

Peter Sloterdijk

You
must
change
your
life



Translated by Wieland Hoban

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Appamādena sampādeṭṭha.
Forge ahead in vigilance!

Mahāparinibbana Sutta, 6, 7

Works, first and foremost!

That is to say, doing, doing, doing!

The 'faith' that goes with it will soon put in an appearance – you can be sure of that!

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*

INTRODUCTION

On the Anthropotechnic Turn

A spectre is haunting the Western world – the spectre of religion. All over the country we hear that after an extended absence, it has now returned and is among the people of the modern world, and that one would do well to reckon seriously with its renewed presence. Unlike the spectre of communism, which, when its *Manifesto* appeared in 1848, was not a returnee but a novelty among imminent threats, the present case does full justice to its revenant nature. Whether it comforts or threatens, whether it greets us as a benevolent spirit or is feared as an irrational shadow of mankind, its appearance, indeed the mere announcement thereof, commands respect as far as the eye can see – if one passes over the summer offensive of the godless in 2007, to which we owe two of the most superficial screeds in recent intellectual history: those of Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. The forces of Old Europe have combined for a pompous welcome celebration with a gathering of unequal guests: the pope and the Islamic scholars, the American presidents and the new rulers of the Kremlin, all the Metternichs and Guizots of our time, the French curators and the German sociologists.

This attempt to restore to religion its attested rights involves the enforcement of a protocol which demands of the newly converted and fascinated that they confess to their previous errors of judgement. As in the days of the first Merovingian, who pledged allegiance to the cross because of a victorious battle, today's children of the banalized Enlightenment are likewise meant to burn what they worshipped and worship what they burned.¹ In this change of direction, long-dormant liturgical intuitions come to the fore. They demand that the novices of post-secular 'society' publicly dissociate themselves from the

criticisms of religion in the theorems of the enlightened centuries. During those centuries, human self-determination seemed attainable only at the price of reclaiming the powers wasted on the world above, using them instead to improve earthly conditions as far as possible. Large quantities of energy had to be deducted from 'God' in order to get in shape at last for the world of humans. In this transference of strength lay the élan of the age that had devoted itself to the great singular 'progress'. The humanist aggression even went so far as to elevate hope to a central principle. The supplies of the desperate were to become the *primum mobile* of better times. Those who chose to advocate this first cause made the earth an immigration country in order to realize themselves there – and nowhere else. From now on, the goal was to burn all bridges to the spheres on high and invest the energy thus released in profane existence. If God existed, he would have become the loneliest figure in the universe at that point. The migration from the beyond took on aspects of a mass exodus – by comparison, the current demographically thinned-out condition of Eastern Europe seems like overpopulation. That the majority, unimpressed by ideologies of immanence, still indulged in secret excursions across the border in the time of the triumphant Enlightenment is another matter.

In the meantime, quite different drives have gained the upper hand. The situation is governed by complicated perceptions of human chances. Once it gained an awareness of itself, the Enlightenment revealed its own paradoxes and progressed to regions where life, to quote a well-known storyteller, 'becomes complex and sad'.² Only tired leftovers of the former unconditional forward impetus have remained in use. Things need only advance a little further and the last of the enlightened hopeful will withdraw to the countryside like the Amish of postmodernism. Other eternal progressives follow the calls of non-governmental organizations that have devoted themselves to saving the world. For the rest, the signs of the times point to revision and regress. More than a few disappointed parties seek to cling to the producers and distributors of their progressive illusions, as if there were some consumer protection for ideas to

which they could appeal. The legal archetype of our age, the compensation lawsuit, extends to broad areas of life. Have its American varieties not taught us that one has to demand exorbitant sums at the outset in order to receive a vaguely satisfactory compensation at the end of the lawyers' war? The descendants of those expelled from heaven openly seek handsome reparations – in fact, they dare to dream of epochal compensations. If they had their way, the entire expropriation of the world above would be reversed. Some newly religious entrepreneurs would like nothing more than to put the disused sites of metaphysical production back into operation overnight, as if we had simply been through a recession.

European Enlightenment – a crisis of form? An experiment on a slippery slope, at any rate, and from a global perspective an anomaly. Sociologists of religion put it quite bluntly: people keep believing everywhere else, but in our society we have glorified disillusionment. Indeed, why should Europeans be the only ones on a metaphysical diet when the rest of the world continues to dine unperturbed at the richly decked tables of illusion?

Let us recall: Marx and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto* with the intention of replacing the myth of a spectre named communism with their own aggressive statement of true communism. Where the mere fear of ghosts had predominated, there would now be a justified fear of a real enemy of existing conditions. The present book likewise devotes itself to the critique of a myth, replacing it with a positive thesis. Indeed, the return of religion after the 'failure' of the Enlightenment must be confronted with a clearer view of the spiritual facts. I will show that a return *to* religion is as impossible as a return *of* religion – for the simple reason that no 'religion' or 'religions' exist, only misunderstood spiritual regimens, whether these are practised in collectives – usually church, *ordo*, *umma*, *sangha* – or in customized forms – through interaction with the 'personal God' with whom the citizens of modernity are privately insured. Thus the tiresome distinction between 'true religion' and superstition loses its meaning. There are only regimens that are more and less capable and worthy of propagation. The false dichotomy of

believers and unbelievers becomes obsolete and is replaced by the distinction between the practising and the untrained, or those who train differently.

Something is indeed returning today – but the conventional wisdom that this is religion making its reappearance is insufficient to satisfy critical inquiries. Nor is it the return of a factor that had vanished, but rather a shift of emphasis in a continuum that was never interrupted. The genuinely recurring element that would merit our full intellectual attention is more anthropological than ‘religious’ in its implications – it is, in a nutshell, the recognition of the immunitary constitution of human beings. After centuries of experiments with new forms of life, the realization has dawned that humans, whatever ethnic, economic and political situation might govern their lives, exist not only in ‘material conditions’, but also in symbolic immune systems and ritual shells. It is their fabric that we shall discuss in the following. Why their looms are referred to with the coolly rational term ‘anthropotechnics’ should become self-evident in the course of their description. I would like to take the first step in justifying our interest in these matters by recalling Wittgenstein’s well-known demand to put an end to the ‘chatter about ethics’. It has meanwhile become possible to reformulate that part of the ethical discourse which is not chatter in anthropotechnic terms. Since the 1840s, the work on this translation has – albeit under different names – formed the confused centre of modern ‘cultural studies’. The ethical programme of the present came into view for a moment when Marx and the Young Hegelians articulated the theory that man himself produces man. The true meaning of this statement was immediately obscured, however, by another chatter that presented work as the only essential human act. But if man genuinely produces man, it is precisely not through work and its concrete results, not even the ‘work on oneself’ so widely praised in recent times, let alone through the alternatively invoked phenomena of ‘interaction’ or ‘communication’: it is through life in forms of practice. Practice is defined here as any operation that provides or improves the actor’s qualification for the next performance of the same operation, whether it is declared as practice or not.³

Anyone who speaks of human self-production without addressing the formation of human beings in the practising life has missed the point from the outset. Consequently, we must suspend virtually everything that has been said about humans as working beings in order to translate it into the language of practising, or self-forming and self-enhancing behaviour. It is not only the weary *Homo faber*, who objectifies the world in the 'doing' mode, who must vacate his place on the logical stage; the time has also come for *Homo religiosus*, who turns to the world above in surreal rites, to bid a deserved farewell. Together, workers and believers come into a new category. It is time to reveal humans as the beings who result from repetition. Just as the nineteenth century stood cognitively under the sign of production and the twentieth under that of reflexivity, the future should present itself under the sign of the exercise.

The stakes in this game are not low. Our enterprise is no less than the introduction of an alternative language, and with the language an altered perspective, for a group of phenomena that tradition tended to refer to with such words as 'spirituality', 'piety', 'morality', 'ethics' and 'asceticism'. If the manoeuvre succeeds, the conventional concept of religion, that ill-fated bugbear from the prop studios of modern Europe, will emerge from these investigations as the great loser. Certainly intellectual history has always resembled a refuge for malformed concepts – and after the following journey through the various stations, one will not only see through the concept of 'religion' in its failed design, a concept whose crookedness is second only to the hyper-bugbear that is 'culture'. Then one will also understand why, in the light of the altered expositions, it would be equally futile to take the side of the negative bigotry that has presented itself in our climes for almost two centuries as a simplistic atheism – a Gessler's hat⁴ that elegant intellectuals were happy to salute every time they passed it, and not without taking the opportunity to claim for themselves the distinction 'intellectually honest', or sometimes 'critical' or 'autonomous'. Now it is a matter of turning the whole stage by ninety degrees until the religious, spiritual and ethical material becomes visible from a revealing new angle.

Let me repeat: the stakes are high. We must confront one of the most massive pseudo-evidences in recent intellectual history: the belief, rampant in Europe since only two or three centuries ago, in the existence of 'religions' – and more than that, against the unverified faith in the existence of faith. Faith in the existence of 'religion' is the element that unites believers and non-believers, in the present as much as in the past. It displays a single-mindedness that would make any prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome green with envy. No one who overcame religion ever doubted its existence, even if they opposed every single one of its dogmas. No denial ever confronted the denier with the question of whether its name was justified, and whether it had any lasting value in such a form. It is only because society has grown accustomed to a comparatively recent fiction – it did not come into use until the seventeenth century – that one can speak today of a 'return of religion'.⁵ It is the unbroken faith in religion as a constant and universal factor which can vanish and return that forms the foundation of the current legend.

While psychoanalysis relied on the return of repressed feelings as its central theorem, an analysis of ideas and behaviour such as the present one is based on the return of what is not understood. Rotation phenomena of this kind are inevitable as long as the element that was there disappears and resurfaces without being adequately understood in its particularity. The aim of getting to the heart of the matter oneself can only be made fruitful if one neither affirms nor rejects the object of examination, and begins instead with a more fundamental explication. This is a project that was set in motion by a vanguard of researchers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, albeit using methods whose inadequacy has long been apparent – I am thinking of such authors as Feuerbach, Comte, Durkheim and Weber. In their investigations, at least, so-called religions gradually gained clearer profiles as symbolically structured behavioural systems – though none of them sufficiently formulated the practice nature of 'religious' behaviour and its foundation in autoplasmic procedures. It was

only the later Nietzsche, in his diatological reflections of the 1880s – recall the corresponding pages in his self-crucifixion text *Ecce Homo* – who offered points of departure for a doctrine of life practice, or a general ascetology. Though they have been misunderstood by inattentive readers as a withdrawal of philosophy to the apothecary level,⁶ whoever studies them sufficiently closely can discover in them the seminal ideas for a comprehensive theory of practising existence.

The translation suggested here of the religious, spiritual and ethical facts into the language and perspective of the general theory of practising defines itself as an Enlightenment-conservative enterprise – a conservatory one, in fact, in the matter itself. It rests on a twofold interest in preservation: firstly, it declares its allegiance to the continuum of cumulative knowledge that we call Enlightenment, and which, despite all rumours of having entered a new ‘post-secular’ state, we in the present continue as a context of learning meanwhile spanning four centuries; and secondly, it takes up the threads, some of them millennia old, that tie us to early manifestations of human knowledge about practice and animation – assuming that we are prepared to follow on from them in an *explicit* fashion.

With this, we have introduced the key term for everything that will be read in the following: the world ‘explicit’, applied to the objects in question, contains the present book *in nuce*. The aforementioned rotation of the intellectual-historical stage means nothing other than a logical manoeuvre to render explicit circumstances that, in the masses of tradition, are present in ‘implicit’ – that is, inward-folded and compressed – forms. If Enlightenment in a technical sense is the programmatic word for progress in the awareness of explicitness, one can say without fear of grand formulas that rendering the implicit explicit is the cognitive form of fate. Were this not the case, one would never have had cause to believe that later knowledge would necessarily be better knowledge – for, as we know, everything that has been termed ‘research’ in the last centuries has rested on this assumption. Only when the inward-folded ‘things’ or facts are by their nature subject to a tendency to unfold

themselves and become more comprehensible for us can one – provided the unfolding succeeds – speak of a true increase in knowledge. Only if the ‘matters’ are spontaneously prepared (or can be forced by imposed examination) to come to light in magnified and better-illuminated areas can one seriously – which here means with ontological emphasis – state that there is science in progress, there are real knowledge gains, there are expeditions in which we, the epistemically committed collective, advance to hidden continents of knowledge by making thematic what was previously unthematic, bringing to light what is yet unknown, and transforming vague cognizance into definite knowledge. In this manner we increase the cognitive capital of our society – the latter word without quotation marks in this case. In earlier times, one would probably have said that conceptual work leads into a ‘production’. Hegel went so far as to say that the truth is essentially a result – and thus, inevitably, only appears at the end of its drama. Where it reveals itself in a finished state, the human spirit celebrates the Sunday of life. As I do not wish to examine the concept of the concept here, and have other things in mind with the principle of work, I shall content myself with a somewhat less triumphant, but no less binding thesis: there is nothing cognitively new under the sun.

