

communication +1

Volume 9
Issue 1 *A Decade of Futures (of
Communication)*

Article 2

October 2022

Communication and one

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communication+1, so far. Who is the one? What is the relation of *plus*? Who will communicate? The title of this journal, which reaches its 10th anniversary with this special issue, communicates itself to the one through the one. It cannot stop because it constantly reaches out for the addition—but only one addition at a time. What is the result of this calculation? Communication, it demonstrates, is never alone. One cannot talk to oneself without dividing oneself into two who then talk to each other.

Friedrich Nietzsche knew this very well when he wrote a short aphorism about the last human in 1872 or 1873, shortly after the publication of his first book *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this unpublished text, Nietzsche erects a stage for the imagination of the last human on earth and develops a paradoxical position in which he inserts himself as a speaking voice.

Oedipus: Soliloquies of the Last Philosopher

A Fragment from the History of Posterity

I call myself the last philosopher because I am the last human being. I myself am the only one who speaks with me, and my voice comes to me as the voice of someone who is dying. Let me commune with you for just one hour, beloved voice, with you, the last trace of the memory of all human happiness; with your help I will deceive myself about my loneliness and lie my way into community and love; for my heart refuses to believe that love is dead; it cannot bear the shudder of the loneliest loneliness and it forces me to speak as if I were two persons.

Do I still hear you, my voice? You whisper when you curse? And yet your curse should cause the bowels of this world to burst! But it continues to live and merely stares at me all the more brilliantly and coldly with its pitiless stars; it continues to live, as dumb and blind as ever, and the only thing that dies is – the human being. – And yet! I still hear you, beloved voice! Someone other than I, the last human being, is dying in this universe: the last sigh, your sigh, dies with me, the drawn out Woe! Woe! sighing around me, Oedipus, the last of the woeful human beings.¹

[Oedipus. Reden des letzten Philosophen mit sich selbst. Ein Fragment aus der Geschichte der Nachwelt

Den letzten Philosophen nenne ich mich, denn ich bin der letzte Mensch. Niemand redet mit mir als ich selbst, und meine Stimme

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings: From the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 43.

kommt wie die eines Sterbenden zu mir. Mit dir, geliebte Stimme, mit dir, dem letzten Erinnerungshauch alles Menschenglücks, laß mich nur eine Stunde noch verkehren, durch dich täusche ich mir die Einsamkeit hinweg und lüge mich in die Vielheit und die Liebe hinein, denn mein Herz sträubt sich zu glauben, daß die Liebe todt sei, es erträgt den Schauer der einsamsten Einsamkeit nicht und zwingt mich zu reden, als ob ich Zwei wäre. Höre ich dich noch, meine Stimme? Du flüsterst, indem du fluchst? Und doch sollte dein Fluch die Eingeweide dieser Welt zerbersten machen! Aber sie lebt noch und schaut mich nur noch glänzender und kälter mit ihren mitleidslosen Sternen an, sie lebt, so dumm und blind wie je vorher, und nur Eines stirbt – der Mensch. – Und doch! Ich höre dich noch, geliebte Stimme! Es stirbt noch Einer außer mir, dem letzten Menschen, in diesem Weltall: der letzte Seufzer, dein Seufzer, stirbt mit mir, das hingezogene Wehe! Wehe! geseufzt um mich, der Wehemenschen letzten, Oedipus.]²

Of the last human one could never read anything since no one exists who could read anything, unless one began anew with a first human. Yet, the last human must necessarily be two men. He must differentiate himself from himself.³ Nietzsche's aphorism shows that communication, even if there is no one to communicate with, always addresses one more. If there is only one to communicate with, this one must "speak as if I were two persons." The aphorism explores the elementary oppositions of communication and it deconstructs its modes of operation. It makes clear that communication—even when curtailed in its most radical form—presupposes a difference and thus a multiplicity, even if there is only one human left.

The aporia of communication involves a condition for beginning anew, a beginning that can only commence with two, that means itself plus one. Commencing with one is impossible: be it with single units of sound in speech, with a single human being, or with single spatial points in orientation. Nobody can refer solely to themselves. Without a second, there would be no direction.

