

Studies in 20th Century Literature

Volume 11
Issue 1 *Special Issue on Walter Benjamin*

Article 7

9-1-1986

Street Talk

Avital Ronell
University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl>



Part of the [French and Francophone Literature Commons](#), and the [German Literature Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Ronell, Avital (1986) "Street Talk," *Studies in 20th Century Literature*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 7.
<https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1192>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in 20th Century Literature* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Street Talk

Abstract

This essay investigates the fragile intersection where rumor and a more "authentic" modality of language can be shown to cross over into one another. Treating the relationship of Benjamin, Heidegger and Rousseau to rumor-logical paranoia, "Street-Talk" interprets the epistemological teetering between the knowing and not-knowing around which *Fama* articulates her power. All three of these thinkers are shown to be exemplarily afflicted by rumorous utterances and share a drive to create, in their works, a rumor control center. Often these controls take over the features which they attempt to disown; thus the greatest moment of truth-telling appropriates the form of inferential small-talk. The essay analyzes a temporality of writing disclosed by Rousseau's *Promenades* in terms of an *après-ma-mort* structure. Finally, guided by Blanchot's insights and Huet's notion of monsterized publicity, the essay addresses the rapport of rumor to oeuvre: *Ecce Fama*.

Keywords

rumor, authentic, language, modality, Benjamin, Heidegger, Rousseau, rumor-logical paranoia, knowing, not-knowing, Fama, truth-telling, small-talk, Promenades, après-ma-mort, structure, Blanchot, Huet, monsterized publicity, Ecce Fama

STREET-TALK

AVITAL RONELL

University of California, Berkeley

The SECOND PART of *HENRY IV.*

ACT I.

INTRODUCTION.

Enter RUMOUR, painted full of Tongues.

Open your ears: for which of you will stop
The vent of hearing, when loud *Rumour* speaks?
I, from the orient to the drooping west
Making the wind my post-horse, still unfold
The acts commenced on this ball of earth.
Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,
The which in every language I pronounce,
Stuffing the ears of men with false reports:
I speak of peace, while covert enmity
Under the smile of safety, wounds the world:
And who but *Rumour*, who but only I,
Make fearful musters and prepar'd defence,
Whilst the big year, swoln with some other griefs,
Is thought with child by the stern tyrant war,
And no such matter? . . .

HEIDEGGER: Das ist eine Verleumdung.

SPIEGEL: Und es gibt auch keinen Brief, in der dieses Verbot gegen Hussler ausgesprochen wird? Wie wohl ist dieses Gerücht wohl aufgekomen?

HEIDEGGER: Weiss ich auch nicht, ich finde dafür keine Erklärung. Die Unmöglichkeit dieser ganzen Sache kann ich Ihnen dadurch demonstrieren, was auch nicht bekannt ist. . . .

HEIDEGGER: That's slander.

SPIEGEL: And there is no letter in which such a prohibition is recorded? How did **the rumor** come about?

HEIDEGGER: It's beyond me. I've no explanation for it. I can show you the unlikelihood of the accusation. . . .¹

I. "I am dead; thou liv'st: report me and my cause aright." (Hamlet)

What does it mean to begin an essay on Benjamin by quoting Heidegger? Not just Heidegger whose proper name resonates imperial dignity, but the Heidegger cited above (the interview appeared when Heidegger was no longer here)—to borrow a subtitled phrase from Nietzsche, the Heidegger "for everyone and no one," the philosopher who put himself into circulation after his death.² Part of his destinal mark was to have been made in a newspaper article, the space of Gerede's loudspeaker. It is beyond Heidegger, the speaker is quoted as saying. We all know what "the rumor" concerns. Its epistemological authority is such that no further naming is necessary in order to establish a sound referential ground. In a gesture that rumorological paranoia exacts, the subject will want to settle his debt with rumor in a structure of "after-my-death," in the very fragile place where rumor encounters itself, the supplementary issue, in this case, the *Spiegel*; to quell "the rumor" in a weekly journal. Is there something perturbing about the philosopher's explication with a forum of public opinion, has Heidegger wanted to bequeath his most urgently authenticated confession to a discourse of Gerede—in other words is Heidegger's final word, made to be articulated after his death, a stroke against his philosophy, a woundingly ironic utterance made against the grain of his thinking (what does it mean for a Heidegger to tell the truth in a newspaper?), or will his afterworldly in-the-world discourse force a rethinking of language's housing projects?

What does it mean to begin an essay on Benjamin by citing Heidegger? Hannah Arendt ends her essay by citing Heidegger, by calling him into the room where he might meet Benjamin: "Without realizing it, Benjamin actually had more in common with Heidegger's remarkable sense. . . ."³ This, however, is a different Heidegger, a different meeting place, scheduled according to an entirely different agenda. Nonetheless, the articulation of the rumorous space in which a rendezvous between Heidegger and Benjamin can take place—this making room for a double occupancy of thinking's imaginary occurs in Arendt's text, in just about any work that claims to perform "introductions" for Benjamin. Let me introduce you: this used to be an axiomatic moment on the path that led to Benjamin. At the time they could not say I've heard so much about you; in fact they had heard very little about Benjamin. Thus the first word of Arendt's introduction is "Fama"—rumor's proper name.

We are already deep within Benjamin's "Destructive Character," a small passage in which he introduces a certain rapport of rumor to suicide; we are at the intersection "between the public and private zones that commingle demonically in prattle,"⁴ as Benjamin puts it in another context. In other words—and we shall speak only of other words—we want to address precisely that place which puts Benjamin and Heidegger into circulation within one another—the "cardiac strength" according to which Benjamin paced himself and all urgent writing. A circulation which would not be limited to a body whose "remotest limbs" would be infused with writing's bloodlines, but which would be extended to the circulation of a newspaper and most pressingly into street circulation, whether that street be conceived in terms of a path, aporetic or not, one-way or a dead end, cut off from itself or even the U-turn where the troping *methodos* carries with it very specific sounds, as both Heidegger and Benjamin were to remind us. There is a certain circulation, therefore, an automobility that was brought to a screeching halt and at the primary register of pure, that is to say, contaminated noise. Benjamin will begin his enigmatic essay on Karl Kraus and journalism, taking us through dense passages of *Verkehr* (where prostitution and language traffic), starting up an enigma on a modality of *fama*, toward which we shall want to turn (I am already setting the blinkers, the blinkers of the last man; Benjamin has a fantasy of being dragged through the streets of America as the "last European"): "How noisy everything grows." And Heidegger gives a sense of noise as he starts his cars all along his roadways, there are so many cars, autos that blink as emblems of a false semiotics, motorcycles parked in the spaces provided by the German university, and a certain origin of sound ascribable to the different registers of street noise which permit us to hear, almost equiprimordially, the difference in the noises produced by a Mercedes and a Volkswagen—as usual, a difference between high and low gears, emissions from big cars and talk, small talk, vehicles of the people.⁵ In Heidegger and Benjamin, then, a problematics of sonic transmission, a thinker's ear pierced by gutter noises which, however, will become ineluctably linked to the very possibility of their *oeuvre*. A writing fundamentally attended by walking against the wind of Gerede, by getting out of the car and walking toward another set of transmission problems, another topography of circulation: "it is attained chiefly by the cardiac strength of great thoughts, which drives the blood of language through the capillaries of syntax into the remotest limbs" (*Reflections*,

p. 261). As if one could jog across a frontier without losing heart.

