

1 Of "This" Communication

Briankle G. Chang

We speak suggesting that something not being said is speaking.

—Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

Communication happens on the side—or in some cases does not happen: then the sound of the voice fades away, or the text is left there.

—Hans-Jost Frey, *Interruptions*

I shall speak about communication.¹ With the statement "I shall speak about communication," I have just made known what I am about to do. However, in saying this, by saying, "I shall speak about communication," am I not communicating? In this instance, the act of my saying and what is thus said appear to stand in happy agreement, the latter being little more than a self-reflective report on the former, thereby saying nothing but affirming that this saying, this report, is taking place. Indeed, I begin by making a promise presaging what I shall speak about, and yet this making, this act by which the promise in question comes to pass, immediately dissolves the promise that is being made, since what is being promised by me is accomplished without delay by my *saying* so.

Nothing is more banal, more self-evident, than saying, "I am now speaking" as one speaks, yet there seems to be something troubling when one begins discussing communication by saying, "I shall speak about communication." This, I am quick to admit, is how I begin, which means that my quick beginning may be in trouble, or that I might begin without clarity, perhaps even blindly. Worse still, perhaps I should not even begin. But I did speak; I have already begun. In fact, it is in my having already spoken that my beginning becomes a problem, a problem made grave all the more by its having begun problematically. In any case, since I have already begun, I cannot but go on and go on beginning, if for no other reason than that I cannot unsay or undo what I have said or done so far. Having begun in this way, this beginning, this beginning of mine, turns out to be a nonbeginning. This nonbeginning will then be my beginning. For I do not begin; only this nonbeginning begins.

Curiously, a nonbeginning begins nonetheless. I cannot begin but with this nonbeginning. However, we recall that the nonbeginning I just spoke of is a beginning that has

already begun and hence a beginning that should not be called a beginning. That being the case, when I say "Only this nonbeginning begins," I appear to be lying, for, in saying it, I contradict myself, saying that what I also say is not the case. Willingly or not, I seem to lie from the beginning because I say of what I claim to be a beginning that it begins and does not begin.

That a lie or contradiction arises when I begin to speak of communication suggests that any beginning of communication is not merely complicated or prohibitive, but essentially aporetic. Being aporetic (*a-poros*, not porous, not passable), a nonbeginning commences what it also enjoins from taking place, and conversely, it makes impossible what it nonetheless kicks off. Acknowledging the paradox implicit in my beginning and mindful of having said that one cannot really begin speaking, I can perhaps try to remain true to my initial promise by tracing the movements by which the *non-* in my nonbeginning is linked to the troubling and troubled way I begin, and is thereafter preserved in what I manage to say as I go on communicating. Inasmuch as my present condition, aporetic as it is, reflects the determination of contradicting voices articulated while I speak, the kind of tracing I propose should help us gain some access to my beginning's very inaccessibility, an inaccessibility that coordinates my starting point and prompts this tracing.

Tracking what I was led to say so far requires that I continue speaking about communication and do so by keeping in view the aporia within which I managed to begin and made the promise. Bearing this in mind, let me suggest, as a preamble to what follows, that the aporia in question not only marks an imperative underlying the condition of the possibility of communication, but, made manifest as an active response to the demand released by this imperative, it also works to overturn the condition of the possibility of communication into its condition of impossibility—an overturning that, as dictated by the imperative, demands in turn another demand in and of itself. This is the case because, as I will argue, it is in this aporetic nonbeginning, in this beginning that fails to—but nevertheless does—begin, that what might be called the force of communication is singularly concentrated, that communication, understood as sending and receiving of messages in general, including the message that begins by promising "I shall speak about communication," comes to take place and will continue to take place—always as instances of a self-announcement. Beginning only insofar as it exposes itself to the condition of nonbeginning, communication appears to begin by having begun already, for it begins only from and as a nonbeginning and ends, if at all, only as a response to a call that continues to re-call the message sent by a prior call, that is, by the imperative that does not fail to recall itself and thus to begin again. So, before I go further, let me pause and telegraph the point I shall develop later: To communicate is to communicate the imperative to communicate; to communicate is to demand communication, to demand, that is, the very demand that communicates it and that it in turn communicates.

Never too late to begin because it is always already too late (not) to begin. Since this is the condition in which I began and in which I promise to communicate, I can keep my

promise only by communicating this promise endlessly. Acting in this way, not only do I communicate my promise and promise to communicate, but, most critically, I also find myself already and squarely in a space of communication, a space in which my promise is made and endlessly communicated. This space must be opened before I speak and must be kept open as long as I communicate. Presupposed and, at the same time, affirmed by my saying what I say now and will have said as I go on, this space marks off a welcome clearing as the very topos of communication, a discursive epoch (*epochē*) wherein the topic of communication can be established, and everything spoken thereof, questions regarding relevance aside, will be considered topical nevertheless. This opening—this epoch—will have been the first and last topic of communication, a topic from which all communications about communication come, and to which they ultimately return. In fact, it is within this epoch, within this opening that neither begins nor ends because it remains epochal, that communication begins to take place and continues to do so through the one, anyone, who communicates. This is what the epoch of communication makes possible, and it is in turn what keeps the epoch open, that is, keeping it as an epoch, our epoch. It is from within this epoch that one speaks and speaks about communication, failingly or not. And it is to this epoch that what I have to say ultimately speaks back.

I

No speech, no address to the other without the possibility of an elementary promise.

—Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge"

This world must be promised . . . and made possible before it can exist.

—Werner Hamacher, "Lingua Amissa"

I began this essay by saying "I shall speak about communication." Sincerely or not, I did say what I would do; I did appear to make a promise to speak about communication.² However, since I communicate my promise by promising to speak about communication, the promise I make returns in the same breath to, perhaps never departs from, my utterance, out of which it appears as such. This condition—a condition in which a promise in the making is compromised by the very act that is making it—seems to force itself on anyone who promises to speak about communication if only because the very force that anchors the speech act of promise-making seems to flood without remainder into one's *making* the promise as much as into the *promise* that is being made, and this by and through the non-distinction it effects, regardless of one's intention, between the fulfillment of what one does by saying it and the veracity of what one says as one is doing it. So, right from the beginning, from the very moment when I say "I shall speak about communication," not only do I, despite displaying a welcome instance of performative consistency, fall short of making a promise, but also, more momentously, my saying and what is therefore said by me also

cross into each other to annihilate the so-called promise precisely by fully saturating, or what amounts to the same thing, by nullifying, the temporal distance upon which the speech act of promising depends for its felicity and intelligibility. Seen in this light, my promise—in fact, any promise—to speak about communication is hardly a promise at all, for no sooner do I begin to make the promise, indeed, before my sentence is even finished, than I am doing what, according to what my utterance suggests, is yet to be done. My promise, if one can still call it a promise, is at best a botched promise, a promise betrayed that, despite its appearance, promises nothing and hence cannot be kept. The promise to speak about communication, I repeat, cannot be and need not be kept because it is never properly made, and since it falls short of making itself as a promise, there is nothing for the speaker to unmake; still less is there a question of keeping, or failing to keep, it. Stated plainly, inasmuch as my saying that “I shall speak about communication” is an act of communication, this act communicates what it instantaneously enacts and it enacts what it decidedly communicates, for what is communicated by my act of communication, namely, my making a promise, returns in full force to attest to its own taking place, to the act itself as an event of communication.

