitungssprache*, the language that more than any other exemplified the time in which Nietzsche understood himself to be writing, is here portrayed as a language that is written and read *before* it is spoken. It is, in other words, a *Sprache* that cannot be understood from the standpoint of speech, of voice and gesture; it is modelled not on the supposed fullness of the spoken word but rather on the written word – a word that 'lies on the pages of newspapers' (*auf Seiten der Zeitungen liegt*) and that 'stamps itself on the ear' (*sich einprägt*). It is in this sense that the remarks on *Zeitungssprache* anticipate the revaluation of reading and writing and the reconceptualisation of speech and the figure of the speaker that will take on an ever more prominent role throughout Nietzsche's work.

[66] Lacoue-Labarthe examines the lingering opposition of speech and writing in Nietzsche's writings after the study of rhetoric in his essay 'Apocryphal Nietzsche', 47-55.
[67] KSA I: 222; UM I: §11.
[68] KSA VII: 27[62], Spring–Autumn 1873.

Rumours

To the portrayals of the newspaper – and in particular its language, *Zeitungssprache* – as the figure of a certain timeliness, Nietzsche counterposes another image of language and thought: an image that is, not accidentally, compressed in the figure of a messenger who brings a different, untimely kind of news. Throughout Nietzsche's work we find various messengers of this kind, various images of an untimely tiding or *Zeitung* in the ancient sense of the word that serve as a counterpart to the philosophical caricatures of the journalist and the newspaper in the early writings. The exemplary instance of this untimely news is undoubtedly captured in the famous scene conjured up in *The Gay Science*: the scene where a messenger walks unto a town square, turns to his contemporaries and announces to them what is happening today, what is happening right now: the news of a 'tremendous event' (*ungeheure Ereignis*) that, according to this messenger, defines his time, our time, the news that is compressed in the terse phrase 'God is dead' (*Gott ist Tod*).[69]

Gott ist Tod – before being a sentence or a statement, a *Wort* or *Satz* – two terms that are customarily employed to describe the status of this phrase[70] – the death of God is presented in this scene as a *Nachricht*: that is to say, as a message or a piece of news. It is also this term that Nietzsche himself will use in the other aphorism of *The Gay Science* where he engages directly with the theme: the aphorism in the fifth book, added four years after the initial publication, that refers to 'the message that the "old God is dead"' (*die Nachricht, dass der 'alte Gott tod' ist*).[71] 'Haven't you heard of that madman' (*habt ihr nicht von jenem tollen Menschen gehört*): if the death of God is announced as a message, a piece of news, then the figure who here makes his entrance into a town square must be understood first of all as a messenger. As a messenger, this *tolle Mensch* speaks without ever truly becoming a speaker: the message that is delivered here – the news of the death of God – comes from elsewhere. As the portrayal of the madman makes clear, this messenger is at no point to be mistaken for the stable origin of the words he speaks. Words pour out of the mouth of this wildly gesturing madman who 'cries incessantly' (*unaufhörlich Schrie*): they are the words of a speaker who is not in control of his speech but rather possessed by it, the bearer of words that do not originate within himself. There is no speaker in this scene to which these words could be traced back: no identifiable origin that could guarantee their meaning. That the figure who walks unto a town square is designated as a 'madman' – at least by the contemporaries who have supposedly related this

[69] KSA III: 480–82; GS, §125.

[70] On the death of God as *Wort* and *Satz*, see Heidegger, 'Nietzsches Wort "Gott ist tot"', in *Holzwege*, 209–68. For a general exposition of the death of God and Nietzsche's theory of nihilism, see Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. 4, 3-57.

[71] KSA III: 574; GS, §343. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche will also refer to the death of God as a 'novelty' (*Neuigkeit*). See: KSA V: 238; BGE, §295.

story – must not be understood as a contradiction of its status as a messenger but rather its radicalisation: the madman is here, before anything else, the figure of a speaker who could never lend authority to the words he speaks. Every word spoken by that speaker designated as a madman could be nonsense. In this sense, the madman is the figure of a speaker who has become a messenger in the pure sense: the bearer of words whose meaning he could never guarantee. That not even the one who signs this aphorism, 'Nietzsche', could be mistaken as occupying this position is suggested by the phrase with which it begins. 'Haven't you heard...' – with this phrase, the possibility of referring to the signatory of this aphorism as its stable origin has also become problematic: the report of a madman who is delivering the news is, in turn, marked as a piece of hearsay.

As words spoken by a messenger who appears to his contemporaries as a madman, the news that God is dead does not just lack an identifiable sender; as the aphorism in the *Gay Science* makes clear, it also lacks an addressee. Even though this madman is unmistakably portrayed as a messenger who intends the message he bears to arrive, a speaker who goes to great lengths to make sure the words he speaks are heard, that is to say, who intends the words he speaks to be understood, this message remains without a final destination. The scene of a town square where a speaker addresses 'his audience' (*seine Zuhörer*) is conjured up only in order to stage the breakdown of this familiar scene of speaking and listening, to perform the impossibility of this audience to hear this message and to fully understand it. After being initially greeted by 'a great laughter' (*ein grosses Gelächter*), the audience 'turns silent and looked at him in astonishment' (*sie schwiegen und blickten befremdet auf ihn*): but this is not the laughter of an audience that has understood what has been said but finds it ridiculous, just as the dumb silence that follows it is not the silence of an audience that has understood this message but chooses to ignore it. This laughter and this silence signal before anything else that this news is neither heard nor understood, that these words are spoken without an addressee who, despite the absence of a sender, is able to bestow on them their full signification. Just as this message has no speaker, so there is no addressee or destination – whether an earthly audience or a divine one – that could guarantee its meaning. Words are spoken, but they are fated to remain unheard.[72]

When the death of God is, once again, thematised in one of the aphorisms included in the fifth book of *The Gay Science*, which was added in 1886, four years after its initial publication, Nietzsche returns on two occasions to its status as a message or a piece of news. Not only does the last sentence of the aphorism refer to 'the message that "the old god is dead"' (*die*

[72] For an interpretation of the death of God as an 'event of disappropriation' that plays out in language and must be understood as an 'ongoing event' in all speaking, see Werner Hamacher, '"Disgregation of the Will": Nietzsche on the Individual and Indivuality', 169-72.

Nachricht, dass der 'alte Gott tod' ist); this designation of the death of God as a *Nachricht* is already anticipated in the first sentence, which refers to 'the greatest newer event – that "God is dead" (*das größte neuere Ereignis – das "Gott tot ist"*), that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable'.[73] Even though the death of God is again characterised as an 'event' (*Ereignis*), a term that reiterates the reference to the *ungeheure Ereignis* in the earlier aphorism, this 'event' is once again presented only indirectly, as a message whose status is here marked by the recurrent use of quotation marks. When Nietzsche speaks of 'the greater newer event – that "God is dead"', the inverted commas must be interpreted as quotation marks: it is as if the writer of these sentences refers to an event of which he has no direct knowledge, an event of which he has only heard reports. As in the case of the madman's announcement, this message does not seem to originate in the one who speaks these words or the one who signs these sentences: once more, the 'death of God' is announced as if it were a piece of hearsay, a message that was overheard and passed on. When Nietzsche refers to this news, the news that 'God is dead', he does so by reciting words that are not his own. These are words that are not imbued with a meaning by their writer; by placing them between inverted commas, their writer treats them as words that are as strange to him as they are to reader of this text. Once placed between inverted commas, these words are thereby also divorced from any concept that they may have been thought to communicate: they appear as bare words on the page, words that remain external and irreducible to any 'proper meaning' that may be ascribed to them.

When Nietzsche repeats the initial reference to 'the greatest new event – that "God is dead"' in the last sentence of the aphorism, which refers to 'the message that "the old god is dead" (*dass der "alte Gott tod" ist*)' this effect is further emphasised though a shift in the position of the quotation marks. In an adjustment that remains untranslatable from the original German, in this second formulation the verb *ist* is excluded from this recited message, placed outside of the quotation marks. The message recited is thereby reduced to three words: *alte Gott tod*. 'Old god dead': the message here confronts the reader as an opaque combination of words whose significance could never be fixed definitively or completely determined; a message of which it even has to remain uncertain whether it can be read as a *Satz*, a sentence or proposition. The message here appears as the ruin of a constative sentence; a ruin that is brought about in particular by the exclusion of the word that guaranteed the cohesive structure and function of the sentence, *ist*. It seems as if, in addition to the death of God, the possibility of saying *ist* has expired too; that any language in which the news of the death of God could no longer have recourse to the structure of substances and predicates. The news of the death of God therefore bears the traces of the 'tremendous event' that it announces: its language is stamped by that of which it speaks. This news takes the form of a message without a speaker or addressee,

[73] KSA III: 574; GS, §343.

without intention or destination, without any guarantee of its proper signification. The news of the death of God is delivered as a message without truth, substance, or subject: a message that cannot even sustain its status as a constative sentence – *Gott ist Tod* – but must deteriorate into a combination of marks whose status as a sentence must remain uncertain: *alte Gott tod*. Perhaps it is possible to say that this errant, deteriorating message is not as much stamped by the event of which it speaks: perhaps the 'tremendous event' of the death of God *is* nothing but the impossibility that is exposed in this errancy and deterioration – the impossibility of securing a stable referential ground.[74]

In the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which was published the year after *The Gay Science*, this impossibility is thematised once more. In the opening pages of the book, Zarathustra expresses his astonishment over the fact that the news of this death has not yet reached the first interlocutors he encounters on his wanderings. 'How is it possible!' Zarathustra exclaims after this first conversation: 'This old saint in his woods has not yet heard that God is dead (*hat noch Nichts davon gehört, dass Gott tod ist*)!'[75] The death of God is here treated as a rumour that does the rounds: a rumour that is already circulating, perhaps since time immemorial. That the news of the death of God is here no longer proclaimed as an announcement but takes the form of a rumour is no accident: for it is the ancient form of the *Gerücht* that exemplifies the dimension of language in which God has always already died and must die again and again. Not only is the *Gerücht* is the exemplary instance of a message that is no longer tied to a speaker from which it originates, a message that shows itself to be irreducible to any given intention that would precede the act of speaking, nor does it only exemplify a message that is no longer tied to an addressee for whom it is destined, a message in which language shows itself to be always exposed to being heard and overheard by others. The rumour also exemplifies a language that is no longer tied to a verifiable truth that exists outside of it: it is language that shows itself to be irreducible to its reference to 'things in themselves'. The rumour of the death of God is like the other rumour that is evoked later in Zarathustra, not accidentally in the section 'On Great Events', which relates in a digression how one day 'the rumour circulated' (*lief das Gerücht umher*) that Zarathustra had disappeared – an unsubstantiated story that quickly spreads, transforming in an uncontrollable manner in the process, only to turn into the rumour that 'the devil had fetched Zarathustra'.[76] In the rumour, it has become impossible to secure the proper meaning of words – or rather, it becomes clear that this impossibility had been at work all along. But this impossibility is not merely a breakdown, it is also a liberation: language shows itself to be irreducible to the status

[74] Blanchot refers to the 'fragmentary speech' that for him characterises Nietzsche's work as 'barely speech – speech only at the limit'. See Blanchot, 'The Limit-Experience', 159-60.
[75] KSA IV: 14; Z, 5.
[76] KSA IV: 167-171; Z, 102-5.

of a means that serves an end outside of itself. Throughout his writings, Nietzsche will explore rumour as the figure of a language without a subject; rumours do not only 'circulate' (*laufen herum*), they also 'spread themselves' (*verbreiten sich*) and 'travel from door to door' (*ziehen von Haus zu Haus*).[77] When Nietzsche's messenger in a town square exclaims that the 'tremendous event' of which he brings news is 'still underway and wandering' (*noch unterwegs und wandert*) these words echo the vocabulary of a wandering language that characterise his descriptions of rumours. The rumour would reveal that dimension of language that would resist any possible stable or definitive fixation of meaning.

'Rumour (*fama*),' Tertullian already writes, 'only lives on as long as it fails to prove itself. As soon as a rumour proves itself to be true, it expires: as if its task of reporting news were at an end, it quits its post. [...] Because a wise man puts no faith in an uncertainty, a rumour is believed by none but a fool (*stultus*).'[78] But for Nietzsche there is a truth to this foolish belief in rumour: because this fool, this *tolle Mensch* knows that there is a sense in which all language, after the death of God, must have the instable character of a rumour. This instability must even affect the news of the tremendous event that God is dead. When Zarathustra sighs that his faithful interlocutor 'has not yet heard' (*hat noch Nichts gehört*) of this tremendous event, this does more than just refer to the rumourous character of language after the death of God; it also characterises this language as a language that is exposed to the possibility of remaining unheard, perhaps even fated to remain unheard entirely. It is certainly no accident that Nietzsche begins to stage the announcement of the death of God in *The Gay Science* with the same phrase, expressed once again in the negative mode. 'Haven't you heard of that madman...' – who reads this aphorism is, each time again, addressed as a reader who may not have heard this news: it is as if the one who has heard this rumour, who has begun to think the breakdown of language that is imparted in this message without a speaker or addressee, has already begun to mishear it, to secure its proper meaning, to posit new origins and destinations. With each reading, the reader hears this news once again and forgets it once more. Perhaps this is why, with each reading, the messenger in the town square must reiterate that the 'tremendous event' of which he conveys the news has not quite happened yet – that this news 'has not yet reached the ears of men (*bis zu den Ohren der Menschen gedrungen*)'.[79]

Idolatry of facts

God may have died, but gods nevertheless continue to be worshipped – even by those who claim to have renounced all religion. As long as these gods are not deities of a genuinely new

[77] KSB II: §480, Letter to Hermann Mushacke, 20-09-1865.
[78] Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, 1:7.
[79] KSA III: 574; GS, §343.

kind, as long as they are not the deities of the 'new religion' that Nietzsche will proclaim in his later writings, these gods are mere reproductions of the old God in a different form – *Götzen*, not *Götter*.[80] One of the exemplary sites for this idol worship is for Nietzsche the newspaper. In the worship that is practiced here on a daily basis the old God returns in a sphere that is claimed to be secular: the sphere of history. The second essay of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', may be read as an attempt at exposing how the modern experience of history continues to harbour a concealed idolatry. This is programmatically announced towards the end of the essay, where Nietzsche exclaims: 'What, there are no more living mythologies? What, the religions are dying out? Just behold the religion of the power of history!'[81] The old God lives on in the religion of history: not only in the form of lofty ideas of historical reason or progress, but also in the form of idols that are more difficult to recognise as such. Of the many idols that are attacked in the *Untimely Meditation* on history, the most pernicious would seem to be an idol that is claimed to have an utterly profane status: the 'fact'. 'Every instant is turned into a bare admiration for success and leads to an idolatry of the factual (*Götzendienst des Tatsächlichen*),' Nietzsche writes; 'an idolatry that is now generally described by the very mythical yet quite idiomatic expression "to take the facts into account" (*den Tatsachen Rechnung tragen*).'[82] Towards the end of the same paragraph these sentences are reiterated in summary form in a passage that suddenly turns to the reader, addressed directly as an *ihr* – you, the reader, you, the contemporary: 'You make success, the factual (*den Erfolg, das Faktum*) into your idol, while in reality the factual is always stupid (*dumm*) and has at all times resembled a calf rather than a god.'[83]

What is at stake in these two sentences is more than a commentary on the general reverence of facts that is characteristic of the modern study of history. The image of an 'idolatry of the factual' captures a specific philosophical reflection on the constitution of the fact itself. This is already suggested by Nietzsche's description of this *Götzendienst*, whose object is not *Tatsachen* but *das Tatsächliche*: not merely particular facts, but the factual as such – the fact considered in its facticity. Nietzsche's understanding of the basic structure of this facticity is suggested by the word with which he will replace *das Tatsächliche* in his second reference to an idolatry of the factual: *das Faktum*. Like the German *Tatsache*, the Latin *factum* refers to 'something done'; but as a noun that is constructed out of a perfect participle of *facere*, it presents the fact emphatically as an act that has been completed. There is something ineluctable and irreversible about the fact considered in this sense: every fact would be the account of an occurrence that has already come to a conclusion, that has already been closed

[80] Heidegger discusses Nietzsche's understanding of idolatry in relation to the death of God in 'Nietzsches Wort "Gott ist tot"', in *Holzwege*, 209–68.
[81] KSA I: 309; UM IV: §8.
[82] Ibid.
[83] KSA I: 310; UM IV: §8.

off, that is complete in itself. Read in this way, Nietzsche's reference to the *factum* would suggest that every fact has the structure of a *fait accompli*: just as the 'accomplished fact' presents a history that has already completely transpired before it is imparted, so every fact claims to present a history that has taken place conclusively and definitively before it is recounted or interpreted. But Nietzsche's reference to the *Faktum* not only points to the complete, conclusive character of the fact that is here worshipped as an idol; it also points to the opposition that has traditionally sustained this determination of the factual – the opposition between *factum* and *fictum*. The fact is here strictly separated and opposed to everything that involves a *fingere*: a forming, moulding or, in the most general terms, a mere touching or handling. In its opposition to the *fictum*, the *factum* is conceived as that which has not formed, been touched: that which is directly and immediately given. The fact that emerges here is a positive fact: a fact that has an independent unity before it has been touched by any formative activity. *Factum* and *fictum* are therefore not merely opposed but also hierarchically ordered: the *fictum* is conceived as a representation that is always secondary to the factual – a representation that can, at best, stand in an adequate relation to the positive fact but is always susceptible to falsification. In the fact, historical reality is thought to present itself as a pure given that precedes any *fictum*, any account that is in turn conceived as a representation of an already established reality. Historical reality is conceived by this idolater as an aggregate of actual events: events that, in their independent unity as positive facts, would enjoy an existence that can be neatly separated from their writing or reading.

Only this pure *factum* conceived in a strict opposition to the *fictum*, only a conception of the fact as something that is directly and immediately given, could ever give reality the air of immutability and inevitability that lends full force to the demand to 'take account of the facts'.[84] *Den Tatsachen Rechnung tragen* – if this expression is 'quite idiomatic', as Nietzsche writes, this is first of all because it implies that the fact renders the sphere of history comparable and therefore commensurable with the sphere of the *Rechnung*, that is to say, of counting and accounting. Who conceives of historical reality as an aggregate of facts, so it suggests, ultimately treats history in the same way that the accountant reckons with incomes and expenses: as facts that can be determined with absolute exactitude and without the least ambiguity, governed by the same rules of iron necessity that govern the balance sheet. When Nietzsche refers to this same expression – *den Tatsachen Rechnung tragen* – also as a 'very mythological turn of phrase' (*sehr mythologische Wendung*) this is because it presents historical reality as if it were governed by iron necessity.[85] Insofar as the fact is believed to have a self-sufficient unity prior to all writing or reading, there is a sense in which every fact

[84] KSA I: 309; UM IV: §8.
[85] Ibid.

deprives historical reality of its plasticity and mutability.[86] Historical experience is thus denied the possibility of freedom implied in this mutability – but also sheltered from the groundlessness to which it opens up. The idolater of the factual may concede that every fact allows for multiple interpretations; but these interpretations are always opposed to a factual reality that is thought to be prior to it and thought of as secondary. In the demand to 'take account of the facts', historical reality is presented as a mythical world that is not in any way made or shaped but can at best be responded to in an adequate manner. There is thus a relation between the fact and the category that Nietzsche understands to be central to myth: fate. Nietzsche will explicitly name this relation between *factum* and *fatum* in a later passage, contained in the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morality*, where he speaks of the 'the *will* to stand still before the factual, the *factum brutum*, that fatalism of *petits faits* (*ce petit faitalisme*, as I call it)'.[87] Such a small, petty fatalism would be the proper name for the pettiness of facts – a name that brings to the fore the fatalism that is at work in every fact. From the standpoint of such fatalism, historical reality is thought of as purely given, inevitable and ineluctable, predetermined by 'actual events' that are supposed to be directly available to empirical consciousness. What claims itself to be an enlightened conception of history turns out to be stamped by the structure of fateful predetermination.

This 'fatalism of *petits faits*' marks the point where the fact can turn into an idol. In the belief in the pure, positive fact, God lives on after his death – and it is in this sense that Nietzsche can write, elsewhere in the essay on history, that the idolater of the factual treats each fact as a manifestation of 'God's sojourn on earth' (*das Wandeln Gottes auf der Erde*).[88] Only the belief in historical reality as an immutable given could ever provide the idolater with a stable referential ground after the old God has died. Only a *factum* that is strictly separated from the *fictum*, a fact that is denied its plasticity, could ever alleviate the burden of freedom inherent in the mutability of reality. That the fate to which the idolater submits is itself not a given is already suggested by Nietzsche's reference to 'the *will* to stand before the factual'.[89] The submission to a reality that is believed to be given and the imperative to take account of the facts imply a prior renunciation – a renunciation that Nietzsche, in the same passage from the *Genealogy*, describes as the 'renunciation of any interpretation (*jenes Verzichtleisten auf Interpretation überhaupt*): of forcing, adjusting, shortening, omitting, filling-out, inventing, falsifying and everything else *essential* to interpretation'.[90] Nietzsche had already begun to problematise the status of the fact as a pure given and pointed to this active renunciation when

[86] Rebecca Comay draws out the tension between the 'idolatry of the factual' and the 'plasticity of the moment' in the second *Untimely Meditation* in her essay 'Redeeming Revenge', 28–30.
[87] KSA V: 399-400; GM III: §24.
[88] KSA I: 308; UM IV: §8.
[89] KSA V: 399; GM III: §24.
[90] KSA V: 400; GM III: §24.

he wrote that the idolatry of facts consists precisely in turning 'the success, the fact' (*den Erfolg, das Faktum*) into an idol. These two words, *Faktum* and *Erfolg*, juxtaposed to one another and only separated by a comma, are here presented as if they are synonyms – two words that are purely tautological and potentially interchangeable. What is implied by the peculiar presentation of these two terms is not the general claim that history is written by the victor, even if this thought surfaces on several occasions in Nietzsche's early reflections on history, but a more specific claim with regards to the constitution of the fact itself. That every fact is an *Erfolg* suggests, first of all, that the fact is not something given but always already an outcome or result, something that follows from an activity. It is the translation of an *eventus* in the Latin sense, an occurrence conceived as outcome. Moreover, that the fact is not merely a *Folge* in the general sense of the word but an *Erfolg*, would suggest that this it is not merely an arbitrary outcome of an activity: the fact is that in which a certain activity finds its final accomplishment. Every fact, so it would seem, must be thought of as an accomplishment; the fact is not simply given, but that which has achieved the status of facticity. Finally, the term *Erfolg* in the sense of a success suggests that Nietzsche understands this process by which the fact claims its facticity – and thus comes to count as a fact in the first place – in terms of a relation of force. This relation of force is, at its most fundamental level, the force by which something that is an outcome of an activity – the *Faktum* as *Erfolg* – comes to achieve the status of a reality that is thought to be directly given.[91]

If one reads the passage from the *Genealogy* from this perspective, this means that it is not just other interpretations that must be renounced in order to construct the positive fact in its independent unity: what is renounced is 'interpretation as such' (*Interpretation überhaupt*). In a note from 1875 which once again takes up the theme of a worship of the factual, Nietzsche makes this explicit when he writes: 'Everything that is suppressed by success (*alles durch den Erfolg Unterdrückte*) punts up gradually; history as scorn of the victor; servile disposition and devotion for the fact (*servile Gesinnung und Devotion vor dem Faktum*).'[92] If every fact is the outcome of a relation of force, this relation is here construed in terms of suppression. What is suppressed in every fact is left undetermined here because it is implied in the concept of the fact as *Erfolg*, an outcome: before it can count as a fact, every fact has already suppressed that it is not a given but constituted. This repression is exactly what is evoked in Nietzsche's claim that the idolatry of the factual emerges only out of a 'bare admiration of success' (*nackte Bewunderung des Erfolges*). This 'bare admiration' would be an admiration that turns the accomplishment that is admired into a bare accomplishment, that is to say, an outcome divorced from the process through which it is constituted: to turn the fact into an idol, to take it

[91] On the presentism of journalism, the 'positive fact' and the fetishism of force that underpins it, see Hamacher, 'Journals, Politics', 453-54.
[92] KSA VII: 35[12].

as a pure given and posit it as a stable referential ground, entails forgetting the process through which 'reality' is made – and it is only in this forgetfulness that the fact is constituted in the first place.

Echographies

Throughout his writings, Nietzsche will attempt to articulate an experience of history that does not lapse into an 'idolatry of facts' and its representation of history as a sequential arrangement of what 'actually happened'. One of the principal directions that he will begin to explore in his early writings revolves around acoustic imagery and the concomitant attempt to rethink historical experience according on the model of sound, resonance and echo. The sound will serve here as a model for both a critique of the hypostasis of historical reality and the attempt to escape from it. An exemplary instance of this imagery is found in one of his notebooks of 1882, which includes the following brief note: 'Now it is first through an echo that events acquire "greatness" (*jetzt ist es erst der Widerhall, durch den die Ereignisse "Größe" bekommen*) – the echo of the newspapers (*der Widerhall der Zeitungen*).'[93] The image of the 'echo of the newspapers' is here introduced in the context of a note whose premise is implied by its first word: *jetzt*. History, so it would seem, does not always take place in quite the same way. In our time – the 'now' to which the writer and the reader must both relate themselves – 'events' acquire their 'greatness' in a way that is different from any other time. That this note is written in the same year that the *Gay Science* was published suggests that this now has a specific inflection: the *jetzt* in which 'events acquire their "greatness"' (*die Ereignisse ihre Größe bekommen*) through an echo would be the same now in which the madman in the marketplace announces the 'enormous event' (*ungeheure Ereignis*) that is the death of God. The note and its reference to the echo of the newspapers are thus stamped with a specific date: 'now' – now that God has died – history can no longer take place as before, nor can it be spoken of in quite the same way. Even though the words that are employed in this note to refer to history – 'event' and 'greatness' – seem to have remained intact, their use is now punctuated by the same marks that appeared in the announcement of the death of God. Who stamps his notes with this date – 'now' – could, so it seems, no longer use words such as 'event' or 'greatness' without placing them between inverted commas. Who attempts to live up to the demand implied in this date could only speak these words by citing them, passing them off as words that are not his own, marking them as words that can no longer lay claim to the meaning that once seemed proper to them.

[93] KSA X: 3[1] 250, Summer–Fall 1882. In his lecture series on Nietzsche, Heidegger cites this note in his exposition of the distinction between affect and passion, treating it as a mere paraphrase of Nietzsche's claim that 'our age is an agitated one, and precisely for that reason not an age of passion'. (*Nietzsche*, Vol. 1, 47)

In another note that is found on the same page, these inverted commas return, together with the categories of the 'event' and 'greatness'. Here Nietzsche exclaims: 'I do not believe in the greatness of all these "great events" of which you speak (*ich glaube nicht an die Größe aller dieser "großen Ereignisse", von denen ihr sprecht*).'[94] Even now, precisely now, in a time when the news of the death of God spreads like a rumour, there is apparently talk of 'great events': talk that is here, once more, attributed to the 'you' in the plural – you the readers, you the contemporaries, but also a you that implicates and admonishes the writer of this note, who will reread it in his notebooks. Even though 'great events' are still spoken of in this now – and it is words like these that above anything else characterise the *Zeitungssprache* – this writer who begins his sentences with the word 'now' must call them into question, renounce them as words in which he does not 'believe' (*glauben*), a word that Nietzsche uses as a term that has both an epistemic and a religious sense, suggesting that these categories must be rejected in the same way that one would reject a false God. But when Nietzsche claims that he does not believe in the 'great events' that the newspapers never cease to talk about, this must not be mistaken for the claim that other 'events' could unproblematically lay claim to this 'greatness'. What is denounced here is not merely the 'greatness' of some occurrences, a denunciation that would correspond to the claim that this 'greatness' could only be rightly attributed to others. Similarly, Nietzsche does not claim that a conception of 'greatness' measured on the basis of mere effects is to be denounced in order to attend to the 'event itself'. What is called into question here is the category of 'greatness' as such – and together with it the conception of the 'event' that could ever 'acquire greatness' (*Größe bekommen*), that is to say, the event that is hypostasised as an independent substance of which attributes such as 'greatness' might be predicated in the first place.

This critique of the hypostasis of history that is implied in the category of the 'great event' is already undertaken in Nietzsche's early writings. To better understand what is at stake in the notes from the 1880s one could turn to a passage at the outset of the fourth of the *Untimely Meditations* – the essay on Wagner, which is the text where Nietzsche deals most extensively with questions of sound and music. 'No event has greatness in itself (*an sich hat kein Ereignis Größe*),' Nietzsche writes in the first paragraphs of the essay, 'even when whole constellations of stars disappear, entire peoples fall, expansive states are founded and wars are fought with tremendous forces and losses; the breath of history (*der Hauch der Geschichte*) has blown through many things of that kind as if through flakes of snow.'[95] He then continues to elaborate this proposition in acoustic terms: 'It can also happen that a powerful human being strikes a blow (*einen Streich führt*) that sinks down from a stone surface without having any

[94] KSA X: 3[1] 248, Summer–Fall 1882.
[95] KSA I: 431; UM IV: §1.

effect (*wirkungslos niedersinkt*): a brief, sharp echo, and all is over (*ein kurzer scharfer Wiederhall, und Alles ist vorbei*). History has almost nothing to report of such as it were blunted events (*die Geschichte weiss auch von solchen gleichsam abgestumpften Ereignissen beinahe Nichts zu melden*).'[96] Even though Nietzsche is, in his writings of the time, himself still entangled in the talk of 'great events' he will later emphatically denounce, it already shows the attempts to struggle to escape from such talk. The claim that 'no event has greatness in itself' is such an attempt. What is problematised here through the category of greatness is the very separation between the 'event' and its 'effects' that makes it possible to speak of 'great events' in the first place. When Nietzsche evokes occurrences on a world-historical and even a cosmic scale – from the disappearance of constellations of stars to wars in which tremendous force is expended – these exemplify not so much the most extreme asymmetry between an 'event' with an independent unity and its effects but, rather, the complete dissolution of the category of the 'event' into these effects. An occurrence without effects, an occurrence that is purely *wirkungslos*, would not have occurred at all; the 'event' would be nothing but *Wirkung*. As long as the passage continues to speak of 'events' it can only approximate this point, only refer to those 'truncated events' of which history has 'almost nothing' (*beinahe Nichts*) to report.