Benjamin, we are told in another introduction to his work, needed to be rescued as recently as 1968 from "near oblivion." It was a matter of "transforming what had been . . . a rumor among the *cognoscenti*" (*Reflections*, p. vii). In the way it goes to meet Benjamin, rumor is not merely a thematic internal to his writings, but appears rather to have a decisive rapport to an "after-my death" discourse which still needs to be understood. Within a simple polarity one would be justified in thinking that while Heidegger's text is threatened by the power of a kind of counter-text, rumor, Benjamin's existence as text depends on this same power. One would expect the polarity to respect its poling propensity, to establish a sound border that would place Benjamin on the other side of Heidegger, the one posthumously sustained by rumor's decisive turn, the other run down by "the rumor" launched against him to which he can only respond in kind, according to a rumorous logic that originates in the absence of the subject, in a journal. Certainly, the melancholic thinking that goes to meet Benjamin's end cannot take place without seriously interviewing rumor's winds.

These winds, however, do not blow the superficial traces of rumor aside in order to uncover some firmer ground of language. Nor do they appear to blow Heidegger and Benjamin apart, to have them occupy two sides of a borderline: "You look and cross over the line; I look first only at the line you present" (*Zur Seinsfrage*).⁶ No. In fact, when Heidegger himself writes of the locality of *Denken* and *Dichten* in "Über die Linie," when he writes that "we can only prepare for dwelling in a locality by building," he first asserts that such "building must be content with constructing the *road* which leads into the locality of the restoration of metaphysics and thereby permits a walk through the destined phase of an overcoming of nihilism" (*Question*, p. 41). Without entering the question of a reactive restoration, an active or re-active nihilism and the *Auseinandersetzung* which Heidegger conducts with Ernst Jünger, what bears pointing out concerns the inversion Heidegger is about to perform on what might have been understood in his thinking in terms of a derived classical opposition entailing authentic and inauthentic speech, manifest moments in *Rede* and *Gerede*. What needs pointing out is the outward turn of thinking's inwardness, the locality it conceives for itself, constructing a space of public or publicity with which Heidegger elsewhere deals in different terms, apropos of Nietzsche, but which here places his thinking on a broadcasting summit shown to be vulnerable to the

winds while it also furnishes the originating point of rumorously diffusion. Heidegger has just inflected his open letter (already a thing which is not quite a letter nor entirely open like a switched on radio)—his letter has just folded in on “the erection of the house of God,” on the *road*, metaphysics, nihilism, the destined phase. These are not simply fillers, though a Nietzsche might be tempted to argue otherwise. Heidegger continues, giving his thinking another fold: “Whoever dares to say such things, and what is more, in writing which is open to the public [und gar in öffentlicher Schrift], knows only too well how prematurely [übereilt] and easily these words, which would only like to induce some reflection, are only shut off as murky rumblings [Raunen, also “rumors”] or are rejected as arbitrary pronouncements. Regardless of this, one who is on the learn must think of testing the language of reflective thinking [die Sage des andenkenden Denkens] in a more original and more careful manner” (*Question*, p. 105; translation modified). Heidegger goes on to encourage the memory of Hölderlin’s words in “Brod und Wein” evoking the words which “originate like flowers.” But this disjunctive origination (*ent-stehen*)⁷ stimulates a tension between the aforesaid and the power or prejudice of Hölderlin’s proper name, creating in turn a kind of strategic enervation. (Benjamin has introduced the “rights of nerves” as a principle of reading and valuation in his essay on Karl Kraus: “He found that [the nerves] were just as worthy an object of impassioned defense as were property, house and home, party, and constitution. He became an advocate of the nerves . . .” [*Reflections*, p. 247].) Participating in a kind of circulation, our cruising has brought us to a nerve center, an intersection of modes of origination or ingathering that a nervous reading would have to agree is pinched, congested. Which suggests that a careful kind of acupressure needs to be applied here, if not to relieve the tension then at least to understand its knottiness.

Heidegger tells us, without dwelling on the point, that rumor is essentially related to the most daring thinking. Or rather, a daring writing enjoys a relationship of enslavement to something like rumor, utterance’s murky rumbling. Rumor would not be reducible to some sort of external envelope that can be taken off, put on or thrown aside like clothing. On the contrary, these words, composing the most daring thinking, can be shut down “easily” because they provoke a recognition in them of rumor. To the extent that the borderline trait which could prevent rumor and thinking from crisscrossing does not possess a fixed value or stabilizing power, authentic language cannot

be sheltered from a reading that will take the word of being from something else, where the disclosure of being can be made to seem interchangeable with rumor. These words are therefore shut off, pushed down, quelled: *abgestellt*. Heidegger does not say that this exchangeability of thinking for rumor takes place only in print or in a thinking that becomes public. He begins to establish this simulacrum by circumscribing the subject from whom the daring word emerges: "the one who dares such a word [Wer ein solches Wort wagt]." Only then does he qualify, append "and what is more, in writing which is open to the public [und gar in öffentlicher Schrift]." More clearly, then, writing that is open, is fundamentally open to rumor. But already the dared word, in its anteriority, has been open to rumor which acts as the horizon to all language testing. While still under the shadow of negativity, rumor nonetheless acts as the enabler, the ground and horizon for the founding of a "more original and more careful thinking."

In the work we are reading, Heidegger questions a hermeneutico-medical interpretation of madness that claims to be more than a punctuation mark to thinking (in *Was heisst denken?* he also disputes prescriptive explications of madness). Heidegger evokes the name of madness' silence, the place of a production of unmeant knowledge, when naming Hölderlin, as if by some radically double gesture, where words originate as rooted flowers, Hölderlin could offer a cover or grounding closure. In any case, Heidegger here staples Hölderlin's name to a fleeting reflection on *oeuvre* as rumor, guaranteeing, it would seem, a language that cannot be made susceptible to shut down—as if the name of the one who was to be solemnly shut up for forty years could ensure a safe passage of the most daring word beyond the confines of rumor's domain.

The threat of shutdown contained within this open letter as the possibility of self-sealing appears to be lifted at the end of the missive, prior to the moment he signs with customary heartfelt wishes, "I send you my hearty greetings [Ich grüsse Sie herzlich]." The "I" is mediated in such a way that the rumorously run of his thinking promises to be circumvented; he puts his thinking into another circulatory track, the one named and performed by Goethe. The letter will be closed on Goethe, a closing place (*Erörterung*) that leaves no history of loose ends, a loss of end:

How it would be like, however, to cultivate reflection and discussion [Besinnung und Erörterung], Goethe says in the statement with which I should like to close this letter:

“If anyone regards words and expressions as sacred testimonials and does not put them, like currency and paper money, into quick and immediate circulation [Verkehr], but wants to see them exchanged in the intellectual trade and barter as true equivalents, then one cannot blame him if he draws attention to the fact that traditional expressions, at which no one any longer takes offense, nevertheless exert a damaging influence, confuse opinions, distort understanding, and give entire fields of subject matter a false direction.”