I began by promising to speak about communication. However, since this promise is necessarily betrayed by its own making, I cannot be said to have spoken about anything effectively, except perhaps sending something that refuses to depart. Apparently, I have begun speaking, but in effect I have not said anything that is not already communicated by the *making* of the remarks I just made; or I appear to have made a promise to speak about communication, but this promise evaporates the moment it is communicated. In any case, I have begun and have not begun, have spoken but have not said anything, have promised and have not promised. From the beginning, my beginning fails to begin, suffering, regardless of my effort to the contrary, from having already undergone what it says it is about to start doing. Suffering in this way, I appear to begin, but not *at* the beginning, which is to say, I have begun, and can only begin, in the middle. This, then, means that instead of beginning, I continue. Simply put, I can succeed in beginning to speak about communication only on the condition that I continue speaking about it and keep doing so, irrespective of my failure to do so.

“To begin,” “to begin to communicate,” “the beginning of communication”—these are phrases with which one can only lie. For “what, having begun, cannot begin, cannot end,” because ending is but a chance to begin and beginning is but a word that names no thing except a moment of what is of seamless succession.³ Making all one (*continuāre*), communication continues: it transpires by crossing from *this* to *that*, from *this* *this* to *that* *that*, all the while taking place *here* and *now* precisely because it remains the same by becoming an other, by not being same, namely, by taking place nowhere else but *here* and *now*. Making a start on stopping, on what is being left behind, it moves on only to come back, unfolding ceaselessly in circles as the very circle that repeats, postpones, or resumes itself. Seen in this light, what is taken as the beginning lies as much ahead as behind, and what is taken as its

ending lies behind as well as before. One thus finds oneself beginning to communicate only when one finds oneself interrupted in and by communication, since to begin to communicate is to resist what begins to end, and to end communication is to desist from what does not cease to begin anew. To the extent that to begin to communicate is to continue communicating, to continue communicating is to interrupt what unfolds continually. Communication affirms itself by interrupting itself, by being interrupted between *this* communication and the return of another *this* in no time. Whatever form it may take, whatever message it transmits, communication continues by way of interruption. It communicates interruption, which continues and communicates it.

Continually interrupting itself, communication continues; however, being interrupted continually, it also does not continue in that not only does it come to a stopping point, but it also does not remain unchanged as it separates itself from what has been transpiring all along. Inasmuch as I must speak to prove that I can go on speaking, I can be considered to continue speaking only if I say something more than, and other than, what I just said. Speaking and yet not allowing myself to speak unchanged, I continue speaking and do not continue speaking; thus establishing distance from communicating so as to continue communicating, I continue communicating and do not continue communicating. It is in this impossible connection between a yes and a no, between a coming and a going, between a repetition and its breaking, that I continue, and, continuing in this way, my continuation releases or survives itself: it outlasts itself by interrupting itself.⁴ In fact, I cannot but interrupt my continuation, for I can succeed in continuing only if I also succeed in coming between what I continue to interrupt. Or, we can say, I succeed in communicating only if I fail to communicate, which is to say, I must fail to communicate so that communication can succeed and continue. Failing to succeed, or succeeding by failing, one no more succeeds than fails when one communicates. In this situation where the difference between failure and success is no longer distinct, it is also no longer certain whether one is the subject of one's own actions, except that one must continue and continue to interrupt. Continually interrupting and interrupted, "I"—the one who communicates—shall remain forever unfinished. Being unfinished, that is, when my being unfinished is definitive, I am finally open to that which never reaches me, but also to that which I never reach.

The logic of continuation underlying communication is thus one of incompleteness, of (non)fulfillment in process predicated on self-deferral in principle. Breaking itself apart so as to go on, or, more exactly, converting its end into the means to renew itself, communication continually unfinishes as if autoimmune to its own success, surviving quiescently in its own nonfulfillment by producing the effect of nonfulfillment as its own cause. Always surviving as unfinished, it keeps itself open to itself, to its own continuation. It is, in a word, free: free from itself and free to become itself. Thanks to this freedom, it comes and goes, measured by nothing other than its ability to come and go freely. Between its coming and its going, each of which is no more a coming than a going, communication continues and, accordingly, remains in principle incomplete, because it is not free not to go on in this way.

(From a slightly different angle, we may say that in this free going and coming of communication, what is considered "past," "residual," or "emergent" is essentially a moment of the "ancestral," which, surpassing to yield and yielding to surpass, emerges constantly and thus remains always "contemporary."⁵) In this sense, and in this sense only, communication is *communicative*: it communicates its own possibility, coming off without fail as the very medium through which it comes to pass and, through the nondistinction between its success and its failure, makes common all that over which it crosses and interrupts continually. Or, we can say, communication is communicative because it does not cease to express or expose itself as such, existing as a self-becoming owing to the profound ambiguity of the transcendence and immanence it embodies. The telos of communication, if there is any, is the perpetuation of its telos, the perpetual deferral of the telos by the telos itself, indeed, by a closure that is at once an opening.

The tautology, "*Communication is communicative*," expresses what I call the "fault of communication," a structural shortcoming inherent in transmission that, readily observed as the cause of incompleteness described above, affects sending or receiving all the way so as to keep what is sent in a constant state of *being sent*, of being suspended in transmission. To the extent that the point of communication is *trans-mission*, is *sending across*, the fault of communication is that communication transmits its own disappointment, its incomplete crossing. It is in light of this fault that one can draw a parallel between the event of communication and that of promise-making. Just as communication necessarily falters in view of the teleology normally taken to characterize it, and for this reason, continues, making a promise likewise must keep saying what it only appears to say, since, when one says, "I promise," the word "promise" says that it does not yet say anything, and for this reason, speaks (un)failingly what it does not yet speak about. "To communicate" and "to promise" are therefore alike, one resembling the other in that when they take place, something other than a promise, something other than a transmission, also occurs, and when one speaks about them, something other than this speaking is also spoken of. The two acts parallel each other not only because they interact from the start and project comparable incomplete projections, as attested to by my troubled (non)beginning, but also because it is impossible for them not to be this way.

Lest I speak ahead of myself, let me recall that, as a common and deceptively simple mode of discourse, "to promise" is to say—to perform a speech act that says—"I will do X." It is to project X as possible, to project the possibility of X by *saying* "I will do X." However, since what corresponds to that which is being promised, X, is placed by the promise in a time yet to come—this speaking (of X) *ahead of oneself* in view of oneself being the necessary condition of "promise-making" as a performative—the promise thus made carries nothing but the very promise so performed. In principle and in fact, a promise promises, is capable of giving, only promise(s). When it is made, it says little more than the *saying* of the promise, giving, through the performative that it is, the said promise as the mere coming of a promise, as the mere promising of the coming of like promises, since, as just said, what

is asserted to be effected by the promise at one moment can be secured only by the illocutionary act that depends for its reality entirely on a force that is exclusively possibility- or future-oriented.