The novelty of the new, as noted earlier, stems from the unfolding of the known into larger, brighter, more richly contoured surfaces. Consequently, it can never be innovative in an absolute sense; in part, it is always the continuation of the cognitively existent by other means. Here, novelty and greater explicitness amount to the same thing. We can therefore say that the higher the degree of explicitness, the deeper the possible, indeed inevitable disconcertment caused by the newly acquired knowledge. I have previously accepted as a conventional fact that this table is made of cherrywood; I acknowledge with the tolerance of the educated that the cherrywood consists of atoms, even though these oft-cited atoms, these epistemological contemporaries of the twentieth century, possess no greater reality for me than unicorn powder or Saturnian influences. That these cherrywood atoms dissolve into a mist of sub-atomic almost-nothings upon further

explication – this is something that I, as an end consumer of physical Enlightenment, must accept, even if it goes decisively against my assumptions about the substantiality of substance. The final explanation illustrates most emphatically how the later knowledge tends to be the more disconcerting.

Among the wealth of cognitive novelties under the modern sun, none are remotely comparable in their far-reaching consequences to the appearance and propagation of immune systems in the biology of the late nineteenth century. From that point on, none of the scientific integrities – animal organisms, species, ‘societies’ or cultures – could remain the same. Only hesitantly did people begin to understand that the immune *dispositifs* are what enable systems to become systems, life forms to become life forms,⁷ and cultures to become cultures in the first place. It is only by virtue of their immunitary qualities that they ascend to the level of self-organizing unities, preserving and reproducing themselves with constant reference to a potentially and actually invasive and irritating environment. These functions are performed to an impressive degree in biological immune systems – whose discovery resulted from the investigations of Ilya Mechnikov and Robert Koch’s student Paul Ehrlich at the end of the nineteenth century. There one finds the baffling idea that even relatively simple organisms like insects and molluscs have a native ‘foreknowledge’ of the hazards that accompany a typical insect or mollusc life. Consequently, immune systems at this level can be defined *a priori* as embodied expectations of injury and the corresponding programmes of protection and repair.

Viewed in this light, life itself appears as a dynamics of integration that is equipped with auto-therapeutic or ‘endo-clinical’ competencies and refers to a species-specific space of surprise. It has an equally innate and – in higher organisms – adaptively acquired responsibility for the injuries and invasions it regularly encounters in its permanently allocated environment or conquered surroundings. Such immune systems could equally be described as organismic early forms of a feeling for transcendence: thanks to the efficiency of these devices, which are constantly at the ready, the organism actively confronts the

potential bringers of its death, opposing them with its endogenous capacity to overcome the lethal. Such functions have earned immune systems of this type comparisons to a 'body police' or border patrol. But as the concern, already at this level, is to work out a *modus vivendi* with foreign and invisible powers – and, in so far as these can bring death, 'higher' and 'supernatural' ones – this is a preliminary stage to the behaviour one is accustomed to terming religious or spiritual in human contexts. For every organism, its environment is its transcendence, and the more abstract and unknown the danger from that environment, the more transcendent it appears.

Every gesture of 'suspendedness' [*Hineingehaltensein*] in the open, to use Heidegger's term, includes the anticipatory preparedness of the living system for an encounter with potentially lethal powers of irritation and invasion. 'The creature gazes into the open with all its eyes', Rilke states at the beginning of the eighth *Duino Elegy* – life itself is an exodus that relates inner matters to the environment. The tendency into the open emerges in several evolutionary steps: though virtually all organisms or integrities transcend into the first-level spaces of surprise and conflict that are assigned to them as their respective environments (even plants do this, and animals all the more so), only very few – only humans, as far as we know – achieve the second level of transcendent movement. Through this, the environment is derestricted to become the world as an integral whole of manifest and latent elements. The second step is the work of language. This not only builds the 'house of being' – Heidegger took this phrase from Zarathustra's animals, which inform the convalescent: 'the house of being rebuilds itself eternally'; it is also the vehicle for the tendencies to run away from that house with which, by means of its inner surpluses, humans move towards the open. It need hardly be explained why the oldest parasite in the world, the world above, only appears with the second transcendence.

I shall refrain from touching on the consequences of these reflections for the human realm at this early stage. For now it is sufficient to note that the continuation of biological evolution in social and cultural evolution leads to an upgrading of immune

systems. In the case of humans, we have reason to expect not only a single immune system – the biological one, which is the first in evolutionary terms, but the last in terms of its discovery history. The human sphere contains no fewer than three immune systems, which function layered on top of one another in close collaborative interaction and functional augmentation. In the course of man's mental and socio-cultural evolution, two complementary systems have developed for the pre-emptive processing of injuries: firstly the socio-immunological methods, especially legal and solidaristic ones, but also the military ones by which people resolve their confrontations with distant and foreign aggressors and insulting or harmful neighbours;⁸ and secondly the symbolic or psycho-immunological practices on which humans have always relied to cope – with varying success – with their vulnerability through fate, including mortality, in the form of imaginary anticipations and mental armour.⁹ It is one of the ironies of these systems that their dark sides are capable of explication, even though their existence depends on consciousness from the start and they consider themselves self-transparent. They do not function behind the backs of subjects, being entirely embedded in their intentional behaviour – nonetheless, it is possible to understand this behaviour better than it is understood by its naïve agents. This is what makes cultural science possible; and it is because a non-naïve approach to symbolic immune systems has itself become vital to the survival of 'cultures' today that cultural science is necessary.¹⁰

In this book, we will naturally be dealing primarily with the manifestations of the third level of immunity. I gather material on the biography of *Homo immunologicus*, guided by the assumption that this is where to find the stuff from which the forms of anthropotechnics are made. By this I mean the methods of mental and physical practising by which humans from the most diverse cultures have attempted to optimize their cosmic and immunological status in the face of vague risks of living and acute certainties of death. Only when these procedures have been grasped in a broad tableau of human 'work on oneself' can we evaluate the newest experiments in

genetic engineering, to which, in the current debate, many have reduced the term ‘anthropotechnics’, reintroduced in 1997.¹¹ What I have to say on this matter from today’s perspective will be woven *ad hoc* into the further course of this study. The tendency of my position is already manifest in the title of this book: whoever notes that it reads ‘You Must Change *Your* Life’ rather than ‘You Must Change *Life*’ has immediately understood what is important here.¹²

The hero of the following account, *Homo immunologicus*, who must give his life, with all its dangers and surfeits, a symbolic framework, is the human being that struggles with itself in concern for its form. We will characterize it more closely as the ethical human being, or rather *Homo repetitivus*, *Homo artista*, the human in training. None of the circulating theories of behaviour or action is capable of grasping the practising human – on the contrary: we will understand why previous theories had to make it vanish systematically, regardless of whether they divided the field of observation into work and interaction, processes and communications, or active and contemplative life. With a concept of practice based on a broad anthropological foundation, we finally have the right instrument to overcome the gap, supposedly unbridgeable by methodological means, between biological and cultural phenomena of immunity – that is, between natural processes on the one hand and actions on the other.

It has been stated often enough in endless discussions on the difference between natural and cultural phenomena – and the methods of their scientific investigation – that there are no direct routes from the one sphere to the other. The demand for a direct connection, however, is a superfluous nuisance to which one should pay no heed. It is revealing that it is made primarily by those who claim a reservation, enclosed by metaphysical fences, for what are known here as the humanities.¹³ Some defenders of the world of the spirit seek to make the divide between natural events and works of freedom as deep as possible – if need be, down to the very depths of an ontological dualism, supposedly to preserve the crown colonies of the

intellectual from naturalistic interference. We will see what is to be thought of such efforts.

In truth, the crossing from nature to culture and vice versa has always stood wide open. It leads across an easily accessible bridge: the practising life. People have committed themselves to its construction since they came into existence – or rather, people only came into existence by applying themselves to the building of said bridge. The human being is the pontifical creature that, from its earliest evolutionary stages, has created tradition-compatible connections between the bridgeheads in the bodily realm and those in cultural programmes. From the start, nature and culture are linked by a broad middle ground of embodied practices – containing languages, rituals and technical skills, in so far as these factors constitute the universal forms of automatized artificialities. This intermediate zone forms a morphologically rich, variable and stable region that can, for the time being, be referred to sufficiently clearly with such conventional categories as education, etiquette, custom, habit formation, training and exercise – without needing to wait for the purveyors of the ‘human sciences’, who, with all their bluster about culture, create the confusion for whose resolution they subsequently offer their services. It is in this ‘garden of the human’ – to recall a well-chosen non-physical formula by the physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker¹⁴ – that the following investigations will find their objects of examination. Gardens are enclosed areas in which plants and arts meet. They form ‘cultures’ in an uncompromised sense of the word. Whoever enters the gardens of the human encounters the powerful layers of orderly internal and external actions with an immune-systemic tendency above biological substrates. In the face of the worldwide crisis of cultures, which also includes the ghostly neo-religious episodes mentioned at the start, it is more than a mere academic pleasure if the explication of this domain is placed on the agenda of civilization parliaments.¹⁵

For internal reasons, a practice-anthropological study cannot possibly be carried out in a detached, unbiased fashion. This is

because sooner or later, every discourse on 'man' exceeds the limits of mere description and pursues normative goals – whether these are revealed or not. At no time was this more clearly recognizable than in the early European Enlightenment, when anthropology was founded as the original 'civil science'. At that time, the new science of human beings began to push itself in front of the traditional disciplines of logic, ontology and ethics as the modern paradigm of philosophy. Whoever entered the debate on man did so in order to assert – as a 'progressive' – the equation of citizen and human, either with the intention of abolishing the nobles as secessionists of humanity or elevating humanity as a whole to nobility, or – as a 'reactionary' – to portray man as the originally sinful, corrupted and unstable animal that one should, for one's own sake, never release from the hand of its taskmasters – or, mediievally put, its *correctores*.

The insurmountable bias of anthropological theory is closely interwoven with the nature of its object. For, as much as the general talk of 'man' may be infused with an egalitarian pathos, whether it concerns the real or stated equality of humans against their biological background or the virtual equal value of cultures before the court of survival-worthiness – it must always take into account that humans are inescapably subject to vertical tensions, in all periods and all cultural areas. Wherever one encounters human beings, they are embedded in achievement fields and status classes. Even the outside observer cannot entirely escape the binding nature of such hierarchical phenomena, as much as they might try to view their tribal idols in isolation. Quite obviously there are certain meta-idols whose authority exceeds cultural boundaries – clearly there are universals of achievement roles, status recognition and excellence from which no one can be emancipated, neither in their own context nor in a foreign one, without finding themselves in the position of the barbarian.

Fatally, the term 'barbarian' is the password that opens up the archives of the twentieth century. It refers to the despiser of achievement, the vandal, the status denier, the iconoclast, who refuses to acknowledge any ranking rules or hierarchy. Whoever wishes to understand the twentieth century must

always keep the barbaric factor in view. Precisely in more recent modernity, it was and still is typical to allow an alliance between barbarism and success before a large audience, initially more in the form of insensitive imperialism, and today in the costumes of that invasive vulgarity which advances into virtually all areas through the vehicle of popular culture. That the barbaric position in twentieth-century Europe was even considered the way forward among the purveyors of high culture for a time, extending to a messianism of uneducatedness, indeed the utopia of a new beginning on the clean slate of ignorance, illustrates the extent of the civilizatory crisis this continent has gone through in the last century and a half – including the cultural revolution downwards, which runs through the twentieth century in our climes and casts its shadow ahead onto the twenty-first.