I send you my hearty greetings.

Multiple addresses, constructions of multilayered containments guided by a double economy of *Verkehr*: Goethe closing Heidegger’s letter on a currency that imprints its stamp on current opinion, a current of thought which overruns a language of undistortion, words: these sacred testimonials. What does it mean to sign with Goethe, what kind of traffic control is implied by the intersection of an I, Heidegger, I, Goethe? For Benjamin, signing with Goethe meant another end to his career, a collision discourse blocked by the institution of Goethe scholarship, the opening of rumorological fury that aimed to keep him in his place, that is, out of place. It is too soon to determine what signing with Goethe means for Heidegger. We can only gather from the end of a text seeking immunization from rumor—a reproach made by Heidegger to Jünger targets his medicalization of thinking, particularly in his *On Pain* work. The issue, therefore, cannot lead to a comparative literature of thinking. Benjamin’s Goethe needs to be perverted within the question of a difficult Elective Affinity so that the naming of an *Erörterung*, a place of rendezvous for Benjamin and Heidegger, can still take place. Benjamin went into hiding. A pseudonym, the final last name he chose for himself was Holz. Thus, like the eponymous hero of “The Destructive Character,” “he always positions himself at crossroads,” *Holzwege*. In a moment we shall discover how the destructive character carves a rumor into Holz, onto the wood or Benjamin’s other dwelling place, the name meant to protect his clandestinity.

At the crossroads between a certain type of journalism and itself, Benjamin began an essay entitled “Karl Kraus” with a quotation: “How noisy everything grows [Wie laut wird alles].” Here begins the

name engraving, in a complex materiality where rumor is coconstitutive with disease, where the temporality of spreading cannot be assigned to the one over the other, in a kind of war-text whose noises have not stopped becoming.⁸ "In old engravings," begins Benjamin, "there is a messenger who rushes toward us screaming, 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 of fire and flood, spreading everywhere the 'latest news.' News in this sense, in the sense the word has in Shakespeare, is disseminated by *Die Fackel* [The Torch]" (*Reflections*, p. 239). News in this sense, what Benjamin calls in Shakespeare's sense, is the rumor. He does not merely say "news" but something like "times": *Zeitung*. The times in this sense, the temporality of this sense, resides within a notion of uncontrolled spreading, carried by a tortured messenger whose speech is a crying one, pointing to the subtitle of his horror, a kind of horror from above to which his hair points. A punk messenger of old engravings who, set in motion, as a pointer, blinks toward the direction of writing which carries war and other cries, his screams being dictaphoned somehow by the inserted cries of murder and pain, spreading everywhere. This is not exactly the same cry as Heidegger's *Schreiben/Schrei*, the *cri/ecrit* of Nietzsche but it's not that remote either because whoever implants the instrument of messenger within his body, whoever turns himself into a running transmitter of a brandished sheet of paper, crying aloud, his hair on end—our end, as the end of the antenna, pointing and blinking; whoever will have said I am the messenger will have had to traverse the place where Benjamin stopped running, in Nietzsche, in Heidegger, in their rumorously rapport to the War. Perhaps some will be astonished by the fact that Nietzsche (and Heine, said to be a paternal ancestor of Benjamin) are situated in the place reserved for "hack journalists": "The hack journalist is in his heart at one with the ornamentalist. Kraus did not tire of denouncing Heine as an ornamentalist, as one who blurred the boundary between journalism and literature . . . indeed, he later placed even Nietzsche beside Heine as the betrayer of aphorism to the impression" (*Reflections*, p. 241). This is precisely the type of reading Heidegger tries to divert in his work on Nietzsche, one that appears to be inextricable, however, from the *Zeitung* of rumor. This quickly becomes clear in the rescue missions he performs on behalf of Zarathustra, leading us from temptation (whose temptation one is

tempted to ask?) thus: "The temptation to take the thought of the eternal return merely as something obvious, to take it therefore at bottom as either contemptible mumbling or fascinating chatter is overcome [oder aber wie ein blendendes Gerede, ist überwunden]."9 Or to stay with the cries of the messenger, with screams whose vocal cords appear to be the hairs, in *Was heisst denken?* Heidegger's construction of a rumor control center goes in this direction:

But riddle upon riddle! What was once the scream "The Wasteland grows . . .," now threatens to turn into chatter. The threat of this perversion is part of what gives us food for thought. The threat is that perhaps the most thoughtful thought will today, and still more tomorrow will become suddenly [über Nacht] no more than a platitude, and as platitude, spread and circulate. This fashion of talking platitudes is at work in that endless profusion of books describing the state of the world today. They describe what by its nature is indescribable, because it lends itself to being thought about only in a thinking that is a kind of appeal, a call—and therefore must at times become a scream.¹⁰

Riddle upon riddle, Benjamin's messenger might be Nietzsche, "Nietzsche, most quiet and shiest of men, knew of this necessity. He endured the agony of having to scream (*What Is Called Thinking?*, p. 48). From where does the scream emanate within an understanding of post-Laokoonian speech acting? Does it arrive in that non-rhetorical moment which hesitates between the fall (into chatter) and the lofty transagony of lucidity's knowledge? And what renders Nietzsche, in Heidegger as in Benjamin, so vulnerable to falling at the border between small talking and big thought?¹¹ Can some sort of public opinion settle the issue, for instance, the disputable *sensus communis* of Kant? Who negotiates what stays clear of idle chatter? And how to put a contract out on that which threatens Nietzsche's commanding voice, "the threat of this perversion"? Perhaps more imposingly, how can the thought of the eternal return be taken for chatter? Is it not the case that the eternal return could be shown to be a rumor, launched by Nietzsche as the thought of his thought but never articulated or demonstrated philosophically, only pointed to by the innuendo of Zarathustra and his animals, his readers?¹² And what if Being were itself a rumor, the murky rumbling

of an unheard of ontology? The answers can be shown merely to reside in the form of these questions, whose constructions are only partially complete, hardly posed correctly or on reliably firm ground.

The question needs to be asked again. It wants to be asked, but not begged, in terms of the special architectonics put together by Benjamin and Heidegger in a shared residency of Denken Bauen Wohnen. Like many works of this era, housing projects were projected in the main for language-tenants. A crucial theorem of Freud's "Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis" (1909), no less than the epistemophilic instinct, is explained by means of houses which in America are *translated* or transported in their entirety from one site to another.¹³ Benjamin cites a new type of house in order to inspect a breakdown between public and private discourses, houses similar to those that can now be viewed in Southern California, with large curtainless windows into which you can look, if you want, and see a man walking around in his underwear, beer at hand, the television on, doubling public diffusion in the radical translucency of a private space, the television communicating with the window, the outside looking inside, at the television, for the outside, all these broadcasting systems turned on, and no one is really supposed to be looking. Benjamin recalls "the political radioscopy of sexuality and family, of economic and physical existence, in a society that is in the process of building houses with glass walls, and patios extending far into the drawing rooms that are no longer drawing rooms . . . in other words, private life that is dismantling itself, openly shaping itself" (*Reflections*, p. 247). It is as if the House of Being were opening itself up to expose the fragility of its containment, where interior decorating can no longer feel secure about itself, anxiously rearranging the site of language according to the decoration of exteriority, the ornamentalism of a Nietzsche whose drawing room has been drawn out toward a televisibility where the noise, the static, still grows. How fragile a *Gestell* keeps this household what it seems to be becomes discernible in "The Destructive Character," on the way to a language which is always out of the way, drifting, rubbing over the scratch that separates the creator from the destroyer. For "the destructive character knows only one watchword: make room; only one activity: clearing away [Der destruktive Charakter kennt nur eine Parole: Platz schaffen; nur eine Tätigkeit: räumen]." Like Nietzsche, "his need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred."¹⁴ Clearing away the laboriously plotted tracks of our own age, the destructive character