Vouchsafed by a linguistically summoned future, a promise dispenses nothing but its own yet-to-come. Delivering nothing actual, only what lies ahead as spoken thereof, a promise guarantees that nothing is actually guaranteed. Or, we can say, promising by projecting, thus deferring the arrival of, what is being promised, a promise stretches itself across a fault-line that divides what it establishes, falling, in spite of itself, between "at least two 'times': a time of a future that can come and a time of a future that cannot come; a time that renders possible and one that renders impossible this very rendering."⁶ Internally divided and dividing itself, a promise leaves open a possibility that defines it, but in leaving open this possibility, it also leaves open the possibility that none of what it promises will be preserved as a possibility. Faulty at the core, that is, temporally dislocating and dislocated with regard to itself, to promise is at once to keep the promise alive by keeping it at a distance, keeping it, that is, *away* and away *from* itself. Entirely and purely performative, a promise is from beginning to end a promise-in-the-making; it is never but a *performing* promise that plays out the necessity that it be open to future openings, future possibilities, including the possibility of their not being possible, of turning the promise into an unmistakable lie. Seen in this light, to promise is to continue to promise; it is to continue the promise-making, in short, to promise what is to be continued on the condition that it is continued.⁷

And the same holds for communication.⁸ Just as a promise promises promise(s) and communicates the *making* of the promise(s), communication communicates, regardless of whatever else may happen with it, communication, and, that being always incomplete, communication promises its continuation. If a promise is always at the risk of being broken and is a promise only insofar as it is so at risk—otherwise it would not be a promise but a constative statement—communication is communicative only insofar as it remains promising, that is, incomplete, to be continued. Just as a promise is only *possible* and exceeds the speech that performs it because it says what it cannot actually speak about, communication likewise says that it has yet to speak, moving and re-moving only by removing itself, by doing away with what it imparts. Finally, to put it more economically, just as a promise must be prohibited, must be kept unfulfilled, by itself for the sake of promising, of there being this promise, communication necessarily faults itself so that it may continue. From the beginning, to communicate and to promise have never been apart from each other, not least because to promise is at once to communicate the promise being made, and to communicate is to promise that communication will have already begun and will have had no end. From the beginning, one necessarily begins *in* and *with* the other and, therefore, never begins by oneself. While we may say of communicating and promising that "they begin," what this statement really means is that they continue—each by itself as much as with the other.

From the above, one can easily ascertain why I was in trouble when I began this essay by saying "I shall speak about communication": from the moment I begin, from the moment I make the promise to speak about communication, both my promise as such and what I promise to discuss return, through the promise, from a future—from this promise's future—to render null my beginning as well as my promise. "To promise," "to speak," and "to communicate," individually or when tethered together, signify little that has not been taken as read when one begins to speak about them, as each term, being part of a chain, extends the syntagm by terminating in, without terminating, the others. This, as I just suggested, results necessarily from the fault of communication, a fault as continuous and long as it is horizontal. This fault marks the horizon, against which sending and receiving come to appear and continue to mistake each other, a faulty horizon, that is, from which arises the possibility of communication and to which this possibility falls only to rise again. In the end, I am permitted perhaps to say only this: Communication appears to begin and end, but it cannot, beginning, communicate its beginning or, ending, communicate its end.⁹

What, having begun, cannot begin, cannot end. That communication cannot begin or end does not merely mean that communication must be accepted as a *fait accompli*, or that it extends as long as one speaks about it. It means, principally, that communication first becomes a topic and can be posed as a problem only in communication, and this process is recursive. Indeed, as a notion whose "content" is easily turned into "form," and vice versa, and where discourses about it are easily objectivized to be discussed in turn—a situation reflected, for example, in such popular sayings as "the medium is the message"—"communication" floats fluently as its own going or ongoing concern, remaining topically relevant because of its self-reflective nature. More significant, to the extent that communication cannot begin or end, communication, beyond being incomplete, is also free from negation. It cannot be negated, annulled, or doubted, because to cross out or to doubt communication in any way is undeniably a communicative act, because the actuality of communication is necessarily implicated in the problematization that affirms *via negativum* this actuality and its continuation, and because, finally and from the start, the possibility of communication is already and irreducibly given in the presence of the concept as well as in the concept of a present fact.

Implicated when problematized, affirmed when negated, and its limits shown only when experienced in and made apparent by itself, communication performs the very fault that constitutes the opening for its performances which, being incomplete, can only continue. But it is an opening that also promises that the performances it so authors will be inadequate to—will be in excess and in want of—the performance as promised. It is an opening that does not fail to open the possibility of confusing the performance's own space and time, a faulty opening, indeed, where each moment of what it makes possible is both a "before" and an "after" and is therefore both an "already" and a "not yet." Thus confusing and being confused by its own occasioning, communication is *performa-communicative* in the strict sense that it is never—nor could it ever be—fully what it promises to be, since its

performance, the taking place of *this* communication *here* and *now*, is always at the risk of being something and somewhere other than promised and, possibly, other than performed.¹⁰ Just as a promise—insofar as it promises something—exceeds and hence exists not in the speech that performs it but, rather, in a horizon it projects, communication, insofar as it takes (its) place and does so continually, moves and re-moves itself only by removing itself. Moving in the (non)distinction between removing and re-moving, communication is at once ex-communication. To communicate is to exit communication at once. It is to come out of, while going beyond, what one is communicating, namely, to be ex-communicated by the communication one enacts continually. Like making a promise, like making a promise to speak about communication, in fact, like making a promise to promise anything, to communicate is to performatively communicate and is never not to ex-communicate, to leave itself behind, to render itself obsolete. Similarly, to be communicative is to be ex-communicative and is at once to be para-performatively communicative. Being ex-performatively communicative, communication keeps itself open to a future, to what makes it possible by rendering uncertain or doubtful what it thereby makes possible. In view of this promised future, of the coming of this future, which, since it is *coming*, does not and may not arrive, a past is retained, the present becomes active, and a future—always the future of a future—is kept open. Communication performatively ex-communicates in this way, and as a result and at once, everything, always to come even if having come, is brought back to it. In this way too, communication saves itself; it sets itself aside, reserving itself for the future, for the future of its own future. Herein lies what may be called the "confidence" of communication, a presumed or projected assurance taken as certitude, to which one, anyone, who communicates submits and must submit. Thanks to this submission in confidence, one communicates continually, that is to say, (un)failingly. Without beginning and without ending, one simply communicates. A promise!

II

But if the imminence of what is thus owed to death suspends the moment it falls due . . . at the same time it signs its verdict. . . . It will have to die, it is assigned to residence and the date is set (*la mise en demeure est en marche*), the countdown has begun, there is simply a delay . . . but no one dreams of escaping death, and nothing will be saved.

—Jacques Derrida, *Counterpath*

A promise communicates nothing certain, except the certainty that, however promising, it is but a promise. Since a promise, as said earlier, is a promise only on the condition that it concedes its potential failure, it necessarily includes the possibility that it would no longer be promising, no longer be a promise. Entirely verbal in nature, a promise delivers not more than do the words of which it is made. Not only that, but "in every promise," as Hamacher remarks, "there must be a non-promise, if it is to be and remain a promise."¹¹

Promising—and thus communication and speech in general, to which promising owes its continuation—directs itself and is directed by this “non,” a void or wound in the speaking of every language, and it is kept as a promise only so long as it is kept in this “non.”¹² Signifying no logically based negation and unlike counterfactuals, this “non” opens a future worthy of its name—a future that only a promise can open and that it will performatively (dis)organize, a future that sees itself coming (*avoir venir*) and is decided, in this coming, as essentially undecidable, as something *possibly* other than a future.