But in this approximation, the passage already signals an attempt to think of an occurrence that is nothing but an occurring, an occurrence that is no longer ascribed to an 'event' that can be separated from its 'effects'. But while the passage remains caught in the talk of 'event' and its 'effects' on a conceptual plane, the images introduced here further elude this distinction altogether. It is no accident that images of sounds, reverberations and echoes return throughout the reflections on history in the *Untimely Meditations*. These images are not to be mistaken for mere illustrations: they are examples of imagery in and through which Nietzsche attempts to problematise how 'history' is constituted. If the sound serves as a privileged image for the historical occurrence, this is precisely because it problematises any understanding of history as a sequence of 'actual events' that may be isolated and described as a thing in itself. Every sound resists the possibility of being separated from its *Wirkung*: the sound is nothing but its sounding, its resonance and reverberation. This sounding is, in turn, always already marked as a resounding: there is no original sound that could ever be separated from its sounding as a cause that could be separated from its effects. A 'blow' may be struck – and Nietzsche tends to use the *Streich* not only as the most elementary of all sounds but also as the most elementary of all deeds – but it can take place as a sound only insofar as it resounds. Only in and as this resounding does the sound first take place. When Nietzsche refers to the *Widerhall* this must therefore be understood in the literal sense: as the *Wider-hallen*, the re-sounding in which every sound is constituted in the first place. If it is translated as 'echo' then it must be

[96] KSA I: 431; UM IV: §1.

understood as an originary echo, the sound insofar as it is always already constituted as echo and cannot be traced back to a sound that exists prior to it. To think history in terms of a sounding and resounding would therefore remove the possibility of ever tracing history back to what 'actually happened', of ever isolating a sequence of 'actual events' that can be neatly separated from their effects: the sound would be the model of an occurrence that is nothing but an occurring – a resonating and reverberating, pulsating and echoing, fading away and dying out without a substantial subject.

The attempt that informs Nietzsche's use of acoustic imagery, the attempt to speak of history without separating between 'events' and their 'effects', is summarised in his later recourse to the word *das Geschehen* in his reflections on history. Nietzsche uses *Geschehen* as a reluctant noun, a noun that indicates an occurrence that has almost managed to indicate nothing but its occurring, its distinction from the verb *geschehen* reduced to the most minimal distinguishing mark of a capital letter. But precisely in the minimal difference between the two words, occurrence and occurring, it also testifies to the stubborn tendency of language to separate and hypostasise a subject. It is no accident that Nietzsche derives his images from the sphere of sound, which – like rhetoric, but ultimately in an irreconcilable way – indicates a sphere of imparting that is prior to (conceptual) language. The fate that is reserved for the *Geschehen* that Nietzsche captures in the image of the sound, once it is transferred into language, is the same as that of the well-known example of the flash of lightning in the later writings.[97] Just as language 'separates' (*trennt*) the 'bolt of lightning' (*Blitz*) from its flash (*seinem Leuchten*) and 'takes the latter for a deed, an effect of a subject called lightning', so the *Geschehen* of history can only appear as doubled once it has entered language. The *Geschehen* is separated into the occurrence and its occurring, into 'effects' which are attributed to an 'event' that is taken to be their cause. In this separation, the 'event' is taken to have a reality apart from its effects; like the 'subject called lightning', the 'event' is taken to be a substratum independent of its effects, the doer of a deed. This separation is driven to an extreme in the talk of the 'great event', where the hypostasis of the 'event' culminates in its treatment as an object that could be placed in front of an observer – an object that could be inspected and measured just as one would ascertain the *Große* of a stone on a table. What is forgotten in this talk of 'great events' is the same as that which is forgotten by those who speak in sentences like *der Blitz leuchtet*: 'There is no "being" behind the doing, the effect, the becoming (*dem Tun, Wirken, Werden*); the "doer" is a mere fiction added to the doing (*der Täter ist zum Tun bloß hinzugedichtet*) – the doing is everything. People at bottom double the doing when they allow the lightning to flash. That is a doing-doing (*Tun-Tun*): it posits the same occurrence (*dasselbe Geschehen*), once as cause and then again as its effect.'[98]

[97] KSA V: 279; GM I: §13.
[98] Ibid.

It is precisely this doubling that affects any occurrence once it comes into contact with language that is thematised in the note of 1882 where Nietzsche speaks of the *Widerhall der Zeitungen*. The image of the echo is here first introduced right after the 'now' that stamps the note with its particular date, in a phrase with a strange syntactical structure. 'Now,' Nietzsche writes, 'it is first through an echo that events acquire "greatness" (*jetzt ist es erst der Widerhall, durch den die Ereignisse "Größe" bekommen*).' *Jetzt ist es erst der Widerhall*: if the shift in the way in which history takes place now, now that rumours of the death of God circulate everywhere, is captured in the image of an echo, it is thus an echo of a peculiar kind. The *erst* that is here pressed as closely as possible to the *wider-* seems to indicate not only a precedence in importance ('first and foremost') but perhaps also a precedence of a logical and temporal kind. The *Widerhall* is an echo that comes first, a resounding that occurs before the sound. The chronological reversal that is introduced in this phrase recalls the one that Nietzsche describes in a later note of 1888:

> The *chronological reversal* (*die chronologische Umdrehung*), by which the cause later enters consciousness than the effect. We have learned that pain is projected in a part of the body without being located there. We have seen that the perceptions which one naïvely considers as conditioned by the outside world are much rather conditioned from the inside. The fragment of outside world of which we are conscious is born after (*nachgeboren*) the effect that has reached us from the outside and that is then projected, afterwards (*nachträglich*), as its 'cause'.[99]

When Nietzsche writes that it is 'first through an echo' that the category of the great event first comes into being, he presents it as the result of a similar reversal. The *Widerhall* of the newspaper here signifies a writing that is only naïvely thought to be conditioned by the 'actual events' of which it writes but is, instead, conditioned by the writing first by the writing itself; the 'actual events' that are written of do not precede this writing but are first constituted in this writing. Only afterwards, *nachträglich*, these 'actual events' are projected as that which preceded this writing; the 'actual event' is now posited as the cause of which the writing is a mere effect. Nowhere is this reversal expressed more clearly than in the category of the 'great event', where the sheer volume of writing on an event that first comes into being in this writing is mistaken for a property of an event that is thought to have caused it. What is considered to be a cause – the great event – is the effect of an effect, the echo of an echo.[100]

[99] KSA XIII: 15[90] – Spring 1888. Hamacher offers a detailed interpretation of this example and the 'doubling' by which language 'separates the occurrence from itself' in his essay 'The Promise of Interpretation', in *Premises*, 117–19.

[100] For a detailed analysis of this 'chronological reversal' and its relation to Nietzsche's theory of rhetoric, see De Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 107-8.

This schema of reversal is already anticipated on multiple occasions in Nietzsche's writings of the early 1870s. In the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, 'On the Uses and Abuses of History', Nietzsche relates his attempts to understand history in terms of a sounding and resounding to writing – a writing whose exemplary site is the newspaper. He writes here:

> The modern human being [...] has been brought to a condition that even great wars and great revolutions are able to alter for hardly more than an instant. The war has not even come to an end, and it has already been transformed a hundred thousand times into printed paper (*schon in bedrucktes Papier hunderttausendfach umgesetzt*), has already been served up as the newest stimulant for the weary palates of those greedy for history. It seems almost impossible to elicit a strong and full sound (*starker und voller Ton*) even with the strongest sweeping of the strings (*Hineingreifen in die Saiten*): immediately it fades away (*sofort verhallt er*) and in the next instant it already dies out (*klingt er ab*), historically subdued, evaporated, powerless.[101]

Before the war has come to an end, before this war has fully and completely taken place, it has already been converted, *umgesetzt*, transposed into marks printed on paper. This conversion into writing therefore does not follow take place after the war, as a report that may be separated from that which it reports; this war is already converted into writing before it has ended and takes place precisely as this writing. This conversion into writing is, moreover, not to be thought of as a representation that could ever stand in a supposedly adequate relation to the thing that is represented: it is an *Umsetzung*, a transposition between spheres that could have no adequate relation to one another. As a transposition in this sense – a transposition which has 'already' (*schon*) occurred and will have already occurred before any other 'great war' or 'great revolution' has taken place – the marks imprinted on paper would leave no possibility of gaining access to a history that has 'actually happened'. Shifting once again to an acoustic register, Nietzsche compares this history that is inseparable from its writing to the sounding and resounding of a 'sweeping of strings'. If history must be thought of in terms of such sounding and resounding, the newspaper may be understood as an echo chamber that defines the conditions and possibilities for its sounding and resounding – a chamber where sounds resonate and reverberate in a manner that is characteristic of the time in which Nietzsche is writing. The study of history would no longer be concerned with what 'actually happened'; much rather, this passage suggests that it would have to take the form of an echography. The study that Nietzsche begins to undertake here is a descriptive analysis of sounds that 'fade away' or 'die out', of 'brief' or 'sharp' echoes, of sounds that are 'cut off' or 'evaporate'. Such an echography would seem to be concerned not only with the description of actual sounds but also with a study of the echo chamber itself: a study of the conditions under which sounding and resounding becomes possible – a study of the conditions under which sounds are muted and muffled, but also of possible resonances and reverberations. This

[101] KSA I: 279; UM II: §5.

echography would start from a different conception of what it means for history to occur, a different conception of the *Geschehen* of *Geschichte*. The terms that Nietzsche uses in the first attempts at such an echography – *wiederhallen*, *verhallen, abklingen* – suggest that the study of what 'actually happened' would have given way to a study of history understood as a sounding that is always already marked as a *wieder-*, *ver-*, *ab-* – as a re-sounding and re-sonating that leaves no possibility of ever identifying an original.

Prosopopoeia of history

In parallel to his attempts to conceive of history in acoustic terms, Nietzsche's efforts to articulate an experience of history that does not fall prey to the positivism of facts will focus mainly on extending and reworking his early reflections on language. Even if rhetoric is no longer at the core of his philosophical project after 1875, it will continue to play an important role in his reflections on history.[102] This is suggested, for instance, by an important note from 1883, the same year that Nietzsche published the first two parts of his *Zarathustra*. The note reads as follows:

> A fact (*Faktum*) or a work is of a new eloquence (*von neuer Beredsamkeit*) for each time and for each new kind of human being. History speaks ever-new truths (*die Geschichte redet immer neue Wahrheiten*).[103]

The note foregrounds an important motif in Nietzsche's reflections on history: a motif that might be referred to as the *prosopopoeia* of history, a presentation of history as something that speaks. Throughout his writings, Nietzsche will attribute speech not only to occurrences – the 'facts and works' to which this note makes reference – but also to the time of history, to the past and especially to the future, of which Nietzsche will write in a later note that it 'speaks even now in a hundred signs'.[104] When this prosopopoeia is evoked in the note on the 'eloquence' of facts and works, it is easily mistaken for a mere extension of Nietzsche's perspectivism, applied and elaborated in relation to the experience of history. Understood in this way, the reference to the *Beredsamkeit* of historical occurrences would be yet another reiteration of the thesis that there is no fact without interpretation, that there is no such thing as an objective historical fact, only interpretations that are inseparable from the particular perspective from which they are undertaken.[105] But even though the prosopopoeia of history that Nietzsche evokes in this fragment certainly stands in a close relation to his doctrine of

[102] Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe, 'The Detour', 14–18.
[103] KSA X: 16[78], Autumn 1883.
[104] KSA XIII: 11[411], November 1887 – March 1888.
[105] For a detailed discussion of Nietzsche's perspectivism, see Alexander Nehamas, *Life as Literature*, 15–17.

perspectivism, it is by no means exhausted by it. The image of history presented here cannot be reduced to the status of an illustration or application: it captures an experience of history – and its relation to thought – whose implications are at once broader and more precise than concepts of 'perspective' or 'interpretation'.

What does it mean, then, to think of historical experience in terms of a prosopopoeia? Besides implying that historical experience has a linguistic structure, the image of prosopopoeia first of all suggests that this linguisticality finds its model in speech. As such, it suggests that the object constituted in this experience – the 'fact' and the 'work' to which the note makes reference – is not understood as something passive in the way that a text is typically considered to be. Rather than being portrayed as a text that waits to be read, the historical occurrence is conceived as something that calls to be heard and understood, something that makes a demand upon the one who hears it. Moreover, that history not merely speaks but has an 'eloquence' (*Beredsamkeit*) suggests that the speech and the language spoken here have an emphatically *rhetorical* character. The rhetoric of facts and works would be a rhetoric of a specific kind: it would be an *eloquentia*, a rhetoric of persuasion. What is the one who hears this speech of history persuaded of? What would be the effect of such persuasion? Before anything else the eloquent fact would persuade its audience that there is a speaker; that there is a 'fact' or a 'work' that speaks. In other words, the two types of occurrences that the note distinguishes between – the *Faktum* and *Werk*, the pure given and the pure intentional act – do not precede their speech: they are rather the effects of this speech, this eloquence that persuades the listener that they exist. The *Beredsamkeit* of history is not merely the eloquence of an already established speaker who proves his persuasive force by making what is said appear as the truth; more fundamentally, this eloquence once again follows the schema of metonymy: as in the case of the 'echo of the newspapers', the real persuasive force of this eloquence is the substitutive reversal of an effect for a cause, of what comes first and what comes after.[106] That history 'speaks ever-new truths' (*redet immer neue Wahrheiten*) must be understood both as a confirmation of this thesis and as a further elaboration. There is a notable dissonance here between the 'truth' and the 'speaking' to which Nietzsche refers here, which is not a *sprechen* but a *reden*. This is not a truth that has an existence prior to its own communication in a language of concepts and propositions – it is a truth that is produced in the first place by a language of persuasion.

Not only does Nietzsche's image of an 'eloquence of facts' therefore undermine the notion that history consists of 'actual events' that precede this eloquent speech; it also undermines the notion that these 'actual events' could ever be organised into a linear sequence. That history

[106] De Man provides an exposition of this reversal of cause and effect in his study of metonymy in Nietzsche. See *Allegories of Reading*, 103–18.

'speaks ever-new truths' would not only mean that the same 'fact' – if this can even be isolated – speaks to each epoch differently. Nor would it simply extend this claim by proposing that each fact not only has a different thing to say to each epoch, but has a different way of speaking, a different eloquence, a different *Beredsamkeit*: its persuasive force differs from one epoch to another, together with its possible effects. Insofar as that which speaks is constituted only in the speech itself, the thesis of an *Beredsamkeit* of history does not merely involve a claim that the same occurrences are seen in an ever-new light; it suggests precisely that these occurrences themselves – the facts and works of history – are constituted ever anew in this speech. Such truths would be 'always new' (*immer neu*) in a specific sense: they would never persist through time but only persist in the form of their return and renewal.

In another note from the early 1880s, Nietzsche returns to the motif of a prosopopoeia of history and his attempt to model his conception of historical experience on speech. In this case, however, he focuses on the question of what it means to *hear* this strange spoken language of history:

> We do not hear much and we hear in an uncertain way when we do not understand a language that is spoken around us (*eine Sprache die um uns gesprochen wird*). The same goes for music that is unfamiliar to us, like the Chinese one. Hearing well (*das Guthören*) is therefore a constant guessing (*Erraten*) and filling in (*Ausfüllen*) of the few actually perceived sensations (*Empfindungen*). Understanding is a fantasising and closing off (*Phantasiren und Schließen*) that approaches surprisingly fast: from two words we guess a sentence (while reading); from one vowel and two consonants a word while hearing – indeed, many words we do not hear, but think them as heard (*denken sie als gehört*). What has actually happened (*was wirklich geschehen ist*) is difficult to say through our inspection (*Augenschein*): for we have constantly filled things up and closed things off (*gedichtet und geschlossen*).[107]

The interplay of hearing and saying here serves as the principal model for a reflection on experience – in particular the experience of 'what has actually happened'. Even though there is a reference to reading – significantly enough placed within parentheses – the examples that are mobilised here derive first of all from the sphere of spoken language. Experience is compared to hearing, in particular hearing what has been said. Nietzsche avoids references to identifiable speakers: the image that the fragment starts from does not evoke a 'we' directed towards and addressed by someone who is speaking, but rather a 'we' that – perhaps inadvertently – hears 'a language that is spoken around us' (*eine Sprache die um uns gesprochen wird*). Moreover, the language that is heard here is one that we do not understand (*verstehen*): a language that is unfamiliar (*fremd*) to us, perhaps, like the music to which Nietzsche refers afterwards, in the sense that we only pick up a few words, never with certainty, struggling to make out words; or

[107] KSA IX: 11[13], Spring–Autumn 1881.

perhaps speech that we cannot quite understand in the literal sense of the word *verstehen*, a language we struggle to understand because we cannot quite hear what has been said. This hearing is not taken as an aberration; in the inversion that is central to the note, it is taken to be exemplary of all hearing and the experience modelled on such hearing. If 'interpretation' for Nietzsche always evokes a reading that is at the same time a matter of writing – a theme to which we will return later in this chapter – the hearing that Nietzsche depicts here is at the same time a matter of speaking. To hear always involves an active 'guessing and completing' of what was said: an activity that takes place 'astonishingly fast' (*erstaunlich schnell*), so fast that it always outdoes the one who is hearing. If hearing is always to 'think as heard', it is a thinking of which the hearer can never quite become conscious. To hear well, *Guthören* – a term Nietzsche of course uses polemically – would thus be a hearing that is always predicated on a mishearing. We are persuaded that we have heard what has been said, that we have heard 'what has actually happened' (*was wirklich geschehen ist*) without ever being fully aware that this is in the first place *gedichtet*: not only completed and closed off but also, in the other sense of the word, actively produced.

In an aphorism that is included in *Daybreak*, which was published in the same year, 1881, Nietzsche draws the outlines of a conception of historiography that has abandoned any reference to 'what actually happened'. Returning to the question of factuality, he writes:

> *Facta*! Yes, *facta ficta*! A historian has to do not with what actually happened (*was wirklich geschehen ist*), but only with events supposed to have happened (*vermeintlichen Ereignissen*): for only the latter have produced an effect (*haben gewirkt*). Likewise he only has to do with supposed heroes. His theme, so-called world history, is opinions about supposed actions (*Meinungen über vermeintlichen Handlungen*) and their supposed motives, which in turn give rise to further opinions and actions, the reality of which is however at once vaporised again (*deren Realität aber sofort wieder verdampft*) and produces an *effect* only as vapour *(und nur als Dampf wirkt*) – a continual generation and pregnancy of phantoms (*Zeugen und Schwangerwerden von Phantomen*) over the impenetrable mist of unfathomable reality (*über den tiefen Nebeln der unergründlichen Wirklichkeit*). All historians speak of things which have never existed except in their representation (*Vorstellung*).[108]

History, that with which the historian concerns himself – and for Nietzsche we are all historians of our own life – can be said to consist of 'facts' only insofar as these facts are understood as *facta ficta*, facts that are made rather than given. The fact is here treated according to the schema of Nietzsche's theory of rhetoric. The distinction between *doxa* and *epistēmē* that Nietzsche elaborates in the notes for his lecture course of the early 1870s – a distinction summarised in the claim that 'language is rhetoric because it desires to convey only

[108] KSA III: 224-25; D, §307.

a *doxa*, not an *epistēmē*'[109] – is here applied here to the sphere of history and the opposition between *factum* and *fictum*. Just as concepts are not be mistaken for the carriers of a proper meaning, so history is not to be mistaken for 'what has actually happened': just as the concept of the 'hero' hypostasises a subject that precedes its actions, so the 'fact' hypostasises an 'event' that precedes its effects. What 'actually happened' only has 'reality' – if it is still possible to use this word – insofar as it produces effects. If it is possible to speak of a reality, this is the reality of ever-renewed vaporisation – a reality that exists only as its own aftereffect, an effect that has no reality in itself but only in producing other effects, in vaporising yet again. History is not the stable account of 'what has actually happened'; it is precisely the 'continual generation and pregnancy of phantoms' – phantoms that can never be stabilised as a self-same phenomenon but always differ from themselves. There is no substantial ground to history conceived in this way: the reality with which the historian is concerned is *unergründlich* not only in the sense that it is unfathomable, that one has no access to 'what actually happened' but also in the sense that there is no reality that could ever provide a stable ground for a complete and definitive account of history. The ever-renewed vaporisation that constitutes historical reality does not consist of phantoms over an unfathomable but stable ground, but over a 'deep mist' (*tiefen Nebeln*) – a groundless ground that is itself nothing of vapour.

The model for the conception of history outlined here by Nietzsche is not the 'fact', but rather the linguistic form – if it can still be called a form – in and through which the news of the death of God will be imparted: the rumour. If 'history speaks', as Nietzsche claims in his note of 1883, it speaks first of all a rumourous speech that has no stable reference to a speaker, a 'fact' or a 'work' that could be established before their speech and identified as its origin. To conceive of history as a rumour would mean, first of all, that neither the question of who is speaking, nor that of what is spoken of, can ever be determined with any certainty. The rumourous speech of history is for Nietzsche not an aberration from factuality proper, quite the contrary: what is called a 'fact' is nothing but a rumour whose status has been forgotten and suppressed – a suppression that can only continue to exist on the condition that it persuades the listener through its eloquence that it hears what has 'actually happened'. This reversed relation between fact and rumour is thematised in a passage in one of Nietzsche's letters, also written in the early 1880s, where he provides his friend Heinrich Köselitz with a detailed description of his encounter with a rumour.

> Here, in the hermitage that lies alone in the woods and whose hermit I am, there is a great emergency (*große Noth*). I actually do not know what has happened (*ich weiß eigentlich nicht, was geschehen ist*), but the shadow of a crime lies over the building. Someone has buried

[109] DA, 23.

> something, others have discovered it, one heard terrible whining, there were many police officers, a house search took place, and at night I heard someone sighing in heavy torment, so that I could no longer sleep (*der Schlaf floh*). Also there appeared to be digging in the woods in the middle of the night, but something surprising took place, and then there were tears and cries again. A civil servant told me that it was a 'story of bank notes' (*Banknotengeschichte*) – but I am not curious enough to know as much as is probably known by the whole world around me.[110]

In its density and specific choice of words, the passage stands out from the letter and reads almost like a philosophical aphorism.[111] The 'history' that Nietzsche relates here to his friend is a history that takes place in the medium of rumour. Even though the author of the letter 'does not know what has happened (*was geschehen ist*)', the signs that something is happening are unmistakable. Whatever is happening speaks to the author of this letter – and it does so in the register of tears and cries, of a whining and sighing that wake him from his slumber. What appears to the 'civil servant' who enters the stage at the end of this story as a *Geschichte*, a coherent story presented as a sequence of actual events, is experienced by the author of the letter as a constellation of dispersed occurrences – signs that resist being fixed definitively as a sequence of causes and effects. Rather than asking what has 'actually' happened, however, the experience of this history as rumour is deliberately maintained – at least in the account that the author of the letter gives to his friend. Besides the claimed indifference towards the question as to what has 'actually' happened – an indifference that Nietzsche ascribes to his lack of 'curiosity' (*Neugier*) – there is an unmistakable pleasure in suspending the knowledge of the 'facts'. Perhaps it is a pleasure that stems from the sense that there is a different truth to this experience of this history as a rumour whose proper meaning cannot be fixed or stabilised – an experience that suspends the construction of a coherent history through a 'guessing and filling in'.

Reading and returning

When the preoccupation with journalism surfaces in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the work of the following years, it is set in a close relation to a problem that had already appeared in Nietzsche's early writings but that would come to play an ever more important role in the later texts: the problem of *reading*. The figure of the journalist, which still appeared in the early lectures, has disappeared entirely from the later writings; not the language of the newspapers,

[110] KSB VI: §40, Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, 14-08-1880.

[111] Heidegger has argued that Nietzsche's letters cannot be ostracised from his oeuvre. 'This [...] accounts for Nietzsche's remarkable habit of writing drafts of his letters directly into his manuscripts. He does that, not because he wants to economise on paper, but because his letters pertain to his oeuvres. Letters too are mediations.' Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. 2, 10.

but *Zeitungslesen* and *Zeitungslektüre* will figure as a central trope in the texts of these years. 'We despise every formation that has a tolerance for newspaper reading (*jeder Bildung, welche mit Zeitungslesen verträgt*),' Nietzsche writes in an exemplary note of 1885.[112] At the same time as it returns to the theme that was central to his Basel lectures of early 1872 – *Bildung*, understood here in the sense of the formation of subjectivity – this note replaces the figure of the journalist, which served as a negative image of the formation that these lectures had sought to articulate, by the image of an activity, a certain mode of reading. The question of *Bildung*, which was already in the early lectures understood as a question concerning the future, is now framed as a question of reading, of a certain relation to text and meaning; and this question is, in turn, framed as a matter of extricating oneself from a specific mode of reading – the reading of the newspaper. An initial indication of how Nietzsche understood the specificity of this reading is suggested by another fragment that stems from a notebook of the same months, where *Zeitungslesen* described through a series of adjectives:

> The coarsening of the European spirit, a certain plump directness (*ein gewissen täppisches Geradezu*) that likes to hear itself celebrated as rectitude, propriety or scientificity (*Geradheit, Redlichkeit, oder Wissenschaftlichkeit*) […] – this is the effect of newspaper reading (*die Wirkung des Zeitungslesens*).[113]

Newspaper reading would thus be a reading that stands under a single imperative: *Geradezu*. This word captures two aspects of this reading: as an adverb it evokes a certain literalness, a certain relation to meaning as something that is simply and directly given; and it presents the retrieval of this literal meaning – by way of an ironic metaphor – as a movement that follows a straight line, a movement that goes 'straight towards' (*gerade zu*) its goal. The word that follows on from it, *Geradheit*, evokes the same directness – but here, like the English translation, 'rectitude', it transposes this directness into a moral register, rendering the straight movement as a good movement. To read well, to move straight towards the meaning of the text, without detours – to read as one reads the newspapers.