(henceforth, "DC") is a device whose transmissions need ears that hear, he needs public ears: "Just as the creator seeks solitude, the destroyer must be constantly surrounded by people, witnesses to his efficacy. . . . The DC is a signal. Just as a trigonometric sign is exposed on all sides to the wind, so is he to rumor. To protect him from it is pointless." The DC is a marker in the semiology of landsurveying. He or it signals the site prior to the building of any house. As signal for what is to become, as trigonometric character, he is at once private, solitary and open on all sides to the winds of rumor. He is a signal of what is to become if rumor does not topple him. He has witnesses.

As a signal, however, the DC does not need to be understood. He is hardened into the position, opened by Nietzsche, from which misunderstanding has become a philosophically rigorous way to thinking: "The DC has no interest in being understood. Attempts in this direction he regards as superficial. Being misunderstood cannot harm him. On the contrary, he provokes it, just as oracles, those destructive institutions of the state, provoked it." Benjamin now suggests a distinction to be drawn between rumor and gossip, *Gerede* and *Klatsch* of which we could say quickly that rumor belongs to the ec-static while gossip has something to do with assuring a community's stasis: "The most petit bourgeois of all phenomena, gossip comes about only because people do not wish to be misunderstood. The DC tolerates misunderstanding; he does not promote gossip." Gossip, therefore, is essentially linked to the practice of literary criticism.

The DC knows only the *Parole*; no vision guides his movement, as the English translation has put it, or rather no image controls his deed, "dem destruktiven Charakter schwebt kein Bild vor." The cards are stacked against visual representation, DC responds to and is tele-commanded by sounds, not by any concept of television (in this sense, DC still belongs to the domain of the Old Testament, the witnessing text that proceeds by modes of aural ingestion, no new vision before the era of video tapes of flesh-words). "But we shall never find Superman," writes Heidegger, "as long as we look for him in the places of remote controlled opinion and on the stock exchanges of the culture business—all those places where the last man, and none but he, controls the operation."¹⁵ The Overman will not appear in a space that is not distilled by rumor—the stock exchange, itself an engine fueled by rumor, goes up and down the corridors of speculation, determining valuations. The Overman will not compete with remote control

systems of public circulation. Heidegger bets on this. "The Overman's appearance is likewise inaccessible to the teletypers and radio dispatches of the press which present—that is, represent—events to the public before they happen." The press runs ahead of the times, creating events prior to their taking place, announcing through megaphones, constituting thereby the event, or at any rate the advent of event. But does this not correspond precisely to Zarathustra's calling? To announce, as absolute newscaster, this is Zarathustra's desire. He repeatedly notes that some have not heard the news, the news that God is dead, for instance, or the end of man. Is not Zarathustra another of Benjamin's messengers, running ahead of the teleprinter, reading out the news aloud? Is this not the mark of an event's eventness which asserts its ontological priority as that which is constituted in and by language? But "this well made-up and well staged manner of forming ideas, of representation, with its constantly more refined mechanism, dissimulates what *is*. . . . The Johnny on the spot, in every area including the literature industry, is the famous 'man in the street,' always available in the required quantities. Faced with this dissimulating type of representational ideas, thinking finds itself in a contradictory position."¹⁶ This Heidegger saw clearly: "This Nietzsche saw clearly." Johnny Heidegger is on the spot.

I would like to stay with this contradiction; it forces us to see double (it places "das Denken in einer zwiespältigen Lage"), perhaps, indeed, inducing a double clarity. I would like to stay with it, walk its path, but not in order to seek a tunnel vision; to understand, rather, this clear vision that arises from loud-growing noises, for the last man blinks, as we might say of a television on the blink.

I think they all wore or needed to wear glasses. The frame that holds glasses together belongs no doubt to the most fragile of all *Gestell*.

II. "Paris taught me the art of straying" (W. B.)

Benjamin's DC has a capacity for opening a special kind of glance whose description in fact commences the piece. This glance is attributable to anyone: "it could happen to someone looking back over his life [Es könnte einem geschehn, dass er, beim Rückblick auf sein Leben]." The *Rückblick*, takes place as a stumble improving upon vision:

It could happen to someone looking back over his life that he

realized that almost all the deeper obligations he had endured in its course originated in people on whose "destructive character" everyone was agreed. He would stumble on this fact one day, perhaps by chance, and the heavier blow it deals him, the better are his chances of picturing the destructive character.

The vision has improved within this opening paragraph, the picturing has become clearer. The first mention of the DC was framed by quotation marks. What was Benjamin quoting? We know he had a weakness for quotation; he boasted that his *Trauerspiel* work was composed of over six hundred of these. He would collect quotations, insert them here or there, pick them up, take them home with him, discovering their solicitations on the reading boulevards, caring for them. The relationship of rumor to quotation still needs to be grasped, indicating a bent for the nakedness of the cited recited pick-up phrase ("I heard that so-and-so . . ."). She might be taken in provisionally, if only to be turned out again, to follow the course of an anonymus flânerie. Or she may be a pick up the way *Aufhebung* lets itself be picked up, kept. But before "destructive character" has assumed the chances of the DC, engaging perhaps a bit more than a chance encounter upon which one stumbles, one can formulate the reasonable assumption that "destructive character," as quotation, appears to recapitulate the title—or does it rather suggest an anonymous source, the man on the street talk? Between the title as inaugural gesture and the man on the street, another reference and value insinuates itself, the directionals point to another mention. In other words, the instituting gesture of the man on the street bears a name whose history in fact thematizes the loss of name as he stumbles, being made to stumble by the DC. This occurs at crossroads. The immemorial stumble takes place, like that of "the destructive character," toppling an ordinary man on the street whose arrival argues for a translation of "Johnny"—which, strictly speaking, is Jacques; however, all bases of displacement are covered by this man who, discarding his patronym, loses only what has been already discarded. The text which dramatizes becoming-the-man, the muffled speaker of the street *epistémé*, announces itself like the teletypers, like the Heidegger who spoke through his *Spiegel* years before the occurrence of his death (which he began to do, prior to the interview, as an open letter to the press), like "The Destructive Character" that begins on the *Rückblick*, happening "to someone looking back over his life," in a supplementary exit-text,

circumscribable as the after-autobiographical walk taken by Jean-Jacques in the *Promenades*. This takes place at the crossroads destined to hold a meeting between Heidegger and Benjamin. The meeting was to have been recorded, I am told, in the work never yet written by Benjamin, his work on the Paris streets, the Arcades for which the trigonometric sign still stands, rumor blown, the *Passagenarbeit*.