In the same way that an act of promise is exposed to the uncertain possibilities of the future, an act of communication, too, fails to conform to the teleology that is supposed to guide it and, possibly going amiss in this way, does not fail to risk being *not* an act of communication. For, being promise-like, hence positing, like all promises do, a nascent fact the anticipation of which must have already been the very production of this fact, it also “must leave open at least one extreme possibility—and leaving open means risking and risking failure—the possibility of no longer falling under the regime of an intentional subject, and thereby no longer qualifying as an act.”¹³ Accordingly, the subject of communication is always a possible subject, a subject vulnerable to the possibility that it may not be the subject and may no longer be possible, since its actions, admitting, as they must, a horizon of possibilities not of their own, are but contingent performances, performances produced by the “possibilities not given *by* it but given *to* it, ceded, imparted, or left.”¹⁴ Always to come in that it is given the possibility to come or is made to come only *possibly*, the subject of communication, if it comes at all, is but a promised subject, a subject *made* to make possible the promise to communicate.

Only a subject acts, and only a subject can make promises that, as performatives, implicate the subject as the medium of their incomplete continuation. However, since a subject of an act becomes one only if it is first subject *to* what makes it possible, to what is not so gracefully termed “subjectivization,” a subject of communication capable of promising to communicate also has to undergo what must have happened to it before it emerges as the medium of promising; it must suffer from what makes possible the promises it makes, and in so doing, it renders possible its failure to make good the promise made. The subject of communication is born in this way, arising from a formative trial that gives it the possibility of being possible. At the same time, however, since what arises must first fall, since what is possible must be made possible and thereafter be *kept* as possible, the birth of the subject implies that this subject comes to be only by being withdrawn in some way and by being withheld in this withdrawal; it must be made to disappear from the very scene on which it is also first made to appear and to act as a subject. Before becoming one, in other words, the subject must die, as it were, a performative death—a possible death (could death ever be more than a possibility?), a death before death as a certain withdrawal in its uncertainty. This withdrawal, this symbolic death, and above all, the life after made possible by this death, must have happened and will continue to happen. “The countdown has begun; there is simply the delay”—a delay that perhaps even death cannot delay. “No one,” it is true,

"dreams of escaping death, and nothing will be saved," but something, I suggest, is saved most certainly by this withdrawal and persists as the return of a disappearance that only death is able to promise.¹⁵ It is out of this withdrawal, this performative death—the postal epoch, as I called it—that the possibility of communication comes and comes continually. To illustrate my point, let me retell a story.

The story is well-known. After running nonstop from Marathon to Athens, Philippides gasps out *Nenikkamen* (We have won) in the middle of the Agora and drops dead. Having completed his task, he perishes as did the Persian enemy to whose destruction he ran to bear witness. The death of our messenger in this case coincides with the successful delivery of a message—a death known to us as part of the story that this death itself helps make known.

Philippides is a courier. A courier ought to deliver, and Philippides delivers the news as he was ordered to do. Death is not usually a consequence of a courier fulfilling his job. However, Philippides dies upon finishing his job; he dies, quite literally, *on* and *for* the job. Seen in this way, Philippides is more than a reliable transporter; he is a mailman par excellence, the first postman, remembered in history because of his on-the-job performance. Indeed, not only does he deliver the message, but he also delivers himself into the very delivery, for which he works and, consequently, dies. From this vantage point, the tale of Philippides can be read as presenting a thesis about sending and receiving, about letters or the post, about mediation and communication in general, which would be hard to think without the figure of the postman.¹⁶

To deliver (*rederre*) means to make something arrive, to make something visible or known. Philippides, the postman, arrives in Athens and makes known the news to the waiting crowd. At the same time, "to deliver," as the German *zustellen* reminds us, also means to withdraw, to halt, to put oneself in suspension, and thus to set oneself free.¹⁷ Once the delivery is made, the postman withdraws or undelivers himself from the given task. For once the delivery is made, the possibility of the message's being lost, which the postman carries no less than the message itself, can, happily, be eliminated. The postman now withdraws because he is no longer needed, and he is no longer needed because the message is no longer *with* him. In other words, insofar as Philippides succeeds in completing the delivery of a message to the people in Athens, and through this success, leaves the message behind him, he is perforce also left *behind* the message *by* the very message he delivered and left behind. As can easily be seen, just as the medium (a sheet of paper, for example) must recede and become invisible, so that the message (the words printed on the page) can be read, and just as the so-called ether, the empty space containing objects, as Aristotle insists against Democritus, cannot be a complete void but rather must be diaphanous (*to diaphones*) or appear transparent so that the objects in it can stand out and be seen as individual beings, what enables the message to appear must disappear or be kept invisible so as to make the delivered deliverable. The appearance of the message—we are speaking of "appearance" here in that the delivered message must come forth and be made visible to

someone other than the one who carries it—is thus a determined appearance, a postal appearance, if I may so call it, into which the postman disappears. It is this moment of undelivery within the delivery that marks the event of delivery, ending the sending in a distant end, toward which it first began to move.

Philippides dies at the end of his run, extinguished, as it were, by the deed that distinguishes him as a reliable postman. As seen in his case, the end of a delivery spells the end of the postman that he is. The success of a delivery thus marks a break, a period, in transmission, an instance of sub- or ex-traction, whereby the messenger withdraws or is erased from the scene, upon which is then seen the possibilities of his performance—his failures as well as his successes. It is in this postal epoch (*epochē*) that Philippides, the postman, appears and reports to work, only to disappear from the message his work makes appear. In principle and in fact, then, Philippides' death is timed and timely, demanded, as it were, by the epochal principle of the post his life exemplifies.¹⁸ According to this principle, and in view of how this principle plays itself out through the one who performs it, we can go so far as to say that Philippides, once chosen to deliver the news, is already dead, that he died before he left Marathon. Timely, more than timely, a messenger lost is the possibility of delivery regained, regained by being deleted at the end of the delivery so that the message can be delivered.

The post kills, and Philippides is put away accordingly. However, in being so erased, he lives on, delivered, as suggested earlier, from death by being delivered into history, reappearing, all the more vividly, in a tale as a figure exemplifying the principle for which he runs to his death, even before he started to run. Indeed, Philippides is saved by what kills him, remembered—well beyond the time of his physical expiration—precisely because of his physical disappearance. Or, we can say, Philippides, the running courier, must sacrifice himself, must be sacrificed, so as to open the postal epoch, to open the age of delivery, into which the postman is born and for which he can then serve, in life and in death alike. In this story about Philippides that we have all heard, in this figure that my reading has made of him, and, above all, in this postal epoch in which my reading of this story takes place is found the transcendence of the postal withdrawal as a self-effacing play (*Spielrump*), into which all of the above possibilities withdraw and, in turn, reappear.

Philippides's story is interesting in that, whatever morals one may find in it, the story tells essentially about itself: it communicates a message it embodies and does so by embodying as its message what grounds the communication of this message—a self-allegorizing tale, it seems. For, as can be easily seen by now, within this story about delivery is inscribed the very principle of delivery that motivates the story and that the story in turn motivates, and, in being so motivated and thus motivating its self-motivated readings, the story and its message revive each other in exchange—each commenting not only on the other like an echo, but through this resounding extension, also on all forms of delivery as long as they partake in the postal epoch that the principle of the post first opens and keeps open. The story asks to be read in this way because it is already (fore)closed by what it openly

suggests, and because by opening the reading with an end in view, it ends in what begins it. Like the postman, like the post, and like the reading of a post, the story, thanks to a death it recounts, survives. It, its reading, delivers itself. Delivering itself to itself, it reads itself. What I read, I quickly learn, reads itself, it reads itself in me—its own reading. In this *reading*, in the survival of this reading, the end, says the postal principle, ends—and begins (itself) again. Like a promise.