As the following pages deal with the practising life, they lead – in accordance with their topic – to an expedition into the little-explored universe of human vertical tensions. The Platonic Socrates had opened up the phenomenon for occidental culture when he stated *expressis verbis* that man is a being potentially ‘superior to himself’.¹⁶ I translate this remark into the observation that all ‘cultures’, ‘subcultures’ or ‘scenes’ are based on central distinctions by which the field of human behavioural possibilities is subdivided into polarized classes. Thus the ascetic ‘cultures’ know the central distinction of complete versus incomplete, the religious ‘cultures’ that of sacred versus profane, the aristocratic ‘cultures’ that of noble versus common, the military ‘cultures’ that of brave versus cowardly, the political ‘cultures’ that of powerful versus powerless, the administrative ‘cultures’ that of superior versus subordinate, the athletic ‘cultures’ that of excellence versus mediocrity, the economic ‘cultures’ that of wealth versus lack, the cognitive ‘cultures’ that of knowledge versus ignorance, and the sapiential ‘cultures’ that of illumination versus blindness.¹⁷ What all these differentiations have in common is the espousal of the first value, which is considered the attractor in the respective field, while the second pole consistently functions as

a factor of repulsion or object of avoidance.

What I here call attractors are, in their mode of effect, the yardstick for vertical tensions that provide orientation in mental systems. Anthropology can no longer ignore the reality of such elements unless it wishes to talk around the decisive vectors of the human condition. Only from the angle of the attractive forces acting 'from above' can one explain why and in what forms *Homo sapiens*, whom the palaeontologists deliver directly to the entrance of the humanities faculty for us, was able to develop into the upward-tending animal described more or less in unison by the historians of ideas and world travellers. Wherever one encounters members of the human race, they always show the traits of a being that is condemned to surrealist effort. Whoever goes in search of humans will find acrobats.

The reference to the pluralism of central distinctions is not meant only to draw attention to the multifarious 'cultures' or 'scenes'. Such a pluralism of central distinctions also implies an explanation of how, in the history of 'cultures', especially in their more intense and creative phases, there could be superimpositions and mixtures of initially separate areas, reversals of values and intersections of disciplines – phenomena, then, that underlie the forms of spirituality and sophistication still attractive today. It is because the central distinctions can migrate from their original field and settle successfully in foreign zones that we have the spiritual chances which still fascinate us as the higher and highest possibilities of human beings: these include a non-economic definition of wealth, a non-aristocratic definition of the noble, a non-athletic definition of high achievement, a nondominatory definition of 'above', a non-ascetic definition of perfection, a non-military definition of bravery and a non-bigoted definition of wisdom and fidelity.

To conclude these preparatory remarks, I would like to say a few words on the partiality of the present book and warn of a misunderstanding that could easily occur. The following investigations take their own result as the point of departure: they testify to the realization that there are objects which do not permit their commentator a complete *epoché*, no withdrawal into

disinterestedness, even if the project is theory – which presupposes an abstinence from prejudices, caprices and zealous obsessions. We are dealing here with an object that does not leave its analyst alone; it would not be appropriate to the topic if the author were to remain entirely behind the fence of nonintentionality. The matter itself entangles its adepts in an inescapable self-referentiality by presenting them with the practising – the ‘ascetic’, form-demanding and habit-forming – character of their own behaviour. In his treatise on the battles between the gods underlying ancient Dionysian theatre, the young Nietzsche notes: ‘Alas! The magic of these struggles is such, that he who sees them must also take part in them!’¹⁸ Similarly, an anthropology of the practising life is infected by its subject. Dealing with practices, asceticisms and exercises, whether or not they are declared as such, the theorist inevitably encounters his own inner constitution, beyond affirmation and denial.

The same applies to the phenomenon of vertical tensions, without which no purposeful practising is possible. With reference to tensions of this kind, the theorist will do nothing to fend off their bias – aside from the usual willingness to clarify that which causes it. Anthropological study understands an affection by the matter itself as a sign of its philosophical orientation. In truth, philosophy is the mode of thought shaped by the most radical form of prejudice: the passion of being-in-the-world. With the sole exception of specialists in the field, virtually everyone senses that anything which offers less than this passion play remains philosophically trivial. Cultural anthropologists suggest the appealing term ‘deep play’ for the comprehensively absorbing preoccupations of human beings. From the perspective of a theory of the practising life we would add: the deep plays are those which are moved by the heights.

Finally, a word of warning about the misunderstanding that, as stated above, could easily occur. It follows from the fact that at present a large number of people with ‘religious’ interests are taking part in a large-scale anti-naturalistic mobilization that seeks to fend off the alleged and genuine interventions of the

reductive sciences in the hallowed regions of what is experienced and qualitatively felt. It is immediately clear how the arguments against naturalism serve an early epistemological defence of the facts of faith. Whoever transfers what they experience to an inner fortress that cannot be conquered by the scientific Saracens of today or tomorrow can, initially at least, believe they have done enough to place these delicate treasures under philosophical protection. This at least secures the conditions of the possibility of religiosity, if not the actual tenets of faith. The criticism levelled at naturalists – represented mostly by assertive neurologists today – rightly on the whole, concerns the tendency, conditioned by their field, to view the facts of consciousness in functional distortion and external reflection, without being able to do justice to the irresolvable single-mindedness of the ideational elements that appear in the first-person perspective.

To those who deal with these thought figures,¹⁹ I would like to say that at their core, the following investigations serve neither naturalistic nor functionalistic interests, although I consider it desirable to keep open the possibility of drawing on the results of such research from the ‘spirit side’ too – especially under the aforementioned immunological aspect. If my intention leads to a defamiliarization or, at times, a provocative re-description of the objects of analysis, it is not because external systems of logic are applied to them – as one can observe when neuroscientists talk about Christology²⁰ or geneticists discuss the DNA of monotheists.²¹ The defamiliarization resulting from my theoretical exercises, if it is perceived as such, rests entirely on internal translations by which the internal anthropotechnic languages are made explicit in the spiritual systems themselves. What I refer to here as ‘internal languages’ are, as can be shown, already contained in the countless ‘religiously’ or ethically coded practice systems, so making them explicit does not cause any foreign infiltration. With their help, the things inherently expressed by the holy texts and time-honoured rules are restated in a closely connected alternative language. Repetition plus translation plus generalization results, with the correct calculation, in clarification. If there is such a thing as

'progress in religion', it can only manifest itself as increasing explicitness.

The Planet of the Practising

THE COMMAND FROM THE STONE

Rilke's Experience

I will first of all present an aesthetic example to explain the phenomenon of vertical tensions and their meaning for the reorientation of the confused existence of modern humans: the well-known sonnet 'Archaic Torso of Apollo', which opens the cycle *New Poems: The Other Part* from 1908. Beginning with a poetic text seems apposite because – aside from the fact that the title of this book is taken from it – its assignment to the artistic field makes it less likely to provoke those anti-authoritarian reflexes which follow almost compulsively from any encounter with statements made dogmatically or from above – 'what does "above" mean anyway!' The aesthetic construct, and nothing else, has taught us to expose ourselves to a non-enslaving experience of rank differences. The work of art is even allowed to 'tell' us, those who have run away from form, something, because it quite obviously does not embody the intention to confine us. 'La poésie ne s'impose plus, elle s'expose.'¹ Something that exposes itself and proves itself in this test gains unpresumed authority. In the space of aesthetic simulation, which is at once the emergency space for the success and failure of the artistic construct, the powerless superiority of the works can affect observers who otherwise take pains to ensure that they have no lord, old or new, above them.

Rilke's 'Torso' is particularly suited to posing the question of the source of authority, as it constitutes an experiment about allowing oneself to be told something. As we know, Rilke, under the influence of Auguste Rodin, whom he had assisted between 1905 and 1906 in Meudon as a private secretary, turned away from the art nouveau-like, sensitized-atmospheric poetic approach of his early years to pursue a view of art determined more strongly by the 'priority of the object'. The proto-modern

pathos of making way for the object without depicting it in a manner 'true to nature', like that of the old masters, led in Rilke's case to the concept of the thing-poem – and thus to a temporarily convincing new answer to the question of the source of aesthetic and ethical authority. From that point, it would be the things themselves from which all authority would come – or rather: from this respectively current singular thing that turns to me by demanding my full gaze. This is only possible because thing-being would now no longer mean anything but this: having something to say.

In his field, and with his means, Rilke carries out an operation that one could philosophically describe as the 'transformation of being into message' (more commonly, 'linguistic turn'). 'Being that can be understood is language', Heidegger would later state – which conversely implies that language abandoned by being becomes mere chatter. When, and only when, being contracts in privileged things and turns to us via these things can we hope to escape the increasing randomness, both aesthetically and philosophically. In the face of the galloping inflation of chatter, it was inevitable that such a hope would draw in numerous artists and people of 'spirit' around 1900. In the midst of the ubiquitous dealings with prostituted signs, the thing-poem was capable of opening up the prospect of returning to credible experiences of meaning. It did this by tying language to the gold standard of what things themselves communicate. Where randomness is disabled, authority should shine forth.

It is clear enough that not every something can be elevated to the rank of a thing – otherwise everything and everyone would be speaking once more, and the chatter would spread from humans to things. Rilke privileges two categories of 'entities' [*Seienden*], to express it in the papery diction of philosophy, that are eligible for the lofty task of acting as message-things – artifices and living creatures – with the latter gaining their particular quality from the former, as if animals were being's highest works of art before humans. Inherent to both is a message energy that does not activate itself, but requires the poet as a decoder and messenger. This underlies the complicity between the speaking thing and Rilke's poetry – just as, only a

few years later, Heidegger's things would conspire with the 'legend' of a contemplative philosophy that no longer wants to be a mere scholastic discipline.

These somewhat accelerated remarks outline a framework in which we can attempt a brief reading of the 'Torso' poem. I am assuming that the torso mentioned in the sonnet is meant to embody a 'thing' in the eminent sense of the word, precisely because it is merely the leftover of a complete sculpture. We know from accounts of Rilke's life that his stay in Rodin's workshops taught him how modern sculpture had advanced to the genre of the autonomous torso.² The poet's view of the mutilated body thus has nothing to do with the previous century's Romanticism of fragments and ruins; it is part of the breakthrough in modern art to the concept of the object that states itself with authority and the body that publicizes itself with authorization.

ARCHAIC TORSO OF APOLLO

We never knew his head and all the light
that ripened in his fabled eyes. But
his torso still glows like a gas lamp dimmed
in which his gaze, lit long ago,

holds fast and shines. Otherwise the surge
of the breast could not blind you, nor a smile
run through the slight twist of the loins
toward that centre where procreation thrived.

Otherwise this stone would stand deformed and curt
under the shoulders' transparent plunge
and not glisten just like wild beasts' fur

and not burst forth from all its contours
like a star: for there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.³

Whoever absorbs anything vaguely concrete upon first reading has understood this much: the poem is dealing with perfection –

a perfection that seems all the more binding and mysterious because it is the perfection of a fragment. It is reasonable to suppose that this work was also an expression of thanks to Rodin, his master in his Paris days, for the concept of the autonomous torso, which he had encountered in his workshop. The reason for the existence of the perfection conjured up in these fourteen lines is that it possesses – independently of its material carrier's mutilation – the authorization to form a message that appeals from within itself. This power of appeal is exquisitely evident in the object evoked here. The perfect thing is that which articulates an entire principle of being. The poem has to perform no more and no less than to perceive the principle of being in the thing and adapt it to its own existence – with the aim of becoming a construct with an equal power to convey a message.

Rilke's torso can be experienced as the bearer of the attribute 'perfect' because it brings along something that permits it to snub the usual expectation of a morphological whole. This gesture is one of the motifs of modernity's turn against the principle of imitating nature, that is to say, imitating predefined morphological expectations. It is still capable of perceiving message-totalities and autonomous thing-signals when no morphologically intact figures are left – indeed, precisely then. The sense for perfection withdraws from the forms of nature – probably because nature itself is in the process of losing its ontological authority. The popularization of photography also increasingly devalues the standard views of things. As the first edition of the visible, nature comes into discredit. It can no longer assert its authority as the sender of binding messages – for reasons that ultimately come from its disenchantment through being scientifically explored and technically outdone. After this shift, 'being perfect' takes on an altered meaning: it means having something to say that is more meaningful than the chatter of conventional totalities. Now the torsos and their ilk have their turn: the hour of those forms that do not remind us of anything has come. Fragments, cripples and hybrids formulate something that cannot be conveyed by the common whole forms and happy integrities; intensity beats standard perfection.

A hundred years after Rilke pointed to this, we probably understand it better even than his own contemporaries, as our perceptual capacity has been numbed and plundered by the chatter of flawless bodies more than in any preceding generation.