While Benjamin's "Destructive Character," "Karl Kraus" and other characters, ciphers or signals will have shown rumor to emerge, possibly against their own winds, like a dialect of the *oeuvre*; and while Heidegger has signed a contract with Gerede for the purpose of disseminating a final transmission whose status, or even transmissibility, remains difficult to discern or to unscramble in its at-handedness, the out-of-hand rumor first slipped into the microphones of public broadcasting with Rousseau. They slipped, they literally fell into chatter at a moment of finality's crisis, recorded in the supplementary exit-text (like the black box that remains after a crash) "beim Rückblick auf sein Leben," within the impossible U-turn of an "after-my-death" report. There has been something of a *logos-athleticus* at play here, something requiring an interview after having reached the finish-line of thought. In short, and in order to start from scratch, as did Roman athletes—they would start their sprint from a scratch etched into a path—one may begin to wonder whether all great competitions and events of moment do not require the establishment of some sort of rumor control axis. Thus in the recent Los Angeles Olympics (1984), the existence of a Rumor Control Center was broadcast widely. The center presumably was intended to monitor and absorb straying utterances, stray shots. This brings us to the paths leading into Rousseau's decathlon, his ten walks and diverse athletic events in which, like Benjamin and Heidegger, he tries to establish a rumor control center in an attempt to disarm the stray utterances that pierce his corpus, or fall within earshot. Jean-Jacques will be placed in this reading, then, as trigonometric signal, the street sign pointing toward a construction site for future *oeuvre*-shelters. When rumors affecting his standing are not noticeably stray but in some sinister way appear to be motivated, they are shown to reach Rousseau's ear via what is called the "grapevine"—a method of transmission whose origins are in the Civil War, but which extends toward all wars and pestilence, designating in the first place an alternate telegraph system

or secret coding. A *civil* war, as it were, conducted through language ducts.

In the war zone, where one cannot escape situating the texts under discussion, a variety of speech act continues to wage battle. Traced out in its occurrence, it turns out that we have stumbled into a twilight zone between knowing and not knowing, a space where utterances ("as well Publick as Private")¹⁷ create myths whose transmissions are primarily oral. They operate according to a logic of contagion, communicating, like certain diseases, a kind of uncontrollable proliferation that essentially escapes a literature and, leaking, they often taint the proper name. These utterances are not imputable to a knowable origin ("Heidegger: It's beyond me"); they rarely come with an identifiable creator or signator, and yet, they are invoked in the guise of a revealed truth. A variety of speech act that is, like Benjamin's messenger, essentially on the run, it exists in the mode of a hit-and-run temporality, coming like a sudden accident, from nowhere. As with the figures who are struck by it, or in this account, who will stand for it—Rousseau, Benjamin and Heidegger—the rumor will never have suffered the purity of discourse's absolute alien. Instead, it retains a mark of belonging which articulates the pain of a felt exile.

If one should arrive at the man in the street via Jean-Jacques, this is for several reasons, and largely in order to sustain the notion of a bad or faltering text. As it happens, scenes of physical deterioration and self-mutilation abound in Rousseau's *Promenades*. In step with the event of an out-of-hand rumor, his writing hand is permanently deformed as a result of an accident he describes in great detail. And the encyclopedia of batterings which he unfolds remains in step with the drastic *telos* of his project. Rousseau projects his text, or walks it, he writes, "to contemplate myself before my decline," "I am devoting my last days to studying myself," "when death is already at the door" and "all you have to consider then is how to make your exit. If an old man has something to learn it is the art of dying."¹⁸ We have been asking what it means to write at the point of decline. How to get up and walk or stagger to the end without losing heart, and to extend one's language beyond the finish line as do all DCs. On the one hand, the mutilated one, it means that Rousseau does not want to be buried alive: "Could I suppose . . . that an entire generation would of one accord take pleasure in burying me alive?" On the other hand, to write

on the decline means to maintain a vertical stance, to keep from falling while writing to the end of a *curriculum vitae*. (Within the verticality of his walk, Rousseau employs a *methodos* or path that is opened by the question of self-knowledge, one which ever since Oedipus, however, has been associated with an impeded movement. The desire to know has been linked to a type of walk, "La Verité en Marche."¹⁹

The writing, or walking, susceptible to mutilation occupy the opening pages of the *Promenades*, turning us toward a reading whose partial alienation from the discourses of literature and philosophy still raises questions. In a text that convulses with attempts to define beatitude, circumscribing its locus in a benevolent immunized zone—"me voici donc seul"—what does Rousseau perceive as the agent of decline? A response to this question requires us to inquire about the oral trace responsible for an alternate discourse grounded, in Paul de Man's words, in "hypothetical inferences that cannot be verified."²⁰ For Rousseau, these inferences communicate from one orifice to another, from the mouth to the ear, which are thematically inflected as carriers of poisonous utterances. In other words, he writes of a language that, having no original taking-place, occurs on unauthorized epistemological grounds where it is armed with the power to kill. Trained as a double projectile, at once confidential and unrepeatable ("Don't repeat this to anyone, but I heard . . ."), this language is always oriented toward the future of its repetition, always on the make.

Rumors are in the air; they fly. They are often designated as something going around, essentially coming from a secret source, from a nowhere that is beyond me. They are spoken into ears that function like loudspeakers. The ear canal, like institutional corridors or political vestibules, is traversed by rumors. In so far as the rumor arrives from nowhere it would be useful to recall Benjamin's undisclosed sense of Shakespeare's sense of news. To this end, let us recall Shakespeare's great rumor-text whose nervous unfolding and semiotic restlessness can guide our reading. Very briefly, and on the run, *Hamlet* is organized around a concept of a nothing and nowhere that speaks. The sense of drama and the source of information it gives about itself issue from a form of nothing: it can be said to be narrated from two sources, both being like Heidegger's teletypists at a remove from the events which they nonetheless convey. The first anchor man is Horatio who, in order to situate the other source, puts his mouth to the sentry's ear and begins, "as the whisper goes." The other source,

as origin of all rumors, is the ghost of course. The phantom utterance itself originates from something that resembles the transmission of a rumor-text. For we must not forget that Hamlet's father died of a poison that was poured into his ear, and the whole drama recycles this poison, from mouth to ear in a great ring of espionage and infection (separated, like Polonius, only by a curtained membrane). Infecting and paralyzing everybody, including the body politic, rumor, whose only paternity is the ghost of paternity ("Heidegger: It's beyond me"), is the very thing that Hamlet wants confirmed. And so the ghost transmits a poisoned paternity to which every ear is open.