Philippides dies, but, as a courier and because he is a courier, his death saves him. Philippides would not be known to us, certainly not in the way he is, if he did not die the way he did, if he did not fall for the sake of a "fault" that is called "delivery," by virtue of which this story is delivered to us and, through this delivery, is transmitted to a future that, seeing (itself) coming, promises the continuation of this delivery. "No one dreams of escaping death," because no one, I suppose, knows anyone who does not die.¹⁹ But something is saved and arises when Philippides falls: not only is his story saved because it is read and reread, but, through the continuity of reading and rereading, one also finds oneself always and already in an opening of sending/receiving that only what remains beyond the death of delivery can make possible.

What withdraws remains, and it remains in withdrawal. If the postman can speak of withdrawal, it is because he speaks *in* and *through* the withdrawal he personifies. As such, consequently, he speaks only of the post he is. He does this, and does this necessarily, because, embodying the withdrawal that his death delivers and that, at the same time, also delivers him as an exemplary instance of delivery, he stands as *exceptional* with regard to the messages he carries as well as to the epoch that his withdrawal keeps open and in which he delivers his own demise as the message behind all the messages he delivers. Being excepted in this way, namely, being both inside and outside the topos in which he is always "absent from his own place," the postman, as a historical figure, as a figure of the figuration of delivery, exists in absence in the postal epoch, floating, as it were, across the open it looks over, and, in this free floating, he secures the unity of the open in one single catastrophe as it sends itself to wherever sending calls on him to perform. It is through this self-extraction that the postman can be said to *belong ecstatically* to the epoch that excludes or erases him and, in the same gesture, includes him as an exceptional one, as a floating void—an "empty square," to use a term of Gilles Deleuze's—that, *being outside* and yet *belonging*, "makes everything function."²⁰ This void, floating as an *extimate* remainder of the withdrawal, makes room for what comes to appear in the epoch, for what comes to be transmitted in it, including itself.²¹ This is how the postal epoch establishes itself: it takes place by taking away its own place, in the very place in which it takes place.

It is in this place of loss, a lost place in which one can get lost only because one is already lost *in* and *to* it, that one sees the postman coming and going. Coming by going and going by coming, the postman arrives no sooner than he departs, and he departs only to return. It is in this turning and turning again that what may and may not come finds the rift in time whereby hours pass as so many moments of anticipation, of looking forward to that

which is possible to come. And it is in this rift as a recurring element, in this emptiness in situ where what is lost returns through withdrawal, that the future unseen is given the possibility of being seen. Is it not true that Mary Magdalene finds the tomb empty? Is it also not true that the departed One is not recognized when she first sees him again? And even when she comes to recognize him somehow visible in his withdrawal, she is greeted with the injunction, *Noli me tangere* (Do not [even want to] to touch me).²² He says it immediately, *Mē mou haptou*, as the phrase is given in the original Greek, wherein the verb *haptēin* (to touch) can also mean "to hold back, to stop."²³ He does not want to be and could not be held back, because he, his resurrected body (*son corps ressuscité*) being visible notwithstanding, is departing and must depart. Departing, that is, in returning to where he was sent from, he reappears (to her) in disappearance. This reappearance—indeed a miracle that there is this *miracle*, something to wonder at and to be seen—means that he is now set free. For only those who are freed through withdrawal reappear in this way. And he is set free or taken away in this way so that those who choose to follow him can be free, freed to be set free. It is out of his spectral presence that a certain promise is dispatched, a promise that posts the future in its hallowed universality. There must be this coming of the promise through withdrawal if there is to be a future, a future that, in its coming, shall include all that takes place henceforward as promised possibilities, as possibilities that no sooner arise than they begin to fall, through the promise, into what will have been their future perfect. Herein is played out in archetypal form what can be called the freedom of the post(man), the postal performance of a free sending that communicates itself as the message of communication, a post forever and for all, a post that, surviving death, continues to post the message even if all is yet to receive it.

III

I have the impression that everything comes to resemble itself, and me first of all, in a post card, the post card that I am, am following (*qui je suis*). There is but that, this reproduction of a reproduction of which I am dying and which forbids me, which makes of you, my living one, an interdiction

they have *intercepted* us

. . . if the post card is a kind of open letter (like all letters), one can always . . . attempt to make it indecipherable without compromising its making its way. Indecipherable, my unique one, even for the addressee. And yet there are but post cards, it's terrifying.

—Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card*

If, as said earlier, the postman comes and does not stay, if he leaves only to return, it is because he is always in transit, always en route in the postal clearing, in an epoch of delivery, with which he, as the ideas of "return" and "en route" suggest, is in some way familiar, more or less feeling at home. This epoch, with which he is uncannily familiar but in which he is nevertheless susceptible to getting lost, defines the very regime of the post, and it

accomplishes this *de-finition* precisely by *making finite* its own opening as a delimited topos, achieving this, that is, strictly by setting its own limits and hence making all movements within it unlimited, if only because the limit of the post in this case is none other than the post itself. Setting its own limits and hence unlimited with regard to all deliveries made within its spread, the postal topos is inclusively and appropriately (in)finite, since it permits, via its appropriative inclusion, infinite movements of sending and receiving in it as endless turning and returning.

In *The Post Card*, Derrida gives evidence to the general idea of the post's unlimited limits when he says, "To post is to send by 'counting' with a halt, a relay, or a suspensive delay, the place of a mailman, the possibility of going astray and of forgetting. . . . The *epokhé* and the *Ansichhalten* . . . is the place of the postal."²⁴ On this account, to post is to "send, *envoyer*, to 'expedite,' to cause to leave or to arrive, etc.," by way of a middleman who, always and already inside "the place of the postal," translates and transports.²⁵ Accordingly, to post is not only to send but also to receive; it is to give and to take, to go away and to come back, in a word, to exchange, even if the exchange is not equal, faithful, or symmetrical. It is thus against a certain "reason" of exchange, a certain economic ideal based on equivalence, correspondence, or assured arrival of goods, that Derrida reminds us of the possibilities of letters going astray, of their loss and destruction *in principle*. This warning stems, among other considerations, from the simple fact that once a letter is *sent*, once it is separate from and separated by the sender, it is no more and no less certain that it *was* sent (or even received) than that it *might* go anywhere or to anyone—even someone nonexistent—in the postal network. Efficiency of delivery aside, if it is possible for a letter to get lost, to be misdirected in any way, then this possibility of loss—seated factually in the distance or difference between sending and receiving, without which "delivery" would make no sense because there would be nothing to deliver (*dēlībērāre*), nothing to set free or to move across—belongs to delivery and belongs to it with no less certainty than the likelihood of the letter's expected arrival at its destination. Whatever form it may take, delivery implies a need for delivery, but this need turns around immediately to jeopardize the delivery so needed, not only because this need might not be fulfilled but also because it *must* remain potentially unfulfilled for the delivery to take place. In principle and in fact, delivery threatens and is threatened by delivery itself, by what calls for delivery in the first place. The condition of the possibility of delivery, as said earlier, spells at once the condition of the impossibility of delivery. Delivery does not and cannot deliver itself. It is *autoimmune*.