These observations will have made it clear how the phenomenon of being spoken to from above embodies itself in an aesthetic construct. To understand an appeal experience of this kind, it is not necessary to address the assumption, accepted by Rilke, that the torso he describes was once the statue of a god – of Apollo, the curators of the day believed. One cannot entirely rule out an element of art nouveau-esque reverence for education in the poet's experience of the sculpture; it is said that Rilke encountered the poem's real-life model during a visit to the Louvre, and as far as we know, it would have been a piece from the classical period of Greek sculpture rather than an archaic work of art. What the poet has to say to the torso of the supposed Apollo, however, is more than a note on an excursion to the antiques collection. The author's point is not that the thing depicts an extinct god who might be of interest to the humanistically educated, but that the god in the stone constitutes a thing-construct that is still on air. We are dealing with a document of how newer message ontology outgrew traditional theologies. Here, being itself is understood as having more power to speak and transmit, and more potent authority, than God, the ruling idol of religions. In modern times, even a God can find himself among the pretty figures that no longer mean anything to us – assuming they do not become openly irksome. The thing filled with being, however, does not cease to speak to us when its moment has come.

We are approaching the critical point: the final two lines have always captivated readers. They awaken feelings of significance that virtually unhinge the entire lyric construct – as if it were merely the path towards a climax for which the rest is laid out. And indeed, the two closing sentences – 'for there is no place / that does not see you. You must change your life.' – almost began an independent career, imprinting themselves on the

memories of the educated in general, not only Rilke admirers and poetry fanatics. I admit: on this particular occasion, I am inclined to agree with the need to take lines out of their context, not least because the popular taste for the beautiful places sometimes contains a valid judgement on authentic moments of climax. One does not need to be an enthusiast to understand why those closing lines have developed a life of their own. In their dignified brevity and mystical simplicity, they radiate an art-evangelical energy that can scarcely be found in any other passage from recent language art.

At first glance, the initial statement seems the more enigmatic one. Whoever understands or accepts it, or allows it to apply in the lyric context – which amounts to the same in this case – is immediately affected by an almost hypnotic suggestion. By seeking to ‘understand’, one gives credit to a turn of phrase that reverses the everyday relationship between the seer and the seen. That I see the torso with its stout shoulders and stumps is one aspect; that I dreamily add the missing parts – the head, the arms, the legs and the genitals – in my mind and associatively animate them is a further aspect. If need be, I can even follow Rilke’s suggestion and imagine a smile extending from an invisible mouth to vanished genitals. A completely different aspect, however, the thoroughly incommensurable one, lies in the imposition of accepting that the torso sees me while I observe it – indeed, that it eyes me more sharply than I can look at it.

The ability to perform the inner gesture with which one makes space for this improbability inside oneself most probably consists precisely in the talent that Max Weber denied having. This talent is ‘religiosity’, understood as an innate disposition and a talent that can be developed, making it comparable to musicality. One can practise it, just as one practises melodic passages or syntactic patterns. In this sense, religiosity is congruent with a certain grammatical promiscuity. Where it operates, objects elastically exchange places with subjects. Therefore, if I accept that there are – on the shimmering surface of the mutilated stone – numerous ‘places’ that amount to eyes and see me, I am performing an operation with a micro-religious

quality – and which, once understood, one will recognize at all levels of macro-religiously developed systems as the primary module of a ‘pious’ inner action. In the position where the object usually appears, never looking back because it is an object, I now ‘recognize’ a subject with the ability to look and return gazes. Thus, as a hypothetical believer, I accept the insinuation of a subject that dwells inside the respective place, and wait to see what this pliable development will make of me. (We note: even the ‘deepest’ or most virtuosic piety cannot achieve more than habitualized insinuations.) I receive the reward for my willingness to participate in the object–subject reversal in the form of a private illumination – in the present case, as an aesthetic movedness. The torso, which has no place that does not see me, likewise does not impose itself – it exposes itself. It exposes itself by testing whether I will recognize it as a seer. Acknowledging it as a seer essentially means ‘believing’ in it, where believing, as noted above, refers to the inner operations that are necessary to conceive of the vital principle in the stone as a sender of discrete addressed energies. If I somehow succeed in this, I am also able to take the glow of subjectivity away from the stone. I tentatively accept the way it stands there in exemplary radiance, and receive the starlike eruption of its surplus of authority and soul.

It is only in this context that the name of the depicted has any significance. What appears in the former statue of Apollo, however, cannot simply be equated with the Olympian of the same name, who had to ensure light, contours, foreknowledge and security of form in his days of completeness. Rather, as the poem’s title implies, he stands for something much older, something rising from prehistoric sources. He symbolizes a divine magma in which something of the first ordering force, as old as the world itself, becomes manifest. There is no doubt that memories of Rodin and his cycloplan work ethic had an effect on Rilke here. During his work with the great artist, he experienced what it means to work on the surfaces of bodies until they are nothing but a fabric of carefully shaped, luminous, almost seeing ‘places’.⁴ A few years earlier, he had written of Rodin’s sculptures that ‘there were endless places, and none of

them did not have something happening in them'.⁵ Each place is a point at which Apollo, the god of forms and surfaces, makes a visually intense and haptically palpable compromise with his older opponent Dionysus, the god of urges and currents. That this energized Apollo embodies a manifestation of Dionysus is indicated by the statement that the stone glistens 'like wild beasts' fur': Rilke had read his Nietzsche. Here we encounter the second micro-religious or proto-musical module: the notorious 'this stands for that', 'the one appears in the other' or 'the deep layer is present in the surface' – figures without which no religious discourse would ever have come about. They tell us that religiosity is a form of hermeneutical flexibility and can be trained.

'For there is no place / that does not see you. You must change your life.' It remains to be shown why the second sentence, which seemingly requires no interpretation, is actually far more enigmatic than the first. It is not only its lack of preparation, its suddenness that is mysterious. 'You must change your life' – these words seem to come from a sphere in which no objections can be raised. Nor can we establish from where they are spoken; only their verticality is beyond doubt. It is unclear whether this dictum shoots straight up from the ground to stand in my way like a pillar, or falls from the sky to transform the road before me into an abyss, such that my next step should already belong to the changed life that has been demanded. It is not enough to say that Rilke retranslated ethics in an aestheticizing fashion into a succinct, cycloplan, archaic-brutal form. He discovered a stone that embodies the torso of 'religion', ethics and asceticism as such: a construct that exudes a call from above, reduced to the pure command, the unconditional instruction, the illuminated utterance of being that can be understood – and which only speaks in the imperative.

If one wished to transfer all the teachings of the papyrus religions, the parchment religions, the stylus and quill religions, the calligraphic and typographical, all order rules and sect programmes, all instructions for meditation and doctrines of stages, and all training programmes and dietologies into a

single workshop where they would be summarized in a final act of editing: their utmost concentrate would express nothing other than what the poet sees emanating from the archaic torso of Apollo in a moment of translucidity.

‘You must change your life!’ – this is the imperative that exceeds the options of hypothetical and categorical. It is the absolute imperative – the quintessential metanoetic command. It provides the keyword for revolution in the second person singular. It defines life as a slope from its higher to its lower forms. I am already living, but something is telling me with unchallengeable authority: you are not living properly. The numinous authority of form enjoys the prerogative of being able to tell me ‘You must’. It is the authority of a different life in this life. This authority touches on a subtle insufficiency within me that is older and freer than sin; it is my innermost not-yet. In my most conscious moment, I am affected by the absolute objection to my status quo: my change is the one thing that is necessary. If you do indeed subsequently change your life, what you are doing is no different from what you desire with your whole will as soon as you feel how a vertical tension that is valid for you unhinges your life.

As well as this ethical-revolutionary reading, there are also somewhat more concrete and psychologically accessible interpretations of the torso poem. There is no need to limit our commentary to lofty art-philosophical and being-philosophical positions; the experience of authority that binds the poet for a moment to the ancient statue can perhaps be reconstructed more plausibly on a more sensual, aesthetically comprehensible level. This raises the somatic, or, more precisely, the auto-erotic and masculine-athletic, impressions of the sculpture, which must have provoked in the poet (who, in the language of his time, was a neurasthenic and a weak-bodied introvert) an empathetic experience of the antipodal mode of being that is native to strong ‘body people’. This is in keeping with a fact that did not escape Rilke, namely that, in the immeasurably rich statue culture of the ancient Greeks, there was a dominant system of physical and mental kinship between gods and athletes in which resemblance could reach the level of identity.

A god was always a form of sportsman too, and the sportsman – especially the one celebrated in a hymn of praise and crowned with a laurel wreath – was always also a god of sorts. Hence the athlete's body, which unifies beauty and discipline into a calm readiness for action, offers itself as one of the most understandable and convincing manifestations of authority.

The authoritative body of the god-athlete has an immediate effect on the viewer through its exemplarity. It too says concisely: 'You must change your life!', and in so doing simultaneously shows what model this change should follow. It displays how being and being exemplary converge. Every classical statue was a petrified or bronze-cast teaching permit in ethical matters. What was known as Platonism, an otherwise rather un-Greek affair, could only find its home in Greece because the so-called ideas had already established themselves in the form of statues. Platonic love was already widely anchored in society some time before Plato, as a training affect in exercises between the somatically perfect and the beginners, and this eros worked in both directions – from the model to his emulators and from the desirer to his model. Now, I certainly do not wish to posit any narcissistic relationship between Rilke and a fragment of ancient Greek art exhibited in the Louvre glorifying the male body cult. It is plausible, however, that the author of the sonnet saw some of the radiance of ancient athletic vitalism and the muscular theology of the wrestlers in the palaestra in the real torso he viewed. The difference of vitality between the elevated and profane bodies must have spoken to him directly, even when faced with a mere relic of idealized masculinity.

With this way of feeling, the poet would have been no more or less than a sensitive contemporary of the late renaissance in Europe, which reached a critical stage around 1900. Its defining trait is the return of the athlete as the key figure of ancient somatic idealism. With this, the process of post-Christian cultural reorganization that had begun around 1400 as a philological and artistic Renaissance entered its mass-cultural phase. Its foremost characteristic is sport, and it can never be emphasized too much how deeply it affected the ethos of the

moderns. The restarting of the Olympics (and the excessive popularization of soccer in Europe and South America) marked the beginning of its triumph, whose end is barely in sight, unless one interprets the current doping corruption as the indication of an imminent breakdown – though no one can say at present what might replace athleticism. The cult of sport that exploded around 1900 possesses an outstanding intellectual-historical, or rather ethical-historical and asceticism-historical, significance, as it demonstrates an epochal change of emphasis in practice behaviour – a transformation best described as a re-somatization or a de-spiritualization of asceticisms. In this respect, sport is the most explicit realization of Young Hegelianism, the philosophical movement whose motto was ‘the resurrection of the flesh in this life’. Of the two great ideas of the nineteenth century, socialism and somatism, it was clearly only the latter that could be widely established, and one need not be a prophet to assert that the twenty-first century will belong to it completely, even more than the twentieth.

After all we have said, it does not seem inappropriate to suggest that Rilke had some participation in the somatic and athletic renaissance, even though his connection was obviously indirect and mediated by artefacts, namely the category of ‘things’ discussed above. Rilke certainly made no secret of feeling stimulated by Nietzsche, and he equally – in the ‘Letter of the Young Worker’⁶ – took up the timely cause of reclaiming sexuality from the crippling tradition of Christian ‘renunciation of instincts’.

The presence of the athletic *mana* in the torso, still shining and licensed to teach, contains an element of orientational energy that I shall term – even if the phrase initially seems inappropriate – ‘trainer authority’. In this capacity and character, it addresses the present-day weaklings of the body and of life with words of an unmistakably sport-ethical nature. The statement ‘You must change your life!’ can now be heard as the refrain of a language of getting in shape. It forms part of a new rhetorical genre: the coach discourse, their changing-room lecture to a weakly performing team. Whoever speaks to teams

must address each individual player as if speaking to them alone. Such speeches cannot be tolerated in company, but they are constitutive for teams.

Give up your attachment to comfortable ways of living – show yourself in the gymnasium (*gymnos* = ‘naked’), prove that you are not indifferent to the difference between perfect and imperfect, demonstrate to us that achievement – excellence, *areté*, *virtù* – has not remained a foreign word to you, admit that you have motives for new endeavours! Above all: only grant the suspicion that sport is a pastime for the most stupid as much space as it deserves, do not misuse it as a pretext to drift further in your customary state of self-neglect, distrust the philistine in yourself who thinks you are just fine as you are! Hear the voice from the stone, do not resist the call to get in shape! Seize the chance to train with a god!