It has fallen to the Benjaminian stray-thinking to point out a kind of homonymic effect connecting Hamlet's predicament with that of Rousseau. Quite apart from being pursued by the ghost of paternity, Rousseau is likewise pursued quite literally and run down in the *Second Walk* by a figure whom he calls the "great Dane"—who, on a certain level of fantasmatic transmission, therefore, can be only Hamlet. Be that as it may, Rousseau is brutally pursued by utterances that fly at him wherever he steps in the double hermeneutics of the *Promenades*, double because this work is concerned with the intersecting marks of public and private discourses. One of the most pressing desires he asserts consists in putting a stop sign before the proliferant effects of the public circulation, to contain it; that is, he wants to create a space where so-called internal, formal, private structures of a literary language control external, referential and public effects:²¹ a rumor control center. Regardless of the "type" of discourse one engages, however—autobiographical, philosophical, political—the rumor traversing the text is reported always to be foreign to it. In a scene that underscores the structuration of this foreign species of utterance over which Rousseau can exercise little control, he suddenly attains a moment of quietude. Strangely enough, the scene of asserted beatitude takes place in the *Fifth Walk*, but it is not centered on the famous boat of plenitude; in fact I would suggest that the boat-scene which tradition considers as the place of greatest self-gathering has displaced or submerged the moment in which Rousseau, in complete good faith, can call himself a founding father. And so the priority, the "great day" of mastery which as such launches the boat, goes to the event in the *Fifth Walk* when Rousseau becomes the founding father, the sovereign subject behind a rabbit colony. The questions that have caused him some anxiety—those of paternity and posterity, of transmitting to a future, the wild prolifera-

tion of another species and the hope of containment—are generously raised in this densely compacted passage: “The founding of this colony was a great day,” writes Rousseau. The rabbits, like the rumor, “could multiply there in peace.” But unlike the rumor they could multiply, as he writes, “without harming anything.” “We proceeded in great ceremony to install them on the little island where they were *beginning to breed before my departure*” (emphasis added). “The founding of this little colony was a great day. The pilot of the Argonauts was not prouder than I was, when I led the company and the rabbits triumphantly,” etc. And now Rousseau, triumphant, as he says, takes command of his society, supplying the antidote to all phobic reactions: “and I was gratified to see that the Steward’s wife, who was extremely afraid of water and could not step into a boat without feeling unwell, embarked confidently under my command.” They were beginning to breed before my departure, writes Rousseau. But to discover the precise contours of this phenomenon, he must cruise the streets.

Because time may be running short, I step up the pace in order to join the rumor that has been running down Rousseau. For the rumor, as Rousseau teaches us exemplarily, loses no time: it belongs to the *Zeitung*. This is his final Olympiad, Rousseau keeps on walking but finds himself always to be lagging behind the speed of the rumor, “les bruits qui courent,” which overtake him. The price to be paid for this lag involves his phantasm of being buried alive: long after his *Confessions* something exceeds their intended totality where he thought he had told all, “tout entier au publique,” “incéssamment sous ses yeux.” The rumor usurps from Jean-Jacques the privilege of showing and telling.

The Second Walk establishes a pace within which Rousseau keeps on succumbing to lapses and collapses. His lapse in memory, which includes the forgetting of his address and name, is an effect of his fall. This is where he becomes the man on the street. In fact his address and proper name are intercepted by a foreign species (arguably Germanic)—promoting a structure that will be immediately doubled in his treatment of the rumor. One recalls the misfortune that befell him, an accident which disrupts the very possibility of liquid *rêverie*: “the flow of my rêveries was suddenly interrupted by the event which I must now relate,” an event that begins as he walks downhill, confidently poised within the movement of his decline. The street accident, the unforeseen, meets him in the shape of a dog,

"knocking [him] down." So the disruption of *réverie* comes about as a literal *interference* with his text, caused by another, extraneous or alien species—the singularity of a dog that recalls but opposes the rabbits. This produces a collision or break in the structure of reception. Carrying the unseen and unforeseen, the great Dane bears up a catastrophic message which allows us to read this passage as a sign of intertextual collision, running interference. The term used to denote a problem in transmission, interference is a kind of break in the flow of an utterance while it also evokes a mutual effect on meeting in two wave trains of the same type such that wave trains of light produce lines, bands or fringes. But if the dog and his unruly carriage (*carrosse*) come to be introduced as the double agents of the unforeseen, the fundamental interference breaking into an already discontinuous movement of walking, this is not only to mark the violent origin of the rumors that are about to fly as Rousseau hits the pavement, fracturing his jaw (his attempt to avoid the fall entailed his aiming to be above the situation, flying in the air to preempt the rumors that were about to fly). The howling collision threatens to obliterate the memory of a name, changing the course of a destination, transforming Rousseau into the originary awakening of "das Man."²² And it is not too farfetched to suggest that like the dog who comes around the bend in an irreversible circular motion, causing Rousseau to fall, rumors tend to be circulated about someone who stands to lose, and what is at risk in the catastrophic economy of losing one's balance is always the name one carries.

Here Rousseau, in an anticipatory *fort/da* game of textual command, narrates the power to forget from his place as subject: the "I" that constitutes itself does so in order to affirm its unshakeable control over forgetting: "I was unable to answer. I asked them where I was. . . . I had to ask in turn the name of the country, the town and district where I was. Even this was not enough, it took me the whole way from there to the Boulevard to remember my address and name." The drama of forgetting one's name, one's place, the drama of being forgotten falls initially under Rousseau's control. With suspicious precision he remembers, "I could remember nothing; I had no distinct notion of myself as a person. . . . I did not know who I was" (Rousseau repeats this, as if in a traumatic trance). How to represent the excluded story now under narration? The fall into oblivion occurs prior to being forgotten or having one's name effaced by the general public or that uncontrollable ear-mouth that is going to try to commit

Rousseau to forgetfulness. In other words, Rousseau puts himself in the position of being the first to absorb the shock of being utterly forgotten and rather literally effaced—he goes into great detail on literal and figurative registers of defacement. Thus one example of the diagnostic gaze to which he severally submits himself evokes, among other things, this vocabulary of protection and prevention: “my upper lip was split on the inside right up to the nose. On the outside the skin had given it some protection and prevented it from coming completely apart. I had four teeth knocked in on my top jaw, all the part of my face over this jaw extremely swollen and bruised,” etc. Rousseau begins to resemble Frankenstein, the other monster-outcast of Geneva.²³ This scene of multiple fractures and mutilations is rendered throughout in the mode of painlessness, the non-sensory or an anaesthetics of serene control: “I felt neither the impact nor my fall. . . . The first sensation was a moment of delight”; most importantly, the Promenades have not really been disrupted, for “I was able to walk very well and easily, feeling no aches or cuts though I was still spitting up blood. . . . But in spite of all this battering there was nothing broken, not even a tooth—a small miracle considering what a fall I had had.” So Rousseau had lost his name to himself, his address slipped his mind, his face was disfigured but nothing was broken; there was no pain (“ni mal, ni crainte, ni inquietude; un calme ravissant”). And like a faithful dog his name eventually comes back to him. I mention the *fort/da* structure discovered by Freud because in this violent passage through painlessness, Rousseau shows himself to be in command, as paradoxical as this may seem, of his sinking into oblivion. He is producing a *good* or legitimate version of his disappearance, the one which he can control and contain.

In this version, about to be doubled in another version over which he loses control, Rousseau maintains an absolute authority over his physical and textual body; he will have attended one of his many funerals remembered in this text to survive himself and provide a controlled narration, what he calls a “faithful account”: “That, then, is a faithful account of my accident.” And because he can account for his fall, an accident, nothing will have been broken, and the pain which he is about to narrate will arise from an altogether different type of mutilation in which words cannot heal or close because there will be no closure. That, then, was the faithful account. He closes it, naming its containment, and continues to walk.