To grasp the significance of this provisional characterisation of *Zeitungslesen*, it is crucial to understand these remarks in relation to the analysis of reading that Nietzsche developed in the same period. Reading is here not conceived in terms of a direct, straightforward comprehension of the meaning of inscripted signs but, rather, as an activity that is modelled before anything else on a certain movement of turning or, more precisely, a movement of returning (*Wiederkehren*). Nowhere is this articulated in a more precise and programmatic way than in a dense passage on reading found in the preface to one of the texts of the late 1880s – a

[112] KSA XI: 34[65], April–June 1885.
[113] KSA XI: 35[9], May–July 1885.

passage included in a *Vorwort*, the place at the threshold of the text that Nietzsche already liked to use for the sparse reflections on reading in the early writings. In this passage, itself introduced as an aside, Nietzsche formulates a theory of reading that is organised around a figure of return: 'rumination' (*Wiederkäuen*):

> If anyone finds this writing (*diese Schrift*) incomprehensible and hard on the ears, I do not think the fault necessarily lies with me. [...] An aphorism, properly stamped and moulded, has not been 'deciphered' ('*entziffert*') just because it has been read out (*abgelesen*); on the contrary, only now must its *interpretation (Auslegung)* first begin, and for this an art of interpretation (*Kunst der Auslegung*) is needed. [...] I admit that you need one thing above all in order to practise the requisite reading as *art* (*Lesen als Kunst zu üben*), a thing which today people have been so good at forgetting (*verlernen*) – and therefore the 'readability' ('*Lesbarkeit*') of my writings will take some time – and for which one must almost be a cow and certainly not a 'modern human being': *rumination* (*das Wiederkäuen*)...[114]

In reading this passage, it is crucial to bear in mind that the word Nietzsche used, *Wiederkäuen*, differs in a crucial way from every translation that has its roots in the Latin *ruminari* – a word that has its root in the Latin *rumen*, the throat or gullet. Not only does the English 'rumination' lack the element of return that is emphasised in the German, the *wieder-* that would come to assume such a specific significance in the writings after the summer of 1881 in Sils-Maria.[115] It is also a term that, insofar as it derives from the *rumen*, lacks the distinct emphasis on the materiality of the text that is evoked by the German *Wiederkäuen* – a term that maintains a certain resistance to a conception of reading as a purely ideal process that takes place within an already constituted subject. What allows rumination in the sense of *Wiederkäuen* to serve as a crucial image of reading for Nietzsche is not only its emphasis on the movement of a return, but also its reference to the irreducible externality and materiality of the text. This will play an important role in Nietzsche's understanding of rumination as a reading that can only be thought of as a returning reading, a reading that is always a once again and a once more.[116]

Rumination is a chewing that repeats another chewing; it is an eating of what has already been eaten, a chewing over what has already been chewed – it is, ultimately, a return of what has already returned before. The chewing to which *Wiederkäuen* refers never takes place for the first time, nor for the last; its *wieder-* suggests not only that it must be preceded by another chewing, but also that it is bound to be repeated again: it is an eating without a definitive

[114] KSA V: 255; GM, Preface §8.
[115] KSB VI: §190, Letter to Heinrich Köselitz, 17-08-1881.
[116] For a detailed analysis of the relation between reading, rumination and return in Nietzsche, see Hamacher, *Pleroma: Reading in Hegel*, 277–86.

closure or reconciliation. For this reading there is no such thing as a reading that happens only once: reading only begins in the return to a text that had remained unread in a first reading that, in turn, only emerges in its repetition. It is no accident that Nietzsche begins this reflection on reading in the preface to a 'book' of 'essays' that are in a sense more like a collection of aphorisms – *The Genealogy of Morality* – for the aphorism is the form par excellence to illustrate this strange reading. There is no aphorism, in the precise sense in which Nietzsche uses the word, that could have ever been read on a first reading. The thought of a ruminating reading is thus advanced through a writing – 'this writing' (*diese Schrift*) – that would itself only be read through such a repeated reading. What must be learned by any reader who 'practices' (*üben*) such a repeated reading, by any reader who exercises this repeated reading again and again, is that any renewed reading displaces the reading that preceded it. That Nietzsche refers to 'this' writing, points to a writing that is supposedly immediately present, is thus not without irony. Not only does 'this writing' no longer quite mean what it seemed to mean before; that the reader of 'this' writing now faces 'another' writing also means that the words themselves appear in a different way in the movement of return. To the reader who ruminates, who returns to the text and consumes it yet another time, the word is no longer an unequivocal carrier of meaning; it comes to appear as a cipher, as something that needs to be *entziffert*, that withdraws from understanding. In this repeated reading, writing thus appears at the same time as that which makes reading possible and as that which resists its own comprehension or what Nietzsche here calls 'readability' (*Lesbarkeit*) – a term that needs to be placed between quotation marks because it would precisely suspend the usual understanding of the word. In this repeated reading words do not simply signify something different than in the 'first reading' in which the reader took their significance to be self-evident; as ciphers, words come to signify in an altogether different way: their meaning is no longer thought to be stable or given.[117]

Reading conceived as rumination thus has a double structure, for which Nietzsche here reserves two words that, in their form, almost appear like displaced repetitions: *ablesen* and *auslegen*. Only with in the repetition of *ablesen* as *auslegen* does it become possible to speak of reading in the strict sense: only when the initial reading (*ablesen*) has already transpired can the other reading (*auslegen*) first begin. There is no such thing as a first reading, in the sense that any first reading could only manifest itself as a missed reading, a mere *ablesen*. Any reading that takes place only once would not have taken place at all. The thought of an a priori repetitive reading is contained in the phrase Nietzsche uses – *nun erst hat dessen Auslegung zu*

[117] On Nietzsche's 'eternal return' as an impossible repetition of the same, see Pierre Klossowksi's seminal essay 'The Experience of the Eternal Return' in *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 55–73. For a critique of the ontological interpretation of the eternal return as a new metaphysics of time or the totality of being – Heidegger's claim – see Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, 45–46.

beginnen: in the 'now' indicated here, reading begins for the first time, but already as a repetition of another reading – a reading that was, in turn, not yet a reading. In this repetition, the initial reading is not just displaced by another one; it also opens itself to be displaced yet again. This thought of the repetitive structure of reading is not formulated for the first time in the later writings; when it makes its appearance here, it does so as the repetition of an earlier reflection on reading that Nietzsche included in the preface to his lectures *On the Future of our Educational Institutions* – the same text in which journalism first appeared as an important preoccupation. This preface also reflects on the reading that is demanded by the writing that it introduces, this *meditatio generis futuri*; and like the one of 1887, this preface conjures up a reader who has not yet forgotten or 'unlearned' (*verlernt*) a certain mode of reading:

> The reader, from whom I expect something (*etwas erwarte*) – such a human being has not yet unlearned to think while he reads (*zu denken, während er liest*), he still understands the secret of reading between the lines (*das Geheimniß zwischen den Zeilen zu lesen*), yet he has such a squandering disposition that he even thinks again about what has been read (*noch über das Gelesene nachdenkt*), maybe long after he has put a book away.[118]

The double structure of reading that Nietzsche describes in the *Genealogy* as an *ablesen* and *auslegen*, is here anticipated by the thought of a reading that is split into a 'thinking while reading' (*denken, während er liest*) and a thinking that is deferred, a thinking that takes place after the initial reading, a *nachdenken* that is at the same time a *noch denken*, a thinking that maintains itself as a return. These two coincide in the image of a reading that is a 'secret' (*Geheimniß*) to the extent that it has been forgotten or unlearned, perhaps must be forgotten each time such reading is undertaken: the secret of 'reading between the lines'. Such a reading would not exhaust itself in the 'first reading' that believes itself to restore the presence of the lines of text on the page; it would also attend to the text that remained unread in this reading, the blank space between these lines. This blank space between the lines would point to the irreducible openness of any reading to another reading; an openness that lies not in *Sätze*, sentences that would be able to present their significance in its fullness, but in *Zeile*, lines on the page that retain an irreducible externality and meaninglessness. This other reading, as a reading between the lines, would have to be understood as a parallel reading, which takes place at the same time as the *lesen* that it accompanies but is always a deferred reading (*nachlesen*) and a repeated reading (*noch lesen*). If the 'first' reading of the text is conceived as the transubstantiation of the meaning of what is written, this reading that takes place *nach* and *noch* would be conceived as a priori iterative, a reading that can only take place as a rewriting of what is written in the space between the marks on the page.

[118] KSA I: 643; FE, Preface. For a brief commentary on this passage and the 'anachronistic reading' demanded by it, see Derrida, 'Otobiographies: Otobiography, Transference, Translation', 22–26.

This same conception of reading as iteration also surfaces in the passage on rumination from the preface of 1887, which claims that the exemplary instance of the 'art of rumination' can be found in the book that it prefaces and that the reader, in reading this preface, 'this writing' (*diese Schrift*), has already begun to read. 'In the third essay of this book I have given a specimen (*Muster*) of what I mean by "interpretation" in such a case,' Nietzsche writes – 'this treatise is a commentary (*Commentar*) on the aphorism that precedes it'.[119] The doubled reading of rumination that Nietzsche has described here as an *ablesen* and an *auslegen* thus corresponds to another double in the aphorism, the double of *Schrift* and *Commentar*, between 'this writing' to which Nietzsche refers in the first sentence of the aphorism and another writing, a writing in the margins of a text that only 'lays out' the writing it supplements by producing yet another text. If the reading that Nietzsche proposes to call *Wiederkäuen* is a priori repetitive, this is because it is a priori iterative.[120] Rumination would be an eating that is not only a repeated eating but also a repeated regurgitation of what is eaten. If reading is conceived in the familiar sense, as the rendering present of the signification of what was written, it always does so only as a repeated iteration of the marks on the page – a repetition that, because of the pure externality of these marks, never coincides with the signification it repeats but always has to remain separated from it. Reading is always a double of a reading that was missed at the moment of inscription; but it is also always a renewed inscription – a writing between the lines of the text – that has to remain unread at the moment of its inscription and is only read in its repetition.

In the early writings, this a priori repetitive reading is counterposed to another reading – a reading whose exemplary figure is the newspaper reader. In the drafts for his *Philosophenbuch*, Nietzsche claims that philosophical writing – here exemplified by the aphoristic style of Heraclitus – demands a reading that is incompatible with that of 'readers who skim and race': *lesenden Schnellläufer* whose eyes move as smoothly over the page as the pen of the writer that never ceases to flow.[121] As in the case of the references to *Viellesen* that punctuate the early writings, what is at issue in *Schnelllesen* is not the pace or quantity of reading as such. It should go without saying that Nietzsche's reflections on reading do not dismiss a voracious reading and writing, an intense and excessive relation to the text. What is at issue is, rather, the calculating and controlled relationship to the text that is implied in both *Schnelllesen* and *Viellesen*. The image of the *Schnelläufer* captures this relationship as one of a

[119] KSA V: 255; GM, Preface §8.
[120] On the 'iterability' or 'repeatability' of writing as a priori condition of the possibility of reading, see Derrida, Signature Event Context', in *Margins of Philosophy*, 307–30. For Derrida, the 'iterability' that must accompany the intelligibility of the mark is never a self-same repetition but implies both 'repetition *and* alteration'.
[121] KSA I: 832; PTG, §7.

runner who attempts to achieve an already given goal in the fastest possible way, that is to say, as effectively and efficiently as possible. It is no coincidence that the German term can also refer to a certain type of machine, which is characterised by the speed of its mechanic, purposeful movement. In contrast to the wanderer, another crucial figure throughout Nietzsche's writings, this reader has no time to return to the same text. Nor the need – for who reads like a *Schnellläufer* acts on the presupposition that the text only needs to be read once. Nowhere is this relation to the text exemplified more clearly than in the figure of the newspaper reader. Schopenhauer already counterposes newspaper reading to a practice of reading whose main principle is an ever-repeated but ever-displaced return to the text – a reading undertaken under the motto *repetitio est mater studiorum*.[122] Nothing could be more distant from the aphorism, the form of writing that demands to be read repeatedly if it is to be read at all, than the newspaper, whose writing is written to be read only once and that is supposed to release its meaning entirely in this single reading. The newspaper reader never returns to an article because it has already served its purpose: once it has been read a single time, it has communicated all it needed to communicate. To read the newspaper twice would be an absurdity: for this reader expects the meaning of the text to be fully present and available at every moment – at least in principle. *Zeitungslesen* is a reading that operates on the supposition that every word can be not only comprehended directly and immediately, but also completely and conclusively. Such a reading can only maintain its supposition of a simple readability if it never returns to the text: for every rereading of a text would have exposed the instability of the text, intimate the impossibility of a simple repetition and, like Nietzsche's *Wiederkäuen*, turned words into ciphers – ciphers that not only render reading possible but also resist and limit this possibility. The *lesende Schnellläufer* would, in other words, not be a figure of a hurried reading that fails to 'properly' understand the text, quite the contrary: it would be the figure of a reading that is defined by a perennial flight from its own finitude.

Vomitus matutinus

The relation of reading to its own finitude also determines the appearance of the theme of journalism in the later writings. The central figure of finitude in the writings of these years – 'nausea' (*Ekel*) – is here never far away in Nietzsche's treatment of *Zeitungslesen*.[123] 'How can a clean hand touch a newspaper without a convulsion of nausea (*eine Convulsion von Ekel*)?',

[122] Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Vol. 2, 657.

[123] For an account of the relation between the motif of nausea, finitude and reading, see Hamacher, *Pleroma*, 280–86. Derrida comments briefly on the role *Ekel* and the 'want to vomit' in Nietzsche early writings in 'Otobiographies', 23–24.

it is asked in a note of the late 1880s.[124] Later in the same notebook, the relation between reading and nausea is condensed in a single phrase: '*vomitus matutinus* of the newspapers'.[125] Yet it is in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* – the text that is traversed by questions of finitude – that the association of the newspaper with nausea and its culmination, the act of vomiting, is elaborated in most detail. Whenever Zarathustra or his interlocutors make reference to the newspaper, this is always accompanied by imagery of throwing up and spewing out, of *erbrechen* and *herausbrechen* – of a return, in other words, which would seem incommensurable with that of rumination. An exemplary instance of this imagery appears in the first part of the book, in one of Zarathustra's speeches – a speech that deals with 'new idols' of various kinds:

> Just look at these superfluous! They are always sick, they vomit up their bile (*erbrechen ihre Galle*) and call it the newspaper (*und nenne es Zeitung*). They devour (*verschlingen*) one another and are not even able to digest themselves (*können sich nicht einmal verdauen*).[126]

The motif returns once more in the text, in the third part, where a foam-mouthed fool screams at Zarathustra, in a language that is itself tainted by the nausea of which it speaks:

> Oh Zarathustra, here is the big city. […] Do you not hear how the spirit here turned into wordplay (*Wortspiel*)? It vomits a disgusting dishwater of words (*widriges Wort-Spülicht bricht er heraus*)! And they even make newspapers out of this dishwater.[127]

These passages, and the strange role that is reserved here for the newspaper, can only begin to be grasped if they are understood in their relation to the problem of reading. Like rumination, *Wiederkäuen*, the regurgitation that Nietzsche associates with the newspaper also expresses first and foremost a certain relation to the text, to the written word. When the first of these passages compares the newspaper to the regurgitation of bile, this is not merely to be understood as a reference to a bitter language full of ressentiment. It must rather be read in the specific physiological sense: what is ejected here is precisely the fluid that aids digestion – *Galle* as the supplement without which the digestion of what is eaten would not have been possible. If reading may be likened to a process of consumption and digestion, a process by which meaning is extracted from the text, internalised and appropriated with no remainder, then the indigestible leftover that is spewed out here is precisely that which rendered digestion

[124] KSA XIII: 11[17], November 1887–March 1888. Nietzsche's notes suggest that this is to be read as a general medical term, not as a reference to the morning sickness of the pregnant. For a discussion of morning sickness as a trope of historical experience, see: Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 138–39.
[125] KSA XIII: 11[218], November 1887–March 1888.
[126] KSA IV: 63; Z, 35.
[127] KSA IV: 223; Z, 140–41.

possible in the first place: the supplement that is necessary if meaning is to be conveyed – the word as such, the word in its irreducible externality to the meaning it was supposed to help convey. This remainder is spewed out because it is disgusting, nauseating; it instils nausea because it is in the externality of the word – an externality that is exemplified above all by the written word – that reading confronts its own finitude. The word that is ejected here is not only the word that remains after meaning has supposedly been conveyed; it is above all else the word that reminds that another reading is still possible, that the reading that was supposed to be concluded is unfinished, incomplete – and that another reading would have already been possible.

This interpretation is confirmed by the second passage, where the imagery of nausea and vomiting accompanies an exclamation on the state of the spirit. As in the case of the previous passage, what is vomited up here is at once a supplement and a remainder: *Spülicht*, the water in which the indistinct leftovers of a meal are gathered – what could be consumed, what was uneatable, indigestible. These remainders, vomited up by the spirit, are here explicitly and precisely determined: what is ejected is a *Wort-Spülicht*, a dishwater full of words. If the movement of the *Geist* is understood as a self-externalisation that is always followed by a reinternalisation, a reappropriation that is supposed to be without remainder, then the *Wort-Spülicht* would contain that which cannot be transubstantiated, that which cannot be incorporated in the movement of spirit and must be excreted if it is to continue functioning properly. By a play of alliteration, the *Wort-Spülicht* would reveal itself to be the word in a specific sense; what is ejected by the spirit, what is vomited up here is precisely the word insofar as it participates in *Wortspiel* – the word insofar as it is engaged in a play that has nothing to do with the immanent movement of the spirit. That this playful word is, with another alliteration, *widrig* – disgusting, at least for the spirit that ejects it – must again be understood in terms of the finitude that it never ceases to recall. The word that participates in wordplay is a word that knows no *telos*, that serves no end or purpose – and it is for this reason that the spirit must eject this nauseating remainder, excrete the word that threatens its purposeful movement.

The *vomitus matutinus* that is associated with the morning newspaper would then be the excretion of that which remains after every reading: the word in its irreducible externality. That the reading which Nietzsche thought to be exemplary, symptomatic of the time in which he was writing – *Zeitungslesen* – is characterised as a nauseous reading means that it has become aware of its finitude. But instead of confronting it, this reading ejects the remainder that it finds disgusting: it ejects and expels this remainder in order to ward off the threat that it poses. Nothing could be more different from the reading of rumination, which begins precisely from the word that is encountered in a repeated reading – a word that, as we have found

Nietzsche to describe in one of his prefaces of those years, has already revealed itself as a cipher whose meaning is displaced at every repeated reading. *Zeitungslesen* is a reading that is nauseated by this displacement and the instability that it exemplifies – once the news has been taken in, the reader must rid himself of the newspaper, must throw away the text that risks making him nauseous. Yet at the same time as *Zeitungslesen* exemplifies a reading that is most nauseous at its own finitude, it is precisely on the pages of the newspaper that this finitude is perhaps most pronounced: for it is in the newspaper that a writing which seemed to be full of meaning yesterday turns out to have lost its significance the day after; that the same words have come to mean something else to him than they did only a day before. In contrast to the book that, with its implicit claim to timelessness, might still leave the semblance of an identical repetition intact, the newspaper must remind every reader who returns to it of the impossibility of such a repetition. It is perhaps for this reason – not for the sake of its content – that Nietzsche can claim, in yet another note of the same period, that every newspaper must present the text as a fabric of signs that must make every reader shudder: 'Every newspaper provides the signs of the most horrible human perversity: *un tissu d'horreurs*. This *dégôutant apéritif* accompanies the morning meal of the civilised human being. *Tout, en ce monde, sue le crime*.'[128]

The last human

Nietzsche reserves a specific name for the nauseous inhabitant of this city at the end of history that is described to Zarathustra by a foaming fool: the 'last human' (*der letzte Mensch*).[129] When Zarathustra, at the start of the book, descends from the mountain and addresses the crowd of contemporaries whom he encounters there, he will conjure up this figure when concluding his speeches. 'See!' he exclaims; 'I show you the last humans (*ich zeige euch den letzten Menschen*)' – but the crowd fails to understand the words he utters.[130] 'They stand there,' Zarathustra sighs, 'they stand there and laugh: they do not understand me, I am not the mouth for these ears.'[131] If this crowd, like the crowd surrounding the messenger in *The Gay Science*, do not understand the news that is conveyed to them, this is because they do not understand that this last human is not a species that is yet to come, but that Zarathustra is pointing his contemporaries to themselves – and to himself – as exemplars of this last humanity. The name of the 'last human' is reserved for a humanity that is defined by the

[128] KSA XIII: 11[218], November 1887–March 1888.
[129] A more detailed exposition of the figure of the *letzte Mensch* and its relation to the *Übermensch* is found in Blanchot, 'The Limit-Experience', 143–51 and 155–56. 'The thought of the overman does not first of all signify the advent of the overman, but rather the disappearance of something called man.' (155)
[130] KSA IV: 18–21; Z, 9–11.
[131] KSA IV: 18; Z, 9.

paradoxical contemporaneity with a 'monstrous event' that is still on its way, like a rumour doing the rounds: the death of God. That Zarathustra's speeches on the *letzte Mensch* cannot be understood is no accident; for the one who would have truly understood this news would have ceased to be a human in the sense in which the term is used here. The humanity that would have heard this news in the full sense – who would have *incorporated* it – would have become someone other, would have ceased being a human. In this sense, the last human is the figure of that humanity which is stamped by its contemporaneity to an event of which it has yet to become a contemporary in another, stricter sense of the word. In the attempts to speak of this last human, even Zarathustra himself has already conjured up new idols, has already lapsed into the same language of designation and presentation – 'I show you', *ich zeige euch* – that has lost its legitimacy.

The journalist and the newspaper reader, the *Zeitungsschreiber* of Nietzsche's early writings and the *Zeitungsleser* of the later work – are these not best understood as the exemplary specimens of this 'last human' proclaimed in Zarathustra's prologue? To grasp the continuous preoccupation with journalism in this way means to reserve a decisive role for a question whose importance for Nietzsche's thought still remains to be fully gauged: the question of *language*. The language of the newspapers, *Zeitungssprache*, together with the modes of reading and writing that correspond to it, could only assume their exemplary significance for Nietzsche because the occurrence with which we have found them to be irreducibly bound up – the 'death of God' – is already understood in linguistic terms. What Nietzsche's persistent preoccupation with journalism throws into relief is, in other words, his recurrent attempt to think this monstrous occurrence as a fact of language – a fact that, as the recurrent incomprehension of the news of this death attests, allows itself to be simply unveiled. If Nietzsche's hyperbolic portrayals of journalists and newspaper readers show anything, it is that the 'dead' God survives his own death, continues to inhabit the language that has 'killed' him. Under the heading of *Zeitungssprache*, Nietzsche thus analyses the duplicity of the language of the last human – a language that can no longer speak the truth but cannot help but believe that it does so.[132]

Precisely because it is inseparable from the problem of language, the continuous preoccupation with journalism that resurfaces throughout Nietzsche's work testifies to the inadequacy of any simple division between the early writings and the mature work. The remarks on journalism never cease to lay bare the breach that Nietzsche's early analysis of language already opened up in a certain metaphysics which still animated the work of that period. And it is precisely because of this breach that Nietzsche could already anticipate the death of God in the writings

[132] Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe's analysis of the death of Dionysus – the god of presence that animated the work of the early 1870s – as such a 'fact of language' in 'The Detour', 31–36.

from the period of the *Philosophenbuch* – the years of his intensive engagement with rhetoric. A passage on journalism from the third of the *Untimely Meditations,* written in 1874, indeed already draws up the schematic outline of the condition that Zarathustra would later ascribe to the last human:

> One no longer has the slightest notion how far the seriousness of philosophy is removed from the seriousness of a newspaper. Human beings have given up the last remnant not only of a philosophical but also of a religious disposition and have instead of all this (*statt alledem*) obtained not even optimism but journalism, the spirit and spiritlessness of our day and our daily papers (*den Geist und Ungeist des Tages un der Tageblätter*).[133]

The elements of Nietzsche's later treatment of the theme of journalism are already contained in this passage in summary form. Journalism – and the 'seriousness' that corresponds to it – is associated with the collapse of a disposition that is as much philosophical as it is religious. The place that is occupied by journalism is one that is marked by a loss; human beings have had to 'give up' (*einbüßen*) their philosophical and religious disposition entirely, up to its 'last remnant' (*letzten Rest*). This is not to say that nothing remains; the place that was previously reserved for this lost philosophico-religious disposition is now occupied by journalism. The logic is one of exchange: human beings have had to give up the disposition that had oriented them since the beginning of their history, only to 'obtain' (*einhandeln*) something else in its place. For it to be possible to speak of such an exchange there would have to be a semblance of equivalence; journalism would have to appear as the equivalent of religion and philosophy in the present. But even though journalism takes the exact place of the philosophico-religious disposition, it is at the same time at the furthest remove from it. That it is almost impossible to sense 'how far removed' the seriousness of philosophy is from that of journalism may be read both in the historical and the logical sense. Philosophy and journalism would relate to one another as two extremes that are at one and the same time a beginning and an end; the historical process that Nietzsche sketches begins with philosophy and reaches its end in journalism. But even though they exist at the furthest remove, they are not simply opposed. If the *Gesinnung* of which Nietzsche speaks is at the same time philosophical and religious, and if it has always received its meaning and purpose, its *Sinn*, from a God which it has been forced to relinquish, then what is left in place of this God is not so much an absence as an ambiguity: a *Geist und Ungeist*, a spirit and non-spirit, a presence that is at the same time an absence. This ghostly apparition finds its peculiar embodiment in the daily papers, the *Tageblätter*: papers that, even though they never cease to serve as the ground on which new idols present themselves, cannot quite conceal that their sheets no longer have the weight and substance of the tablet; that they cannot lay claim to the permanence and immutability of the

[133] KSA I: 365; UM III: §4.

book; that every reader who returns to this text will find that every word on these pages has come to mean something else, has altered irreversibly in the repetition.

The exemplary species of the last human, the newspaper reader, would be the figure of that ghostly spirit – the *Geist und Ungeist des Tages* – that is confronted by its own finitude; unable to overcome it, he attempts to forget and expel everything that might remind him of it. The 'seriousness' (*Ernst*) that is ascribed to the newspapers would thus not simply be opposed to the religio-philosophical seriousness from which it is so far removed: if *Ernst* is understood in the strict sense of the word, as the disposition in which things are treated in accordance with their essential being, the possibility of such a disposition would have to perish together with the essence towards which it oriented itself. The seriousness to which the newspapers lay claim would be a seriousness that has outlived itself – a seriousness that must continuously erect new idols in the absence of the old God. It is in this sense that the theme also resurfaces in the last of the *Untimely Meditations*: 'Now only one kind of seriousness is left over in the modern soul (*in der modernen Seele übrig geblieben*): the seriousness that concerns the messages that are brought by the newspaper (*den Nachrichten welche die Zeitung bringt*).'[134] When the drafts for the *Philosophenbuch* that were written in the same period as these passages conjure up the figure of the 'last philosopher' (*der letzte Philosoph*), this figure should perhaps be understood as the counterpart to this last human, the newspaper reader, and the seriousness to which he clings.[135] Even though this *letzte Philosoph* would be a specimen of this humanity at the end of history, it would be an untimely specimen – one that would not only relinquish the old seriousness in the face of God, but also suspect every new seriousness of being mere idolatry. While he distrusts this seriousness, this persistent desire to speak properly and conclusively, he knows that he cannot avoid falling prey to it. If this last philosophy is the 'counter-doctrine of everything journalistic' of which Nietzsche speaks in a note of the same year, this *Gegenlehre* could never be conceived in a simple opposition to the seriousness of the last human – a seriousness that has outlived itself after every stable point of reference has been lost. The seriousness of journalism would find a counterpart in another seriousness: one that the 1873 draft for the preface to the *Philosophenbuch* describes as the most serious play – *ein Spielen mit dem Ernst*.[136]

[134] KSA I: 462; UM IV: §6.

[135] Cf. KSA VII: 19[36], Summer 1872–Early 1873 as well as late drafts for the *Philosophenbuch,* such as KSA VII: 19[318] and 19[320], also written in the same period as Nietzsche's course on rhetoric. The figure of the last philosopher is here introduced after a section on 'truth and illusion'.

[136] See KSA I: 889; TL, §2.

Chapter 3: Benjamin

The opening sentences of Benjamin's last exposé of his *Passagenwerk* are organised around an unlikely juxtaposition of two emblematic figures: those of Herodotus – who appears here as the first, ancient historian – and the modern newspaper. 'The subject of this book,' Benjamin writes, 'is an illusion expressed by Schopenhauer in the following formula: for the one who wants to seize the essence of history (*wer das Wesen der Geschichte erfassen wolle*), it suffices to compare Herodotus and the morning newspaper (*für den genüge es, Herodot mit der Morgenzeitung zu vergleichen*).'[1] The exposé then continues: 'This is the expression of a historical feeling of vertigo (*eines historischen Schwindelgefühls*) that is characteristic of the conception of history of the past century. It corresponds to a way of seeing (*Betrachtungsweise*) in which historical phenomena appear as wholly reified (*als gänzlich verdinglichte eingehen*)' – or what is described in the French version of the same text as 'a point of view (*point de vue*) that composes the course of the world out of an unlimited series of facts congealed in the form of things (*une série illimitée de faits figés sous forme de choses*)'.[2] With this announcement of the subject matter of his planned magnum opus, Benjamin places the preoccupation with journalism and its emblematic form – the newspaper – at the heart of his philosophical work. The newspaper is here introduced as the emblem of a *Betrachtungsweise*, a certain mode of observing and contemplating historical phenomena that is characteristic of the nineteenth century – the epoch that would be treated in the book outlined in this exposé as an *Urgeschichte* ('primal history') of his own time, of the moment in which he is writing. What would be at stake in this comparative analysis of the newspaper and its ancient counterpart is by no means a historical investigation in the traditional sense of the word, let alone a merely empirical study. Benjamin leaves no doubt that the newspaper and its counterpart assume their emblematic significance – the peculiar 'sufficiency' to which the formula cited here alludes – only for those who would want to apprehend the 'essence of history' (*das Wesen der Geschichte*). The newspaper would, in other words, take on its special significance precisely in a study of history that would not play out on an empirical level but, instead, concern itself with its 'essence' – a study that would have a strictly *philosophical* character.[3]

But if the newspaper would have a special significance for the historico-philosophical inquiry par excellence, the inquiry into the 'essence' of history itself, this significance is already presented in the form of a problem. The *Betrachtungsweise* that is captured in emblematic

[1] GS V: 60; AP, 14.

[2] GS V: 1255.

[3] On the relation between 'essence' and 'philosophy', see the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to Benjamin's *Origin of the German Mourning Play*, especially the sections on the relation between idea and phenomenon. (GS I: 214–18; O, 34–38)

form by the *Morgenzeitung* is described here as one for which the course of history congeals and petrifies as soon as it comes into contact with it – a kind of Medusa's gaze. Historical phenomena, as soon as they enter the stage and are inspected from this *point de vue*, turn into an unlimited series of facts that confront the viewing subject as things. This congealing and petrification of phenomena seems to take place with no delay or remainder: in the same moment that phenomena 'make their entrance' (*eingehen*) onto this stage, historical phenomena already appear as 'wholly reified'.[4] If a world that consists merely of things is a world without history, the newspaper, that same form that is to be studied by those who want to apprehend the essence of history, would also be the emblem of a *Betrachtungsweise* from which history in a stricter sense of the word seems to have vanished entirely.[5] That this formula is presented as a paraphrase of a remark of the philosopher of resignation par excellence is certainly no accident. Not only does history – in a sense that has yet to be fully determined – seem to have vanished from this world that takes its course as an unlimited series of facts passing in front of a viewer; this world would seem to have closed itself off entirely from the possibility for history to occur.

The ambiguity of the term that Benjamin uses to describe the feeling that corresponds to (*entspricht*) this way of seeing – *ein historisches Schwindelgefühl* – captures this sense of deprivation at the same time as it points to a possible renewal. Like the earlier reference to an 'illusion' characteristic of the nineteenth century, this *Schwindelgefühl* would not only name a sense of being swindled, of being deceptively deprived of something; it would also, in the sense of the word that is carried over to, and emphasised in, the French translation, *une sensation de vertige*, to a feeling of vertigo that has a highly specific significance for Benjamin. This same term is employed in the concluding paragraph to another crucial text, the prologue to his first published book – here even more emphatically, as a 'significant feeling of vertigo' (*bezeichnende Schwindelgefühl*)[6] – to describe the feeling that corresponds to the encounter with the whirling movement of what is here called an 'originary phenomenon' (*Urphänomen*): a phenomenon that occupies an intermediary status insofar as it is one in which the world of ideas confronts the historical world, intimating itself to philosophical interpretation at the same

[4] GS V: 60; AP, 14.