REMOTE VIEW OF THE ASCETIC PLANET

Nietzsche's Antiquity Project

The term 'late renaissance', which I have suggested to characterize the still inadequately understood sport cult phenomenon that appeared after 1900, proves helpful in dating Nietzsche's intervention in the midst of the discourses of the Enlightenment as it changed into modernity. In truth, any attempt to understand Nietzsche must begin with a reflection on his date. With this thinker, it is not sufficient to cast a glance at his dates of birth and death in order to know when he was living and thinking. One of the enormities of this author is the impossibility of identifying him as a child of his time. Naturally it is easy to point to the aspects of his work that are typical of the time. One can show how, as an artist, he made the transition from Biedermeier-weakened Romanticism to a late Romantically tinged modernity; as a publicist, the leap from Wagnerism to a prophetic elitism; as a thinker, the change of position from symbolist late idealism to perspectival naturalism – or, expressed in names, from Schopenhauer to Darwin. If only the aspects of Nietzsche that were indebted to his epoch were significant, the reception of his work would not have lasted beyond 1914 – the turning point from which the moderns, once and for all, had other concerns; and as early as 1927, Heidegger was already elevating these 'other concerns' to the level of concern [*Sorge*] itself, concern *sans phrase*.

In truth, Nietzsche's impulses only began to unfold in that age of 'other concerns', and there is no end to this work of unfolding in sight. The author of *The Genealogy of Morals* is the most philosophically observant contemporary of the processes referred to with the concept of the 'somatic or athletic

renaissance' introduced above. In order to gain a suitable idea of their thrust and their pull, it is indispensable to reread his writings on the art of living, which pose the question of the true date of Nietzsche's intellectual existence for strong objective reasons.

One can believe without further investigation the claim that the author occasionally thought of himself as someone from the Renaissance who had ended up in the wrong period. What is relevant in our context is not the sense of an elective past, or some homesickness for a bygone golden age for art and uncompromising methods. The decisive aspect is rather the fact that Nietzsche was himself an actor in a genuine renaissance, and that the only reason he did not identify himself accordingly is that his notion of renaissance was too dependent on art-historical conventions. It is not for nothing that the young Nietzsche was one of the most intensive readers of Jacob Burckhardt's epoch-morphological masterpiece *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860), a work in which the historian gathered together several centuries' worth of culture to form a single giant mural. Stepping back from this huge picture, the art-recipient of the late nineteenth century had no choice but to long for times past and project himself into a suitable part of the painting. Everything suggests that Nietzsche was no stranger to such exercises. He may have transported himself to the army camp of Castruccio Castracani to experience heroic vitalism up close, or gone for a walk along the Lungotevere, dreaming of becoming a Cesare Borgia of philosophy.

Nonetheless, it would have sufficed for the wanderer of Sils Maria to abandon the art-historically confined notion of renaissance and advance to a process-theoretical one; then he would inevitably have reached the conclusion that the age of 'rebirth' had by no means ended with the artistic and cultural events of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. From a processual perspective, Nietzsche would have recognized himself at the current pivot of an advancing renaissance that was in the process of outgrowing its educated middle-class definitions. Via the mediation of the Enlightenment, this movement had changed from a hobby among a tiny literate elite

and their secretaries, an ostentatious amusement among princely and mercantile art patrons and their masterly suppliers (who established a first 'art system'⁷), into a national, a European, indeed a planetary matter. In order to spread from the few to the many, the renaissance had to discard its humanistic exterior and reveal itself as the return of ancient mass culture. The true renaissance question, reformulated in the terminology of practical philosophy – namely, whether other forms of life are possible and permissible for us alongside and after Christianity, especially ones whose patterns are derived from Greek and Roman (perhaps even Egyptian or Indian) antiquity – was no longer a secret discourse or an academic exercise in the nineteenth century, but rather an epochal passion, an inescapable *pro nobis*. Hence one must beware of the false conclusion that the topic of the 'life reform', which was in the air from the Romantics and early socialists on, though it only reached its charismatic peak after 1900, was a mere sectarian quirk – with the 'reform houses'⁸ as an endearingly old-fashioned relic. The life reform is rather the renaissance programme itself, transferred from bourgeois art history to the arena of battles for the true *modus vivendi* of the moderns. Placing Nietzsche in this arena means dating him correctly, for the time being.

This expansion of the renaissance zone is no more than a first step, however. If one left it at that, one would only have re-dated Nietzsche semi-correctly at best. One would certainly have done him justice by assimilating his present into a past of his choosing; as far as his more radical 'chronopolitics' is concerned, however, his striving to break out of the Modern Age as such, one would not really be taking him seriously. This attempt to break out is what holds the far greater provocation and the far more potent food for thought. Dealing with it also demands more than the re-dating suggestion that has been common for some time, which posits that Nietzsche belongs not to modernity but to postmodernity, as one of its founding fathers. Nietzsche's position cannot be defined in terms of a choice between modern and postmodern – in fact, it does not even show up on this field. Nietzsche's departure to a period

that suited him did not, as some would have it, take him into an era 'after modernity', whatever that might mean. What he envisaged was not a modernization of modernity, no progress beyond the time of progress. Nor did he, by any means, break up the one historical narrative into several, as seemed plausible to critical minds working on the self-investigation of the Enlightenment during the late twentieth century. Nietzsche was concerned with a radical allochrony, a fundamental other-timeliness in the midst of the present.

His true date is therefore antiquity – and, because antiquity can only exist in modern times as repetition, neo-antiquity. The neoancient antiquity in which Nietzsche locates himself is not meant as a mere programme, something that could be placed on the agenda to meet the needs of today. An arranged antiquity would go against Nietzsche's intentions, as its reservation on the daily agenda would itself be an unwelcome act of modernism. Agendas provide the forms of work that modernity uses to arrange its steps on the timeline to the future, whether one interprets them as a meaningful or empty forward motion. What Nietzsche had in mind was not a repetition of ancient patterns on the model of fashion, whose antiquity is never more than a few years ago; the question of whether fashions rotate in decades or millennia was of no consequence to him. His concept of allochrony – initially introduced shyly as 'untimeliness', then later radicalized to an exit from modernity – is based on the idea, as suggestive as it is fantastic, that antiquity has no need of repetitions enacted in subsequent periods, because it 'essentially' returns constantly on its own strength. In other words, antiquity – or the ancient – is not an overcome phase of cultural development that is only represented in the collective memory and can be summoned by the wilfulness of education. It is rather a kind of constant present – a depth time, a nature time, a time of being – that continues underneath the theatre of memory and innovation that occupies cultural time. If one could show how recurrence defeats repetition and the circle makes a fool of the line, this would not only demonstrate an understanding of the point of Nietzsche's decisive self-dating; it would also fulfil the

these arguments does bring something to light that must be acknowledged as one of the greatest discoveries of intellectual history. Nietzsche is no more or less than the Schliemann of asceticisms. In the midst of the excavation sites, surrounded by the psychopathic rubble of millennia and the ruins of morbid palaces, he was completely right to assume the triumphant expression of a discoverer. We know today that he had dug in the right place; what he dug up, however – to continue the metaphor – was not Homer's Troy, but a later layer. And a large number of the asceticisms to which he referred polemically were precisely not expressions of life-denial and metaphysical servility; it was rather a matter of heroism in a spiritual disguise. Nietzsche's occasional misinterpretations cannot detract from the value of his discovery. With his find, Nietzsche stands fatally – in the best sense of the word – at the start of modern, nonspiritualistic ascetologies along with their physio- and psychotechnic annexes, with dietologies and self-referential trainings, and hence all the forms of self-referential practising and working on one's own vital form that I bring together in the term 'anthropotechnics'.

The significance of the impulse coming from Nietzsche's new view of ascetic phenomena can hardly be overestimated. By shifting himself to a 'supra-epochal' antiquity that waits beneath every medieval and modern non-antiquity, and under every future, he attained the necessary level of eccentricity to cast a glance, as if from without, at his own time and others. His alternative self-dating allowed him to leap out of the present, giving him the necessary eyesight to encompass the continuum of advanced civilizations, the three-thousand-year empire of mental exercises, self-trainings, self-elevations and self-lowerings – in short, the universe of metaphysically coded vertical tension – in an unprecedented synopsis.

Here we should quote especially those sections from Nietzsche's central morality-critical work *The Genealogy of Morals* that deal with their subject in a diction of Olympian clarity. In the decisive passage he discusses the practice forms of that life-denial or world-weariness which, according to Nietzsche, exemplifies the morphological circle of sick

asceticisms in general.

The ascetic [of the priestly-sick type] treats life as a wrong path on which one must walk backwards till one comes to the place where it starts; or he treats it as an error which one may, nay *must*, refute by action: for he *demand*s that he should be followed; he enforces, where he can, *his* valuation of existence. What does this mean? Such a monstrous valuation is not an exceptional care, or a curiosity recorded in human history: it is one of the broadest and longest facts that exist. Reading from the vantage point of a distant star the capital letters of our earthly life would perchance lead to the conclusion that the earth was the truly *ascetic planet*, a den of discontented, arrogant, and repulsive creatures, who never got rid of a deep disgust of themselves, of the world, of all life, and did themselves as much hurt as possible out of pleasure in hurting – presumably their one and only pleasure.¹⁰

With this note, Nietzsche presents himself as the pioneer of a new human science that one could describe as a planetary science of culture. Its method consists in observing our heavenly body using ‘photographs’ of cultural formations as if from a great altitude. Through the new image-producing abstractions, the life of the earthlings is searched for more general patterns – with asceticism coming to light as a historically developed structure that Nietzsche quite legitimately calls one of ‘the broadest and longest facts that exist’. These ‘facts’ demand a suitable cartography and a corresponding geography and basic science. That is all the genealogy of morals seeks to be. The new science of the origins of moral systems (and *eo ipso* of morally governed forms of life and practice) is the first manifestation of General Ascetology. It begins the explication history of religions and systems of ethics as anthropotechnic praxes.

We must not let ourselves be distracted by the fact that, in this passage, Nietzsche is referring exclusively to the asceticisms of the sick and their priestly minders. The ascetic planet he sights is the planet of the practising as a whole, the planet of advanced-civilized humans, the planet of those who have begun to give their existence forms and contents under vertical tensions in countless programmes of effort, some more and some less strictly coded. When Nietzsche speaks of the

ascetic planet, it is not because he would rather have been born on a more relaxed star. His antiquity-instinct tells him that every heavenly body worth inhabiting must – correctly understood – be an ascetic planet inhabited by the practising, the aspiring and the virtuosos. What is antiquity for him but the code word for the age in which humans had to become strong enough for a sacred-imperial image of the whole? Inherent in the great worldviews of antiquity was the intention of showing mortals how they could live in harmony with the ‘universe’, even and especially when that whole showed them its baffling side, its lack of consideration for individuals. What one called the wisdom of the ancients was essentially a tragic holism, a self-integration within the great whole, that could not be achieved without heroism. Nietzsche’s planet would become the place whose inhabitants, especially the male ones, would carry the weight of the world anew without self-pity – in keeping with the Stoic maxim that the only important thing is to keep oneself in shape for the cosmos. Some of this appeared not much later in Heidegger’s doctrine of concern, at whose call mortals must adjust to the burden character of Dasein (after 1918, the mortals were primarily the wounded and non-fallen, who were meant to keep themselves ready for other forms of death on other fronts). Under no circumstances could the earth remain an institution in which the *ressentiment* programmes of the sick and the compensation-claiming skills of the insulted determined the climate.

In his differentiation between asceticisms, Nietzsche posited a clear divide between the priestly varieties on the one side, illuminated by his vicious gaze, and the disciplinary rules of intellectual workers, philosophers and artists as well as the exercises of warriors and athletes on the other side. If the former are concerned with what one might call a *pathological* asceticism – an artful self-violation among an elite of sufferers that empowers them to lead other sufferers and induce the healthy to become co-sick – the latter only impose their regulations on themselves because they see them as a means of reaching their optimum as thinkers and creators of works. What Nietzsche calls the ‘pathos of distance’¹¹ is devoted

entirely to the division of asceticisms. Its intention is to 'keep the missions separate' and set the exercises whereby those who are successful, good and healthy can become more successful, good and healthy apart from those which enable resolute failures, the malicious and the sick to place themselves on pedestals and pulpits – whether for the sake of perversely acquired feelings of superiority or to distract themselves from their tormenting interest in their own sickness and failure.¹² Needless to say, the opposition of healthy and sick should not be taken as purely medical: it serves as the central distinction in an ethics that gives a life with the 'first movement' ('be a self-propelling wheel!' [*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*]) priority over a life dominated by inhibited movement.