The narration will however shortly exceed itself, straying from

his faithful account, and the real fall turns out to be that of this narration which falls out of its containment to produce the pain that Rousseau had not previously felt. While Rousseau's face, as disfigured as it became, was not seriously deformed or in any way unrecognizable, the narrative *après coup*, the fall of the fall within the walk will now take its course leaving Rousseau, who had demonstrated so much control over chance to be faced with a mystery-text, an enigma that overtakes him. He has closed his faithful account, putting it behind him. Now infidelity and contamination take up the relay and run away with his story: "In a matter of days the story had run through Paris, but in such an altered and distorted form as to be totally unrecognizable." We are made to see the accident, the drama of the unforeseeable, repeat itself, only this time Rousseau will be overwhelmed by the story's dislocation from its source; he will be troubled, dazed and mystified: "I should have foreseen this metamorphosis, but it was accompanied by so many bizarre circumstances, mysterious words and silences, and told to me with such an *air* of absurd discretion that all this mystery began to trouble me." Rousseau, then, is overtaken by what he first describes in terms of wordful silences, discretion, mystery, a secrecy speaking elsewhere, around him and ahead of him—all of which issues from vaporous air.

A rhetoric of dark rumblings begins to descend upon the text, to pervade a mood which had sought quietude ("I always hated darkness, the gloom they have plunged me in," etc.) until a certain Mr. Lenoir sends his secretary to deal with Rousseau. These dealings come from the public sector, Lenoir being the lieutenant general of the police: "The man's air of secrecy showed me that there was something mysterious hidden beneath it all which I was unable to unravel. . . . I was prey to a host of gloomy and worrying conjectures and talked about what was going on around me in such a way that suggested a feverish delirium . . ." His discourse has caught the fever, it has been infected by world, the public's police-language: "in a way that suggested a feverish delirium rather than the sangfroid of a man whom the world no longer interests." Rousseau starts to stagger; now, shortly after describing the first accident which he has survived with only a few fractures, he comes to realize that his textual body has been subjected in the meantime to serious mutilation. This will constitute "the event that has dealt the last blow to my peace of mind." For the French regime, thinking he has died, publishes false texts that it

imputes to Rousseau. But the regime—the one, no doubt, that gave him indigestion—has only begun to act up.

Rousseau keeps on falling precisely within the context of his walks, and keeps on struggling to get back on his feet. What defeats Rousseau? He falters largely because a type of textual monstrosity, uncontainable by anybody, is allowed to run freely; from the passage just cited we know that it even has a police license. The text that runs him down, with police complicity, committing him to his death, is one that in French literally runs. What it runs to or from is always shown to be unclear but it emits a noise, a howl that runs through city streets and institutions from which Rousseau has exiled himself in order, he suggests, to avoid exposure to its contaminative properties. Or more exactly, he *has* been exposed, which is why he seeks seclusion and a certain luminosity that might cover the gloom of these poisonous currents. What were these?

Well, in the first place, and this will become inseparable from the rumor of his death—rumor wardens call this “goal gradient” or “home-stretch” rumor—Rousseau runs to a public space where he is gunned down, *descendu*, by a final rumor or the rumor of finality. Spreading a counterfeit posterity, the rumor assumes its form as widely disseminated report detached from a discernible origin or source. Inasmuch as it becomes what it is, the spreading rumor takes on the qualities of a story told, without author or term, imposing itself as an ineluctable and unforgettable account. This account, the post-autobiographical utterance, runs hand in hand with the finitizing rumor of Rousseau’s fall. “I had already gone out several times and was even taking quite frequent walks in the Tuileries, when I saw from the astonishment of many of those whom I met that there was some other story about me that I had not yet heard. Finally I learned that I was rumored to have died from my fall.” Now, this rumor that begins among the populous, the so-called lower classes, spreads like a virus throughout the body politic eventually to reach the head of state: “And this rumor had spread so quickly and irresistibly that more than two weeks after I heard it the King himself and the Queen were talking as if there were no doubt about it.” The rumor in a sense receives ratification from the highest authority, though we must note that Rousseau’s source for the rumor’s run must be a rumor which he presently underwrites. Rousseau’s ear is glued to the King and Queen’s conversation; he even reports the certitude with which the sovereign couple circulates within itself the rumor of his death: “The

King himself and the Queen were talking as if there were no doubt about it." Rousseau had no doubt about it. Here the evidence of the rumor's run, its surpassing power over Rousseau, is brought to his attention, carried as it is by the *Courrier* of Avignon: "The *Courrier* of Avignon, as they took care to inform me, not only announced this happy event, but did not fail to provide a foretaste of the tribute of insults and indignities which are being prepared to honor my memory by way of a funeral oration." The rumor has run so swiftly that it will have delivered to Rousseau, its virtual destination, his final destination, a foretaste—here comes the indigestion—of that which outlives him, his remainder or the very thing that cannot be held down to what is commonly thought an experiential realm.

Rousseau experiences the unexperiencable: he will not only have attended his funeral but he will have read his obituary, which is not exactly "his" in terms of what one might expect from a faithful account. Worst of all, however, he also will have witnessed himself after his presumed death, in his afterdeath, being buried alive. For the obituary which he passes over in silence is a masterpiece of a refusal to produce a funeral oration, it attaches itself to modes of silence and innuendo that at once bury his memory and keep him unburied like an unappeased phantom, like Hamlet's father or one who has survived his funeral, walking about in solitary grief, transmitting the story of his great betrayal to the ears of those who will have become his sons and daughters, the secretaries of the phantom. The ghost walks. Let us at no point forget that the one who delivers this text to us, his testament, remember, is seeking in his own words a resting place, a stable resting place.²⁴

The obituary notice which he does not reproduce but to which he alludes, says this among other calamities: "We are sorry not to be able to speak of the talents, etc. . . . our readers will no doubt feel that his abuse of them imposes the strictest silence on us." The *Courrier* runs its course, establishing a circulation of silence between a writing and a readership, between a type of writing that talks and a readership that hears. What they speak and hear, what they hearsay and the news that they spread, is, they assert, no news; they spread silence or the condition of an unacknowledged loss. Thus creating the place of eclipse in which the ghost-writer will agitate. This is not all. Another accident befalls Rousseau. He learns of something "by chance." After learning of his death and reading his obituary, "I learned this by chance. . . . It was that a subscription had been opened at the same time for printing

any manuscripts that were found in my apartment. This showed me that they had a collection of specially fabricated works ready to be attributed to me as soon as I was dead, for the idea that they would faithfully reproduce anything that I might really leave was a piece of folly that no sensible man could entertain and that the experience of fifteen years was enough to guard me against: Je compris par là qu'on tenait prêt un recueil d'écrits fabriqués tout exprès pour me les attribuer d'abord après ma mort." *Après ma mort*: I am dead, Horatio. "Report me and my cause aright." A speech that would survive the subject whose attribution it never fully outgrows, moving within the paradoxical exchanges affected between exile and freedom, the wing'd word, in flight, retracing in the air the destiny of any *oeuvre* given over to itself, partially canceling the signator whose memory it will be. Like the rumor's essential structure, Rousseau's tidings are perverse, recognizably marked by distortion, a signed bid for anonymity, leaving open the question of rumor's rapport to *oeuvre*; for in the end, his work I think desires to be enveloped by the sovereign ruthlessness of the rumor that will not submit to stoppage but goes around turning things over in easy transmission, the invisibility of the viral *virer* implanted by the father of the revolution whose literature annuls the writer.²⁵ A non-confessable *jouissance* of the irresponsible carrier (producing the seed, the virus, the word, everything that is in the air protected by the ring of invisibility, spilling, spreading; this time they will not say no to his pamphlets).