On the other hand, if it makes sense to speak of the possibility of the post's going astray, of its being forgotten, a possibility Derrida is known to emphasize, it makes equal sense to speak of the possibility of the letter's reaching its addressee as intended. If there is the possibility of forgetting, there must also be the possibility of remembering, of record keeping or archivization in general, without which there would be nothing to forget and, as the logic goes, nothing to remember either. Just as the possibility of loss, of going astray, necessarily haunts the sending, the prospect of the message's fortunate arrival at its end blesses the

delivery with equal tare when the letter leaves the addresser. From the beginning, sending and receiving are paired in their isotopic simplicity, each being the echo or mirror image of the other, thus affirming through each other the continuation of the promise of delivery made by the postman in withdrawal.

All deliveries take place in the wake of the postman's withdrawal, for all deliveries must trace and retrace the steps his withdrawal leaves behind and leaves open. Delivery—the setting free of what is to arrive—thus bears witness to the *epochē* and the *Ansichhalten* as “the place of the postal,” the place of the mailman as one of relay or suspensive delay, into which the postman disappears and, consequently, survives as the promise that his delivery necessarily bears. Carried by and carrying on the sending, this promise becomes a promise of relay that also keeps relaying the promise as part of what it relays. Viewed in this light, every letter is a letter already sent and virtually received, if only because the letter would not be a letter, would not be written as a letter, without this relay that promises its writing as well as its being read, or being readable. Is it not true that the speaker hears his own speech first when speaking to another? Is it not true that one reads what one writes before others do? After all, if a message is to be transmitted across space and time, if it can be delivered after all, how can this transmission be accomplished without a system of relays already in place, that is, if the addresses of the sender and receiver are not identified or identifiable beforehand? Successful delivery requires the proper working of relays, but the relays serving the delivery depends for their proper working on the proper working of a delivery system that maps the delivery routes. There is no delivery unless there is a relay, but a relay works only via the paths made available by the delivery network, the paths that the deliverer must—but, again, may not—follow. Mutually dependent, delivery and relay define and undefine each other, each preceding and receding into the other. Each sends for the other via itself, and, in turn, receives itself in inverted form. In the end, we cannot but conclude that there is no delivery unless there is delivery, and that there is no relay unless there are relays. Only delivery delivers delivery; only relays relay relays.²⁶

A letter leaves the writer's hand and sets out to reach the loved one. As the letter begins to leave, “everything ends up *passing through* . . . as dispensation, and even the gift of *es gibt Sein* or *es gibt Zein* . . . also says address, not the address of the addressee, but the skills of whoever's turn it is, in order to pull off this or that, chance too, somewhat. . . .”²⁷ Following the postman's withdrawal, in its sending and destining, a letter sets out on a path and goes *on leave*. Leaving so as to depart, the letter “becomes the way that gives all ways . . . and makes way for everything.”²⁸ The opening of the letter by the addressee stops the sending, but this stop stops the stop itself, and stops to begin. Within the postal epoch, sending and receiving become but punctuations, moments of hesitation across a journey that in truth is one of self-transmission. For what is sent not only cannot be unsent but also demands that a reply be sent back. No doubt, a letter is sent to be received, yet receiving a letter forces the addressee to leave it to be sent and to be read again. Sending and receiving, despite the possibility of chance and regardless of “the skills of whoever's turn it is,” are already included

in each other. That is, before the letter is sent, it, like the one carrying it, must have already arrived at the other end. Similarly, what is received must have already arrived before its arrival. That arrival—ever ready "to come to the riverbank" (as the word "arrive" from *arrîpâre*, "to come to shore," picturesquely suggests)—is here but also not quite yet. In keeping with the principle that defines our postal epoch, we must conclude once more that only the post delivers a post, which, always arriving, makes its way in what proves to be a way of self-encounter. The post opens what it encloses, and it closes what it keeps open. "The post," as Derrida says, "is an epoch of the post."²⁹ It delivers itself to itself, thanks to the post, within the epoch of the post, into which all sending is drawn, if not drowned.

The withdrawal withdraws; it carries itself away. Since the withdrawal carries itself away, what happens with it would seem to add nothing to what was the case before, as what happens no sooner occurs than it is taken away by the *with*, the opposing force, with which the withdrawal moves and removes. *There is* withdrawal; it takes place. But since it goes away just as it comes, the withdrawal gives away nothing and hence appears not to take place. It cannot be said that with withdrawal nothing happens; it should be said that withdrawal leaves "nothing" behind. Leaving nothing behind, it happens, albeit quietly, taking place without making a scene. Against the *with* it carries, the withdrawal contracts, as it were, engulfing itself and engulfed (*abîme*) by itself in such a way that it gives nothing but its own concealment and self-erasure. Erasing itself by itself, the withdrawal re-replaces itself, performing, in keeping with its own nature, a self-cancellation that nonetheless gives: it gives into itself so as to give itself out as a "nothing," a "nothing that is not nothing," as Martin Heidegger says, since it *is* (a) *given*.³⁰ Without changing register, we could say that the withdrawal is strictly *apophatic*: it unsays and says itself away, existing by persisting groundlessly in the immanence of its silent effectivity. Withdrawal thus should be understood as a kind of "active annihilation" that releases the "nothing" it gives in a double movement: it holds back that which, in holding back, happens to give, and it gives, in this giving, by pulling itself back into a self-giving that it cannot hold back. Both passive and transitive, perhaps more passive than passive, and more transitive than transitive, the withdrawal withdraws. Withdrawing, it dispenses, and in dispensing, it also secedes to become, as silence is to speech, its own negative space, a shadow, a dim region in its original kinship with nothingness, within whose contour everything, as Heidegger would say, is illuminated. Thanks to the withdrawal, all sending and receiving are set on their way—given and given to be given again. Like a promise.

If the post is an epoch of the post, into which all sending, as I said, is drawn, it is because the epoch withdraws and must withdraw first. The epoch must withdraw so that the epoch of the post comes to be and sending can begin. At the same time, since what withdraws leaves nothing behind but the traces of its own erasure, the epoch of the post, like the postman, disappears into that which it opens and keeps open. It dispenses a lack, giving a shadow, as I called it, that nonetheless illuminates a region of illumination. It is in this sense, and in this sense only, that the epoch is strictly *absolute*—separate and separated

because loosened and set loose—with regard to the topos it breaks open. And it is in this sense, too, that the topos of the post is also rigorously *topological*, or even *tropological*, in that it carries out all deliveries by a force of its own that is only and purely *formative*. Finally, it is in this sense as well that the postal epoch, I suggest, is not only *religious* (*re-ligiōus*, *re-ligāre*) because, formatively effective with regard to the delivery it performs, it binds again or re-ties everything within its span, but also *catholic* in that, through this *religioun*, it establishes the epoch's absolute universality and universal validity. If the epoch of the post is given, if it is a gift of the withdrawal, it is a gift that one cannot refuse, for it is a gift one must have always and already accepted before anything can be given, before any exchange can take place.