[5] In his 1922 essay on reification and historical consciousness – an essay that had critically preoccupied Benjamin at least since his *Habilitationsschrift* – Georg Lukács cites Marx in a passage on the 'the unexplained and inexplicable facticity of the here and now': 'Thus history existed once upon a time, but it does not exist anymore.' Cf. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 156–57.

[6] Benjamin writes in the closing paragraph of the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue': 'The improvised attempts to render the sense of this epoch present (*den Sinn dieser Epoche zu vergegenwärtigen*) always encounter that significant feeling of vertigo induced by the sight of its spirituality turning around in contradictions (*ihrer in Widersprüchen kreisenden Geistigkeit*).' (GS I: 237; O, 56)

time as it withdraws from it.[7] Insofar as it arouses this feeling, the juxtaposition of the newspaper to the figure of the most ancient historian would, not unlike the comparison between tragedy and *Trauerspiel*, yield the promise of grasping the originating rhythm of repetition and dislocation that, in his earlier book, Benjamin had ascribed to the historical articulation of the idea. But in this case, the feeling of vertigo would not concern one idea among others, if it is possible to speak of the world of ideas in this way – for it is the idea of history itself that would here confront the historical world.

This problem – the problem of the possibility of history as it crystallises around the *Vergleich* between Herodotus and the morning newspaper – will guide the following study of Benjamin's preoccupation with journalism. This study will trace the theme of journalism as it recurs in numerous passages and remarks dispersed throughout his writings but focus on the reading of a single text: Benjamin's three-part essay on Karl Kraus – the 'nine-month baby' that was published in four parts in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1931 but had been in preparation at least since 1928.[8] It is no accident that precisely this essay serves as the place where Benjamin's ongoing reflections on language and history are tied together with his interest in journalism. Not only does Kraus' work, for Benjamin, provide an important theory of journalism, developed through his 'fire-eating, sword-swallowing philology of the newspapers (*Philologie der Journale*)' – a phrase to which we will return later in greater detail. Besides his reflections on journalism and the singular practice of reading through which these were developed, Kraus himself is for Benjamin also a journalist in the most precise sense of the word. The Karl Kraus that will emerge from Benjamin's dense and hyperbolic portrait is before anything else a figure in which the experience of time and history that lie at the heart of journalism are condensed in a peculiar manner. This is already suggested by one of Benjamin's plans for a lecture series in the early 1930s, where the figure of Kraus is coupled to 'journalism' just as Kafka is coupled to the 'novel', Brecht to 'theatre', and Bloch to the 'essay'. Each of these figures appear here as exponents of a distinct literary form – but supposedly exponents of a dubious kind, insofar as their sensitivity to the origin of this form also requires an explosion of its given reality.[9] If Kraus can be introduced as an exponent of journalism as a form, this is undoubtedly because his writing in every respect responds to the enigmatic 'vocation' that is central to Benjamin's earliest reflection on journalism. In his 1921 announcement of his planned journal *Angelus*

[7] For Benjamin's discussion of the concept of 'origin' (*Ursprung*), see the relevant section in the prologue to his book on *Trauerspiel* (GS II: 225–27; O, 44–46). For an early and more recent exposition of the concept, see Rolf Tiedemann, *Studien zur Philosophie Walter Benjamins*, 71–88 and Samuel Weber, 'Genealogy of Modernity: History, Myth and Allegory in Benjamin's *Origin of the German Mourning Play*', in *Benjamin's -abilities*, 131–63.

[8] Most of the extant notes are gathered in a convolute titled 'Paralipomena zur Kraus' (GS II: 1088–130).

[9] During his time in Paris, Benjamin planned a 'cycle of lectures' on the 'German avant-garde' that would each revolve around 'a figure in whom the present situation finds expression in a decisive way (*sich maßgebend ausprägt*)'. Cf. B, 603; CB, 438.

Novus – a text to which we will turn towards the end of our reading of the essay on Kraus – Benjamin describes the essence of the journal in terms of a demand: 'to proclaim the spirit of its epoch' (*den Geist ihrer Epoche zu bekunden*).[10] It is this demand, which revolves around the relation between time and writing already implied in the form on which Benjamin chooses to focus his reflections, the *Zeitschrift*, that would lie at the origin of journalism – and it is also this demand that determines the vocation of Kraus' work as a writer. Everything that Kraus has written, without exception, must be thought of as journalism in this strict sense: not only his countless glosses and articles for *Die Fackel*, the journal he edited for the large part of his working life, but also his lectures and aphorisms, his dramas and poems. That this journalism is, however, of a singular kind is suggested by a definition that Kraus provides of his own writing in a note that we will have to consider in closer detail: 'May my style capture all the sounds of the time and its temporality (*alle Geräusche der Zeitlichkeit*). This should make it an annoyance to the contemporaries. But later generations will be able to hold it to their ears like a seashell in which there is the music of an ocean of mud.'[11]

Yet it is precisely the scrutiny of journalism itself – in particular the language of newspapers – that will play a privileged role in Kraus' attempts to register the sounds of his time. Like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, who both play an important role in his work, Kraus treats the journalist as a type: in his case, one in which the *Geist* of the epoch takes on a distinct, sensible form. The crowd of figures that together play out the drama of contemporary historical life in his writings – 'journalists, aesthetes, politicians, psychologists, stupid people, scientists', as they are listed in a section title of one of his collections of aphorisms – are described by Kraus as the 'basic types of the spiritual misery' (*Grundtypen des geistigen Elends*) characteristic of the time in which he is writing.[12] Kraus will, in other words, turn to the scrutiny of journalism precisely where his writing shows itself to be journalistic in the sense in which Benjamin understood the word, precisely where it responds to the vocation to 'proclaim the spirit of its epoch'. As Benjamin's portrait of Kraus will show in an unparalleled manner, his writing will be a *Bekundung* in a peculiar sense: not the heroic proclamation of progress that his writings would never cease to mock, but a declaration for a court of law – a *Bekundung* whose prime exhibits will be the newspaper articles, headlines and phrases meticulously scrutinised on the pages of his own journal.

In the following scrutiny of Benjamin's preoccupation with journalism as it comes to an expression in the essay on Kraus, this chapter will attempt to stay close to the stipulation that is included in the opening lines of his 1939 exposé of the *Passagenwerk*: that the newspaper

[10] GS II: 241; AJ, 292.
[11] S VIII: 209.
[12] S VIII: 216.

takes on its emblematic significance only insofar as it is subjected to a certain kind of historico-philosophical interpretation. This chapter will therefore avoid a historicist reading of Benjamin's interest in journalism, which would reduce the significance of his theoretical reflections of journalism to the analysis of a discrete socio-historical phenomenon – whether this is situated in nineteenth century Paris or the early-twentieth century Weimar Republic. It will also attempt to avoid a narrowly biographical reading of the theme, which tends to focus on Benjamin's own turn to journalism in the late 1920s but, even in its more sophisticated versions, misses the profound historico-philosophical significance that the forms of the newspaper article, the feuilleton and the journal have for Benjamin.[13] Finally, this chapter will attempt to avoid the tendency to reduce Benjamin's work to literary theory that may be divorced from his philosophical reflections on language and history. This applies in particular to the 1931 essay on Kraus: a text that, despite being the subject of extensive commentary, has received relatively little serious philosophical consideration – particularly when it comes to its treatment of the theme of journalism. One common approach to the text, which treats it as a work of literary criticism, part of the series of portraits Benjamin wrote after 1929, risks overlooking how the motifs developed in the essay – the figure of the journalist, the 'phrase', 'opinion', 'chatter', etc. – are, even where they revolve around concepts derived from Kraus' work, always recast and reoriented in the context of Benjamin's own philosophy of language and history. Another approach to the text, more sensitive to the philosophical stakes of the text, has traditionally been overdetermined by the controversial position taken up by the essay in the context of Benjamin's work at large. Traditionally, the essay on Kraus has been situated at the supposed divide between his early metaphysics and his later dialectical materialism – a division that is performed dramatically by Scholem's rejection of the essay.[14] But if a close reading of the essay shows anything, it is precisely the artificiality of any schema that would understand Benjamin's work to be divided into two broken halves. Just like the motif of journalism itself, the text shows itself to be inextricably interwoven both with Benjamin's earlier and later writings, both with his reflections on language and his philosophy of history.

Ur-journalist

'Journalism, in its most paradoxical form, is Kraus' (*Journalismus, in seiner paradoxesten Gestalt, ist Kraus*).[15] This note, included in the *Paralipomena* to the 1931 essay, is key to

[13] See, for instance, Uwe Steiner's account of the concept of *Aktualität* in Benjamin's 'Announcement of the Journal: Angelus Novus' in his book *Walter Benjamin*, 56–62.

[14] For a discussion of the genesis and reception of Benjamin's essay on Kraus, see Alexander Honold, 'Karl Kraus', 524. On the contested position of the essay on Kraus in relation to Benjamin's 'metaphysics' and 'materialism', see for instance Scholem's letter to Benjamin of March 30, 1931 (B, 525–29; CB, 373–76).

[15] GS II: 1115.

understanding the figure of Kraus as it is presented in Benjamin's text. It is in the first part of this text, published as a semi-autonomous text in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, that Benjamin addresses the paradoxical character of the figure of Kraus. If Kraus is journalism 'in its most paradoxical form', this is first of all because no one expresses a more intense antagonism towards journalism than Kraus, the truest of journalists. This is at least how Benjamin depicts Kraus in the first part of his essay, which returns on various occasions to the significance of Kraus' 'hatred' towards journalists – a hatred characterised at first as the one 'hurled by an ancestor (*Urahn*) upon a race of degenerated, dwarfish rascals that have sprung from his seed'.[16] Kraus' relentless attacks on his contemporaries are, in other words, the attacks of an archaic kind of journalist on the journalism of his time – they are the attacks of an *Ur*-journalist that Benjamin recognises in the ancestral figure of Kraus himself. The theme of Kraus' hatred towards journalists of his time returns once more later in the section – but this time Benjamin uses it as a starting point for a characterisation of the figure of the journalist itself, the journalist in its essential 'being':

> A hatred such as that which Kraus has heaped on journalists can never be founded simply on what they do (*was sie tun*) – however obnoxious this may be, this hatred must have its reason in their very being (*dieβer Haβ muβ Gründe in ihrem Sein haben*), whether it be opposed or akin (*entgegengesetzt oder verwandt*) to his own. In fact, both are the case.[17]

The figure of Kraus stands in a paradoxical relation to journalism insofar as it is at once akin to the figure of the journalist and set apart from it; its relation is both one of antagonism and of affinity. This antagonism is not based on what journalists do: that is to say, it is not merely an accidental attack occasioned by this or that text they happen to have written. Rather, it has its grounds in what Benjamin calls their 'being' – a term that he reserves in his earlier writings to refer to the essence that imparts itself in phenomena while at the same time withdrawing from them.[18] Kraus' hatred for journalists is the expression of a relation to the essence of journalism and of the journalist as a type. To characterise this essential being of the journalist as a type, Benjamin cites a passage from a recent portrait of the 'journalistic human being' (*der journalistische Mensch*) by Peter Suhrkamp – a portrayal that Benjamin also introduces in a radio broadcast of the same years as an exemplary study of the 'human types' (*Menschentypen*) shaped and formed by their profession.[19] In the essay on Karl Kraus, this

[16] GS II: 334–35; KK, 433.
[17] GS II: 335; KK, 434.
[18] See the discussion of the 'idea as being' (*die Idee als Sein*) in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book (GS I: 210: O, 30).
[19] See the typoscript for Benjamin's radio broadcast 'Carousel of Professions' (*Karussel der Berufe*), in GS II: 670–73.

'most recent' portrayal is put to work for a different purpose, namely to juxtapose the figure of the journalist to its strange counterpart:

> The most recent presentation of the journalist characterises him directly, in the first sentence, as 'a human being who has little interest either in himself and his own existence, or in the mere existence of things, but who first registers things in their relationships, above all where these coincide in events – and who only in this moment becomes united, essential, and alive.' What we have in this sentence is nothing other than the negative of an image of Kraus (*das Negativ des Bildes von Kraus*). Indeed, who could have shown a more burning interest in himself and his own existence than he, who cannot leave this theme behind; who could have shown a more attentive interest for the mere existence of things, their origin (*die bloße Existenz der Dinge, ihren Ursprung*); whom does that coincidence of the event with the date, the witness, or the camera cast into deeper despair than him?[20]

The citation of Suhrkamp's characterisation of the *journalistische Mensch* tears it away from the original text and inserts it into the context of Benjamin's writing. Just as the figure of Kraus can only be understood in relation to the figure of the journalist introduced here, so the latter takes on its specific significance only once it is juxtaposed to Kraus. That the two relate to one another as 'negative images', or rather, that the image of Kraus is the negative of the image of the journalist evoked in the cited sentence, does not mean that the two are simply opposed: as in the case of the photographic *Negativ*, the two extremes are held together by a structural resemblance. The resemblance that plays a crucial role in this passage concerns first and foremost the relation of these two figures to history. If Kraus is akin to the journalist, it is because his writing is concerned first and foremost with history as it takes its course in the moment. But it is precisely in his conception of history that Kraus is most opposed to the journalist. The journalist 'first registers things in their relationships, above all where these coincide in events' (*wo diese in Ereignisse aufeinandertreffen*): in the context of Benjamin's text, this means, first of all, that the 'things' with which the journalist is concerned are always already integrated into the concatenation of empirical events that together constitute the historical world. It is no accident that Benjamin uses the same word – *aufeinandertreffen* – again in the last sentence of the passage: for it is here that the relationship of things that underpins the journalist's conception of history is characterised concretely. The reference to 'that coincidence of the event with the date (*jenes Aufeinandertreffen des Ereignisses mit dem Datum*), the witness, or the camera' evokes a specific conception of history and of historical time. That, for the journalist, the event coincides with the *Datum* may first of all be read in relation to its original Latin sense: that the occurrence of history, the *Ereignis* of history as such, is taken to be a *datum*, something that is immediately given. It is this sense of the word that is emphasised in Benjamin's subsequent reference to the coincidence of the occurrence of

[20] GS II: 335; KK, 434.

history 'with the eye witness or the camera' (*dem Augenzeugen oder der Kamera*): for the history registered by the journalist is taken to be the object of an empirical consciousness – one that could register history objectively and mechanically, whether it is through the account of the *Augenzeuge* or the continuous sequence of images of a camera. As such, Benjamin's paraphrase of the cited description of the *journalistische Mensch* also implies a certain conception of historical time that is already implied in the reference to the *Datum* in the sense of the 'date': for history as a purely empirical given would be unproblematically datable; its occurrence could be assigned a determinate location in a linear time that could be ordered chronologically. History would be the coherent, unbroken concatenation of events narrated by the eyewitness, unfolding in a mechanical time that is not unlike the virtually continuous sequence of images produced by the camera – the 'unlimited series of facts' that Benjamin associated with the morning newspaper in the exposé for his *Passagenwerk*.[21]

Nothing could be more different from the experience of history that motivates the writings of Kraus. Like the journalist, Kraus has his eyes on the course of history – but the 'things' with which he is preoccupied are, in the end, not reducible to events strung together into a continuous series. His 'interest' (*Interesse*), Benjamin writes, does not concern the series of facts that appears in the pages of the newspaper but is ultimately directed towards 'the mere existence of things, their origin'.[22] The 'mere existence of things' (*die bloße Existenz der Dinge*) – that is to say, historical phenomena ripped out of the causal chain in which they are inserted in the empirical world, stripped from the web of relationships in which they appear in the writing of the journalist. Their 'origin' (*Ursprung*) – that is to say, an origin that, insofar as it belongs to the 'mere existence of things', is not reducible to the process of coming into being and passing away in which historical genesis plays out for the journalist: an origin that, in other words, would point beyond the empirical world and the laws of causation that govern it. At this point, Benjamin does not elaborate what constitutes this origin; but the tension that is introduced here – the tension between history as it is reported by the journalist and another experience of history, closely related and yet diametrically opposed, condensed in the figure of Kraus, the *Urahn* of journalism – will structure the rest of the essay. Benjamin's elaboration of this tension will work towards an account of the disposition that is described here as a *helle Verzweiflung* – a despair that is not only deep but also bright, illuminating. If this is the despair over the 'complete coincidence' of the event with the empirical *Datum*, it would belong to the confrontation with a historical world constrained entirely by the horizon of a subjectively limited actuality – a world from which the possibility of history in the strict sense would seem

[21] GS V: 1255.
[22] GS II: 335; KK, 434.

to have vanished entirely. It is this despair that will be at the centre of Benjamin's attempts to articulate the experience of history that animates Kraus' writing.[23]

Archaic messenger

If the image of Kraus as an *Urahn* suggests that Benjamin attempts to portray him as the exponent of an archaic journalism, a journalism close to its own *Ursprung*, it comes as no surprise that the essay on Kraus begins by conjuring up the image of a messenger that stems from times immemorial:

> In old engravings there is a messenger who rushes towards us crying aloud, his hair on end, brandishing a sheet of paper in his hands, a sheet full of war and pestilence, of cries of murder and pain, of danger from fire and flood, spreading everywhere the 'latest news' (*die 'neueste Zeitung'*). A newspaper in this sense (*eine Zeitung in solchem Sinn*), in the sense that the word has in Shakespeare, is disseminated by *Die Fackel*. Full of betrayal, earthquakes, poison and fire from the *mundus intelligibilis*.[24]

Just as the delivery of the news portrayed in such 'old engravings' returns in a certain contemporary newspaper, so it is of course the figure of Kraus that may be recognised in this crying messenger. The messenger who 'brandishes a sheet of paper in his hands', Kraus the writer, is complemented later in the essay by the image of Kraus the public speaker, who is said to move 'with the wild gestures of a market crier (*mit den wilden Gebärden des Marktschreiers*)'.[25] In this scene and its main protagonist, the two central themes of the essay – language and history – are already announced and interwoven: the historical world that is conjured up here is inextricably tied to the sheet of paper that is brandished here, just as the crying that accompanies the delivery of this news points to a distinct but yet to be determined experience of history. One aspect of this experience of history is already alluded to in the final words of this passage: that it is not merely of an empirical kind. Even though this messenger speaks of occurrences that belong in the phenomenal world, the news he brings derives from the *mundus intelligibilis* – a term that Benjamin had already used with reference to the *Ideenwelt* in the prologue to the *Origin of the German Mourning Play* – the study he had completed in the years directly preceding his work on Kraus. The news of war and pestilence, murder and pain, fire and flood brought by this messenger would concern the historical world,

[23] A reference to *Verzweiflung* also appears in an important early sketch that has a close relation to the essay on Kraus: the fragment 'Capitalism as Religion'. Here Benjamin speaks of despair as a *Weltzustand* that marks the extreme accomplishment of the guilt history described in this fragment but also the only state out of which the possibility of another history might arise. (GS VI: 101)

[24] GS II: 334; KK, 433.

[25] GS II: 357; KK, 449.

the world of phenomena and facts – but only insofar as it is grasped in its confrontation with the world of ideas.

In this light it is significant that the particular image of historical life evoked in this passage also stands in close relation to Benjamin's descriptions of the 'presentation of historical life' that he found to be characteristic of the baroque *Trauerspiel*.[26] This relation is above all evident in the description of the news brought by this messenger as 'a sheet full of betrayal, earthquakes, poison, and fire', which echoes a similar list in his *Habilitationsschrift*, where Benjamin characterises the subject matter of the mourning play by citing Opitz, who writes that the mourning play 'deals only with […] killings, despair, infanticide and patricide, conflagrations, incest, war and commotion […] and suchlike'.[27] That this list of miserable occurrences resembles the later description of the tiding brought by an ancient messenger is no accident. It points to an affinity between Benjamin's understanding of the newspaper and his treatment of the mourning play. Like the newspaper, the mourning play does not merely take historical occurrences as its material; history is its true content.[28] What Benjamin says of the *Trauerspiel* also applies to his later analyses of the form of the newspaper: 'Historical life, as that epoch presented it to itself (*das geschichtliche Leben wie es jene Epoche sich darstellte*), is its content, its true subject.'[29] In fact, the motif of the newspaper may well be understood as a pendant to the mourning play in Benjamin's study of modernity: if the *Trauerspiel* harbours the conception of history characteristic of a moment of nascent capitalism, the newspaper does so in the case of high capitalism.[30] While the relation between the two forms remains implicit in the opening lines of the essay, Benjamin will make a more explicit reference later in the text to the strange affinity of Kraus' journalism with an experience of history which 'for the last time had an contemporary validity for the whole of Europe in the seventeenth century'.[31] What constitutes the affinity between the presentation of historical life characteristic of the baroque mourning play and of the archaic messenger evoked in the opening lines of the essay on Kraus is suggested by Benjamin's peculiar rendering of the historical life they present. Whether it is 'news of war and pestilence, of cries of murder and pain, of danger from fire and flood' or 'killings, despair, infanticide and patricide, conflagrations, incest, war and commotion […] and suchlike' – both lists do not merely present historical life as a sequence of the most miserable

[26] GS I: 242–43; O, 62.
[27] GS I: 242; O, 62.
[28] GS I: 242–45; O, 62–64.
[29] GS I: 242–43; O, 62.
[30] In the case of the essay on Kraus, this is captured in the passage where Benjamin refers to journalism as 'the expression of the changed function of language in the world of high capitalism (*in der hochkapitalistischen Welt*)'. (GS II: 337; KK, 435) On the relation between the mourning play and nascent capitalism, which remains implicit in Benjamin's *Habilitationsschrift*, see Howard Caygill, *The Colour of Experience*, 55–57.
[31] GS II: 339; KK, 437.

occurrences but treat this misery as the rule. Not only do all these occurrences belong to the sphere of 'unhappiness' (*unglück*), a word to which Benjamin attributed a special significance; they evoke a world in which there is no place for 'good news' in the strict sense, a world from which the possibility of happiness seems to be expelled. Historical life is staged here as an endless inventory of misery – a list that can only conclude in the words 'and suchlike' (*und dergleichen*).[32]

In the opening sentences of the essay on Kraus, this presentation of the historical world is ascribed to a messenger portrayed on 'old engravings' (*alte Stichen*) – engravings that are, in other words, not explicitly dated but rather seem to stem from time immemorial. Before the list of an inexorable succession of misery and suffering has even been introduced, the first two words of the essay already suggest that this messenger belongs to the realm that Benjamin distinguished rigorously from that of history: the realm of *myth*.[33] In notes from the period in which he was working on the Kraus essay, Benjamin had characterised myth as 'that which has always already been' (*das immer schon Dagewesenen*).[34] History is foreign to the life of myth, which knows no future – only the past and an ever-returning present. In Benjamin's early writings, myth is thus described as the 'natural condition of the living' that precedes history: a condition in which the possibility of history has not yet opened up.[35] In the mythical nexus of fate, there is – as yet – no room for the capacity for freedom or self-determination: every difference is always already integrated into the perpetual concatenation of guilt and atonement.[36] Myth in this sense is to be rigorously distinguished from history, whose movement could never play out in mere identity or the simple reproduction of what has already been. Already in his writings from the student days – texts to which we will return later in more detail – Benjamin had emphasised that history is only possible in and through a relation to a 'future' in the strict sense of the word: a future that remains absolutely irreducible to any given past or present.[37] In notes of the late 1920s, this relation to the future is articulated in terms of an irreducible novelty, whose description recalls that of myth through an inversion: the possibility of history arises from a relation to 'that which has never been yet' (*das noch nie*

[32] GS I: 242; O, 62.

[33] For a broader discussion of Benjamin's concept of 'myth', see Eli Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait*, 112–38 and Samuel Weber, 'Genealogy of Modernity: History, Myth and Allegory in Benjamin's *Origin of the German Mourning Play*', 144–49. An analysis of Benjamin's understanding of the relation between myth and philosophy is found in Rodolphe Gasché, 'Saturnine Vision and the Question of Difference', 70–72.

[34] GS V: G°, 8; AP, 842.

[35] See especially 'Fate and Character' (GS II: 171–79; SW I: 201–06), where Benjamin describes the mythical system of fate as a *natürliche Verfassung* and demarcates it both from the sphere of ethics and that of religion.

[36] For a detailed analysis of the relation between myth and religion in Benjamin's earlier reflections on history, see Hamacher, 'Guilt History: Benjamin's Sketch Capitalism and Religion', 82–85.

[37] Cf. especially the first paragraph of 'The Life of Students' of 1915. (GS II: 75; LS, 197–98)

Dagewesene).[38] If history is a movement that acquires its distinctive character from what appears in it as new, as that which has not yet been, it would therefore only become possible in the breakdown of myth – as the rupture of a world that appears as fatefully predetermined. If it is possible to speak of historical life in the realm of myth, this life must remain 'improperly' historical:[39] history would present itself here as an inexorable succession of occurrences that takes its course fatefully – a list of 'betrayal, earthquakes, poison, and fire' that can, at most, be lamented by its messenger.

Natural history

The image of the archaic *Zeitung* with which Benjamin opens the essay on Kraus thus evokes an experience of history that is – as yet – 'improperly' historical. This experience will be further elaborated in an important passage later in the essay, which returns not only to Kraus' mythical experience of history but also makes reference to the newspaper. This passage appears in the middle of the first section of the essay, where Benjamin writes:

> For him, Kraus, the horrible years of his life are not history, but nature: a river, condemned to meander through a landscape of hell (*ein Fluß, verurteilt durch eine Höllenlandschaft sich zu winden*). It is a landscape in which every day 50.000 tree trunks are felled for 60 newspapers.[40]

Kraus' journalism and the experience of history that permeates it are here connected firmly to the sphere of myth – the 'natural condition of the living'.[41] Just as the reference to the 'horrible years of his life' (*die Schreckensjahre seines Lebens*) evokes the absence of the possibility of happiness that characterises the mythical world, so the fateful predetermination of this world is captured here in the image of the river 'condemned to meander through a landscape of hell'. The river – an image that Benjamin had already employed in his book on *Trauerspiel* as an emblem of historical life as a process of continuous becoming, the river or flow of becoming (*Fluß des Werdens*)[42] – here reappears as a feature of the world of myth. If there is a reference to the sphere of law in the image of this *verurteilten* river, this is only insofar as law may – in contrast to justice – be understood as an institution of myth. The river that is sentenced to take a predetermined course is a river that is subordinated to the law of necessity – or what appears in the world of myth as law of guilt and punishment that secures the persistence of the system

[38] GS VI: 202.
[39] In 'Fate and Character', Benjamin writes that the mythical 'nexus of guilt' (*Schuldzusammenhang*) is 'improperly temporal' (*uneigentlich Zeitlich*). (GS II: 176)
[40] GS II: 341; KK, 437.
[41] GS II: 171–79; SW I: 204.
[42] The most important instance of this image is undoubtedly found in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue', where the concept of origin is likened to a vortex whose movement is distinguished strictly from that of the 'river of becoming'. (GS I: 226; O, 45)

of fate. Also the hellish character of this landscape would have to be understood not in religious but in strictly mythical terms. It would point to the ancient image of hell that surfaced in Benjamin's notebooks of the same period: the hell that finds its exemplary expression in the eternally self-same present of Sisyphos – a figure whose suffering unfolds in a *Höllenlandschaft* that is nothing but an extreme instance of a mythical world from which the possibility of difference seems to have vanished entirely.[43]

But the river and the mythical world to which it belongs are, however, not presented as an image of antiquity; they are said to coincide with the *Schreckenjahre* of Kraus' own life, which are also the moment in which Benjamin is writing. This much is suggested not only by the particular description of this mythical landscape – 'a landscape in which every day 50.000 tree trunks are felled for 60 newspapers' – but above all by the fact that this landscape is derived from a gloss that Kraus had written in 1913 and that Benjamin had presumably encountered himself as a young reader of the *Fackel*. This gloss consists of two components: a brief report, written by Kraus himself, carrying the headline 'Every day 50.000 tree trunks for 60 newspapers', resembling an item from a newspaper both in its style and typography; and a brief commentary, which consists only of a few sentences and is appended to it as a postscript. The report conveys the information of the erection of an industrial site in Newfoundland, where a British newspaper magnate conducts 'the plundering of the vast woods and a part of its processing into pulp for the production of paper'.[44] In minute detail, it describes the infrastructure set up for the large-scale felling of trees, their transport, processing into pulp, and transport across the Atlantic, where 'every week 1000 tons of paper are produced, which is barely enough for the newspapers of Lord Northcliffe, which appear in an edition of 25 million'.[45] When Benjamin, on the first pages of the essay on Kraus, speaks of the information of 'hair-raising precision' (*haarstraubende Akribie*) and 'blood-steeped novelties' for which the *Fackel* provides a model, this must be the meticulous factuality that he has in mind.[46] While the report is kept free from explanation or interpretation, the following postscript frames it in a particular way: 'And the world is still in doubt whether it is at its end. Every publisher of some standing (*bessere Erpresser*) now has at least 1000 tree trunks per day at its disposal. Oh poor life! One can no longer see the forest because of all the papers (*Blätter)*.'[47] The factual account of the construction of this industrial site for the production of newspapers is thus held up as evidence, as material proof to a world that has not yet realised it has come to its end. But the image conjured up by the gloss is not conceived as a moral appeal or a call to action. The

[43] Cf. for instance the note on the 'time of hell' in the early sketches for the *Passagenwerk* and its subsequent elaboration in the convolute on the Eternal Return. (G°, 17; AP, 843; D 10 a, 4; AP, 119)
[44] S XIX: 'Das Ende', 144.
[45] Ibid.
[46] GS II: 335; KK, 433.
[47] S XIX: 'Das Ende', 144.

postscript presents this information without the faintest hope of having any consequences. Despite the play of words (the *Erpresser* as publisher and extortioner, the *Blätter* as leaves and as papers) its message is a grim one: the world is at its end because it is on its fateful course towards it – and there is no doubt that the course of history is as unavoidable as it is unalterable.