The rumor text is superseded by the rumored text ("fabricated works ready to be"), which is to say, Rousseau says, it is caught up in the effects of rumor's contagion, a thing ungrounded and perhaps still in the air, whether or not it has arisen from the imagination or even the transcendental imagination.

Après ma mort, there will be a blurring which I here authorize between authorized speech and anonymous rumor. Rousseau, writing "after my death" in a kind of *Nachruf*, the echo or memorial address, calling after himself in the place of language's *Bodenlosigkeit*, the fundamental ungroundedness in which arises Heidegger's ontology of slander (which he does not want to ontologize but which in *Sein und Zeit* #35 belongs to the "positives Phänomen" of *Gerede*). Rumor as afterword, as that which I would say Rousseau was the first to say is constitutively *après ma mort*—rumor slips in somewhere between

Rede and *Gerede*, between authentic and inauthentic speech between the Destructive Character and creator; it is intended no doubt to dwell beneath authenticity but it rises above, leaning on nothing, since Heidegger grasps for the "Bodenlosigkeit des Geredes." He also calls this *Nachrede*, giving it performative powers before withdrawing its auratic dimension. Writing of *Nachreden*: "Das Geredete als solches zieht weitere Kreise und übernimmt autoritativen Charakter [overtakes or establishes an authoritative character]. Die Sache ist so, weil man es sagt [it is so because one, *man*, says it is]." Further along: "The average comprehension [Verständnis, durchschnittliche Verständnis] of the reader will *never* be able to decide [Das durchschnittliche Verständnis des Lesers wird *nie* entscheiden können]" (emphasis Heidegger's). We shall never be able to decide. Or rather, the average understanding will not cut it. Does Heidegger suggest that such a text must be submitted to the understanding of an above-average reader, that rumor requires the labor of decisive apprehension?

"How noisy everything grows."

Did Rousseau finally launch or stabilize the rumors he set out in his exit-text to kill? This poses a dilemma for all rumor wardens, for example those associated with war-time Rumor Clinics ("In nailing a rumor did the clinic inadvertently spread it?")²⁶ "Das durchschnittliche Verständnis des Lesers wird *nie* entscheiden können." In any case, despite or with himself, Rousseau has granted their unanchorable flotation, navigating or cruising for repetition in terms of an echolalia, risking the motion sickness (navigation + nausea) that permits futurity to arrive by the tidings of rumormurmur, roumurmur . . . and so forth/back: "Thus drawing the frontier between the private and public spheres, which in 1789 was supposed to inaugurate freedom, became a mockery. 'Through the newspaper,' says Kierkegaard, 'the distinction between public and private affairs is abolished in private-public prattle . . .'" (Benjamin, "Monster").

NOTES

1. "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten," *Der Spiegel* (31 May 1976), pp. 193–219; the translation, "Only a God can save us now," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 6, 1 (Winter, 1977), 5–27. The translation repeats the exclusion of Husserl, (p. 12).
2. The subtitle to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* places the work in precarious circulation: "For Everyone and No One."
3. Hannah Arendt, "Introduction" to *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 46.
4. Walter Benjamin, "Karl Kraus," in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1978), p. 261.
5. The translation has led us astray. Heidegger actually writes of the difference between a Mercedes and an Adler, translated into a bug.
6. Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being*, trans. Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback (New Haven: College and University Press, 1958), p. 41.
7. The disjunctive reading of Hölderlin's *ent-stehen* originates in Paul de Man's *Rhetoric of Romanticism*.
8. The coconstitutive status of rumor and disease is particularly in evidence in Defoe's *Journal of a Plague* where it appears that rumor spreads the plague and, inversely, the plague carries rumor.
9. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, "The Eternal Return of the Same," trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 58; in the German, *Nietzsche I* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), p. 313.
10. Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 49.
11. Irving Wolfahrt has indicated language's falling off in *Guilt Assumptions: On Nietzsche's Ressentiment*, (forthcoming): "For the Fall was, according to Benjamin, the Fall of language into chatter. It was a fall from names into signs, and, synonymously, from truth into knowledge (*Erkenntnis, Wissen*). Academics would thus hardly be competent to pronounce on matters of truth. Their scholarship (*Wissenschaft*) would itself represent another form of fallen knowledge, idle chatter masquerading as the Word" (p. 80).
12. A reading of the non-articulation of the eternal return has been promoted in the writings of Bernard Pautrat.
13. Sigmund Freud, *Three Case Histories* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 99.
14. *Reflections*, pp. 301–03; The German text is in *Gesammelte Schriften*, IV.1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), pp. 396–98.

15. *What Is Called Thinking?*, p. 72. Also compare Stephen Spender's poem on the stock market and rumor.
16. *What Is Called Thinking?*, p. 73. The task of the translator has fallen into rumor. There is no "Johnny" in *Was heisst denken?*, but only in *What Is Called Thinking?*, the English version.
17. Part of Defoe's title page to the *Journal of a Plague*.
18. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964); English translation: *Rêveries of the Solitary Walker* (New York: Penguin Books). Citations are from chapters indicated.
19. The extent to which so-called scholarly research can be conducted under hearsay's direction might stand review. In this instance, "La verite en marche" refers to a forthcoming chapter from Denis Hollier's work on Zola, a work in progress, as it were, that is supposed to treat Zola's work of the same title under the heading of "La virite en marche"—presumably with the intent of linking acts of walking to truth and desexualization.
20. Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 161.
21. See de Man, *Allegories*, "Part II: Rousseau."
22. Rodolphe Gasche traces rumor to a "long-sustained howl," asking "what is rumor if not a report widely disseminated with no discernible origin or source." Check "Self-Engendering as a Verbal Body" in *Modern Language Notes*, 93 (1978), 688.
23. Marie-Helene Huet has opened up the possibility of this reading in "Living Images: Monstrosity and Representation," *Representations*, ed. S. Alpers and S. Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, Fall, 1983), pp. 73–88: "The monstrous is no longer anything but an accident" (p. 84) and, suggesting monstrosity as a sort of publicity, she writes that "the monster stands as a *public rebuke*" (emphasis added), p. 73.
24. Nor should we forget that we still do not know the precise grounds of Benjamin's burial place somewhere in Port Bou. This belongs to a cryptological reading of our haunted rapport to Benjamin.
25. Cf. Gasche, p. 693: "Excessively present in the series relating the historical events, the virus is a poison. Turning about itself (*virer*) it becomes absent in the second series in order to make place for the desired body without organs. . . ."
26. This is cited in an old pamphlet, "The Psychology of Rumor."