The last human, as Nietzsche imagines, is condemned to himself. He lacks any partner; his address book has become useless, but because he speaks he must

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente. Herbst 1884 bis Herbst 1885. Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe. Band 7/3*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter 1974), 460 f.

³ Nietzsche does not speak of *man* (Mann), but of *human* (Mensch), though his text certainly enacts a male voice.

nevertheless continue to address, though in doing so he can only ever discover himself. He cannot reproduce and everything he repeats has already been split. For this reason the last human can remain other to himself, a stranger to himself—an important theme for Nietzsche—and speak in danger of confounding himself or of being seduced by the ‘I’ that speaks with his own tongue. The last human is situated in the ambivalent position of, on the one hand, knowing his communication partner all too well, as one can only know oneself, and, on the other hand, being subjected to the unknown, being confronted by the other within himself. In another text, Nietzsche writes: “*One times one. – One is always wrong; but with two, truth begins. – One cannot prove his case, but two are always irrefutable.*”⁴ [*“Einmaleins. – Einer hat immer Unrecht: aber mit zweien beginnt die Wahrheit. – Einer kann sich nicht beweisen: aber zweie kann man bereits nicht widerlegen.”*]⁵ For the last human, there is no third person that would correlate the two: him and himself.

Monologues as the one staged by the last human necessarily follow a dia-logic. A dialogue is not simply a conversation that occurs as the transfer and receipt of a message, but is rather the negotiation of addresses that occur through the dialogue.⁶ The monologue through which one confronts oneself must not be understood as a rudimentary form of communication, as an egocentric form through which the other in one’s own ego is sought out, but as a form through which the disconnection of communication is integrated. It follows then that the self-presence of a soliloquy can, with the help of the concept of communication, be characterized as a sort of communicative negotiation, as the performance of disconnection and connection, a performance that occurs within the self and without any superordinate authority. Its result is an always already fractured and fissured identity. For the last human, all ambiguity [*Zweideutigkeit*] is addressed unambiguously [*eindeutig*].

In the soliloquy, the speaker makes himself into the object while at the same time, within himself, making the other the subject. Insofar as I need my-self to distinguish myself from my-self, I am always already someone else—in order to *have been* I and to be able to *be* that other. Calling oneself “I” is only possible in the plural, because everyone has to be able to do so. All of this is the result of a communicative situation which thus emerges as a constitutive part of any identity. Communication presupposes a difference between two elements which it seeks to transcend in the act

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft. Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe, Band 3*, ed. Giorgi Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974).

⁶ See Briankle Chang, *Deconstructing Communication* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) and John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

of communication and through this act proceeds to constitute the *relata* of communication.

The last human's communications, and in turn, all soliloquies, are not public. Although they are indeed public practices, the "we" that they bring together stands prior to any community. This does not however make them simply private, that is to say, isolated and own. Communication presupposes, along these lines, a disconnection, in order that it might, in the course of being carried out, attempt to transcend this disconnection. In the process, both sides of the abyss become identifiable. Every act of address advances the process of self-determination. The soliloquy can be traced neither through the public sphere nor through a mode of privacy—even though one only has oneself and operates within a social realm of practice, as for instance in worship. Yet, the *dia* is implied in the *mono* of the monologue. This thesis was articulated, for instance, in the 1940s by the Prague structuralist Jan Mukarovsky, for whom the linguistic utterance as such already implies a dialogical form since every act of speech must be addressed. In every conversation, whether with oneself or with a partner, dialogues and monologues are both present and interwoven.⁷

Communication requires unambiguous addresses in order to operate, by directing itself towards these addresses. Because communication cannot remain at one with itself [*bei sich bleiben*], it must have a terminus. Its terminus or address may not last permanently and the act of addressing might remain a hopeless venture—Jacques Derrida and others have vehemently drawn attention to such dissemination.⁸ If every message were perforce directed towards everyone, then that too would already constitute an address. Indeed, the French *adresser* means nothing more than "direct."