The name that Benjamin reserves for this repetition of myth in the historical world and relapse of the historical world into a mythical order is 'natural history' (*Naturgeschichte*). The term, which had played an important role in the analysis of the baroque, returns here in the description of Kraus as a writer for whom 'the horrible years of his life' are 'not history but nature' (*nicht Geschichte, sondern Natur*).[48] Just as Benjamin's concept of *Naturgeschichte* has little to do with the empirical science of *historia naturalis*, so his concept of 'nature' is not to be misunderstood for physical nature as an object of natural science or mathematics. The nature that is at issue here is closer to what the early Lukács had referred to as 'second nature' in *The Theory of the Novel*, a text that Benjamin was deeply familiar with.[49] What Lukács here calls 'second nature' is a world that is created by humanity and yet lost to it, confronting the human being like the 'first nature' of the natural sciences. Even if this world is historically produced, it is subordinated to the law of necessity and knowable only as a system whose coherence is guaranteed by mechanical causation. In this history that has congealed into nature, Lukács writes in a later text, 'the here and now acquires the patina of an eternal law of nature or a cultural value enduring for all time'.[50] The resonance of these passages with Benjamin's articulation of the concept of natural history in the *Trauerspielbuch* is unmistakable. Benjamin argues here that the conception of history particular to the baroque – world history as a 'constantly repeated drama (*das ständig wiederholte Schauspiel*)' – appeared to the writers as 'the natural aspect of the course of history, essential in its persistence (*als die in ihrer Beharrlichkeit wesenhafte, als die naturgemäße Seite des Geschichtsverlaufs)*.[51] The 'natural aspect of the course of history' is that aspect of history that makes it possible to speak of history as something that takes its 'course' in the first place. To speak of the *Verlauf* of history already implies that history has a natural development, that it may be understood as a process that unfolds according to given rules and towards a predetermined goal. Benjamin's image of the river that is 'condemned to meander' through a landscape offers before anything else an image of this conception of nature – and it is certainly no accident that this river, when it is

[48] GS II: 341; KK, 437.
[49] See Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, 62.
[50] This phrase appears in the later essay on reification, in the same passage where Lukács cites Marx's claim that, for bourgeois economics, 'history existed once upon a time, but it does not exist any more' in order to introduce the problem of the possibility of history. See Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 157.
[51] GS I: 267; O, 88.

traced back to Kraus' gloss, turns out to be not a man-made construct. In his description of the landscape 'in which every day 50.000 tree trunks are felled for 60 newspapers', Kraus makes reference to a river dug with the purpose of transporting the felt tree trunks from the inland to the coast – not nature pure and simple but a historical construct that appears as natural after the fact.[52] If the 'landscape of hell' and the river that is 'condemned to meander' are emblems of the natural condition of man, this natural condition does not simply precede history but manifests itself as a history that has congealed into nature. This is why Benjamin can write in his *Trauerspiel* book that fate, just as it is neither a purely natural nor a purely historical category, is also a category that is in the final analysis not mythical but natural-historical: for it is in the congealing of history into nature, in the repetition of the mythical order in the realm of history, that fate would fulfil itself in the sense that it would exert its full force. Kraus is thus the figure of an experience of history in which this 'natural aspect' is driven to an extreme; where it has come to overdetermine historical life to the point where history becomes almost indistinguishable from nature. But if history has turned into nature for Kraus, it is nature of a particular kind: a nature that differs from the 'natural condition' of myth insofar as it is given a theological dimension. Nature is here no longer prereligious, as it was in the realm of myth; in the repetition of myth in the historical world, nature reappears as *fallen*.

History of creation

If Kraus experiences 'the horrible years of his life' not as history but as nature, Benjamin shows that this apparently secular nature has a theological dimension: for the course of history whose natural course is chronicled in Kraus' journalism is consistently grasped as the unfolding of a 'history of creation' (*Schöpfungsgeschichte*).[53] Nature is conceived as created nature; its history is understood as the story of its fall. In this story there is no humanity that could serve as its subject, only a fallen 'creature' (*Kreatur*) deprived of grace.[54] Hence Benjamin can write of Kraus:

> The fact that humanity (*die Menschheit*) is losing the fight against the creature (*die Kreatur*) is to him just as certain as the fact that technology, once deployed against creation (*die Schöpfung*), will not stop short of his master, either. His defeatism is of a supranational – that

[52] A more detailed discussion of the theory of natural history in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book is found in Weber, 'Genealogy of Modernity', 138–39. For a discussion of its relation to Lukács' theory of second nature, see Adorno, 'The Idea of Natural History', 112–17 and Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 35–39.

[53] For a general discussion of Benjamin's understanding of the relation between nature and creation, see Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait*, 13–17.

[54] See the section 'Annulment of the historical ethos' in Benjamin's study of the baroque. (GS I: 267–70; O, 88–91).

> is, planetary – kind, and history is for him only the wasteland that separates his generation (*sein Geschlecht*) from creation, a history whose last act is world conflagration (*Weltbrand*).[55]

Also here Kraus' journalism turns out to be not unlike the baroque mourning play, which dealt only with historical subject matter and nevertheless presented the historical life through the prism of the contemporary theological situation.[56] The same thing that Benjamin writes of the playwrights of the baroque can be applied to the journalism of Kraus: what is at issue in his writing is 'a worldly exposition of history as the story of the world's suffering (*Leidensgeschichte der Welt*)' – but one at whose core is a conception of the human being as a fallen creature.[57] What brings about the endless suffering staged in the *Trauerspiel* – its presentation of historical life as typical catastrophe – is grounded not in the ethical being of humanity but in its natural being: 'not moral decay, but the very estate of the creaturely human being (*der Stand des kreatürlichen Menschen selber*) provides the reason for the catastrophe'.[58] In the mourning play, this is perhaps most evident in the portrayal of the figure of the sovereign – identified by Benjamin as the 'principal exponent of history' – who appears here not as the moral subject of history but as a sinful creature.[59]

Images of the human being as fallen creature indeed permeate Kraus' writings and experience of history; but here the creature is not captured in the figure of the sovereign but instead, above all, in that of the newspaper reader. An exemplary portrayal of this creature is provided in the first paragraph of his 'Tourist Trips to Hell' of 1920, a gloss organised around the citation of a complete newspaper advertisement for luxurious excursions to the Verdun battlefield 'especially recommended as a fall trip'.[60] In his commentary of this article, Kraus writes:

> I have in my hands a document that surpasses and seals the shame of this age, and would warrant assigning a place of honor in a cosmic boneyard to this money-hungry mess that calls itself humanity. If ever a newspaper clipping meant a clipping of creation – here we face the utter certainty that a generation to which such solicitations could be directed no longer has any better instincts to be violated.[61]

[55] GS II: 341; KK, 437–38.
[56] Benjamin emphasises this aspect of the mourning play in his study of the baroque: the *Trauerspiel* 'had to deal with historical subject matter […] but from the outset these efforts remained confined to a context of strict immanence, without access to the beyond of the mystery plays'. (GS I: 259; O, 80).
[57] GS I: 343; O, 166.
[58] GS I: 267; O, 88.
[59] See GS I: 263–64; O, 85–86.
[60] Kraus, *No Compromise*, 69.
[61] Ibid..

It is no accident that the 'document' that Kraus claims to hold in his hands – this evidence that 'seals the shame of this age' – is a newspaper. For Kraus, the newspaper is not only the sheet of paper described in 'The End', a sheet of paper in whose production planetary exhaustion manifests itself in its most wasteful and perverted form; it is also the sheet of paper that conveys the information of this exhaustion – and it is thus in reading the newspaper that the reader finds oneself to be complicit with it. This complicity is folded into the 1913 gloss on the newspaper production facility, where the material evidence for this exhaustion is presented in the form of a newspaper article – but it resurfaces throughout Kraus' work. In a poem titled 'The Newspaper', Kraus writes:

> Weißt du, der du Zeitung liest,
> wie viele Bäume mußten bluten,
> damit geblendet von Valuten
> du dein Gesicht in diesem Spiegel siehst,
> um wieder dich an dein Geschäft zu sputen?
>
> Weißt du, der du die Zeitung liest,
> wie viele Menschen dafür sterben,
> daß wenige sich Lust erwerben
> und dafür, daß die Kreatur genießt,
> der Kreatur unsägliches Verderben?[62]

In the newspaper reader we thus recognise the exemplary instance of Kraus' understanding of the human being qua fallen creature – a creature that is as complicit in the exhaustion of nature as in that of himself. It is in reading the newspaper that the impoverished 'subject' of natural history is confronted on a daily basis with the world's suffering and finds himself to be complicit in it. But whereas the *Trauerspiel* is chronologically contemporaneous with the restoration philosophy of history that provides its model,[63] the conception of the 'creature' that underpins Kraus' journalism, on first sight, appears as an anachronism. But even though Kraus' writing has an affinity with the theological speculations of the baroque, he does not simply reproduce them:

> His concept of creation (*Kreaturbegriff*) contains the theological inheritance of speculations that last possessed contemporary validity for the whole of Europe in the seventeenth century. At the theological core of this concept […] a transformation has taken place that has caused it,

[62] 'Die Zeitung', *Worte in Versen*, 360. 'Do you, who reads the newspaper, know / how many trees must bleed / for you see your face in the mirror / blinded by currencies / in order to hurry back to your business? / Do you, who reads the newspaper, know / how many people die / so that a few can have their pleasure / and so that the creature can enjoy himself / the creature of unspeakable perversion?'
[63] See GS: II, 246; O, 80.

> quite without constraint, to coincide with the cosmopolitan (*allmenschlichen*) credo of Austrian worldliness, which made creation into a church in which nothing remained to recall the rite except an occasional whiff of incense in the mists.[64]

What separates the natural-historical transformation of history in the baroque from Kraus' experience of historical life as 'a river condemned to meander through a landscape of hell' is, of course, the Enlightenment and its conception of history based in progress. In contrast to the sovereign monarch in the mourning play, the Krausian creature is one that has unmistakably lived through the Enlightenment. If the 'theological speculations' of the seventeenth century acquire a new actuality in Kraus, a new resonance in the moment in which both Kraus and Benjamin are writing, then the condition of possibility of this resonance is precisely the collapse of the conception of history based on progress. For Kraus, as for Benjamin, the untenability of this view of history is not only given by the experience of the exceptional violence of the First World War but also by the monstrous banalities of which the newspaper provides evidence on a daily basis.

End time

In the natural-historical world that is presented by Kraus, history is thus construed as the story of a fallen creation. But insofar as the main protagonist of this story is a creature completely deprived of grace, this history is one from which every possibility of redemption has been removed. Or as Benjamin puts it in his 1931 essay:

> This insolently secularized thunder and lightning, storms, surf, and earthquakes – cosmic man has won them back for creation by making them its world-historical answer to the criminal existence of human beings. But the span between creation and the last judgement here finds no salvation-historical fulfillment (*heilsgeschichtliche Erfüllung*), let alone a historical overcoming (*geschichtliche überwindung*).[65]

History, the span between creation and the last judgement of which Kraus chronicles a handful of horrible years, takes its course without the prospect of fulfilment. The fallen creature that Kraus substitutes for the historical subject of the Enlightenment is stripped of not only the faith in a divine act of salvation but also the belief in historical progress. This is the historical life conveyed by the archaic messenger and the sheet that he brandishes in his hands: an ever-same present devoid of the possibility of fulfilment, redemption or renewal.[66] Here, again, a theme

[64] GS II: 339–40; KK, 437.
[65] GS II: 437; KK, 339.
[66] For a discussion of the disappearance of eschatology and the distinction between empty and fulfilled time in Benjamin's studies of tragedy and *Trauerspiel*, see Peter Fenves, 'Tragedy and Prophecy', 234–36.

from Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study returns in the characterisation of Kraus' experience of history. A peculiar characteristic of the German mourning play that is highlighted by Benjamin and central to his study is its complete absence of eschatology. Whereas the Christian chronicle of the middle ages had 'rendered the world-historical (*welthistorischen*) as salvation-historical (*heilsgeschichtlichen*)', the baroque is characterised by the dissolution of the claim that historical actions could contribute to 'the process of salvation' (*Heilsprozess*).[67] To the baroque, Benajmin writes, 'nothing was more distant […] than the expectation of an end time (*ein Endzeit*) or even of an overturning of times (*Zeitenumschwungs*).'[68] The 'total disappearance of eschatology' leaves its mark on the conception of history as the story of a fallen creation. 'Whereas the middle ages present the futility of world events and the transience of the creature as stations on the road to salvation,' Benjamin writes, 'the German mourning play is taken up entirely with the hopelessness of the earthly condition.'[69] In the mourning play, history seems to disappear entirely; instead of the destructive gesture of divine justice that would accompany the *Weltgericht* there is only the endless play of unstable orders that always leaves the setting intact. The possibility of a fulfilled time is here entirely absorbed into natural history.[70] Once history has turned into the story of a fallen creation, its protagonist a creature deprived of grace, predestined to perpetuate its suffering *ad infinitum* without the hope of redemption, every possibility of history in the strict sense seems to have disappeared entirely. In its place, Benjamin writes, something new arises: an 'empty world' (*eine leere Welt*) from which the possibility of fulfilment seems to have completely vanished.[71]

This 'empty world' does not just appear in the mourning play; it is also the world that Kraus conjures up in his journalism. The main protagonist of the poem 'The Dying Human' (*Der Sterbende Mensch*), a human being at the end of the history of the world, laments: 'There is nothing I have fulfilled and nothing I have promised (*ich habe nichts erfüllt und nichts versprochen*).'[72] But whereas the expectation of an end seems to have vanished entirely from the baroque mourning play, Kraus' work is suffused with imagery of a world at its end. 'The End', the gloss of 1913 from which Benjamin takes the image of a landscape that has become barren due to the production of newspapers is no exception: throughout his writings, Kraus consistently treats the present as an end time – even though it is an end without eschatology. Nowhere is this expressed more clearly than in Kraus' great drama, *The Last Days of Mankind*, which is the result of a period of prolific writing following Kraus' prolonged silence in the

[67] GS I: 257; O, 78
[68] GS I: 259; O, 80.
[69] GS I: 260; O, 81.
[70] See Fenves, 'Tragedy and Prophecy', 234–35.
[71] GS I: 317; O, 138–39.
[72] 'Der Sterbende Mensch', *Worte in Versen*, 57.

months after the outbreak of the war.[73] Published in special issues of the *Fackel*, the 209 scenes comprising the 5 main acts, the 10-scene prologue and the epilogue of the drama are all written over the span of two years, between July 1915 and July 1917. Rather than allowing for a presumably more 'objective' distance to contemporary events, Kraus chronicles the present in a language that is inextricable from the moment in which it is written.[74] The drama offers an eschatology in the sense that it engages in a 'gathering of last things', calling to the stage many hundreds of characters, ranging from journalists to prostitutes, from politicians to tradesmen, from emperors to newspaper boys, from fictitious to actual persons; but the end time it portrays is devoid of eschatology in the sense of a redemptive fulfilment.

The occurrence of the end of the world, which is staged in the final scene of the play, is as empty of significance as the endless play of the *Trauerspiel*. The *Last Days of Mankind* may end with divine destruction, but this destruction itself is not an act of divine will. 'I have not willed this' (*ich habe es nicht gewollt*) – these are the last words of the drama, with which God's voice breaks the silence left after the complete destruction of the world.[75] These are the same words attributed to Kaiser Wilhelm II at the outbreak of the war – an outbreak of which the possibility was, in Kraus' understanding, predicated precisely on the feverish reports in newspapers.[76] The apocalypse itself is here absorbed into a conception of history as nature: the end of history is neither divine nor properly historical in itself. More importantly, this vacuous world destruction is presented as a deus ex machina, which intervenes into an end time which is in principle endless. The other 200 odd scenes of *The Last Days of Mankind* do not read as a narrative unfolding toward its end but, rather, as a recurrence of ever-same phrases and deliberations, interrupted by an apocalypse which offers cessation but no fulfilment. This temporality of ever-same recurrence is marked by the cries of newspaper boys, which permeate the drama. The voice of god, with which the drama ends, has its counterpoint in the cries of newspaper boys – 'Extra-a-a! Extra-a-a-a! *(Extraausgabee!)*' – which mark its beginning and recur until the end of the penultimate scene.[77] This is not an end time of passionate destruction, but one where an exhausted creature is caught in a potentially endless exhaustion of nature and itself. Kraus' journalism is marked by this paradoxical experience of an end time: an end time which retains its affinity with the endless play of the *Trauerspiel* to the extent that it remains without eschatology, without possibility of fulfilment. This end time

[73] The beginning of this period is marked by the public speech *In These Great Times*, the text that Harry Zohn rightly refers to as the 'germ cell' of Kraus' work of those years. The speech was delivered by Kraus in November 1914, after several months of silence following the outbreak of the war; and it is the text which is most extensively cited by Benjamin. See Harry Zohn, 'Introduction', in *In These Great Times*, 24–27.

[74] GS IV: 85; OWS, 144.

[75] Kraus, *Die Letzten Tage der Menschheit*, 193.

[76] See Zohn, 'Introduction', in *In These Great Times*, 24–27.

[77] Kraus, *Die Letzten Tage der Menschheit*, 192.

is permeated by the recurrence of ever-same novelties, scandals, and chatter. The dialogue presented in 'The Dying Man' begins, significantly enough, with the declaration: 'Now it is enough. I have not enjoyed this. And there also won't be anything new (*und Neues wird es auch wohl nicht mehr geben*).'[78] The true horror of the end time depicted by Kraus is not divine destruction but, rather, its absence – the ahistorical temporality that Benjamin characterises as the recurrence of ever-same sensations.

The cries of the newspaper boys that punctuate Kraus' *The Last Days of Mankind* thus determine the time of this final act of world history: they serve as temporal markers of an end time that takes its course without a possibility of relief or fulfilment. Here it is precisely the announcement of the latest news that, in its endless repetition, provides the emblem of a world that persistently remains the same. Benjamin takes up this interpretation of journalism in his essay of 1931, where it surfaces in the passage at the end of the first part. In these last sentences, at the furthest remove from the image of the archaic messenger introduced in the opening sentences, Benjamin returns once again to the figure of Kraus and writes:

> To the ever-same sensations (*die immer gleiche Sensationen*) with which the daily press serves its public he opposes the eternally new 'tiding' (*die ewig neue 'Zeitung'*), which is to report of the history of creation: the eternally new, incessant lament.[79]

The formula that Benjamin uses to characterise the news of the daily press – 'the ever-same sensations' – harbours an inner tension. The nature of this tension becomes evident if one takes into account that sensation is for Benjamin the name for an encounter with the new or, more precisely, the newest. If the messages served up by the newspaper are, in the later notes for the *Arcades Project*, claimed to satisfy an 'enigmatic need for sensation', this sensation is to be understood first and foremost as 'the sensation of the newest' (*die Sensation des Neuesten*).[80] The 'ever-same sensations' of which Benjamin first speaks in the essay on Kraus would thus belong to an experience of history in which newness and sameness, pushed to their extreme in the categories of the 'newest' and the 'ever-same', collapse into one another. It is certainly no accident that these two categories are central to Benjamin's reflections on temporality that were written around the same time as the essay on Kraus. In a note on the 'time of hell' that is closely connected to the time of the 'landscape of hell' to which he likens Kraus' experience of history, Benjamin writes:

[78] Kraus, 'Der Sterbende Mensch', *Worte in Versen*, 57.
[79] GS II: 345; KK, 440. On Benjamin's concept of lament (*Klage*), see Rebecca Comay, 'Paradoxes of Lament: Benjamin and Hamlet', 257–61 and Ilit Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy*, 118–62.
[80] GS V: 114; AP, B 2, 1 and GS V: 679; AP, S 2, 1.

> The punishments of hell are always the newest thing (*das Neueste*) that there is in this domain. What is at issue is not that 'the same thing happens over and over' (*das 'immer wieder dasselbe' geschieht*) […] but rather that the face of the world, the colossal head, precisely in what is newest never alters (*gerade in dem, was das Neueste ist, sich nie verändert*) – that this 'newest' remains, in every respect, the same (*das nämliche bleibt*).[81]

The 'time of hell' thus revolves around a peculiar convergence of newness and sameness. This convergence is not construed along the line of a distinction between a changing part and a whole that remains the same; rather, persistent sameness here manifests itself precisely in and as the new. The face of the world never changes – but if it remains the same as ever, it does so precisely in what presents itself as the new or newest. The lack of change that characterises this time does not merely consist in a simple stasis; a sameness that is driven to its extreme is not an absence of newness, but rather a sameness that asserts itself over the new and manifests itself even in the newest. If the natural aspect of history is to be grasped as the overpowering of historical life by a certain persistence of sameness, this persistence is ultimately not to be understood as endurance of the old or a return of what has been, but rather as a sameness that manifests itself as a returning newness and a newness that is ever the same. In a note from the same period, Benjamin distinguishes these two forms of persistence – 'the remaining of the old' (*Altes, das bleibt*) and 'the returning of what has been' (*Gewesenes, das wiederkehrt*)' – from another category, which characterises the time proper to the landscape of hell chronicled by Kraus' journalism: 'the always-again-new' (*das Immer-Wieder-Neue*).[82]

For Benjamin, it is this convergence of the newest and the ever-same that determines the affinity between the mythical depictions of hell and the modern newspaper. If myth returns in the modern, then it does so in the return of the *Höllenstraf* in a newness whose form is always already predetermined. When Benjamin returns to a discussion of this convergence in a later note for the *Arcades Project*, he will associate it directly with the birth of journalism. This note, included in the convolute on 'newness', unmistakably models its reflections on a collective that 'knows no history' (*kennt keine Geschichte*) on the newspaper reader.[83] That the newspaper reader *knows no history* has nothing to do with a lack of 'historical consciousness' in the usual sense: it has nothing to do with a lack of factual knowledge of events past or present, nor does Benjamin refer here to the failure to understand the present 'in the context of the past'. What is at issue in this 'knowing of history' is something fundamentally different from the familiar complaints of historicism: it is the name for a relation to historical life in which history in the strict sense would first become possible. The newspaper reader is presented with historical life, historical life is staged before him – but he fails to grasp its

[81] GS V: G°, 17; AP 842–43.
[82] Ibid.
[83] GS V: 679; AP, S 2, 1.

properly historical element. What corresponds to this failure is a certain 'perception of time' (*Zeitwahrnehmung*) – a perception of time that 'stood at the cradle of modern feuilletonism' and is characterised in terms of the same convergence that had already appeared in the characterisation of the daily press in the essay on Kraus: 'the course of historical occurrence (*der Verlauf des Geschehens*) flows by before it as always the same (*immer Nämliches*) and always new (*immer Neuestes*)'.[84]

Weltgericht

The figure of Kraus as it emerges from Benjamin's essay of 1931 thus serves as the emblem of a specific experience of history. Like the archaic messenger evoked in the opening sentences of the essay, Kraus brings the news of a world that is mythical in its structure. History, as it emerges in the pages of his *Zeitschrift*, takes its course fatefully: it is a process of coming-into-being and passing away that obeys the same law of substitution without exception that also determines the mythical schema of guilt and retribution. History here turns into nature in the sense that historical life is reduced to what Benjamin calls the 'natural life' of the human being: a proto-ethical, pre-religious life in which there is no possibility of self-determination, no relation to an other that is not already integrated into the endless concatenation of events of which this messenger brings the news. Just as the course of history that is chronicled by Kraus has an affinity with the world of myth, it stands in a close relation to the repetition of myth in Christianity and its doctrine of original sin. There is no human subject of this history, only a sinful creature that has called its suffering upon itself; there is no possibility of relief, no redemption to hope for – only a history of suffering that is fated to perpetuate itself without end. The affinity between the three historical constellations that play a central role in Benjamin's portrayal of the peculiar journalism of Kraus – myth, Christianity and the cult religion of capitalism – lies in the ultimate indissolubility of the guilt nexus that characterises all three of them.[85]

What emerges from this is an experience of history that is entirely stripped of the conviction of progress. So-called progress appears to Kraus in a wholly different form: as a 'chimera'. When Benjamin speaks of the 'chimeras of progress' (*Chimären des Fortschritts*) in his essay of 1931, this means not only that progress reveals itself as an illusion, but also that this illusion shows itself to have a mythical character. Progress is for Kraus nothing but the perpetuation of the guilt nexus. In this sense the essay on Kraus – and the time of history of *The Last Days of Mankind* that is central to it – anticipates the important thesis that will surface in Benjamin's

[84] Ibid.

[85] For a more detailed analysis of the relation between Christianity and the cult 'religion' of capitalism, see Hamacher, 'Guilt History: Benjamin's Sketch Capitalism and Religion', 82–85.

later writings: 'The concept of progress is to be founded in the idea of catastrophe. That "things go on like this" *is* the catastrophe (*daß es "so weiter" geht, ist die Katastrophe*).'[86] This is the experience of historical life that Benjamin recognises in the depictions of hell of the mythical world, in the Christianity of the reformation and in the cult religion of capitalism: that the catastrophe is precisely that the 'history of the world' continues to take its course.[87] Hence Benjamin writes, in an important passage that once again plays out the relation between the world of the baroque and the world conjured up in the journalism of Kraus at the beginning of the twentieth century:

> Just as in the most opulent examples of baroque altar painting, saints hard-pressed against the frame extend their hands, spread out in aversion, toward the breathtaking abbreviations of the extremities floating before them – of the angels, the blessed, and the damned – so the whole of world history (*die ganze Weltgeschichte*) presses in on Kraus in the extremities of a single newspaper article (*in den Extremitäten einer einzigen Lokalnotiz*), a single phrase, a single advertisement.[88]

Under Kraus' gaze, a single newspaper article suddenly contains 'the whole of world history'. World history must here be taken in the specific sense in which Benjamin used the term: history insofar as it offers itself in its worldly aspect and is to be distinguished from divine history.[89] Such a history of the world is, for Kraus, nothing but the history of its suffering: just as every occurrence is, for the messenger on ancient engravings, always an exemplary instance of a 'typical catastrophe', so Kraus reads the smallest *Lokalnotiz* as the news of a history of suffering from which there is no escape. In this movement, the experience of history of the journalist – the 'unlimited series of facts' that corresponded to the figures of the date, the eye witness and the camera – is pushed to an extreme. In the course of history that is chronicled by Kraus' journalism there is no break with the mythical order; by grasping the endless concatenation of events as a single catastrophe, the mythical history of the world is rather driven to its final consequence. For the *Urahn* of journalism that Kraus, the *Lokalnotiz* no longer conveys the news of an isolated fact, but the entire series of events grasped in their catastrophic sameness. But even if Benjamin makes reference to the 'whole' of world history here, this whole is not to be mistaken for a totality: insofar as it is a whole of suffering and of misery, of *Unglück*, it is a whole that manifests itself as a lack. With every piece of news, this

[86] GS I: 683; 'Central Park', 184.

[87] For a broader discussion of this thesis and its role in Benjamin's work of the 1920s, see Rebecca Comay, 'Benjamin's Endgame', 262–63.

[88] GS II: 348; KK, 443.

[89] Cf. Benjamin's early note on 'world history' and 'divine history' in GS VI: 91–92. For a detailed interpretation of this note and its claim that guilt is 'the highest category of world history', see Hamacher, 'Guilt History', 82–85.

history of the world not only extends itself and continues to take its course but also, once again, expresses the deficiency that stamps it in its entirety.

For the messenger who brings the news of this *Weltgeschichte* there is, however, no conceivable relief from its suffering. Just as it is futile to hope for salvation, every attempt to escape it or even renounce it would be in vain. Least of all would it be possible to posit another world and another history. It is in this light that one must read the reflections on history in which the passage just cited is embedded:

> 'When the age laid hands upon itself, he was the hands,' Brecht said. Few insights can stand beside this, and certainly not the comment of his friend Adolf Loos. 'Kraus,' he declares, 'stands on the threshold of a new age.' Alas, by no means. […] Kraus is no historic genius. He does not stand on the threshold of a new age. If he ever turns his back on creation, if he interrupts his lamentation (*bricht er ab mit klagen*), it is only to file a complaint at the Last Judgement (*um vor dem Weltgericht anzuklagen*).[90]

At its extreme – the extreme that is marked by Kraus' journalism – this experience of history is deprived entirely of every possibility to positively represent another world. In the journalism of Kraus, historical experience reaches its nadir: there is no history other than the *Weltgeschichte* that fatefully takes its course. Kraus is a figure of the most extreme petrification of historical life, a despair without relief – but for Benjamin it is precisely from here that another experience of history must be won. However, such a retrieval could never be modelled on the figure of the 'historic genius' (*historischer Genius*): the despair over the endless suffering that is world history is driven to an extreme in Kraus, but his experience of history precludes every attempt to begin another history through an act of creative positing. If there is a properly historical dimension to Kraus' journalism, it is not to be understood in a creative or even constructive sense. As Brecht's description of Kraus suggests, it could only be characterised as purely destructive: this historical dimension of his writing would have to be thought in relation to a movement by which the *Zeitalter* deprives itself of its own life. If Kraus' writing is relentlessly focused on his own time, this is before anything else with a destructive purpose – to serve as the medium by which the epoch brings itself to an end.