The extension of the moral-historical perspective makes the meaning of the thesis of the athletic and somatic renaissance apparent. At the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the phenomenon labelled the 'rebirth of antiquity' in the language regulations of art history entered a phase that fundamentally modified the motives of our identification with cultural relics from antiquity, even from the early classical period. Here, as we have seen, one finds a regression to a time in which the changing of life had not yet fallen under the command of life-denying asceticisms. This 'supraepochal' time could just as easily be called the future, and what seems like a regression towards it could also be conceived of as a leap forwards. The manner in which Rilke experienced the torso of Apollo testified to the same cultural shift that Nietzsche was pursuing when he pushed his reflections on the establishment of the priestly, 'bio-negative', spiritualistic asceticisms to the point where the paradoxical struggle of the suffering life against itself became apparent. In discovering the ascetological foundations of higher human forms of life, he assigned a new meaning to 'morality'. The power of the practice layer in human behaviour is sufficiently broad to span the contrast between affirmative and denying 'moralities'.

Let us emphasize once again: this disclosure of 'one of the broadest and longest facts that exist' concerns not only the self-tormenting approaches to shaping one's self-dealings; it

encompasses all varieties of 'concern for oneself' as well as all forms of concern for adaptation to the highest. Aside from that, the jurisdiction of ascetology, understood as a general theory of practising, doctrine of habit and germinal discipline of anthropotechnics, does not end with the phenomena of advanced civilization and the spectacular results of mental or somatic vertical ascent (leading into the most diverse forms of virtuosity); it closes every vital continuum, every series of habits, every lived succession, including the seemingly most formless drifting and the most advanced neglect and exhaustion.

One cannot deny a marked one-sidedness in Nietzsche's late writings: he did not pursue the positive side of his ascetological discoveries with the same emphasis as that he displayed in his explorations of the morbid pole – undoubtedly because of a stronger inclination towards examining the therapeutic purpose of negative ascetic ideals than the athletic, dietological, aesthetic and also 'biopolitical' purpose of positive practice programmes. Throughout his life, he was sufficiently sick to be interested in possibilities of overcoming sickness in a meaningful way, and sufficiently lucid to reject the traditional attempts to bestow meaning upon the senseless. That is why he exhibited a combination of reluctant respect for the attainment of ascetic ideals in the history of mankind to date and reluctance to draw on them himself. In Nietzsche's case, this fluctuation between an appreciation of self-coercive behaviour and scepticism towards the idealistic extravagances of such praxes led to a new attentiveness towards the behavioural area of asceticism, practice and self-treatment as a whole. It is the re-description of this in terms of a general theory of anthropotechnics that is now called for.

There are three points to bear in mind that make the discovery of the 'ascetic planet' as far-reaching as it is problematic. Firstly: Nietzsche's new view of the ascetic dimension only become possible in a time when the asceticisms were becoming post-spiritually somatized, while the manifestations of spirituality were moving in a post-ascetic, non-disciplined and informal direction. The de-spiritualization of asceticisms is probably the

main thing is contained; then climbing higher in the minor things means advancing in the main thing.

ONLY CRIPPLES WILL SURVIVE

Unthan's Lesson

That life can involve the need to move forwards in spite of obstacles is one of the basic experiences shared by the group of people whom, with a carefree clarity, one formerly called 'cripples', before younger and supposedly more humane, understanding and respectful spirits of the age renamed them the handicapped, those with special needs, the problem children, and finally simply 'human beings'.¹³ If, in the following chapter, I persist in using the old term, which has meanwhile come to seem tactless, it is purely because it had its traditional place in the vocabulary of the time that I am recalling in these explorations. Abandoning it for the sake of sensitivity, and perhaps merely over-sensitivity, would cause a system of indispensable observations and insights to disappear. In the following, I would like to demonstrate the unusual convergence of human and cripple in the discourses of the generation after Nietzsche in order to gain further insights into the structural change of human motives for improvement in recent times. Here it will transpire to what extent references to the human being in the twentieth century are rooted in cripple-anthropological premises – and how cripple anthropology changes spontaneously into an anthropology of defiance. In the latter, humans appear as the animals that must move forwards because they are obstructed by something.

The reference to rooting provides the cue, albeit indirectly, for the reflections with which I shall continue the explorations on the planet of the practising stimulated by Nietzsche – and, in a sense, also the contemplations on torsos introduced by Rilke. In 1925, two years before Heidegger's *Being and Time*, three years before Scheler's *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, the Stuttgart publisher Lutz' Memoirenbibliothek printed a book with

the simultaneously amusing and shocking title *Das Pediskript: Aufzeichnungen aus dem Leben eines Armlosen, mit 30 Bildern* [The Pediscript: Notes from the Life of an Armless Man, with 30 Illustrations]. It was 'penned' by Carl Hermann Unthan, who was born in East Prussia in 1848 and died in 1929 – in truth, it was written on a typewriter whose keys were pressed using a stylus held with the foot. Unthan unquestionably deserves a place in the pantheon of reluctant virtuosos of existence. He belongs to those who managed to make a great deal of themselves, even though his starting conditions suggested that he would almost certainly make little or nothing of himself. At the age of six or seven the boy, born without arms, discovered by chance the possibility of playing on a violin fastened to a box on the ground. With a mixture of *naïveté* and tenacity, he devoted himself to improving the method he had discovered for playing the violin with his feet. The right foot played the part of the left hand, fingering the notes, while the left foot moved the bow.

The young man pursued his exercises with such determination that after attending secondary school in Königsberg, he was accepted as a student at the Leipzig Conservatory. There, mastering an enormous practice workload, he reached a notable level of virtuosity. He expanded his repertoire, soon also including showpieces of the highest difficulty. Naturally the handicapped man's violin playing would never have attracted such attention far and wide if it had been carried out in the usual form, without the element of acrobatic improbability. Before long, a vaudeville entrepreneur showed interest in Unthan. In 1868, still a minor, he began to go on concert tours, which, after stops in rural towns, took him to the European capitals, and later even across the ocean. He performed in Vienna, where he was introduced to the conductors Johann Strauss and Michael Zierer. In Munich he impressed the Hungaro-Bavarian military band leader and waltz king Josef Gungl by playing Gungl's brand new composition, the 'Hydropathen-Walzer'; he was especially flabbergasted by Unthan's execution of double stops with his toes. After a concert at the 'overcrowded grand ballroom' in Budapest, he was reportedly congratulated on his virtuosic performance by Franz

Liszt, who had been sitting in the first row. He patted him 'on the cheek and shoulder' and expressed his appreciation. Unthan notes on this incident: 'What was it that made me doubt the authenticity of his enthusiasm? Why did it seem so artificial?'¹⁴ One can see: in this note, Unthan, who was already over seventy by the time he wrote *Das Pediskript*, was not simply touching on imponderabilities in relationships between older and younger virtuosos. Those questions, written down half a century after the scene they describe took place, were significant as a symptom: they reminded the author of a distant time when the illusion that he could be taken seriously as a musician, not merely a curiosity, was still intact. Even fifty years later, the author still felt the cold breeze of disillusionment in Liszt's paternally sympathetic gesture; Liszt, a former prodigy himself, knew from experience what kind of life awaits virtuosos of any kind. So he would have known all the better what future lay before a young man who was to travel the world as a victor over a quirk of nature.

There is a widespread cliché among biographers: that their hero, who often has to go through arduous early years first, 'conquers the world for himself'. In his mode of self-presentation, Unthan takes up this figure by following each anecdote with another and recounting the saga of his successful years as a drawn-out travelogue, moving from city to city and continent to continent. He tells the story of a long life in constant motion: on Cunard steamers, on trains, in hotels of every category, in prestigious concert halls and dingy establishments. He probably spent the majority of his career on dubious vaudeville stages, from which he would blow the baffled audience kisses with his feet at the end of his performances.¹⁵ The dominant sound in Unthan's public life seems to have been the cheering and applause of those surprised by his presentations. Unthan's 'notes', which can neither be called an autobiography nor memoirs – the closest category would be that of curiosities – are written in a language at once naïve and sentimental, full of stock phrases, echoing the diction of the factual account in the mid-nineteenth century; one can imagine the author's tongue in the corner of his mouth while writing.

On every page of *Das Pediskript*, Unthan demonstrates his conviction that the success of his life is revealed through an overflowing collection of picturesque situations he has experienced. Unthan lays out his treasures like a travel writer of the bourgeois age – his first concert, his first bicycle, his first disappointment. These are accompanied by a host of bizarre observations: a bullfight in which the bull impaled several toreros; a sword-swallower who injured his throat with an umbrella; garishly made-up females of all ages in Havana in 1873, with ‘an odour of decay hovering over everything’, with dancing negresses: ‘We saw the most forbidden things imaginable’; a lizard-eating event in Mexico; ‘sold out’ in Valparaiso, with the recollection that ‘the sun slowly sank into the still ocean. As if it were finding it difficult to leave ...’ Seven hours of brisk swimming ‘without turning on my back’, and heavy sunburn as a result; his encounter with an armless portrait painter in Düsseldorf, a comrade in fate who painted with one leg – ‘there was no end to the questions and answers’, ‘he was full of vitality and good cheer. But most of our chats touched on deep matters nonetheless.’ His mother’s death: ‘there was a praying inside me, though I did not and do not know what it was praying’. Appearances in the Orient, where people are more distinctive: ‘a list of my most striking experiences alone would fill entire volumes’. Disappointment at the Holy Sepulchre, where ‘the most degenerate riffraff’ appeared to have gathered; arrest in Cairo, nicotine poisoning in Vienna, rifle shooting with his feet in St Petersburg, in the presence of Tsar Alexander III, guest appearance in Managua – ‘the city of León bore the character of decline’; a comet over Cuba; participation in a film entitled *Mann ohne Arme* [Man Without Arms]. On board the *Elbe* to New York as a fellow passenger of Gerhart Hauptmann, who has a brief conversation with the artiste. Then the New World: ‘Americans show a stimulating understanding in the face of the extraordinary.’ ‘“You’re the happiest person I know”, said a man they called John D. “And what about you, with your money, Mr Rockefeller?”, I asked him. “All my money can’t buy your zest for life ...” ’

everything right. He chooses himself, he asserts himself against the enslaving pity of the others, and remains the perpetrator of his own life rather than becoming a collaborator with the allegedly dominant circumstances. But the reason he does everything right – perhaps more right than can be expressed in any philosophical jargon – cannot be sufficiently illuminated with the thinking methods found left of the Rhine. The inadequacy of the French approach lies in the fact that the existentialism which developed in France after 1940 formulated a philosophy for the politically handicapped (in this particular case, for the people of an occupied country), while in Germany and Austria, the last third of the nineteenth century had seen the growth of a vitalistictherapeutically coloured philosophy for the physically and mentally handicapped, namely neurotics and cripples, that charged itself up with political, social-philosophical and anthropological ideas after 1918. While the occupation taught the French to associate existence (and existential truth) with resistance and freedom in the underground, Germans and Austrians had begun two generations earlier to equate existence (and existential truth) with defiance and compensatory acts. Thus the drama of ‘continental philosophy’ – to draw this once on the laughable classification of content-oriented thought by formalists across the water – in the first half of the twentieth century can only be understood if one bears in mind the contrasts and synergies between the older and more comprehensive Central European existentialism of defiance and the younger, more politically restricted Western European existentialism of resistance. The first goes back to pre-Revolution times, for example the work of Max Stirner, and continues – after its culmination in Nietzsche – until the systems of Freud, Adler and the later compensation theorists who became active in Germany; the second, as noted above, took shape under the 1940-4 occupation, with a history extending back via the revanchism of the Third Republic to the anger collection movements among the losers of the French Revolution, that is to say the early socialists and communists. Once one has understood the German model, one will easily recognize it in its caricatured forms left of the Rhine. What

circulated on the *Rive Gauche* after 1944 as the doctrine of the Anti was the political adaptation of German cripple existentialism, whose adherents were committed to the ethics of the Nonetheless.