Every epoch defines a "period," marking and making a round of time in which one makes one's way around by turning and returning. An epoch would be nothing, if not one of transition, of moving one thing to its next station and moving itself into another phase, all the while keeping everything that takes place within the limits it sets, within its distinct unity and coherence. If the post is an epoch of the post, the epoch is also the post of the epoch in question. Insofar as it makes sending possible, the epoch likewise gives itself away as a predestinal sending that occurrences of transition and transmission affirm and confirm. Within the epoch of the post, beginnings, ever epiphenomenal, have always and already begun, and endings, if at all, are but promises of beginning, since the epoch, causing the post to turn and to return, has always and already withdrawn into itself as the groundless *origin*, not to say beginning, of sending in general.

One can now see why Derrida says of the post that "there is only but . . . this reproduction of a reproduction," and that this forbids him, the sender, to say anything in confidence, and makes of the receiver, the living and loved one, an *interdiction*. Not only can a letter, once sent, go astray, be waylaid, or be misappropriated in every way, but the very transmission of the message, the successful delivery of the letter, also means scantily more than that it is *sent*; to the extent that it is sent, the letter is in a way already *lost*, lost to the sender, if not yet lost by the postman; and, therefore, that it needs to be *re-sent* time and again, doing so not only in anticipation of the cry, "They have intercepted us," but also to sidestep the risk that it might be misread, or even rejected, by the receiver. The same goes the other way around. What happens in sending happens also to the receiver, who will have known this in time, which is to say, the receiver, like the sender, will never know for sure what exactly is being sent and what is ever received. To send and to receive what the other intends to be shared is as desirable and as proper as it is impossible; it is to "have asked each other the impossible," laments Derrida, "as the impossible, both of us."³¹ In the epoch of the post, every sending happens in this way in principle; in fact, it is *against* principle that it does not succeed in doing so, Popperian test and reliable postal service notwithstanding. For Derrida, this is terrifying. For this is the terrifying law of the post, a law, according to which Derrida and we, who write letters too, speak and speak lawfully of its terrifying effects.

Speaking of the post, I speak necessarily from within the epoch of the post, doing so, as I must, thanks to the withdrawal of the post. And speaking on this basis, I return naturally to what I said earlier: communication is communicative, and it continues. In saying this then and, again, now, I communicate according to the law of the post and attest to the effect and the force of its imperative. Moreover, since my saying follows the imperative in question, this imperative must have spoken first, must have made the demand to be spoken about prior to my saying it. Released by what has already withdrawn and, hence, appearing groundless, this imperative is (to be) its own activity, indistinguishable from the continuing project it projects continuously. In other words, having always and already abandoned itself, as do all imperatives, to what it commands and demands, the imperative of communication is at the same time a fact of communication, a *factum*, on the basis of which it establishes itself as reality, as a prior fact. Ever affirmative, ever performative, the imperative of communication is the communication of this very imperative. Communicating with each other, each obliges the other; obligingly, each communicates with the other. Between the two, the force of communication asserts itself across the *topos* cleared by the withdrawal of the post, wherein the imperative realizes the groundless decision that it is. In this *topos*, the post, having withdrawn, is forced to release in its wake the force given to it by the imperative and, through this force, it keeps afloat the promise delivered by the postman to all, including himself. As a result, as promised, communication continues, as does the imperative, to which its continuation submits.

"Communicate!" says the imperative of communication; it is both a saying and a demand that demands to be said and to be said as a demand. The saying of this demand, or the demand that is thereby said, cannot be contradicted, for in contradicting it, one says it and thus has already responded to the demand that it be said. "Communicate!" speaks before speaking, extending or prolonging itself forcefully while remaining in its place as the same, yet ever renewed, demand. However, since this saying, the saying of this demand, would make no sense and could not be announced unless to someone who already knows how to communicate and is free to continue doing so, the irreducible fact of communication necessarily, all but tautologically, implies the fact of both the sender and receiver as first recipients of the demand, as already freed into the fact of being addressed properly, not only so that the imperative can be announced, but also so that the pronouncement can be enacted with the force of communication. Seen in this light, the "first recipients" of the imperative are never *mere* recipients of messages but, rather, must actively give the imperative to themselves and do so by communicating from the power of the imperative, that is, by way of a free self-address.³² It is by this self-delivery, which translates a groundless sending into a self-fulfilling prophesy, into a speaking before actual speech, that sender and receiver, never alone, and yet autonomous and relative, establish sending and receiving as an irreducible fact or objective reality, establishing it, that is, by freely and jointly making possible the communication of everything communicable, including saying that communication is impossible. To the extent that the imperative of communication must subject itself to the

same imperative to take effect, sender and receiver answer to and thereby affirm the imperative only insofar as they have already responded to the call to partake in the announcement of this imperative.

To communicate, as suggested earlier, is to demand communication. However, since to demand communication, as just suggested too, is a self-directed, automatic, response to a prior call to communicate, to communicate amounts to demanding continuously that *there be* communication; it is, in short, to communicate continuously, to continue communicating. By demand, or more exactly, by a demand that demands itself, communication continues. This is the fundamental *proposition* of communication, an absolute proposition that communicates absolutely in that, demanding itself by responding to its own demand, it knows no opposition and has nothing to oppose. Knowing no opposition and having nothing to oppose, this proposition, we should have no trouble seeing, ultimately says nothing about communication, except that it is taking place and is continued, in a word, is re-promised (*respondēre*) or re-responded. Here, as I speak, I see before me what might be called "the primal scene of communication," the ever-environing and ever-environed topos, in and against which acts of communication, mine first of all, continue in response to their own calls. This topos, this scene, will have been the epoch of communication, an epoch, in which we, simultaneously senders and receivers, find our residence as permanent *skeptics* who, as the word "skeptical" (*skeptikōs*, *skopeîn*, "to consider, to look") suggests, look nonstop and diligently for the proper site of communication's continuing power without ever finding it, and who will keep looking and will keep failing to find any, all the while looking to a promise of communication that promises nothing but the possibility of its own coming.

Being "skeptical," sending and receiving can be read as an exercise of power for the sake of the separation of powers, as reflected in skepticism's most general procedure, the skeptical doubt, be it Pyrrhonian, Cartesian, or otherwise.³³ But, more than that, they are also fundamentally a matter of speaking in multiplicity, of sending multiple meanings in a single speech. To be skeptical is to give more than one, at least two, meaning(s) in the message. If communication is communicative, if it sends a message, this message, skeptical in nature, is accordingly multiple; it is, I argue, always triple, always and already three in one: not only does it say what is being said, namely, the message, its content, and not only does it say, ipso facto, that this *saying* is not just possible but actual and actually proven to be possible, because something is being said here and now, but it also says, more forcefully though obliquely, that *this proof*, the fact that *something has been said herewith* and the fact that *that too* is remarked (though obliquely) here and now and will be remarked again and again as long as anything is (to be) said—all these constitute a message affirming an original, authorless, sending that, sending itself as an imperative of sending, makes any message a message and makes it deliverable in principle, that is, infinitely quotable, repeatable, or sayable, as it speaks of the post that remains unsaid or withdrawn in actual speech. This last message, *wit hina* message, within any message, is at once also the first message, the *archi-message*, as it were, of all communication, a message that the postman delivers to us even before he

shows up in person, a message that must have been delivered before any message can then be delivered, a message, finally, that defines this epoch, in which "I," like everyone else, *am* the epoch's own unbroken promise, its indefatigable messenger.