In Benjamin's essay on Kraus, this crystallises around a specific impulse that emerges out of the experience of history as a continuous catastrophe, an impulse out of which the possibility of history in the strict sense could be retrieved: the wish to interrupt the course of the world.[91] That Benjamin articulates this impulse in terms of a 'wish' is no accident: for it is this same

[90] GS II: 348; KK, 443.

[91] For a discussion of the motif of the 'wish of Joshua' – the wish to arrest time and bring history to a standstill – in Benjamin's writings of the 1920s and 1930s, see Comay, 'Benjamin's Endgame', 264–65.

word that Kant had used to describe the longing for the 'kingdom of God on earth', the world in which the realm of nature exists in harmony with the realm of morals – and thus the feeling that first discloses *Geschichte* as the domain of its realisation. The relevant passage from Kant's *Religion* may be cited here again: 'The wish of all the well-disposed is thus: "that the kingdom of God come, that his will be done on earth (*auf Erden geschehe*)"; but what preparations must they make in order that this wish come to pass among them (*mit ihnen geschehe*)?'[92] In the case of Kraus, who experiences the history of the world as a continuous catastrophe, this wish does not have a positive, teleological character; it does not long for a progression through time but, rather, for the interruption of this progression and the arrest of time. Benjamin cites Kraus: 'Let time stand still! Sun, be consummate! Make the end great! Announce eternity!' so Benjamin cites Kraus, 'You golden bell, melt in your own heat, make yourself a gun against the cosmic foe! Shoot firebrands in his face! If only I had Joshua's power, I tell you, Gibeon would be again!'[93] To better understand the nature of this interruption – which coincides with the movement described by Benjamin as a turning (*kehren*), the turning with which Kraus 'interrupts his lament' in the face of the world's suffering – it is important to consider a crucial component in Benjamin's consideration of Kraus' journalism, namely its treatment of language.

Philology of the newspapers

If the vocation of Kraus' journalism is to 'proclaim the spirit of the epoch', then this proclamation unfolds before anything else through a study of its *language*. The newspaper takes up a privileged role in this study: for Kraus, it is the language of journalism in which the spirit of the epoch imparts itself. It is in this light that one must understand Benjamin's characterisation of Kraus' work as a 'philology of the newspapers (*Philologie der Journale*)'.[94] A philology of the newspapers: that is to say, Kraus' writing is, above all, a matter of reading – a reading that treats the newspapers as a text whose language calls for the same meticulous scrutiny as an ancient scroll. Indeed, the *Zeitschrift* to which Kraus devoted himself would be nothing without this scrutiny: most of its glosses are constructed as meticulous studies of the language of newspaper articles, documents that Kraus either reproduces in their entirety or dissects into pieces, framing them by a commentary that analyses their linguistic elements in the closest detail – an approach perhaps expressed most dramatically by his glosses dedicated entirely to a single phrase, word or punctuation mark.[95] But beyond the evocation of a general

[92] Ak 6: 101; RR, 111.
[93] GS II: 365; KK, 455.
[94] GS II: 349; KK, 443.
[95] Cf. for instance 'Tourist Trips to Hell', in *No Compromise*, 69. Kraus' meticulous analysis of the use of punctuation marks in the writings of his contemporaries is exemplified in particular by the texts collected under the title *Worte in Versen*.

study of the structure and history of languages, the precise formula that Benjamin uses here, the *Philologie der Journale*, has a more specific significance. It introduces the same tension into Kraus' study of language that marked Benjamin's description of his experience of history: the treatment of the most recent as the most ancient. The language of the newspapers, if the latter are to be studied as ancient texts, would have a certain affinity with the order of myth and the guilt nexus that characterises it. Only in this way can this study be a *philologia* in the strict sense in which Benjamin had defined in his earlier writings: as a study of language that would at the same time be a 'science of origin'. It is in this sense that Benjamin, in a letter of the early 1920s, defines philology: as a study that 'promises to historical investigation the pleasures that the neoplatonics sought in the ascesis of contemplation'.[96] In other words, *philologia* in the strict sense would be that investigation of linguistic phenomena which is guided by the promise that the world of ideas reveals itself in the historical world – an investigation driven by a *philos* that would find its satisfaction only in what Benjamin was to describe in the prologue of his *Trauerspiel* book as the 'presentation of the idea'.[97]

What is at issue in this *Philologie der Journale* becomes clear if it is read alongside another crucial proposition, introduced in the first section of the essay: that 'journalism […] is through and through the expression of the changed function of language in the world of high capitalism (*der veränderten Funktion der Sprache in der hochkapitalistischen Welt*)'.[98] With this sentence, Benjamin ties Kraus' critique of the language of the newspaper to his own philosophy of history and the theory of language that underpins it. For Benjamin, the moment in which he is writing, the epoch whose spirit is imparted in the language of journalism is – at least since the fragment of 1921 – an epoch determined by the cult religion that bears the name of capitalism. That this epoch is here grasped in terms of a 'changed function of language' not only ties the analysis of capitalism as historico-philosophical category to Benjamin's theory of language, but also points to the place where this is closest to that of Kraus: in its critique of any conception of language that reduces it to its semantic or referential function.

Like Benjamin's own theory of language, Kraus' *Sprachlehre* is animated by a critique of instrumentalist understandings of language. Kraus develops this critique in particular in his bundles of aphorisms, where it plays an important role in his reflections on the relation between thought and language. Throughout these aphorisms, Kraus seeks to dismantle the

[96] See the unpublished fragment 'Methodische Arten der Geschichte' (GS VI: 93–94) and Benjamin's letter to Scholem of February 1921 in *Briefe*, 257.

[97] In the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' Benjamin demarcates the 'givenness' of ideas from the 'neo-Platonic paganism' that he had referred to in his reflections on philology. Distancing himself from theories of philosophical contemplation founded on 'vision' (*Schau*), Benjamin develops a conception of philosophy that grasps the idea as 'something linguistic' (*ein Sprachliches*). (GS I: 216; O, 36)

[98] GS II: 337; KK, 435.

conception of language as an instrument that is, in principle, disposable – a means that could be utilised by a speaker to communicate already formed thoughts. Just as we 'have' no language that could be used as an instrument, so we have no thoughts before there is language. Or, as Kraus writes in *Pro Domo*, a bundle that Benjamin was deeply familiar with, in an aphorism that may serve as summary of his *Sprachlehre*: 'The thoughtless person thinks, that one can only have a thought if one has it and covers it in words (*in Worte kleidet*). He does not understand that, in truth, the only one who has a thought, is he who has the word that a thought grows into (*das Wort in das der Gedanke hineinwächst*).'[99] Language does not cover a thought that precedes it; it is not external to the thought, added on to it only after it has already been thought. Language does not relate to the thought as clothes do to a body. There is no body that has already grown, no figure that has already taken on its shape and that could subsequently be dressed, just as there is no possible adequacy between the two that could be compared to the relation between a body and the clothes that cover it. The relation of thought to language is, rather, a 'growing into' (*hineinwachsen*): if the thought grows, this growth is indissoluble from the language in which it takes place. That, as Kraus writes, 'in truth, the only one who has a thought, is he who has the word that a thought grows into' is, of course, not without irony. For the one who truly 'has' a thought does not have it at all, at least not in the sense of a stable possession – but neither does this speaker 'have' a word, insofar as there is no thinking subject yet to relate to this word as if it were an object that could be possessed. If this aphorism exposes a 'truth', as it suggests, it is that there is no speaker that has a thought, nor a thinker that has a word – that we are only that which has been spoken.[100]

As is well known, Benjamin had already been familiar with Kraus' *Sprachlehre* since his student years. In many respects, the theory of language that Benjamin had begun to systematically articulate in a series of texts written in 1916 – most notably the essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man'– is close to Kraus' conception of language, especially in its critique of instrumentalist understandings of language.[101] In this essay, Benjamin seeks to articulate an alternative to what is here referred to as the 'bourgeois conception of language' (*die bürgerliche Auffassung der Sprache*) – a formulation that must in all likelihood be understood first and foremost in terms of Kraus' polemic against bourgeois

[99] S VIII: 235.

[100] Kraus returns to the impossibility to 'have' thoughts in another aphorism in *Pro Domo*, which has a remarkable affinity with Benjamin's own reflection on this matter in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue': 'The thought is in the world, but one does not possess it (*aber man hat ihn nicht*). It is scattered in linguistic elements (*in Sprachelemente zerstreut*) through the prism of material experience (*stoffliches Erlebens*): the artist combines them into a thought (*schließt sie zum Gedanken*).' (S VIII: 236)

[101] For more detailed expositions of Benjamin's early philosophy of language, see Rodolphe Gasché, 'Saturnine Vision and the Question of Difference'; Hamacher, 'Intensive Languages'; Peter Fenves, 'The Paradisal *Epochē*: On Benjamin's First Philosophy'; Wilfried Menninghaus, *Walter Benjamins Theorie der Sprachmagie*, 9–40.

society. This conception of language is defined by three mutually related claims: 'the means of imparting is the word (*das Mittel der Mitteilung ist das Wort*), its object the thing (*ihr Gegenstand die Sache*), its addressee a human (*ihr Adressat ein Mensch*).'[102] Insofar as it reduces that which it claims to comprehend to a mere means, such a conception denies language any existence in itself. Language has no reality as such: it is turned into a disposable means that is supposed to dissolve when its object is rendered present. If the theory of language that Benjamin attempts to formulate in his early essay is supposed to dismantle the instrumentalist understanding of language, it must not only break with the reduction of the word as a means of reference or signification, but also leave behind the schema of already established speakers and addressees, employing words to convey a meaning or to refer to things that are assumed to be extralinguistic. This 'other' theory of language would be one that 'knows no means, no object and no addressee of communication': it would be a theory of language for which communication *through* words is only a particular case, a derived form that depends on a prior communication – on that which communicates itself *in* language.[103] This project – which leads Benjamin in the early essay to develop the thesis that 'language has no content' but rather communicates 'communicability pure and simple' (*Mitteilbarkeit schlechthin*)[104] – is taken up again in the essay on Kraus.[105] As in the case of the 1916 essay, it will unfold here through a critique of instrumentalist conceptions of language: a critique that will develop through a commentary on Kraus' philology of the newspapers.

The phrase

If Kraus' *Philologie der Journale* is to be understood first and foremost as a study of the 'changed function' of language under capitalism, this function is for Benjamin exemplified by a linguistic form that is at the centre of Kraus' studies of language: the 'phrase' (*Phrase*). The scrutiny of the phrases that punctuate the talk of the day – and in particular those that characterise the language of journalism – plays an important role throughout Kraus' work. Not only do his writings in the *Fackel* often play out as an examination of a particular phrase, as is suggested by the title of an important collection of glosses written between 1910–18, the *Catastrophe of Phrases*; the form is also given a programmatic significance in the announcement of Kraus' own journal: 'What is planned here,' Kraus writes in the announcement of the first issue of the *Fackel*, 'is nothing but the reclamation of the vast morass of phrases (*eine Trockenlegung des weiten Phrasensumpfes*).'[106]

[102] GS II: 144; OLS, 65.
[103] GS II: 144; OLS, 65.
[104] GS II: 145–46; OLS, 66–67.
[105] For a detailed discussion of Benjamin's concept of *Mitteilbarkeit* ('communicability' or 'impartability') see Weber, 'Impart-ability: Language as a Medium', in *Benjamin's –abilities*, 31–52.
[106] *Die Fackel*, I, 1.

What Kraus means here by *Phrase* is not merely a mode of expression characteristic of a certain speaker or language – whether it is the language of journalism, juridical language, or the language of technology – nor is the phrase merely a stereotype or cliché in the familiar sense of the word. As becomes clear in the reflections on this form, whose theory is tentatively developed throughout his aphorisms, Kraus understands the phrase first and foremost as a particular configuration of language and thought. It is the phrase in this sense that Kraus describes in an aphorism that, not by chance, proposes a definition of the figure of the journalist itself. 'A journalist,' Kraus writes here, 'is someone who utters (*ausspricht*) what the reader has already thought (*was der Leser sich ohnehin schon gedacht hat*) in a form that not every salesman is capable of producing.'[107] In the phrase, language is no longer a medium in which thought comes into being, but treated here as a form that envelopes and packages a content that has been 'already thought' (*schon gedacht*). Thoughts which have already been thought are communicated in a form to which they bear no inherent relation. Thought and language are not only separated from one another here – in the phrase, this separation is driven to an extreme. But there is something deceptive about the phrase. A thought which has already been thought, and which for that reason does not deserve to be called a thought at all, is clothed in language in order to make it appear as a thought. The virtuosity of the journalist to which Kraus alludes is thus of a disingenuous and deceptive kind: the skill of making worn-out thoughts appear to be alive. Language serves as envelope, *Hülle*, which brings about the illusion of thought. But whereas genuine thought, for Kraus, shatters the familiar, language here only serves as a means of making the familiar appear extraordinary. This is why Benjamin, in a parallel reading of Kraus and Adolf Loos, compares the journalist to the ornamentalist. Like the ornament, the flowery language that Kraus despised endows the thought with *Liebhaberwert*, value for the connoisseur, by rendering it extraordinary. But, like the ornament, even the linguistic envelope of the phrase is only extraordinary in a manner that can always be readily assimilated into the familiar.

In the first section of the 1931 essay, Benjamin draws on this aphorism when he summarises Kraus' concept of the phrase in a formulaic proposition. 'The phrase of the kind so relentlessly prosecuted by Kraus,' he writes, 'is the seal that allows a thought to be circulated as a commodity (*das Warenzeichen das ein Gedanken verkehrsfähig macht*).'[108] With this formula Benjamin ties together Kraus' concept of the phrase with his own attempts to grasp the language of journalism as the 'changed function of language in the world of high capitalism'. Benjamin will emphasise the petrified (*starren*) character of the phrase: Kraus is portrayed as 'traversing the sentence constructions of newspapers by night, and, behind the petrified

[107] S VIII: 117.
[108] GS II: 337; KK, 435.

façades of phrases, peers into their interior, where he discovers the violation, the martyrdom of words'.[109] But the petrification at stake here is of a specific and paradoxical kind. In one of his aphorisms, Kraus writes: 'The phrase is the starched false front for a normal disposition (*das gestärkte Vorhemd vor einer Normalgesinnung*) that is never changed.'[110] The phrase as a starched false front: the image is crucial for it implies two distinct, separate temporalities. On the one hand, there is the front which is renewed every day, ever-same but in its appearance ever-new and fresh. On the other hand, there is the *Normalgesinnung* underneath it, unchanged, ever more grubby and squalid, concealed and protected by the starched and stiffened front as if it were a shell. Benjamin cites Kraus, who writes in 'splendid abbreviation': 'One ought to throw light on the way in which technology, while unable to coin new platitudes, leaves the spirit of mankind in the state of being unable to do without the old ones. In this duality of a changed life and a form of life dragged along by it, the ailments of the world live and grow (*lebt und wächst das Weltübel*).'[111] But Benjamin is careful to point out that the real issue in Kraus' critique of language is not concerned with a 'petty-bourgeois revolt against the enslavement of the "free individual" by "dead formulae"'.[112] The question posed by the phrase is one of a linguistic form which gives the semblance of thought, by renewing itself in a mechanical, ever-same manner; and, behind this, of a thought which, separated from its linguistic form, no longer incited or challenged, but concealed and preserved by it, turns languid and foul.

Chatter

The 'true substance of journalism', so Benjamin writes in the essay on Kraus, is 'chatter' (*Geschwätz*).[113] This thesis is advanced in a dense passage in the second section of the essay:

> Only Baudelaire hated the satiety of healthy human understanding (*die Saturiertheit des gesunden Menschenverstandes*) as Kraus did, along with the compromise that intellectuals (*die Geistigen*) made with it in order to find shelter in journalism. Journalism is betrayal of the literary life, of the spirit, of the demon. Chatter is its true substance (*das Geschwätz ist seine wahre Substanz*) and every feuilleton poses anew the insoluble question of the relationship between the forces of stupidity (*Dummheit*) and malice (*Bosheit*), of which chatter is the expression (*deren Ausdruck es ist*).[114]

[109] GS II: 335; KK, 440.
[110] S VIII: 224.
[111] GS II: 337; KK, 435.
[112] GS II: 349; KK, 444.
[113] GS II: 352; KK, 446.
[114] GS II: 352; KK, 446.

Just as Benjamin refers to Baudelaire as the only one who equalled Kraus in his hatred of the *Saturiertheit des gesunden Menschenverstandes*, so Benjamin will return to Kraus in his later Baudelaire essay precisely in a passage where he will point to *Verständlichkeit* as one of the principles governing the language of journalism. What Benjamin calls 'chatter' in this passage seems to be, above all else, language subjected to the principle of 'understandability' (*Verständlichkeit*) – an understandability whose measure is, in turn, a human understanding, *gesunden Menschenverstand*. The concept is used in a similar way in the other essay where it appears and to which Benjamin, certainly not by accident, returns in the essay on Kraus: his 1916 essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man'. Here Benjamin already distinguishes the word from its common usage, pointing out that it is to be understood 'in the profound sense, in the way Kierkegaard uses the word' – probably referring to its appearance in the section from Kierkegaard's 1846 book review *The Two Ages* which had recently been translated into German as *Kritik der Gegenwart*.[115] Like Kierkegaard's use of the word, Benjamin's concept of chatter is not only philosophically but also theologically charged. In the 1916 essay, Benjamin uses chatter with reference to human language after the fall: the fallen creature is here simply designated as 'the chattering human being, the sinful one (*der geschwätzige Mensch, der Sündige*)'.[116] Chatter is presented as an emblem of the 'enslavement of language' (*Verknechtung der Sprache*) – a formula that recurs in the essay on Kraus – or its reduction to a mere means.[117] Benjamin here takes up a motif that is central in the work of Hamann, who, as we have seen, speaks of the *Knechtsgestalt* of words – of words shaped like servants, reduced to mere carriers of concepts to which they bear no inner relation.[118] What Benjamin calls chatter is thus precisely language that is subjected to the principles of the bourgeois conception of language – conception of language that, as Benjamin writes here, holds that 'the means of imparting is the word, its object the thing (*ihr Gegenstand die Sache*), its addressee a human.'[119] When Benjamin, in the essay on Kraus, defines chatter in terms of *Verständlichkeit*, he returns to this earlier conception while elaborating it further.

If chatter is language subjected to the principle of *Verständlichkeit*, then this is understandability of a specific kind. In chatter, language is limited by the possibility of it being *readily* understandable – the understandability characteristic of journalism, namely an understandability that prescribes the possibility for words to be understood in the same moment in which they are uttered, punctually and with no delay. Only what can be understood

[115] GS II: 153; OLS, 71. A close reading of this essay and the concept of 'chatter' is found in Fenves, *'Chatter': Language and History in Kierkegaard*, 191–242.
[116] Ibid.
[117] GS II: 154; OLS, 72.
[118] Hamann, Letter to Lindner, 9 August 1759, in *Briefe*, Vol. 1, 394. For a discussion of Hamann's influence on Benjamin, see Winfried Menninghaus, *Walter Benjamin's Theorie der Sprachmagie*.
[119] GS II: 144; OLS, 65.

without delay, without interrupting the continuous flow of the conversation, may be said – for otherwise, it would cease to be chatter. In chatter, language serves as the medium of the actualisation of a set of possibilities that is infinite and yet, at the same time, limited and predefined. This is not to say that there is no room for 'novelties': in fact, chatter thrives on them. It means that anything new is readily subsumed under a pre-existing concept. Before novelties are imparted, they are already potentially understood. They merely serve as the material through which this potential is actualised in chatter. Chatter is not subjected to the demand of *verstehbarkeit* – if this suffix indeed has a special significance for Benjamin[120] – but that of *verständlichkeit*. If *verstehbarkeit* would suggest a specific kind of potentiality, an excessive demand which exceeds precisely the given conditions of possibility, the *verständlichkeit* and the *Menschenverstand* to which this corresponds merely expresses a limitation. It is this limitation, not the supposed triviality of its subject matter, which constitutes the particular *stupidity* (*Dummheit*) of chatter to which Benjamin refers in the essay on Kraus. It is not a stupidity which arises from a lack of understanding; but the stupidity of thought which limits its activity to what can be readily understood – the stupidity of a thought which is always busy actualising possibilities of what was already possible before it was thought.

In all its busyness, fluidity and swiftness, *Geschwätz* harbours a petrified thought and experience. The language of chatter does not set thought in motion, does not incite or shock thought, but instead absorbs and muffles these shocks whenever they occur. Chatter does not tolerate a silence; it maintains its own continuity, propels the speaker to incessantly move forward, immediately leaving any moment of disruption or excess behind. Chatter never dwells on a subject (*Gegenstand*), nor does it tolerate a return to something that was said only moments earlier. Its impatience arises not from a lack of attention, but from an intolerance towards the thought that may occur when one dwells on a topic or a silence disrupts its continuity. Chatter cannot stand a questioning of what is considered to be *selbstverständlich*; it is intolerant towards a questioning that renders strange what is supposedly familiar. Yet it is Kraus who articulates this intolerance in an unsurpassed manner when he writes: 'The bourgeois does not tolerate anything incomprehensible in his house' (*Der Burger duldet nichts unverständliches in seinem Haus*).[121] It is precisely this intolerance which constitutes the *malicious* character of chatter, the *Bosheit* to which Benjamin refers in the essay on Kraus. This is not an intolerance against a particular viewpoint or position; it is an intolerance against thought and experience that exceeds the limits of what it already held to be possible. It is in

[120] For a comprehensive study of the role of this suffix throughout Benjamin's work and its origins in Kant, see Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, esp. 3–10.
[121] S VIII: 256.

this sense that the stupidity of chatter mocks the idea of progress: 'Before its radiance,' Benjamin writes in the essay on Kraus, 'the chimeras of progress evaporate.'[122]

Engelsprache

In his essay on Kraus, Benjamin's attempts to grasp this tension – the tension implied in the conception of journalism as the expression of the 'end point' and 'turning point' of fallen language – culminate in his theory of 'citation' (*Zitieren*). That citation stands in a special relation to the language of the newspaper is already made clear in the first sentences of the section where Benjamin introduces the concept:

> Out of the linguistic sphere of the name (*aus dem Sprachkreis des Namens*), and only out of this sphere, does Kraus' basic polemical procedure open itself up: citation. To cite a word means to call it by its name (*ein Wort zitieren heißt es beim Namen rufen*). So Kraus' achievement exhausts itself at its highest level by making even the newspaper citable (*selbst die Zeitung zitierbar zu machen*).[123]

What Benjamin calls 'citation' thus plays out around the distinction that was central to his early essay on language: the distinction between 'word' and 'name'. Citation emerges out of the 'linguistic sphere of the name': that is to say, it emerges out of a sphere that is concerned only with what imparts itself 'in' language – a *Sprachkreis* that is, like a self-enclosed circle turned inwards, absolutely indifferent to what is imparted 'through' language. Citation, in other words, belongs to the same 'circle' as translation, that other *Grundverfahren*, that linguistic procedure which 'can never signify something for the original'.[124] Citing, insofar as it is one of these procedures gathered around the name, is thus not to be understood as the transposition of the meaning of an original text into a new context. On the contrary: if to cite is to 'call the word by its name', citation would seem to involve an interruption of this context. To be called by one's name is to be interrupted in one's activities, to be torn away from the goals that one was acting towards: the moment in which one is called is the moment in which all intentions are suddenly suspended. To 'call' the word is thus to tear it away from the purpose it was meant to serve, to suspend the task of signification that it was supposed to fulfil in the original text. To cite must therefore be a matter of removing the word out of the textual 'coherence' (*Zusammenhang*) that was supposed to guarantee that every word remains firmly

[122] GS II: 356; KK, 448.
[123] GS II: 362–63; KK, 453.
[124] GS IV: 10; TT, 254.

directed towards its purpose and to secure what Benjamin refers to elsewhere as its 'uni-directionality' (*Einsinnigkeit*).[125]

If 'calling the word by its name' can be characterised as a 'polemical' procedure, this is because it revolves around a destructive gesture (in which the word is wrenched from its context) that takes the form of an interruption (the suspension of its semantic function). Yet at the same time, the formula Benjamin uses – to call the word by its name – also seems to imply a positive dimension. To 'call' is also to appeal to something: it means to call on something that previously lied dormant, to put to work something that was previously idle. Citation calls on the word, suspends its work of signification, but does so precisely by appealing to it as the bearer of a name. To cite is to make an appeal on the name that lies dormant in the word – on that part of the word which is an *Erbteil*, a partial and fragmented inheritance of the paradisiacal language of names. What is at issue in citation is thus not merely to remove the word from the original text and to relieve it of the task it was supposed to fulfil in that context in order to allocate another semantic function to it in the text into which it is transposed. Benjamin may write that the cited word – the word called by its name – appears 'in the order of a new text (*in dem Gefüge eines neuen Textes*)': but this text is one in which the word, as a name, 'stands alone and expressionless (*einsam und ausdruckslos*)'.[126] The citation, in the precise sense in which Benjamin understood the term, does not call the word away from one task in order to put it to work for another. What is decisive is precisely that the word, in the gesture of citing, ceases to signify at the same time as it reveals itself as a name; that this word, in the gesture of naming, points towards that which is and must remain nameless – that which cannot be expressed through any word or proposition. When Benjamin returns to this characterisation of citation later in the same paragraph, he thus only explicates what was already implied in the initial formulation: 'The citation […] calls the word by its name (*ruft das Wort beim Namen auf*), breaks it destructively out of its context (*aus dem Zusammenhang*), but precisely thereby calls it back to its origin (*ruft es dasselbe zurück an seinen Ursprung*).'[127]

The claim that citation 'exhausts itself at its highest level by making even the newspaper citable (*selbst die Zeitung zitierbar zu machen*)' may be understood in this light.[128] If citation must exhaust itself in the confrontation with the newspaper, this is because it is in journalism – characterised, once more, as the expression of the 'changed function of language' in a world that is ensnared completely in the nexus of guilt – that language finds itself at the furthest

[125] The reference is to the fragment on world history of the late 1910s, where Benjamin writes: 'Guilt is the highest category of world history for guaranteeing the uni-directionality (*Einsinnigkeit*) of what occurs.' (GS VI: 92)
[126] GS II: 363; KK, 454.
[127] GS II: 363; KK, 454.
[128] GS II: 362–63; KK, 453.

remove from paradise. It is in the language of journalism as it is presented in Benjamin's essay on Kraus – whether it is in the utter petrification of the 'phrase' or the complete subjection of language to the laws of the understanding exemplified by 'chatter' – the word to be tied most firmly into the mythical *Zusammenhang* of the text and subjected most completely to the demand for *Einsinnigkeit* that sustains it. Such a language is uncitable because its words seem to be reduced entirely to means of designation: it seems no longer possible to call them by their name. That Benjamin refers here to the 'citability' (*Zitierbarkeit*) of the newspaper must be understood in close relation to the possibility of 'impartibility' that played a decisive role in the early essay on language. Like its counterparts, such citability refers not to an empirical but to an *a priori* possibility.[129] That language is *a priori* citable means that it is a structural possibility to 'call the word by its name' – even if this possibility cannot be actualised by finite subjects. If to call the word by its name means to appeal to it as a name, and if such an appeal means to expose its irreducible imparting of impartibility, it also becomes evident how citability differs from its counterpart. That language is *a priori* citable means that the possibility of impartibility and the excessive demand entailed in this is never irretrievably lost, even on the pages of the newspaper. Citability is thus closely related to impartibility but nevertheless of a different order: insofar as it is concerned with the possibility of possibility, it corresponds to the wish that we found to be central to Benjamin's portrayal of Kraus' experience of history – the wish to retrieve a lost sense of the possible. If *Mitteilbarkeit* is a structural possibility out of which history first opens, *Zitierbarkeit* is the structural possibility of retrieving this possibility and the demand it implies – even a language whose inherent dynamic seems to have petrified entirely, a language whose emblem is provided by the *Zeitung*, the sheet of paper brandished by the archaic messenger in the opening lines of the essay. In the paragraph on citation, included in the third part of the essay, this archaic crier suddenly returns in the shape of another messenger, when Benjamin counterposes the language of the newspaper to another language, which recalls the *ewig neue Zeitung* evoked at the end of the first section: 'In the citation (*Zitat*) […] there is a reflection of the language of angels (*die Engelsprache*), in which all words, driven out of the idyllic coherence of sense (*aus dem idyllischen Zusammenhang des Sinnes aufgestört*), have become mottoes in the book of creation (*Motti in dem Buch der Schöpfung*).'[130]

Angelic messenger

In the last sentences of the essay on Karl Kraus, at the furthest remove from the ancient messenger introduced in its opening lines, Benjamin introduces another figure: an angelic

[129] See Weber, 'Citability – of gesture', in *Benjamin's -abilities*, 95–114 and the discussion of 'impartibility' and 'translatability' in Hamacher, 'Intensive Languages', 487–91.
[130] GS II: 363; KK, 454.

messenger. Like the *Bote* at the beginning of the essay, the messenger that makes an appearance at its end is presented as an image of Kraus, the writer who embodies journalism in its 'most paradoxical form'. The *Urahn* of journalism is here presented as a 'new angel' (*ein neuer Engel*):

> A new angel […] – perhaps one of those who, according to the Talmud, are created, new ones each instant in countless throngs, in order to cease and pass into nothingness after they have raised their voices before God. Lamenting, chastising, or rejoicing? No matter – on this evanescent voice the ephemeral work of Kraus is modelled. Angelus – that is the messenger in the old engravings.[131]

Angelus – if Benjamin uses the Latin term here rather than the German *Engel*, this is perhaps to emphasise its etymological roots in the ancient Greek word for messenger, *angelos*, 'the one that announces'. The announcement that is brought by this ancient *angelos* is of a specific kind: in ancient Greek, the word can not only be used to describe the messenger of the latest news, the harbinger of messages conveyed by envoys or beacons; it may also be used to describe the announcement conveyed by the birds of augury, the *oiōnos angelos*. When Benjamin conjures up the image of an *angelus*, he thus presents a figure that, by virtue of its name, is simultaneously closely related to the archaic messenger and distinguished from it. If the *Bote* evoked in the opening paragraph of the essay conveys the news of the ever-same present of world history, the angel conjured up in the closing sentences would, in the sense of the Greek *angelos*, serve as the figure that discloses a world that is yet to come. That this messenger is not just an *angelos* but its religious counterpart, an *Engel*, suggests that the future it announces cannot be thought of as a mere extension of the present. In contrast to the archaic messenger, whose cries express the ever-same suffering of the world of myth, this angelic messenger – a Talmudic one, to be precise – belongs to the domain of religion in the strict sense in which Benjamin had conceived of it in his early writings: as a domain that dispels myth by exposing its ever-same present to a future that is radically other to it. If this angel is thus to announce a future that is a *novum*, a future irreducible to what has already been, and if it is to do right to the unprecedented and singular character of this future, it could never be announced by an already existing figure who speaks in an already existing language; this angel itself would have to be not only an angel of the new but also an *angelus novus*, an angel that is each time new.