Unthan undoubtedly belongs to the earlier defiance-existentialist movement. Because of the special nature of his circumstances, however, he was not fully subsumed under this tendency. What sets him apart is a special form of 'living nonetheless' that isolates him from the heroic mainstream and brings him into the company of artistes. His heroism is that of a striving for normality. Part of this is the willingness to be not simply an involuntary curiosity, but a voluntary one. One could therefore define his position as that of a vaudeville existentialist. Its starting point is the cunning of fate that commands him to make an artistic virtue out of an anomalous necessity. Driven along by strong initial paradoxes, the vaudeville existentialist searches for a way to achieve a form of 'decent exhibitionism'. For him, normality is to become the reward for abnormality. In order to be at peace with himself, he must therefore develop a form of life in which his pathological oddity is transformed into the precondition for a successful assimilation. Hence the 'armless fiddler', as Unthan was known on American stages, could under no circumstances perform as a mere cripple, as was the custom in the European circus and even more in the freakshows across the Atlantic. He had to present himself as the victor over his disability and beat the gawking industry at its own game.

The achievement of this success confirms Unthan's unusual position, which is once more occupied by various outstanding artists today. By managing to develop the paradoxes of their mode of existence, the handicapped can become convincing teachers of the human condition – practising beings of a particular category with a message for practising beings in general. What Unthan conquered for himself was the possibility of becoming, as a cripple virtuoso, a subject that can be beheld and admired to the same extent as it can be exhibited and gawked at – exhibited primarily by the impresarios and circus directors often mentioned, seldom favourably, in *Das Pediskript*,

stared at by an audience whose curiosity often gives way to moved enthusiasm within a short time. When the existentialism of defiance is heightened into its vaudeville form, we see the emergence of the cripple artiste who has chosen himself as a self-exhibitable human. In the race against the voyeuristic curiosity of the normal, which must constantly be won anew, his self-exhibition pre-empts mere sensation. For him, the dichotomy between life and art no longer exists. His life is nothing other than the hard-won art of doing normal things like opening doors and combing one's hair, as well as less normal things such as playing the violin with one's feet and dividing pencils in the middle through a gunshot triggered with the foot. The virtuoso of the ability to be normal can rarely indulge in the luxury of depressive moods. Living in the Nonetheless imposes an ostentatious zest for life on those who are determined to succeed. The fact that things may be different on the inside is no one's business. The land of smiles is inhabited by cripple artistes.

I would add that Hugo Ball, the co-founder of Dadaism and co-initiator of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916, was, alongside Franz Kafka, the most significant German-language vaudeville existentialist, both in his Dadaist phase and in his Catholic period. In his 1918 novel *Flametti oder: Vom Dandysmus der Armen* [Flametti, Or, The Dandyism of the Poor] he assembles a pandemonium of marginal figures from the sideshow and circus milieu and has a speaker declare that these people are truer humans than the ordinary citizens who seemingly manage to keep to the middle. The vaudeville people know more about 'real life' because they are those who have been thrown to the margins, the fallen and the battered. These 'jostled humans' are perhaps the only ones who still exist authentically. In a time when normal people have devoted themselves to madness, they remember – as broken as they are – the better possibilities of being human. They are the non-archaic torsos who keep themselves in shape for unknown tasks. Thanks to them, the circus becomes an invisible church. In a world of fellow travellers complicit in the collective self-deception, the circus performers are the only ones who are not

swindlers – someone walking the tightrope cannot pretend for a moment. A little later, Ball stumbles on the trail of a sacred acrobatics to which he erected a monument in strictly stylized, neo-Catholically aroused studies: *Byzantinisches Christentum: Drei Heiligenleben* [Byzantine Christianity: Three Saints' Lives] (1923). It is dedicated to three heroes of the early Eastern church: John Climacus, Dionysius the Areopagite and Simeon Stylites, and constitutes one of the central works from the twilight of the ascetological age.

This brings us to a new development in our account of the phenomenon of practising. By investigating the forms of life among the disabled, a class of practising persons comes into view among the inhabitants of the ascetic star where more particular motives gain the upper hand. They do not follow their asceticisms for God's sake – or if they do, like Ignatius of Loyola, who was crippled by cannon fire, it is because Christ impresses them as a model for the neutralization of their defect. It is not without reason that Christ was recommended for imitation by the founder of the Jesuit order as the captain of all who suffer. The visibly handicapped, however, only formed a marginal group among the ranks of the holy self-tormentors whom Nietzsche saw marching through the centuries like hoarse choirs of pilgrims. They are not sick in the usual sense of the word, though Nietzsche did voice the suspicion that they were psychologically ill. Incidentally, both psychoanalysis and the official cripple pedagogy of the 1920s found among the disabled a propensity for envy complexes towards the able-bodied – the very thing from which Unthan insists he never suffered in the slightest. For them, leading a practising life is a response to the stimulus that lies in the concrete disability; it provides the incentive of inhibition that sometimes provokes an artist's answer. As Unthan notes, one must grant the handicapped 'freedom' in the form of 'light and air' in their development, until the blow suffered has been overridden by self-will and integrated into a life project. Thus, through the phenomenon of inhibited and handicapped life, General Ascetology now faces its trial by fire.

Now it remains to show how an entire system of insights into the laws of defiant existence emerged from the analytics of inhibitions. This requires an excursion into the catacombs of intellectual history. The most significant document of the existentialism of defiance is in fact of German origin; it is simultaneously the manifesto of the earlier discipline of cripple anthropology, completely forgotten in the philosophical and pedagogical fields. I am referring to the book *Zerbrecht die Krücken* [Break the Crutches] by Hans Würtz, the Nietzsche-inspired initiator of state-run special education, a work that appeared in the early 1930s without eliciting the slightest reaction – for reasons we shall discuss shortly. The book is not mentioned in any history of philosophy, it is not covered in any anthropological textbook,²⁴ and its existence is unknown even among Nietzsche experts – even though Nietzscheans, be they academic or not, would have every reason to examine the reception of Nietzsche's ideas among cripple pedagogues before and after 1918. One cannot possibly gain an adequate understanding of Nietzsche, however, without contemplating the effects and echoes of his work among cripples and their spokesmen.

The reason for the book's oblivion lies above all in the political implications of its subject – and the time of its publication. Appearing in 1932, a work with the title *Break the Crutches* was not timely in Germany – not because the idea of breaking crutches would have been unpopular, however, but rather because the motto of the title attracted too many sympathizers, though they were admittedly not interested in the real handicapped people. Larger libraries list this rare work under its complete title: *Zerbrecht die Krücken: Krüppel-Probleme der Menschheit. Schicksalsstiefkinder aller Zeiten in Wort und Bild* [Break the Crutches: Cripple Problems of Mankind. The Stepchildren of Fate from All Times in Words and Images], published in Leipzig in 1932 by Leopold Voss. The author, who was born in the Holsteinish town of Heide in 1875 and died in Berlin in 1958, was orphaned early on and began his career as a primary school teacher in Hamburg-Altona, then Berlin-Tegel. From 1911 onwards he worked as educational inspector at the

about their struggles, their dreams and their great Nonetheless. The inopportunity of such confessions is obvious enough, to say nothing of their psychological improbability. 'Movements' of this type live off the fact that their *primum mobile* remains in latency. The political space in those years was undeniably steeped in descendants of the cripple problem – not least because Emil Ludwig had made the disability of Wilhelm II a central psychopolitical focus for a wider audience in his biography of 1925. The public sphere was echoing with questions about giving meaning to a handicapped existence – and the compatibility of power and disability. Can the handicapped be allowed to come to power? What is power in any case, if it can be attained by the handicapped? What happens to us if the handicapped are already in power? Nietzsche's meditations from the 1880s, seemingly removed from the real world, had become part of the fiery nucleus of politics within a short time. Hans Würtz skilfully updated Nietzsche's perspectives by showing how disability, with the right 'schooling', can lead to a surplus of will to success in life.

'The material has been collected without any prejudice', we are told in the introduction to his book, which offers an encyclopaedic overview of practically all significant cultural figures with known disabilities in Europe. Würtz thus also mentions his contemporary Joseph Goebbels in his summaries and charts on the human history of the cripple problem: he lists the Nazi propagandist twice in the category of clubfooted cripples, where he did not *a priori* have to fare badly alongside figures such as Lord Byron – once in the list of nations,²⁵ and once in the list of functions, with the classification 'revolutionary politician'.²⁶ Thanks to the cripple educator Würtz, the chief agitator of the NSDAP is mentioned in a *Who's Who* of humanity containing almost five hundred names, featuring the great and greatest, as well as figures like Unthan, whom Würtz lists together with numerous comrades in fate in the broadly represented category 'show cripples and cripple virtuosos'.²⁷

What the protagonists of this work shared was the ability to make the philosophy of the Nonetheless a reality. That Würtz's lists feature persons such as Jesus, who recent findings

suggested was ‘crippled by ugliness’, and Wilhelm II – who had a crippled arm, but within whom there was also a ‘cripple psychopath’,²⁸ like the handicapped doll inside the handicapped doll – shows the magnitude and the explosiveness of this problem complex. Naming such great figures illustrated the theory, leading from the philosophy of life to that of spirit, that disabled persons can transcend their afflictions and anchor themselves in the realm of transpersonal values.²⁹ In fact, Wilhelm had more than plainly neurotic political decisions to answer for; he had also developed stage sets for the Bayreuth Festival and attempted various other transitions into the objective. As for Jesus’ breakthrough from the sphere of his assumed handicaps to the spiritual sphere, its results have long since been worked into the ethical foundations of occidental culture. In Max Scheler’s philosophy of values, which Würtz presumably did not know, there was a parallel attempt to show the autonomous rules of the value sphere in relation to its ‘basis’ in the tensions of life. Würtz calls the epitome of action that leads to the transpersonal ‘work’ – we understand that this word is only one of the pseudonyms under which the phenomenon of practising continues to emerge.

‘Overcome inhibition is the mother of all unfolded [...] movement.’³⁰ According to Würtz, the movement here termed ‘unfolded’ is not simply compensatory, but in fact overcompensatory movement: the reaction exceeds the stimulus. With this, the author had formulated a theorem whose ambit extends to asymmetrical movement complexes of all kinds – organic and intellectual, mental and political – even if he restricted himself in his book to demonstrating his thesis using the phenomenon of physical disability. These applications were demanding enough: through intensive collaboration based on scientific research, he insisted, German doctors, educators and pastors should unite in the ‘goal-setting collective for cripple elevation’ [*Zielsetzungsgemeinschaft der Krüppelhebung*]. As high as he aimed, however, Würtz remained unaware of the political potential of his reflections. Certainly he had stated in general terms that surplus energy from overcoming obstacles turns into a dynamic forwards thrust: ‘the lame Ignatius of

Loyola and Götz von Berlichingen were always on the move',³¹ as were the restless epileptics St Paul and Caesar. And there is no shortage of references to the 'short, crooked-necked Alexander the Great' and the equally 'crooked-necked', 'short, mongoloid-ugly Lenin', as well as the 'small and hip-lame' Rosa Luxemburg.³²

And yet: for Würtz, the cripple-psychological universals of 'sorrow and defiance' retain a purely individual-psychological meaning. A radical political change like the *völkisch* socialism of 1933, however, which boasted above all of bringing movement, attack and revolution – what was this if not an external application of the law of compensation? If overcome inhibition is the mother of all unfolded movement, which 'maternal urges' form the origin of the inclination towards self-aggrandizement through celebration and terror? What does it mean to go to the 'mothers' if the word describes the product of inhibition and overcoming? If overcompensation for disability transpired as the secret of success, should one conclude that most people are not sufficiently disabled? These questions may be rhetorical, but they nonetheless show one thing: the path to a great theory of compensation is paved with awkwardnesses.³³

As far as Goebbels is concerned, he was obviously not interested in the progress of this clarification. He showed little enthusiasm about his acceptance into the pantheon of the handicapped. Being listed alongside great figures such as Kierkegaard, Lichtenberg, Kant, Schleiermacher, Leopardi, Lamartine, Victor Hugo and Schopenhauer, to name only a few, did not induce him to out himself. Making his psyche available to science during his lifetime would probably have been the last thing he was considering. Nor would the central orthopaedic principle of the institute in Zehlendorf have appealed to him: 'The stump is the best prosthesis.' In Würtz's four-group classification – growth cripples (anomalies of size), deformity cripples, latent cripples (incorrect posture) and ugliness cripples (disfigurement) – he would undoubtedly have had to join the second, perhaps also the fourth, as well as the subgroup 'complex cripples',³⁴ which leads over into the psychological field.