For the last human, or for soliloquies in general, sender and receiver coincide. Whoever knows everything about themselves and has access to their own routines—and that means no one—need not speak with themselves. In the unity of having-oneseelf, there is no communication. In the case of the last human, the act of addressing cannot be reduced to the issue of whether the last human speaks with an "I" or a "you" since both of these are indistinguishable. The message is sent and directed to the last human himself *as if he were two people*. Not only can we not not-communicate, there can also be no communication without addresses.

To make communication possible, the last human must distinguish himself from himself and thereby reproduce within himself the difference of ownness and

⁷ See Jan Mukarovsky, *Kapitel aus der Poetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967).

⁸ See Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

otherness. In his ownness, he is in communion with himself. However, he can only do this if, through the difference from his self, he denies that he is the last human. He must distinguish himself from himself only to transcend this distinction in communication. Communication presupposes a difference that it can then erase. With his ineluctable soliloquies, the last human restores a separation which he knows is sublated since he himself is all that still exists. The last human cannot turn anywhere but in circles. “I myself am the only one who speaks with me, and my voice comes to me as the voice of someone who is dying.”⁹ Left on his own, he must lie his way into community and love.

The last human is so lonesome that he must force himself to reduplicate. Because of this, he is never alone—it is simply that through speech he exists in multiplicity. In this sense, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg wrote a century before Nietzsche, “Much has been written about the *first* human beings: someone ought to have a go at writing about the last two.”¹⁰ [*Man hat vieles über die ersten Menschen gedichtet, es sollte es auch einmal jemand mit den beiden letzten versuchen.*]¹¹ The last human, who as the very last can only be alone, exists solely in the plural. Self-presence and lack of difference notwithstanding, communication generates precisely that fracture within itself, which is involved in negotiations of identity as well. The *dia* of dialog does not imply any sort of restriction to two but highlights the preposition “*through*” and thus a separation.

The last human’s words are always already concluded. They are the last words because no one will ever hear them but the last human himself. He dies twice and with him dies his last breath. Yet this breath, the last sigh, the “drawn out Woe! Woe!” will outlive him ever so slightly. This gap, this difference is that of time. The last human cannot catch up with his own thoughts even as he outpaces them by speaking them to himself. On the one hand, he knows what he says; on the other hand, he is confronted with the contingency unique to any act of communication: with an unpredictable otherness. He knows precisely because he is in his own presence. As much as he has this presence at his disposal, it nevertheless eludes him insofar as it is located within the fissure of his self. When he says something, he hears it in the same moment—be it internally or when it is enunciated. He can speak only in his own presence; yet because he speaks, there is difference in ownness, in presence. His presence is simultaneously absent and always deferred to the future in which he is heard by himself.

⁹ Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings*, 43

¹⁰ Georg C. Lichtenberg, *The Waste Books*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: New York Review Books, 2000), Notebook J, 142, p. 157.

¹¹ Georg C. Lichtenberg, “Sudelbücher 1” in *Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Wolfgang Promies (Munich: Hanser, 1968), here 753, J 697. Emphasis in original.

Nietzsche's aphorism stages a performance in which it allows the reader to listen in on the last human, on a breath that withers away. Communication, when it is not solely directed at itself, involves accepting the openness of its failure—whether we call this failure noise, improbability, the parasite, misunderstanding or *plus one*. The abyss that lies between sender and receiver—which first renders communication necessary as the transcendence of this ditch—implies the possibility of precipitation. This noise is a constituent part of communication's immanent mode of operation. Without the possibility of failure, there is no communication. The last human's communication with himself, however, is only made possible by the dissimilarity between sender and receiver. Apart from that, everything else seems to work for him. He is even aware that he is deceiving himself.

Neither one of the I's involved in this process nor even the medium or difference is originary here. On the contrary, they are divisions of the individual through the self. Difference fissures because the medium fissures and hence the medium raises a question in the soliloquy for which it simultaneously provides an answer: identity as difference. Whoever discovers themselves in soliloquy is a step ahead of themselves. Communication+I.

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