[131] GS II: 367; KK, 457. For a discussion of the relation of this angel to the eponymous painting by Klee that Benjamin owned, see Scholem, 'Walter Benjamin and his Angel', 198–236 and Sigrid Weigel, 'Angelus Novus', 94–100. The figure also plays an important role in Stéphane Moses' book *The Angel of History*, where the angels evoked here are treated as a central motif in Benjamin's philosophy of history without, however, subjecting the passages in which it is introduced to a close reading.

The angel evoked by Benjamin is thus first and foremost an *angelus*, a messenger; but it is not the angelic messenger who brings the news from the heavens to the world, who delivers a divine message to human beings. Quite the contrary: if these angels are intermediary beings who 'raise their voice before God', these messengers would – like the archaic crier in the opening lines of the essay – bring the news of the world and its history. In an earlier draft of the passage, Benjamin writes that these angels are created to 'sing a hymn (*Hymnus*)' before they cease and pass into nothingness.[132] Such a hymn would, however, not be the formalised song of praise of Christianity: perhaps it is better understood as the Jewish hymn that, like the *hymnos* sung in the Greek tragedy, where the chorus raises its voice to the Gods in response to the tragic events unfolding on the stage, emerges in response to occurrences in the world and each time has an irreducibly singular character. This interpretation of the hymns of the angels is supported by the description of the angel in the essay on Kraus, which leaves open whether the quickly evanescent voices of these angels are 'lamenting, chastising or rejoicing' (*klagend, bezichtigend oder jubelnd*) or, in an earlier draft, whether it is 'a lament, a complaint, or a song of praise' (*Klage, Anklage oder Loblied*) that resounds in their voice[133] – each modes of expression that correspond to the modes of historical experience that Benjamin uncovers in Kraus' journalism.

Just as the cries of the messenger in the opening sentences of the text, the songs of the angelic messenger thus speak of *Weltgeschichte*. But as an intermediary figure that hovers between the worldly and the divine, Benjamin's angel nonetheless captures a relation between the history of the world and another history, which is strictly demarcated from it: between the realm of history of which it sings and another realm, which is here designated by the figure of God. In both versions of the image, the angel sings its hymn or raises its voice 'before God' (*vor Gott*).[134] This *vor* unmistakably locates this messenger at a specific place: a place which, if the angel is to appear before God, cannot be that of history itself but rather, like the earlier image of Kraus raising his voice at the 'threshold' of the *Weltgericht*, must exist at the end of world history, at a limit where world history must turn into something other than itself. As is suggested by yet another version of the passage, where Benjamin writes that these angels sing their hymns 'before his throne' (*vor seinem Thron*), these hymns would refer the history of which they sing to the divine realm – the *Reich Gottes*, the term that Kant had used in his *Religion* and that Benjamin, following Hermann Cohen, understood as the realm in which history would find its messianic fulfilment and completion.[135] The different modalities of the

[132] GS II, 246; AJ, 296.
[133] GS II: 1106–07.
[134] GS II: 367; KK, 457.
[135] For an exposition of the complex relation between Benjamin's early writings and Cohen's conception of the messianic, see Hamacher, 'Das Theologisch-politische Fragment', 175–78. On Benjamin's later

angel's song to which Benjamin refers in the essay of 1931 – *Klage*, *Anklage*, *Loblied* – are not only the modalities in which Kraus speaks of history; they also exemplify the different modalities in which world history, as the endless perpetuation of guilt and retribution, is related to the possibility of its own redemption.

It is this relation between catastrophic history and its messianic completion – which has now only been characterised in the most schematic manner – that is described by a concept that may be understood as the focal point of Benjamin's preoccupation with journalism: the concept of 'actuality' (*Aktualität*). That this concept plays a decisive role in the text where Benjamin first engages with the theme of journalism – the announcement of his planned *Zeitschrift* that was supposed to be published under the title *Angelus Novus* – is certainly no accident. Nor is it an accident that it is precisely in this text that the figure of a Talmudic angelic messenger is introduced for the first time. In a passage that will be repeated almost verbatim ten years later in the concluding passage of the essay on Kraus, Benjamin here introduces the angel as the emblematic figure of the 'true actuality' to which every *Zeitschrift* must aspire: 'According to a legend in the Talmud, the angels, new ones each instant in countless throngs, are created in order to cease and pass into nothingness after they have sung their hymn before God. That such actuality may fall to the journal – the only true kind – is indicated by its name.'[136] 'Such actuality' (*solche Aktualitat*) – in order to begin to grasp the significance of this angelic messenger, both in its appearance in the 'Announcement' and in its juxtaposition to the archaic messenger in the essay on Kraus, it is necessary to first examine what is at issue in this concept that is so closely related to Benjamin's preoccupation with journalism. Such an examination would not only have to move through Benjamin's reflection on the essence of the *Zeitschrift* of 1921, but also extend its detour through his writings of the early 1910s, where the concept makes its first appearance.

Aktualität

The concept of *Aktualität* makes a first appearance in the reflections on historical time that stem from Benjamin's student days. The concept is introduced in a set of writings that revolve around a problem that Benjamin articulated most concisely in a reflection on a literary form that – like the *Zeitschrift* in his writings of the 1920s – represents an emblematic configuration of time and writing: the *Tagebuch*. In a section from the *Metaphysics of Youth*, written as early as 1913, Benjamin speaks of a question that the *Tagebuch* poses to the diarist before a single word has been written: 'the question in what time the human being lives (*die Frage in welcher*

messianism, see Wohlfarth, 'On the Messianic Structure of Benjamin's Last Reflections' and Hamacher, 'Now! Walter Benjamin and Historical Time', 38–68.

[136] GS II: 246; AJ, 296.

Zeit der Mensch lebt)'.[137] It is this same question that Benjamin will raise in his journalistic writing of the following decade – especially in texts that will take recourse to the diary-form, such as the *Moskauer Tagebuch* and the *Pariser Tagebuch* or some of his shorter *Denkbilder*, concise texts published as newspaper articles that are often reworked versions of passages from Benjamin's diaries of that period. In a letter to Hugo von Hofmannsthal about the *Moskauer Tagebuch*, Benjamin writes that his planned newspaper article is an attempt to capture 'the time in which human beings over there live (*an die Zeit, in der die Menschen dort leben*)'.[138] That this question returns in this context points to the close affinity that Benjamin sees between journalistic writing – whether it is the *Zeitung* or *Zeitschrift* – and the writing of the diarist: both are, in their essence, concerned with the temporal structure that is specific to human life – or, to be precise, the 'living' (*leben*) of human beings. In the *Metaphysics of Youth*, Benjamin provides a concise response to this question: 'With hopeless seriousness, the diary asks the question in what time the human being lives. That the human being lives in no time (*daß er in keiner Zeit lebt*) has always been known to those who think.'[139] The human being lives *in* no time: that is to say, this time cannot be understood as a form that is indifferent to the life that unfolds in it. Implied in this is a thinly veiled critique of the Kantian definition of time as a pure form of intuition. The time of human life is no immobile and unchanging form in which objects of experience come to pass; the insight that the diarist and the journalist share is that time as such is transient – it does not stand outside of history but emerges and comes to pass day after day. What Benjamin writes about the *Tagebuch* anticipates his later reflections on the *Zeitschrift*: 'The diary does not occur *in* time […]. It is rather a book *of* time (*es ist ein Buch* von *der Zeit*).'[140] The time with which the diarist and the journalist are concerned thus cannot be an empty form; but neither can it be a homogeneous continuum in which mechanical change unfolds. Such a conception of time fails to account for the fact that the time of human life – that is to say, historical time – can only be thought as the relation between a time that passes to a time that is structured wholly differently: a time for which Benjamin will reserves the name *Zukunft*.

The concept of *Aktualität* makes its initial appearance in a number of writings that orbit around the problem of historical time as it is introduced here. Benjamin introduces the concept for the first time in a text written in the same years as his reflections on the *Tagebuch*, well before the announcement of his own journal: a short article titled 'Thoughts on Gerhart Hauptmann's Festival Play' that was written and published in 1913.[141] The article takes the play by

[137] GS II: 96; SW I: 10.
[138] B, 444; CB, 314.
[139] GS II: 96; SW I: 10. This passage from Benjamin's early writings bears a striking resemblance to the critique of 'within-time-ness' (*Innerzeitichkeit*) in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, 456–88.
[140] GS II: 98; SW I: 12.
[141] GS II: 56–60; TH, 120–25.

Hauptmann as an occasion for a reflection on the concept of history (*Geschichte*) that unfolds in a language characterised by its specific relation to the moment. The language of Benjamin's early periodical article, written in brief sentences that often refuse conventional rules of grammar and clarity, alternating between fully elaborated passages and ones that read more like unfinished notes, recalls the demand for the 'prompt language' that he would formulate in the late 1920s.[142] It is at the point where this language, in the early article of 1913, touches on the question of historical time that the concept of *Aktualität* surfaces for the first time in Benjamin's work. In the vocabulary typical of his student days, which still bears the traces of his involvement in the youth movement, Benjamin writes:

> We feel a kinship with history: not with a history of the past (*der vergangenen*), but one that is yet to come (*der kommenden*). We will never understand the past, without wanting the future (*Zukunft*). School makes us indifferent (*indifferent*), it wants to tell us that history is a struggle between good and evil. And sooner or later the good will succeed. From that standpoint there is no urgency (*Eile*) in acting. The present is, so to say, not actual (*die Gegenwart, sozusagen, ist nicht aktuell*) – time is infinite.[143]

'Actuality' is here treated as a predicate of the present: it is the *Gegenwart* that can be actual – or not. But at the same time as it allows for a possible convergence of the present and the actual, this last sentence also introduces a split between the two categories and thereby implicitly defines the concept of actuality over and against that of the mere present: if it is possible for a present *not* to be actual, as Benjamin claims here, then the concept of actuality would have to be more than an indifferent container – it would have to be something more than a mere designation of everything that is supposedly given in any present whatsoever. To say that something is *aktuell* – even if this is only said 'so to speak' (*sozusagen*) – would not merely be the same as saying that it is merely *gegenwärtig*. What underpins the split between the two, the mere present and its actuality, is located in the experience of time that corresponds to the conception of history that Benjamin outlined before: the mere present that lacks actuality is a present in which 'time is infinite'. This infinite time is here characterised in terms of a lack of *Eile*: a lack of urgency or, literally, 'haste'. This time would be *unendlich* in the sense that it never runs out; it would correspond to a conception of history in which possibilities never expire, in which there is never a critical point, never a decisive moment in the course of history that may be seized or missed irrevocably. This time is thus not only infinite but also characterised by a uniformity and homogeneity. From the standpoint of this 'indifferent' experience of time, every present is the same: it is, in other words, a time that is, like the

[142] The first fragment of Benjamin's *One-Way Street*, calls for a 'prompt language that shows itself actively able to cope with the instant (*dem Augenblick wirkend gewachsen*)'. (GS IV: 85; OWS, 444)
[143] GS II: 59; TH, 123.

'improper temporality' of which Benjamin speaks in a later note, barred from the differentiation of past, present and future.[144]

The conception of history that remains based on this conception of infinite, uniform time is here sketched out as one that puts its trust in a certain idea of progress: it is a conception of history as a struggle between two already established categories, the good and the bad, in which the good will eventually come out as the victor – 'sooner or later' (*früher oder später*), for such a conception of history is ultimately indifferent as to when this struggle is decided. Benjamin only draws the tentative outlines of another experience of history in which the present would not be deprived of its actuality. In the face of the complacent struggle with an already given outcome, history would have to be conceived as a 'more severe and terrible struggle' (*strengerer und grausamerer Kampf*). Benjamin describes this struggle as one that does not play out between categories that are already given and known but precisely between two different histories, the *vergangenen* and the *kommenden*: history would be a 'struggle between [...] those of the future (*Zukünftigen*) and those of the past (*Vergangenen*)'. This future is not understood in terms of the past; it is an 'unknown future' (*ein unbekannte Zukunft*), a future that is not only unknown but also unknowable. Both of these histories would have a fundamentally different structure: while one corresponds to the sense for *das Gegebene*, what is given as a fact, the other corresponds to the sense for *das Aufgegebene*, a task that is irreducible to anything given and, for that reason, cannot manifest as an conscious intention towards an already known future; this task cannot be 'captured in a reform programme' because it could itself never be fully known; it would have to intimate itself as a 'feeling for a task of the future (*einer zukünftigen Aufgabe*)'.[145] The time that Benjamin attempts to articulate over and against the 'infinite time' of progress is a time where the past and the future, what has been and what is yet to come, no longer exist in a uniform continuum, but are rigorously differentiated from one another. The present would be the point of collision between these two different histories, these two different structures of historical time. Rather than a progression towards a telos that can be fully known, a progression that is eternal in the sense that it is infinite, this would be a present that Benjamin describes in this early article as one in 'eternal crisis' (*ewiger Krisis*), a present in which the very possibility of an unknown future is 'steadily threatened' (*ständig bedroht*) by the passing of time. 'With every present [...] what used to be spring turns into slowness (*was Schwungkraft war wird Trägheit*), spirit turns into stupidity. And through this the one, great historical good is lost: freedom.'[146] It would seem that only

[144] GS VI: 91.

[145] GS II: 59; TH, 123. Even though Benjamin's terminology here is undoubtedly Kantian, Benjamin's break with Kant and Cohen can be located precisely in his concept of *Zukunft*. See Hamacher, 'Das Theologisch-politische Fragment', 175–78.

[146] GS II: 60; TH, 123.

such a present, a present in which the possibility of history itself exists under constant threat, could ever be called *aktuell*.

This same schema, of which Benjamin only draws the provisional outlines in his text of 1913, returns in the historico-philosophical reflections in the *Life of Students* – an important text that was written a year later. Although Benjamin makes no explicit reference to the concept of actuality in this text, its whole opening paragraph may be read as an attempt to elaborate his prior reference to the concept, together with the conception of history that pivots around it. As in the earlier article, Benjamin will set out his thoughts on time and history against a conception of history based on progress; and as in the earlier article, this conception of history is said to rely on a conception of time that, in its reliance on its infinity, fails to make a claim on the present.[147]

> There is a conception of history (*Geschichtsauffassung*) that, trusting in the infinity of time, distinguishes only the tempo, rapid or slow, with which human beings and epochs advance along the path of progress (*auf der Bahn des Fortschrittes dahinrollen*). Corresponding to this is the incoherence, the lack of precision and rigour in the demand (*Forderung*) such a conception makes on the present.[148]

Just as in the earlier article, Benjamin's outlines of an alternative conception of history will revolve around a strict conception of *Zukunft*, a future that is yet to come in the strict sense of the word, that is to say, irreducible to what has already been and thus ultimately unknowable and unforeseeable; in contrast to his earlier reflections on history, however, Benjamin will further specify and radicalise the demand made by such a conception on the present.

> The following remarks, in contrast, concern a particular condition (*einen bestimmten Zustand*) in which history (*Historie*) is gathered as in a focal point, something seen from time immemorial in the utopian images of thinkers. The elements of the final condition (*Endzustandes*) do not lie at the surface (*zutage liegen*) as a formless tendency towards progress (*gestaltlose Fortschritttendenz*), but are deeply embedded in every present as the most endangered, excoriated, and ridiculed creations and ideas. To give shape to this immanent state of perfection and to make it absolute, to make it visible and ascendant in the present – that is the historical task (*geschichtliche Aufgabe*).[149]

[147] For a discussion of Benjamin's critique of 'infinite time' and the conformism implied in the portrayal of history as an inexorable progression towards a pre-established goal, see Comay, 'Benjamin and the Ambiguities of Romanticism', 134–36.
[148] GS II: 75; LS, 197.
[149] GS II: 75; LS, 197. For a brief commentary on this text and its relation to Benjamin's critique of Cohen, see Hamacher, 'Das Theologisch-Politische Fragment', 175–78.

Benjamin specifies this formulation of the 'historical task' in the last sentence of the paragraph: 'To liberate what is yet to come (*das Künftige zu befreien*), through cognition, out of its misshapen form in the present (*aus seiner verbildeten Form im Gegenwärtigen*) – this is the sole aim of criticism.'[150] History is not to be conceived as a steady advancement across the path of progress, a movement guided by an immanent *Fortschritttendenz* towards an end that – even if it can never be reached – can be known and represented. History can take place only as the 'liberation' of a future that is to be strictly distinguished from any empirical present – Benjamin will write elsewhere in the same paragraph that any present can at most be a *Gleichnis* or *Abbild* of a final condition, an approximation of an idea that is strictly unrepresentable in any given present – but that is nevertheless embedded in the present 'in misshapen form'. The *Endzustand* is not located in a distant future that can only be reached through incremental advancement along a linear path – Benjamin describes this movement as a placid 'rolling towards' (*dahinrollen*) an already given goal – but is both immanent and imminent in every present. Only a future that is both irreducible to the present, unforeseeable and nevertheless imminent could make a 'demand' (*Forderung*) on the present for its own liberation that is rigorous enough to first open up to history in the sense in which Benjamin had defined this in his earlier article – to a *künftige* history, a history that is yet to come and is irreducible to the history that has already passed. Actuality would be the name for this 'determinate condition' (*bestimmte Zustand*) – a condition in which the demand of this future to be liberated presses in on the present with the utmost intensity.

Announcement and journal

After it is introduced at a key position in his writings of the early 1910s, the concept of actuality seems to disappear entirely from Benjamin's work for the remainder of the decade. It suddenly resurfaces in 1921, in the text that presents itself as the 'announcement' of Benjamin's planned journal *Angelus Novus* and ends by evoking the same image of the angelic messenger that will return at the end of the essay on Kraus. Already in the first sentences of this text, the *Ankündigung* that is announced in the title of this text, which in its turn announces an journal called *angelus*, 'one who announces', turns out to be less concerned with a description of this yet to be published journal than with a philosophical reflection on what Benjamin refers to as the 'essence of the journal' (*das Wesen einer Zeitschrift*).[151] In turning to the *Zeitschrift* as a literary form, the text also returns to the question that had already been touched upon in Benjamin's early reflections on the *Tagebuch*: just as that other compound, the word *Zeitschrift* suggests that anyone who would attempt to reflect on its 'essence' would have to start by considering the relation between time and writing that is named by it.

[150] GS II: 75; LS, 198.
[151] GS II: 241; AJ, 292.

Benjamin's text of 1921 may indeed be understood to return to the question that his early reflections had recognised in the *Tagebuch*, the question 'in what time the human being lives'; and like the earlier texts, it attempts to think this time in terms of a tension between a time that passes and a time that is yet to come. This tension is already introduced obliquely in the opening sentences of the announcement, before the text has properly begun, in a brief reflection on the *Ankündigung* as the only form that does justice to the essence of the journal. When Benjamin, in the first paragraph of the text, empathically distinguishes the 'announcement' that is about to be undertaken from a 'programme', he has in effect already begun his reflections on the essence of the *Zeitschrift*. The opening sentences of the text read:

> The journal whose plan is presented here hopes to create confidence in its content by giving account of its form. This form arises from a meditation on the essence of a journal (*das Wesen einer Zeitschrift*). Even if it does not make a programme wholly superfluous, a journal should avoid it as an incitement to deceptive productivity. Programmes are only valid for work of individuals and associations that is conscious of its goal (*zielbewußtes Wirken*). A journal, as the expression of life (*Lebensäußerung*) of a certain kind of spirit (*Geistesart*), is always much more incalculable and unconscious (*unberechenbarer und unbewußter*), but also fuller of the future and richer in its unfolding (*zukunftsvoller und entfaltungsreicher*) than any expression of the will (*Willensäußerung*).[152]

The 'programme' is not an adequate form of announcing a journal – let alone a journal that bears the name *angelus* – because it betrays its relation to a time that is yet to come. The configuration of time and writing that is constitutive of the journal, conceived as *Lebensäußerung* – an 'expression' or, literally, 'utterance' of life – is distinguished here first of all from a *Willensäußerung*. In contrast to the *Lebensäußerung*, this expression or 'utterance' of the will is characterised by a certain relation to a *Ziel*, an end conceived as an aim that can be posited and realised through purposeful activity. Such an expression of the will implies a certain configuration of time, a certain relation between the time of the journal and a time that is yet to come. In contrast to an announcement, the programme treats the future as an end to be pursued, thus predetermining this future by subjecting it to the requirement that this future be representable and its realisation calculable. To present a journal through a programme would mean to mistake it for a *Willensäußerung* – an utterance of which the drafting of programmes would be the exemplary form – and thus to relate it to a future that is thought to be realisable through intentional activity.[153] By contrast, Benjamin characterises the *Lebenäußerung* in and as which the journal is constituted as 'incalculable and unconscious': it does not hold up a

[152] GS II: 241; AJ, 292.

[153] In his *Critique of Violence*, written and published the year before the announcement of his journal, Benjamin writes that Sorel, whose *Reflections on Violence* provides an important point of reference for his own text, 'in taking up occasional statements by Marx, rejects every kind of programme, of utopia [...] for the revolutionary movement'. (GS II: 194)

future in front of itself as an end that may be intentionally pursued through conscious activity. But precisely for that reason it is *zukunftsvoller*, fuller of a future that is conceived as a time that is yet to come, as well as *entfaltungsreicher*, richer not in its possibilities for 'development', as it is usually translated, but for a sudden unfolding of a state that is already immanent in the present but remains concealed. The *Zeitschrift* would thus seem to be concerned precisely with a future that, on the one hand, resists all conscious representation and calculable realisation but that is, on the other hand, to use the expression from Benjamin's writings of the previous decade, 'embedded deeply in the present'.[154]

Before it has begun its reflections on the essence of the *Zeitschrift*, the first paragraph of Benjamin's announcement has thus already started: if the journal that is announced here cannot be described through a programme, this is because its only true measure lies in its relation to a *Zukunft*, a time that is yet to come. Only in this light does it become possible to read the sentences with which Benjamin, once more, begins his reflections on the essence of the journal:

> The true vocation of a journal (*die wahre Bestimmung einer Zeitschrift*) is to declare the spirit of its epoch (*den Geist ihrer Epoche zu bekunden*). Its actuality (*dessen Aktualität*) is more binding to it (*gilt ihr mehr*) than even its unity or clarity and therefore it would – like the newspapers – be sentenced to inessentiality (*zur Wesenlosigkeit verurteilt*) if a life did not take shape in it that is powerful enough to save even what is questionable (*auch das Fragwürdige zu retten*), because this is affirmed by it. Indeed, a journal, whose actuality is without a historical claim (*historische Anspruch*), has no right to exist (*besteht zu Unrecht*).[155]

Even though its only measure is its relation to a time that is yet to come, the journal is directed towards its own time: the vocation of a journal is to 'declare the spirit of its epoch'. At first sight, there is something strangely pompous about this proposition, which may seem to recall the proud proclamations of the spirit of an epoch that plays a lead role in the forward progression of history towards an immanent telos. But as Benjamin's prior dismissal of any programmatic announcement of the journal as a *zielbewußtes Wirken* suggests, something else is at stake here. The key to the interpretation of this proposition lies in its last word, *bekunden*, the act of declaration that here replaces and specifies the *Lebenäußerung* of a *Geistesart* to which Benjamin had made reference in the first paragraph. As the terminology of the passage and the rest of the 'Announcement' suggests – throughout the text there will be talk of 'claims', of 'dictums' and 'verdicts', of 'confessions' and 'justifications' – the *bekunden* must be read in the technical, legal sense of the word: as a declaration for a court of law. The declaration of the 'spirit of the epoch' has little to do with a proclamation, as the common English translation of

[154] GS II: 75; LS, 197.
[155] GS II: 241; AJ, 292.

Benjamin's announcement suggests; it is a declaration whose only proper context is the trial. The *Zeitschrift* declares the spirit of the age – but it does so in the context of a courtroom.[156]

If it is read in this way, the proximity of the 'Announcement' – Benjamin's first reflection on journalism – to the later essay on Kraus suddenly comes into view: for it is here that he compares the writing of the Viennese journalist to a *Gerichtssaal* where the age is subjected to an uninterrupted *Anklage*. Journalism has an inner relation to this *Gerichtssaal*: 'For Kraus, it is the forum that it has always been for the great journalists – for a Carrel, Paul-Louis Courier, Lassalle.'[157] Indeed, Benjamin uses the same terminology that he used in the 'Announcement' when he writes that the phrases and scandals of the day with which Kraus never ceased to occupy himself turn into a 'declaration' (*Bekundung*) – yet one where 'it no longer suffices to call on the world as witness to the demeanors of a cashier; it must summon the dead from their graves'.[158] If the 'declaration of the spirit of the epoch' involves its presentation in a courtroom, this courtroom would no longer be a wordly court of law but the *Weltgericht* to which Benjamin will make repeated reference in the essay on Kraus – that is to say, the site where the entirety of history lays claim to its messianic completion.

This is also implied in the term that Benjamin uses towards the end of the passage, where he speaks of the 'declaration of the spirit of the epoch' that every *Zeitschrift* is destined to undertake as a declaration that has to involve a 'historical claim' (*historische Anspruch*). The reference to this 'claim' may be read in light of the reference to a 'demand' (*Forderung*) of which Benjamin had spoken in the texts of the early 1910s, where it was closely tied to the concept of actuality. The *Forderung* of which Benjamin speaks in these texts is a demand that emerges out of *Historie* taken in its totality – 'gathered together' – and presses in on the present.[159] As we have seen, it is in and as this demand that history first enters into a relation to the state that Benjamin describes as both an end (*Endzustand*) and a fulfilment (*Zustand der Vollkommenheit*).[160] When Benjamin refers to a 'historical claim' in his reflections on the essence of the journal, this claim occupies a comparable position. In the 'Announcement', Benjamin speaks of this demand as a claim that has no determinate subject or object. The reference to a *historische Anspruch* does not present a subject that raises this claim or an object that is claimed; at most it suggests that, inasmuch as this claim is historical, it is a claim that rises up out of history itself. The *historische Anspruch* is not a historical claim made by an

[156] For an account of the problems of justice and judgement and an analysis of the motifs of the complaint, claim and trial in Benjamin's early writings, see Irving Wohlfarth, 'On Some Jewish Motifs in Benjamin', 167–205.
[157] GS II: 353; KK, 446.
[158] GS II: 337; KK, 435.
[159] GS II: 75; LS, 197.
[160] Ibid.

already established subject: it is a claim *of* history. Benjamin does not stipulate that the *Zeitschrift* only has a right to exist if it makes a claim on behalf of history: in its declaration of the spirit of the epoch, history itself must come to speak, must raise a claim that is immanent to it. The nature of this claim is suggested by the term *Anspruch*, which has a specific juridical meaning. To raise a claim (*ein Anspruch erheben*) does not just mean, in the general sense of the word, to assert one's right to something; insofar as it translates the Roman *vindicia*, it does not just evoke the claim over something as one's rightful property; in its more precise sense, it involves the claim for the restoration of something to a free condition.[161] The 'historical claim' without which it is not possible to speak of actuality in the first place may perhaps be understood in this more fundamental sense: as a claim to a restoration that, in combining the demand for justice and freedom, recalls the references in Benjamin's writings of the previous decade to 'the messianic kingdom or the idea of the French revolution'.[162]

Like the 'demand on the present' of these earlier texts, the 'historical claim' articulated here marks the site where history first enters into a relation with the messianic. This *Anspruch* would at the same time be a demand for a restoration, a return of all of historical occurrences to their origin, and a demand that, as a still outstanding claim, opens up history as the domain of its fulfilment. It is this claim that plays a decisive role in the determination of the concept of *Aktualität*, which had already slipped into the text at the beginning of the passage without, at first, being defined. That Benjamin introduces what is arguably the key concept of the text by referring simply to 'its actuality' (*dessen Aktualität*) suggests that an initial, provisional definition of this actuality has already been given in the preceding sentence. The pronoun that Benjamin uses – *dessen* – does not refer to the *Zeitschrift* but to the nominalised verb *bekunden*. Actuality is introduced as another name for what Benjamin describes as the *Bestimmung* of the journal, its 'vocation' or 'destination' to declare the spirit of the epoch. This is confirmed by the last paragraph of the text, where Benjamin refers to the vocation of the journal as a 'striving for actuality' (*werben um Aktualität*).[163] If the actuality for which this journal strives is to be an actuality of the true kind, that is to say, if this journal is to have a right to exist, then it must involve the historical claim in the precise sense in which Benjamin uses this term: a claim of history to its messianic completion. What is here called actuality is thus not the state in which this claim is redeemed: *Aktualität* is rather the name for the state in which this claim makes itself heard in all its intensity. That the vocation of the *Zeitschrift* is also a 'striving for actuality' means that it must turn its epoch into a court of law where the *Geistesleben* of this time expresses the demand for its messianic completion in another time, a time that is yet to come.