Goebbels had other plans: supposedly, all copies of *Zerbrecht die Krücken* not yet in distribution were confiscated on his orders. The further course of history speaks for itself. Not long after January 1933, Würtz was denounced at his own institute as an enemy of the people; his critics suddenly claimed to have discovered in him an armchair communist and philo-Semite. Owing to a well-timed accusation of abuse of office and embezzlement of donations, he was dismissed without notice and without any claim to a pension; allegedly he had used some of the donations received by the society for the promotion of the Oskar-Helene Home for the publication of *Zerbrecht die Krücken* – as if the book were merely the author's private matter, unconnected to the work of the institution he co-directed.

It is not difficult to recognize in the allegations against Würtz a conflict between the institution's fieldworkers and the publishing alpha leader. His accusers, ambitious colleagues, took over leading positions following his removal – as if to make it clear that a successful revolution cares for its children rather than devouring them. Würtz remained naïve enough to believe that he could prove his innocence under the prevailing conditions. He therefore returned to Germany from exile in Prague for his trial, at the end of which a Berlin court gave him a suspended sentence of one year's imprisonment. He subsequently left Germany, finding refuge in Austria until the end of the war. In 1947 he achieved complete legal and professional rehabilitation. He was buried in July 1958 in the Berlin-Dahlem Waldfriedhof [forest cemetery].

It is instructive for our further reflections to examine the connections between Nietzsche's efforts towards the analytics of the will and Würtz's deliberations on special education. Each author could have referred to the other to illustrate his axioms – which, in the case of the younger in relation to the older, indeed occurred. From the perspective of the Berlin disability expert, Nietzsche offers an example of his concept of 'overcome inhibition'. He classifies the philosopher, without whose ideas his own work would scarcely be imaginable, somewhat cold-bloodedly as the 'psychopathically handicapped growth cripple

Nietzsche'.³⁵ At least the latter, he admits – through a combination of the laws of compensation, great talent and hard work on himself – managed to overcome his handicap partially, which is why his work should be acknowledged as an attempt to cross over into the trans-pathological sphere of values.

Reversing the perspective produces a more complex picture. Nietzsche would recognize in the special needs educator from Berlin the phenomenon of the pupil, which he viewed with some suspicion, and about which we need only say here that they frequently display the weaknesses of their masters, and in compromising magnifications, rather than their virtues. A second glance would show what concrete form the priestly syndrome attacked by Nietzsche took in Würtz's case. The main characteristic of this phenomenon is the tendency, found among the stronger sick, to assume leadership of a following composed of weak existences. The literature I have consulted does not mention any disability on Würtz's own part, so it remains unclear whether Nietzsche's diagnoses of the dynamics of the priestly-ascetic ideal apply in the personal case of his emulator. The style of Würtz's publications, which culminate in hymns to 'victorious fighters for life',³⁶ certainly suggests a spokesman syndrome; the manner in which he is ignited by his own mission would support this. The proximity to the priestly type reveals itself in Würtz's quasi-imperial taste for bringing increasingly large parts of mankind into his jurisdiction. Here the usual dynamic of the alpha leader becomes visible: for Nietzsche, an unmistakable manifestation of the will to power.

Nonetheless, everything we know today suggests that for Würtz, his work at the Oskar-Helene Home in Berlin was the focal point of his commitment. Outside observers are in no position to question the seriousness of his lifelong dedication to the welfare of his patients – even if his authoritarian approach is less appealing today, and, at least on paper, one would sooner sympathize with the self-determination model of the alternative special needs educator Otto Perl.³⁷ For its educational inspector, the Berlin institution additionally served as the pulpit from which he announced his suggestions for solving the riddle of mankind to a somewhat reluctant audience. These consisted

analytic philosophy of sport, Würtz declares at the training-theoretically decisive point, referring to the disabled person:

His will thus gives his life an inner gradient if he compares his earlier state of powerlessness with the abilities he has triumphantly acquired, and measures the success he has already achieved against the goal of his regimen. His striving gains a forward drive. Overcoming the earlier sense of powerlessness is simultaneously an ethical victory [...]. The carefully mediating character of the education must not be burdened with a fear of excessive strain. [...] We therefore demand a life-affirming attitude in those who educate the handless [...].⁴³

There cannot be many statements in recent literature that encapsulate the post-metaphysical transformation of vertical tension – that is, of the inherent awareness of vital asymmetry – so explicitly. For this gain in explication one has to take a few heroic phrases in one's stride; in their content, however, they are simply the mask of the athletic renaissance. One can, incidentally, also observe the de-heroization of the trainer's role in the sporting history of the twentieth century. There is, however, a counter-movement in the field of sport – analogous to the developments in the religious field – that could be called the *renouveau athlétique*: here the extreme athlete is raised aloft as the spiritually empty counterpart of the saint.

The philosophical anthropology of the twentieth century ignored the contributions of special education – but nonetheless arrived at related observations from similar conceptual points of departure. With its own means, the anthropology of the ordinary person forged a path to an even more general disability awareness than the special needs educators could have dreamt of – its practical conclusions, however, were diametrically opposed to those of heroic cripple didactics. Its maxim: do not break the crutches under any circumstances! One can already hear this warning in Viennese psychoanalysis, when Freud describes man as a 'prosthetic God' who could not survive without the support of civilizatory provisions for existence. With his Oedipus legend, one might add, Freud managed to incorporate the male half of humanity into the family of clubfeet

while diagnosing the female half with genital crippledom in the form of inborn penislessness. One hears the warning call even more loudly in Arnold Gehlen's doctrine of supportive institutions, which states that the delusional boundlessness of unleashed subjectivity can only be saved from itself through a protective framework of transpersonal forms. Here the crutches reappear as the institutions, and their significance becomes all the greater because the anarchists of the twentieth century – on the left and the right – had called rather too successfully for their destruction. Gehlen was extremely concerned when he witnessed the emergence of a new Without movement among the young people of the West in the 1960s. In his anthropological justification of institutions one finds a culmination of the anti-Rousseauism of the twentieth century, condensed in the warning that human beings always have much more to lose than their chains. He asks whether all political culture does not begin with the distinction between chains and crutches. This advocacy of existence with compulsory crutches reaches its most dramatic form in the statements of biological palaeoanthropology in the work of Louis Bolk and Adolf Portmann: according to them, *Homo sapiens* is constitutively a cripple of premature birth, a creature condemned to eternal immaturity that, because of this condition (which biologists term neoteny, a retention of juvenile and foetal traits), is only capable of survival in the incubators of culture.⁴⁴

These highly generalized statements of modern anthropology present a functional explication of the holistic pathos that was characteristic of older cultures – those cultures that insisted intransigently on the priority of tradition and custom (the established incubator) over the whims of individuals eager for innovation. Every orthodoxy, whether it draws its validity from religion or from being venerable and ancient, is a system for preventing mutations of the structures that ensure stability. In this sense, the ancientness of the ancients is self-validating. While a tradition, as long as it appears old enough, provides evidence of its viability and its compatibility with other stock elements, a new idea and its subjective deviation must first prove their repeatability – assuming they are interested in doing

so. In the antimutation traditionalist systems, however, the presupposition is that even permitting the attempt to prove the usability of something new is never worthwhile. Periods with a greater openness for innovation, on the other hand, rely on the observation that even after far-reaching moral revaluations and technical innovations, a sufficient number of stabilizations are still possible in order to redirect our *modus vivendi* towards a more pleasant state. But the innovations must always be assessed in terms of their agreement with the need for stability in care systems for premature birth cripples (commonly known as cultures).

Wherever humans appear, their crippledom has preceded them: this insight was the chorus of philosophical discussions on the human being in the previous century, regardless of whether, as in psychoanalysis, one speaks of humans as cripples of helplessness who can only hobble towards their goals;⁴⁵ or, like Bolk and Gehlen, views them as neotenic cripples whose chronic immaturity can only be balanced out by rigid cultural capsules; or, like Plessner, as eccentric cripples chronically standing beside themselves and observing their lives; or, like Sartre and Blumenberg, as visibility cripples who must spend their lives coming to terms with the disadvantage of being seen.

Beyond these forms of constitutive crippledom, historically acquired variants also come into view – most of all, if one believes Edmund Husserl, among modern Europeans. In their effects to achieve the intellectual conquest of reality, they have fallen into two dangerously misguided positions of enormous dimensions – in almost pathographical formulations, he calls them physicalist objectivism and transcendental subjectivism.⁴⁶ Both are modes of thinking being-in-the-world that amount to comprehensive misreadings of the world and reality. If one considers that our existence in the ‘lifeworld’ constitutes the original relationship termed ‘being-in-the-world’ since Heidegger, one reaches an ironic conclusion: due to laboriously acquired misconditionings, we chronically confuse the first world with the second world of physicists, philosophers and psychologists. The ageing Husserl had adopted this precarious

view of the civilized European as a cripple of world-misreading from his renegade pupil Heidegger, for whom man begins in most cases as a cripple of inauthenticity – and ends in the same state, unless he is lucky enough to happen upon a trainer who will put his orthopaedic data of existence in order. Among the acquired disabilities, the neo-phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz recently uncovered a new one, habitual irony: it robs the ironist of the ability to be fulfilled in shared situations. Here the focus of investigation shifts to a crippledom of distance, emerging from an impairment of the capacity for participation through the compulsion to chronic elegance. And indeed, the role of irony in the history of reality-misreadings has not yet been sufficiently acknowledged.

The implications of these observations are as diverse as the diagnoses themselves. They have one thing in common, however: if humans are cripples, without exception and in different ways, then each one of them, in their own particular way, has good reason to understand their existence as an incentive for corrective exercises.

We recall that in Würtz's schema of crippledoms, short persons were classified as 'growth cripples'. In later times, the same people were termed 'disabled in terms of growth'. When it even became offensive to speak of 'disability', the small became those who have different abilities in terms of their format. In the 1980s, politically correct Americans found the most up-to-date name for people who often have to look upwards: 'vertically challenged people'. This turn of phrase cannot be admired enough. It constitutes a terminological creation that outgrew its inventors without their even noticing what they had achieved. We can laugh at this formulation twice: once at the correct preciousness of its authors and once at ourselves. We have every right and reason to laugh, for we have an absolute majority in the assembly of those who are challenged by verticality. The formula has been valid since we began to practise learning to live – and, as I am seeking to show, one can neither *not* practise nor *not* learn to live. Even being a poor student must first be learned.

In short, people had to speak about the handicapped, the

differently constituted, to stumble on a phrase that expresses the general constitution of beings under vertical tension. 'You must change your life!' means, as we saw in Rilke's torso poem: you must pay attention to your inner vertical axis and judge how the pull from its upper pole affects you! It is not walking upright that makes humans human; it is rather the incipient awareness of the inner gradient that causes humans to do so.

of a primal scene, as it describes the constitution of a new type of *communio*: no longer a people of God, but travelling people; not a community of saints, but one of acrobats; not paying contributors to an insured society, but members of an organization of those living dangerously. The animating element of this – for the time being – invisible church is the pneuma of affirmed danger. It is no coincidence that the acrobat who has fallen from his tightrope is the first to move towards Zarathustra's doctrine. In the final moment of his life, the tightrope artiste feels that the new prophet has understood him as no one has before – as the being that, even if it was scarcely more than an animal that was taught to dance, had made danger its profession.

After this prologue to the acrobat's novel, it was Kafka who wrote the next chapter. In his case, the dawn of the acrobats is already several degrees brighter and clearer, which is why one can make out the scenery in something close to daylight. There is no need to explain in detail here that Kafka was an advocate of gymnastic exercises, vegetarian diets and ideologies of hygiene that were typical of the time.⁴⁹ In the collection of statements he excerpted from his octavo notebooks and arranged in a numbered list (later edited and published by Max Brod under the title *Betrachtungen über Sünde, Leid, Hoffnung und den wahren Weg* [Observations on Sin, Suffering, Hope and the True Path]), the first entry reads:

The true path is along a rope, not a rope suspended way up in the air, but rather only just over the ground. It seems more like a tripwire than a tightrope.⁵⁰

No one would claim that this note is self-explanatory. The two sentences become transparent if one reads them as a continuation of the scene opened by Nietzsche – albeit in a direction that markedly deviates from Nietzsche's heroic and elevating intentions. The 'true path' is still connected to the rope, but it is shifted from a high altitude almost to the ground. It serves less as a device for acrobats to demonstrate their sureness of step than as a trap to trip them up. This seems to convey the message that the task of finding the true path is