As the postman withdraws, every sending and receiving is accomplished as promised, that is to say, becomes realizable, if not yet realized. What withdraws gives; however, since it, in giving, holds itself back, that which withdraws returns and releases itself only through a departing that traces the departure, of which, as a result, it is a trace. This trace, which traces and hence is a trace of traces, traces the story of the post, a story in which not only the sayable but also what is foreign to or remains withdrawn in the sayable can be traced, even if not directly constated or clearly heard. If this story can be told as one of Being, as, for example, in Heidegger, or as a fiction of (non)being, as in Derrida, I see no reason why it cannot be read as a story of communication, of how and why we communicate and do so (un)failingly.

Are we not, knowingly or not, telling and retelling this story of the post, of which we are part, whenever we speak or do not (want to) speak? Are we not, knowingly or not, communicating, communing, or coming together only to fall apart so as to start over again? What could the poet possibly have in mind when he says "Man is a sign," if not the understanding that communication makes a man and makes him by unmaking him into what makes him? Communication is communicative, and it continues. Nothing we do or say can stop it; not even silence, not even suicide, not even self-withdrawal, can deny that we are, knowingly or not, "a verbalism without end."³⁴ For, I said earlier and will say here one last time, communication cannot be avoided, if only because the avoidance of communication leaves a void that nonetheless communicates. The promise of communication always communicates what it promises, its promised coming . . . a promise.

What comes, always that which withdraws, must have been set out on its way, to come and also to go away. It is never certain that what is coming also arrives, but it is certain that what is coming, because it is *coming*, must not be here yet. Come what may, the possibility of whatever comes going away belongs to the condition of coming and to that of what comes.³⁵ "Without greeting, without a word, in a going even prior to coming and going," in a silent speech prior to the choice between saying "come" and saying "go," "it is there and gone away."³⁶ Communication comes and continues to come in this way because, given the way it promises to come, regardless of whether one admits seeing it coming or not, it has been coming and has already taken place in and as this coming. It is from within this coming—but also in its going away—that I now speak and have spoken. One always speaks and speaks without the power (not) to do so. So, without stopping, I say "look and see." Look and see the post turning and returning into itself, into the withdrawal at the post's center, into that of which communication, always plastic in form and in substance, is but a continuation of the post. In the end, there is no end. Like a promise—a promise of the post, in this epoch of the post.

Notes

1. Here I wish to point out that the word *this* in the title of this chapter should be taken as the cardinal deictic. Unlike "I," "here," and "now," which can refer to the agent of the speech, and the place and time in which what is said is said, "this" can only refer to itself as word or utterance or event. "This," as Jeffrey Bennington remarks, "might mean just this, itself, its own self," this "this." Bennington, *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London: Verso, 1994), 290. This essay is dedicated to Jacques Derrida in memory of his kindness, encouragement, and the future perfect of his thoughts.
2. I want to say at the outset that my ideas regarding promise and beyond, as I try to put them to work in this essay, are greatly influenced by the writings of Werner Hamacher. On this, see especially the essays collected in his *Premises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), and his "Lingua Amissa," in *Futures of Jacques Derrida* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001). Having said that, I should add that the question of how the condition of sincerity relates to promising is complicated. For the purpose of making my point here, it suffices to say that I hold the more or less classic view, best represented by Paul Grice, that one cannot say insincerely what cannot be said sincerely. This is because, as David M. Rosenthal, explains, "When I speak insincerely, I intend you to take my speech act to be sincere. If it is impossible for tokens of a particular sentence type to be used to perform a sincere illocutionary act, I cannot hope to use such a token to produce in you the right response. Accordingly, I cannot intend to do so. So I cannot use it even to say something insincerely." Rosenthal, *Consciousness and Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101.
3. Hans-Jost Frey, *Interruptions*, trans. Georgia Albert (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 23.
4. On the idea of continuation as used here, see Werner Hamacher, "Ou, séance, touche de Nancy, ici," in *On Jean-Luc Nancy*, ed. Darren Sheppard, Simon Sparks, and Colin Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1997), 38–62.
5. I adopted the idea of "the ancestral" developed by Quentin Meillassoux. See his *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2009), esp. 1–27.
6. Hamacher, "Lingua Amissa," 174.
7. Promising must continue because, as just suggested, it is in principle incomplete, because, as Hamacher puts it, "missing is the truth of promising. If something promises—promises promising and thus promises language," which alone makes it possible, "it is missing. Missing releases the promise from promising, and it alone lets it go out freely." Hamacher, *Premises*, 142.
8. I must add here that the point I am making is already forcefully developed, though from a slightly different angle, by Hamacher in "Lingua Amissa," where he writes, "Communication—and therewith every being-with-another, every being—is a promise" (158), and later on, suggests that "the promise in question here must consequently be thought of first of all as the 'medium of all media.'" (160).
9. See Frey, *Interruptions*, 24.
10. For a nuanced discussion on the variations of performativity, see again, Hamacher, "Lingua Amissa," 163–165.

11. Hamacher, *Premises*, 128.
12. Ibid.
13. Hamacher, "Lingua Amissa," 175.
14. Ibid.
15. Catherine Malabou and Jacques Derrida, trans. David Wills, *Counterpath* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 108. A slightly different translation of the passage, from which the quoted sentence comes, can be found in Jacques Derrida, *Athens, Still Remains*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 27–28.
16. For a detailed discussion on the idea of "post," see Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 1999.
17. Ibid., 10.
18. Epoch, *epochē*, refers to that which releases, to that which makes what is released possible, to a giving that makes what is given possible. This is the idea behind Heidegger's thinking of Being as epochal sending; he writes: "Epoch does not mean here the span of time in occurrence, but rather the fundamental characteristic of sending, the actual holding-back of itself in favor of the discernibility of the gift, that is, of Being with regard to the grounding of beings." Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1972), 9.
19. Malabou and Derrida, *Counterpath*, 108.
20. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 51.
21. Coined by Jacques Lacan from the term "intimacy" (*intimité*), the word *extimité* (extimacy) is meant to suggest that the most intimate in oneself, the Other, is at the same time the most hidden and unknown to oneself. I use it here to mean "externally intimate," "both inside and outside at the same time." For a brief discussion on this idea, see Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimité," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, ed. Mark Bracher, Marshall W. Alcorn Jr., Ronald J. Corthell, and Françoise Massardier-Kenny (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 74–87.
22. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere: On the Raising of the Body* (New York: Fordham University Press), 2008.
23. Ibid., 15.
24. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 65.
25. Ibid., 63.
26. Niklas Luhmann is famously known for saying, "Only communication communicates." This claim, and variations of it, come from his systems theory-based idea of "operational closure," and means something different from what I try to suggest here. See, for example, his "What Is Communication?" in *Theories of Distinction: Redescribing the Descriptions of Modernity*, ed., William Rasch (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 155–168.

27. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 65, emphasis added.
28. Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 92.
29. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 63.
30. See Marlène Zarader, *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 130.
31. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 8.
32. See Peter Fenves, *"Chatter": Language and History in Kierkegaard* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 149.
33. See Odo Marquard, *In Defense of the Accidental* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. chap. 1, 3–7.
34. Wiltold Gombrowicz, *A Guide to Philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 84.
35. Hamacher, *Premises*, 386–387.
36. *Ibid.*, 387.