[161] Cf. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 'Anspruch'.
[162] GS II: 75; LS, 197.
[163] GS II: 246; AJ, 296.

First days

In his reflections on the essence of the *Zeitschrift*, Benjamin returns to this 'claim' and the relation between *Historie* and *Zukunft* that it implies in the same passage where the concept of actuality also resurfaces for a second time in the text. After stating that the journal must prove its 'sense for true actuality' through an elaboration of its 'philosophical universality', the text goes on to specify this universality in terms of an *Anspruch*:

> For this journal, the universal validity of expressions of spiritual life (*geistigen Lebensäußerungen*) must be bound up with the question of whether they are able to raise a claim (*Anspruch zu erheben vermögen)* to a place in religious orders that are still coming into being (*einen Ort in werdenden religiösen Ordnungen*). Not as if such orders were foreseeable (*absehbar wären*). What is foreseeable is that, without them, what struggles for life in these days as the first days of an age (*was in den diesen Tagen als den ersten eines Zeitalters nach Leben ringt*) cannot make its appearance.[164]

The 'historical claim' without which no journal would have a right to exist is here further specified: the *Anspruch* to restoration is here explicitly rendered as a claim that is related to the future – 'the claim to a place in religious orders that are still coming into being'. The reference to 'religious orders that are still coming into being' must be understood in the precise historico-philosophical sense in which Benjamin had conceived of religion in the early writings: as the sphere in which myth opens up to the idea of a 'kingdom of God on earth' as the realisation of the idea of freedom in the empirical world. That the claim for a place in such religious orders must have a 'universal validity' must also be understood as a specification of both the history and the fulfilment that is at stake here: the *Anspruch* that is raised here cannot be restricted to a particular language or polis; the demand for liberation must have a universal character, must concern all of history if it is to be a *historische Anspruch* in the emphatic sense. If Benjamin sticks to the terminology of 'religious orders', this is not only to evoke this divine order in which history is first fulfilled, but also to reiterate the strict separation of this order from the *Historie* from which this claim arises: the order in which every historical phenomenon must be able to claim a place is an order that can never be posited from within history itself.

This strict separation of historical existence and *Zukunft* is further elaborated in Benjamin's stipulation that the 'true actuality' described in this passage would involve a claim to a place in orders that are not 'foreseeable' (*absehbar*).[165] This characterisation must be understood as a specification and radicalisation of the reference to an 'unknown future' (*unbekannte Zukunft*)

[164] GS II: 244; AJ, 294.
[165] Ibid.

in his historico-philosophical reflections of the early 1910s.[166] That the future is not just unknown but *unabsehbar* means not only that what is yet to come is unknown, that it cannot be seen or represented from the perspective of what is given or conceivable within the categories of the present.[167] The term implies a specific temporal dimension: not only is the *Zukunft* in the strict sense of the word unforeseeable in the sense that it is impossible to see what is yet to come, but also that it is impossible to ascertain when it is coming – and ultimately even that it has to remain uncertain *if* this future is to ever arrive. That *unabsehbar* serves here as a technical term is suggested by Benjamin's comments on his *Moskauer Tagebuch*, which return time and again to references to what is 'unforeseeable' in order to characterise the experience of time that he attempts to capture in this diary. In a letter to Buber, Benjamin speaks of 'something unforeseeable' (*etwas Unabsehbares*) [...] whose image will be far removed (*weit unterschieden*) from all programmatic portrayals of the future (*Zukunftsmalerei*)'.[168] In a letter to Jula Radt, he describes the unforeseeable element in the future in a language marked by repeated references to a cautious perhaps: 'It is fully unforeseeable (*völlig unabsehbar*) what will now emerge in Russia. Perhaps a truly socialist community, perhaps something entirely other (*vielleicht etwas ganz Anderes*).'[169] The unforeseeable future is here characterised as that future where the 'perhaps' that punctuates this sentence takes on a different charge, where it no longer serves as a marker of various possibilities that can be conceptually fixed, but where the 'perhaps' suddenly indicates a threshold, arrives at an indeterminate possibility that can only be indicated as 'entirely other' than all those that could have been listed and anticipated.[170] As a claim that relates itself to an unforeseeable order, the *historische Anspruch* must therefore remain radically indeterminate – at least from the perspective of the present. The claim to a place in an order where all of history finds its completion is a claim to a place in an order that can only be known once it has arrived, but which might never arrive at all. Because of this indeterminacy, the claim that is raised by historical phenomena could never be realised from within history itself: for it is only in the orders that are yet to come that such a claim could ever be understood or granted. What is only foreseeable – and this is the paradox of the claim that history is to raise in the courtroom of the journal – is the impossibility that the claim of history for its salvation would ever be granted without these orders that are yet to come. Before such an order is realised – and whether it will ever be realised is uncertain – any claim for historical phenomena to their salvation cannot be heard completely. Only in the unforeseeable future would it first become

[166] GS II: 56; TH, 120.

[167] On the radically unassimilable character of *Zukunft* in Benjamin, see Hamacher, 'Das Theologisch-politische Fragment', 175–78 and Comay, 'Benjamin's Endgame', 265–66.

[168] Letter to Buber, 23 February 1927, in B, 443; CB, 313.

[169] Letter to Jula Radt, 26 December 1926, in B, 439; CB, 311.

[170] Cf. Derrida's reflection on Nietzsche's use of the word 'perhaps' in 'Loving in Friendship: Perhaps – the Noun and the Adverb', in *Politics of Friendship*, 26–48.

possible to see, retrospectively, how this future was already called for in the present; only from the standpoint of this future order would it be fully apparent what it is that is still struggling for life 'in these days' (*diese Tagen*) but will allow to recognise them as 'the first days of an age' (*als den ersten eines Zeitalters*)'.[171]

At this point it becomes possible to return to Benjamin's stipulation that, in order for any journal to gain actuality, a 'life would have to take shape in it that is powerful enough to save also what is questionable (*auch das Fragwürdige zu retten*)'.[172] What is meant here is not that such a life would be powerful enough to save historical phenomena, to bring history to its messianic fulfilment. What the life in this *Zeitschrift* must be able to save, if it is ever to gain actuality, is first of all the claim of historical phenomena to their own salvation, that is to say, their claim to a place within those 'religious orders that are still coming into being' – even in the case of those phenomena where this claim seems to have the most questionable status. The reference to *das Fragwürdige* takes the place of what, in the writings from Benjamin's student days, is referred to as that which is 'most endangered (*gefährdetste*), excoriated (*verrufenste*), and ridiculed (*verlachte*)'.[173] The superlatives Benjamin uses here have the same function as the 'also' (*auch*) in his reflections on the journal, which emphasises that the *Zeitschrift* would have to show that even the most questionable elements in the *Geistesleben* of the epoch have an essential content that demands to be saved from its deformed shape in the present. If the messianic would involve the redemption of 'the entire occurrence of history' (*alles historische Geschehen*)' as Benjamin writes in the so-called 'Theologico-Political Fragment' that is probably written in the same years, then the claim to this salvation would be most intense precisely in those phenomena where this claim is most questionable from the standpoint of historical existence itself. What is at stake in actuality is thus not the salvation of *Historie*; only the salvation of its *Anspruch*, the claim to its messianic completion. Nowhere is this claim that refers every phenomenon to a time that is yet to come more questionable, more tenuous than in that which is 'new or newest':

> 'Every journal must hold fast to that which, as something truly actual, takes shape under the infertile surface of that which is new or newest (*was als wahrhaft Aktuelles unter der unfruchtbaren Oberfläche jenes Neuen oder Neuesten sich gestaltet*), whose exploitation it should leave to the newspapers.'[174]

What is here called 'true actuality' does not rely on the distinction between *Zeitschrift* and *Zeitung*; instead, it must be understood to revolve around the distinction between the actuality

[171] GS II: 244; AJ, 294.
[172] GS II: 241; AJ, 292.
[173] GS II: 75; LS, 197.
[174] GS II: 241–42; AJ, 293.

to which both the *Zeitung* and the *Zeitschrift* – as the two exemplary forms of journalistic writing – must aspire insofar as they respond to their essential vocation and the actuality of the journals and newspapers – *Zeitungen* and *Zeitschriften* in the plural – in their empirical historical reality. Moreover, what is 'truly actual' is here not simply opposed to the 'new or the newest' (*Neuen oder Neuesten*) – a phrase that evokes a novelty that is already surpassed and substituted by a newer one the moment after it has occurred and recalls the references in Benjamin's later writings to the temporality of the 'landscape of hell' evoked in Kraus' writings as *das immer-wieder-Neue*.[175] The decisive distinction in this passage is rather between the 'infertile surface' of the ever-same novelties and what struggles for life in them underneath this surface. If the vocation of a *Zeitschrift* is to strive for true actuality, this striving would exhaust itself at its highest level in its attempts to show that even the ever-same sensations of the newspapers – or what Benjamin elsewhere calls the 'most recent, journalistic actuality'[176] – harbour something that may be called *ursprünglich*: an origin that demands to be restored in an unforeseeable future.[177] Even though it is not mentioned by name, the model for the *Zeitschrift* that aspires to such actuality is unmistakable: it is the journal in which Kraus dissected the newspapers on a daily basis and found the whole of world history – as a single, uninterrupted catastrophe – pressing in on every single article, phrase or advertisement. It is no accident that the image of uncountable throngs of angelic messengers, raising their voice before God at every instant, expressing the possibility and demand for history to be brought to an end and completion, finds its closest counterpart in one of Benjamin's attempts to characterise the peculiar kind of journalism that he understood to be exemplified by Kraus. In a passage that echoes his earlier definition of the vocation of the *Zeitschrift*, Benjamin characterises this journalism as follows: 'Kraus knows no system. Every thought has its own cell. But every cell can, in the now (*Nu*), apparently occasioned by nothing, turn into a chamber – a legal chamber (*ein Gerichtskammer*).'[178]

[175] Ibid.
[176] GS II: 1198.
[177] GS II: 244; AJ, 294.
[178] GS II: 349; KK, 443.

Afterword: 'Today'

> The *day*, precisely, the question or reflection of the *day*, the resonance of the word *today*...
> — Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading*[1]

The philosopher and the journalist: in the work of the three thinkers addressed here, these two figures have been pitted against one another in a manner that does not cease to recall the ancient polemic between the philosopher and the sophist. In a reprise of the polemic between philosophy and sophistry, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin will each propose to conceive of philosophy itself precisely in and through its relation to journalism. Philosophy would, according to an origin myth that returns in their hyperbolic remarks on journalism, come into being precisely in the moment where it differentiates itself from everything journalistic, just as philosophy in ancient times first emerges in its polemical distinction and separation from sophistry.[2] In strict analogy with its ancient counterpart, philosophy does not merely secure its own boundaries by setting itself against everything journalistic, but would understand itself to be constituted precisely in and through this distinction. It is Kierkegaard who seems to suggest precisely this when he explicitly draws out the analogy between philosophy's relation to its ancient and its contemporary opponents, the sophist and the journalist. In one of his journals of the mid-1840s, he will compare the relation between philosophy and journalism to a lapse from philosophy into sophistry. 'If you were to think of a most eminent polemical author, the likes of whom has never existed, and confront him with a journal,' Kierkegaard writes here in characteristic hyberbole, 'he cannot but lose unless he himself is willing to publish a newspaper: and in that case he loses as well, inasmuch as he has sunk from being a writer to being a journalist (which is just like a philosopher becoming a sophist)'.[3] But it would be a mistake to assume that this analogy suggests that philosophical thought and writing, here captured in Kierkegaard's figure of the *Forfatter*, could simply be opposed to journalism. In Kierkegaard's own presentation of the ancient polemic between the philosopher and the sophist, the two figures are set against one another – but they are not placed in a relation of simple opposition. Quite the contrary: in Kierkegaard's account philosophy comes into being precisely as a *radicalisation* of sophistry.[4] The ancient philosopher, exemplified by the figure

[1] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 3.

[2] For an extensive discussion of the conflict between philosophy and sophistry, see Barbara Cassin, *L'Effet Sophistique*.

[3] Pap. VII 1 A 122; NB, 30.

[4] SV XIII: 223; CI, 138. Kierkegaard develops this hypothesis in his reading of Aristophanes' account of Socrates, which identifies him with the sophists. Such an identification is possible precisely when 'one bears in mind that in a certain sense Socrates and the Sophists held the same position and that Socrates actually struck at their very roots by carrying through their position, by destroying the halfness in which the Sophists set their minds at ease, so that Socrates by defeating the Sophists was thereby in a certain sense himself the greatest Sophist.' (Ibid.)

of Socrates, takes certain principles that lie at the root of sophistry – certain 'secrets' harboured by their apophthegm that 'man is the measure of all things' of which they refuse to become conscious – and pushes this to an extreme, that is to say, beyond the point where sophistry is willing or able to go. If philosophy can place itself in the sharpest possible contrast to sophistry, this is not because the two can be neatly separated and opposed to one another: it is because philosophy takes up and radicalises a question that sophistry fails to follow through to its end.[5] Understood in this sense, it is indeed possible to draw an analogy between the ancient couple of the philosopher and the sophist and the polemic between philosophy and journalism staged in different ways by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin. As in the case of their ancient counterpart, the conflict between philosophy and journalism articulated here is – even where the shrillest polemical tone may suggest so – not to be mistaken for one of simple opposition. To transpose the schema of Kierkegaard's interpretation of the ancient polemic onto the relation between philosophy and journalism would suggest instead that philosophy would have to be understood as a *radicalised* journalism: an attempt to take a concern that lies at the root of journalism, its *radix*, and to follow this through in the most uncompromising manner.[6]

Philosophy as a radicalised journalism: to understand philosophy in these terms would mean to grasp its relation to the word that is at the root of journalism itself – the *jour* of journalism, the day of today. If this word – *today* – is a cause for concern for philosophy, if philosophical thought is to concern itself with this word at all this is because it poses a challenge to it. It is perhaps this challenge that Derrida attempts to articulate when he defines the main concern of a series of newspaper articles written in the 1980s as a concern with the 'resonance' of this word – a resonance that is brought out by its repeated iteration in the sentence that we have taken as our epigraph: 'the *day*, precisely (*le* jour*, justement*), the question or reflection of the *day* (*la question ou la réflexion du* jour), the resonance of the word *today* (*la résonance du mot* aujourd'hui)'.[7] The challenge that this word poses to thought would, then, not only be the challenge of treating precisely, *justement* this word but also of treating this word *justement* – that is to say, of doing justice to it. To do justice to this word would be a matter of treating it not merely as a sign that one could well do without, a disposable means to refer to this or that

[5] SV XIII: 286; CI, 207. 'The Sophists' pompous, confident parading, their matchless self-sufficiency (all of which we learn from Plato), is proof enough that they thought themselves able to satisfy the demands of the times, not by shaking the foundations of everything but, after having shaken the foundations, by making it all secure again.' (Ibid.)

[6] The term 'radicalised journalism' also appears in a brief newspaper article that Michel Foucault wrote in 1973, where it is also related to the question of the 'today'. 'If we want to be masters of our future,' Foucault writes here, 'we must fundamentally pose the question of the today (*la question de l'aujourd'hui*). This is why, for me, philosophy is a sort of radical journalism (*une espèce de journalisme radical*).' Foucault, *Dits et ecrits*, Vol. 1, 1302.

[7] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 3.

day: it would require instead attending to that in the word which calls for a response in the first place. What calls for a response, what first sets philosophy's work of questioning and reflecting into motion would, in other words, not be a conceptual problem or a logical contradiction: this movement would arise out of the word itself – or what is described here as its resonance. But what is the resonance of this word with which philosophy, as a radicalised journalism, would concern itself? And what does it mean to say that this word – *today* – resonates at all?

The moment that philosophy would begin to respond to this word – 'today' – it would have already returned to the question with which our study began: the question of the relation between thought and its time. Perhaps it is possible to say that the same question that is implied by the proposition from which we started out – Hegel's proposition that 'philosophy is its time, apprehended in thoughts' (*Philosophie ist ihre Zeit, in Gedanken erfaßt*) – is already inscribed in this word and the way in which it designates time.[8] 'Today' is a deictic – a time designator that, insofar as it is considered only on the level of its abstract semantic function, indexes time in the same way as a word like 'now'.[9] As a deictic, its meaning is inseparable from the time in which it is uttered; its meaning shifts depending on the day it is said. The word 'today' always implies a certain relation between the time of which one speaks and the time in which one is speaking. To speak of today always means to speak of *this* day: it means to speak of a time that is also the time in and from which one is speaking. In doing so, the word harbours a certain resistance to the possibility to refer to time and history as if they may be represented and placed in front of us as objects. In this sense 'today' is nothing like historico-philosophical categories such as 'the age', 'the century', 'the decade', 'the year' or 'the moment': as a word, 'today' resists the illusion of an objective, infinitely distant perspective on time and history. The sign of this resistance is the awkwardness one experiences when turning it into a noun – the today – and its implication that time and history may be placed in front of us as if they were objects. The question of the relation between thought and its time is thus not just inscribed in the word 'today': it is also configured in a specific way. For philosophy to concern itself with the word today would mean to think a time from which it can never extricate itself, a time towards which it would never be able to take a distance. To think 'today' would mean to think one's time with the awareness that one irrevocably belongs to it – that one is, at least to some extent, its ineluctable contemporary.

'Today': if there is a resonance to this word, this is first of all because it oscillates between its literal and figurative meaning. The status of this word as a time designator – to ask, for

[8] GW 7: 26; PhR, 15.

[9] For another discussion of the word 'today' that begins from its status as a deictic but develops a different reading of the problematic implied in the word, see Jean-François Lyotard, 'Time Today', in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, 58–77.

instance, what is happening *today* – is always susceptible to be read in at least two ways, always wavers between its reference to two distinct temporal categories. Today, in this day and age: in this phrase the two senses of the word, the literal and the figurative, are laid out beside one another. The word 'today' conjures up both senses of the word, the day and the age, at the same time. To speak of 'today' does not merely serve as a metaphor for saying 'our time'; in doing so it also presents this time in a particular way. In its oscillation between these two meanings, it collapses distinctions between the major and the minor, the great and the small, the important and the trivial. This collapse is reflected in the journalist's suspicion that history makes itself known in the most inconspicuous occurrences of the day as much as in the loudest event, that the new may announce itself in the most trivial novelty as much as in the most portentous rupture. Those who speak of their time as 'today' have already stopped treating history as a story whose main protagonists are great men and epochal events. Indeed, the trope that is at work in the word and causes it to waver between the day and the age – synecdoche – suggests that there is a sense in which the age is, in its entirety, compressed in this day. It suggests that today, this single day, contains the age *in nuce*, like the version of that great book that, according to Pliny the Elder, was small enough to be enclosed in the shell of a nut.[10] Those who would attempt to do right by the word 'today' would face the challenge of responding to this oscillation – that is, of reading the occurrences of the day as figures in which the age is condensed in concentrated form. In different but related ways, the sense of temporal contraction and expansion involved in such a view of history returns in the work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin alike – not least in the treatment of journalism itself.

Yet at the same time that the word today, in the oscillation between its figural and literal meaning, suggests that the day, if subjected to the right reading, might reveal itself to contain the age in its entirety, it also suggests a certain resistance to full and complete comprehension. In this sense it both approximates and distinguishes itself from this other closely related deictic, 'now'. Yet the experience of time that is implied in the two words needs to be distinguished. While 'now' in the first instance introduces a moment that is always missed, designating a moment that has already passed away before the word has been uttered, 'today' points to a different problem. Those who utter the word 'today' are not confronted with a day that has already passed away the moment the word is uttered: rather, to speak of 'today' points to the problem of referring to a day that has never fully taken place. Those who speak of 'today' are always confronted with the incompleteness of what is spoken of. Only one who utters this word in the last moment of the day, in the instant it turns into tomorrow, might savour the illusion of completeness, saying the word at the impossible moment where this day has supposedly fully and completely taken its course; but this day will have passed away by

[10] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 7: 21. 'Cicero informs us, that the Iliad of Homer was written on a piece of parchment so small as to be enclosed in a nutshell.'

the time the word has been fully uttered. Even when time is reckoned in narrowly chronological terms, 'today' refers to a time that resists closure. To write 'today' thus means to write of a day that is still happening, to write of a day that will never have fully taken place.

The writing of the journalism is marked by a paradoxical relation to the experience of time implied by this word, today, the word that is the ultimate concern of journalism. The journalist knows his words will not outlast the day they are written: his writing expresses an absolute scepticism with regards to the durability of the written word. Each word he writes is ephemeral in the strict sense of the word, destined to endure only one day – just like the occurrences of which he is writing. But precisely because it is the most ephemeral, the writing of the journalist will be undertaken under the sign of perfection and completion. After today, the writing of the journalist will never be reread, revised, rewritten. In this sense the writing of the journalist could not be more different from notation. Whereas notation is always preliminary and provisional, the journalist writes each word as if it were his final one. It is no accident that Kant, in a letter to Fichte of 1797, presents his decision to write only in journals as the form adequate for a thinker who experiences each day as possibly his last. 'My choice of the *Berliner Blätter* for my recent essays will make sense to you and to my other philosophizing friends if you take my disabilities into account,' Kant writes. 'For in that paper I can get my work published and evaluated most quickly, since, like a political newspaper, it comes out almost as promptly as the mail allows (*fast posttäglich*). I have no idea how much longer I shall be able to work at all.'[11] The journal represents the only form of writing left to those who doubt whether another day will come. But there is another aspect to this finality. After today, the journalist will never have the chance to capture this day in writing. This is the necessary sacrifice made by any writing that will never cease to concern itself with the 'today'. Tomorrow will bring a new day, a new today that will replace this one: this is no reassuring thought, but rather one that charges his writing with a certain urgency. The occurrences of the day, the occurrences of *this* day, can only be written once; today is the only chance to apprehend them in words. For the journalist each day is the first day, but also the last. It is here that the figure of the journalist shows itself to be most closely related to the diarist. The writing of the diarist is governed by a finality comparable to that of the journalist, but also by a comparable urgency: an urgency that stems from the possibility of missing the day. It is no accident that Kierkegaard inaugurated his journals with reference to a thought of Hamann, perhaps a warning, that 'there are certain thoughts one only has once'.[12]

[11] Kant, Letter to Fichte, December 1797?, in *Correspondence*, 544.
[12] Pap. VI A 6; JJ: 295.

This finality determines journalism's paradoxical character.[13] Journalism undertakes its writing under the sign of the incompleteness of the time it attempts to capture in words, the irreducible openness to the future – and yet it never quite lives up to it. In its tendency towards finality, the writing of the journalist always tends to forget and disavow the incomplete character of the present indicated by the word today: a present that is never exhaustively known, that will always harbour elements that remain unperceived, uncomprehended, unthought. There is no newspaper that does not evoke the illusion of completeness. Every newspaper will claim to give an exhaustive overview of the day, to present the day in a nutshell. Such completeness is predicated on the assumption that what is happening today can be known completely and definitively in the moment in which it happens. It is predicated on the assumption that what happens today, in our time, is readily available to us; that the present does not escape us but is given to us as a chain of actual events that may be known and comprehended as an inventory of facts and opinions. There is nothing enigmatic about the present of which it reports; everything that happens is, at least in principle, assumed to be readily given to the witness and the camera, the reporter and the commentator. Journalism becomes the figure of a certain 'presentism': a tendency to turn the contemporary historical situation into a comprehensible picture, which is at the same time a tendency to stabilise the significance of this word – today – and to reduce it to a supposedly transparent means of reference.

'The resonance of the word *today*' – if philosophy is a radicalised journalism, it would begin from its persistent refusal to petrify this word in its attempt to think it.[14] Philosophy would instead hold fast to the enigmatic character of this word, the resistance of this word to being stabilised, known completely and definitively. It is precisely this gesture of refusal, in which the philosophical concern with today distinguishes itself from that of journalism, that is thematised in one of the last texts of Jacques Derrida. This text stages a dialogue between a journalist and a philosopher – a dialogue which takes the form of a staged interview between a 'passing journalist' and an unnamed philosopher, presumably the author himself. The setting recalls not only the trope that we have seen recur in the above chapters, the polemical counterposition of philosophy and journalism; perhaps it also echoes the ancient dialogue between the philosopher and the sophist in which philosophy first forges a name for itself. But here it is not the philosopher who asks the questions, at least not in the first instance. In the questions of the journalist, the divergence between the philosopher and the journalist's relation to the word today, their different modes of thinking the occurrences of the day – not accidentally the publication of a book that deals precisely with the question of how thought takes place today – is thematised at the level of language. 'Allow me to insist,' the journalist

[13] On the finality that characterises the writing of both the journalist and the diarist, see Werner Hamacher, 'Journals, Politics', 438–39.
[14] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 3.

says, 'in the name of what I believe to be the ethics and deontology of journalism, that is to say my duty toward my readers. They ask you to be more concise and clear, more spontaneous, more direct than usual, at least as much as possible.'[15] 'There is not much time and space left. Say what you want to say without delay and without detour. My readers, and even my editor...'. Or, as he begins his following question: 'Could you start by explaining to my readers, *in a nutshell*...'.[16] At some point these demands turn into an insistent begging: 'Couldn't you answer me with facts or short quotations, rather than with digressions?'[17] 'Couldn't you explain yourself in a little more concrete, pedagogical, intelligible way? A little more communicative?'[18] Finally they are expressed as a command: 'You, too, have duties,' the journalist says. 'You must communicate in an intelligible fashion and make yourself accessible in the public sphere.'[19] The 'passing journalist' that Derrida evokes here is not a particular person; his persistent demands may be taken as the cipher for a certain mode of speaking, a certain mode of orienting oneself in language towards what is happening to us today, what is happening right now. The language that he asks his interlocutor to speak is characterised by the demand for a certain clarity and directness, a certain conciseness and lack of excess, a certain spontaneity and comprehensibility – in short, a certain kind of communicability. The world that is presented in this language is always already structured and limited by this demand for communicability: it is a world where what is happening is thought to be immediately perceptible and readily comprehensible – at least in principle.

If the figure of the journalist emerges from these repeated demands to speak only of what is readily communicable, the figure of the philosopher comes into being first and foremost in the persistent refusal to speak this language. The interviewee resists the demands of his interlocutor, sighs and complains – but it would be a mistake to think that philosophy here opposes itself to journalism. The relation between the two hinges on a phrase that is reiterated time and again by the philosopher in response to the journalist's questions: *vous voulez rire* – you must be joking. 'You must be joking,' the philosopher responds to the journalist whenever he is asked to speak his language. The phrase articulates a relation between philosophy and journalism in the form of a scolding reminder of what is disavowed in the journalist's questions. You must be joking: when the philosopher exclaims this phrase, he suggests there is something ridiculous about the seriousness of the journalist. Precisely the journalist, it suggests, that figure who reminds philosophy of the vanity of its claims to timeless truth, treats the language of its time as though it were eternal, and the occurrences of which it speaks as complete, fixed. In asking to speak of the occurrences of the day in a language that is direct

[15] Derrida, 'Vous Voulez Rire! Interview with a passing journalist', 3.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 12.
[18] Ibid., 14.
[19] Ibid., 15.

and readily comprehensible, journalism turns into a faint version of itself: it inverts the principles of which it reminds philosophy and, in doing so, betrays the question that pulsates within it, its concern with the word today. Also here, in its confrontations with this interviewer, philosophy would, then, not come into being in an opposition to journalism but precisely where it radicalises the question implied by this word. Philosophy would not distinguish itself from journalism by taking recourse to timeless values and eternal truths, but rather when it asks the question of the day with a certain persistence, when it holds fast to its concern with the word 'today' with a rigour that exceeds its interlocutor's demands for clarity and comprehensibility. The philosophical concern with the word 'today', the attempt to do right by its specific resonance, has to be accompanied by a resistance towards the tendency of this word to congeal, to assume a stable significance, to appear as if it were fully transparent: philosophy, insofar as it is concerned with the attempt to think its time, would always involve a resistance towards the presentism on which journalism and its presentation of the day necessarily relies. Such a thinking would involve a certain attentiveness to the conditions under which this today is rendered present in our time, the conditions under which it becomes possible for our time to assume a phenomenal form. Perhaps it is this same attentiveness to which Derrida may have alluded when he suddenly interrupts one of his newspaper articles to ask, in a play on one of the characteristic formulas of philosophy's ancient opponent, the sophist: 'Has the day ever been the measure of all things, as one pretends to believe?'[20]

[20] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 85.

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