

Interruptions

- Here we are, talking again. As though we still had something to say to each other. It seems that we cannot get away from each other.
- We don't know each other.
- But we need each other . . .
- Neither of us is complete.
- . . . without the other. We complement each other.
- Aren't we talking right past each other?
- Aren't you overshooting the mark there?
- That's just what I was saying.
- I still hope that we'll understand each other some day.
- Maybe we will some time. But when we understand each other, we don't understand *each other*. I don't understand you or you me. What we understand, we have in common, but what we would like to make understood—what you are and what I am—is precisely what we cannot have in common.
- If we can only say what we have in common, then no conversation, no matter how long, can help us get to know each other. And yet we only talk because we are separated and would like to get beyond that.
- That's what we have in common . . .
- . . . and we can come to an understanding about it. Yes. But what is in common could be said by one of us for both. We don't need a dialogue for that. My talking to you and your talking to me, that is still something else than reveling in what we have in common, even if this common element were only our insight into our being irreparably separated. It is not the same if two talk or only one. The difference . . .
- . . . consists in this, that if there are two people each person can only ever talk when the other lets him.

- So why don't you let me finish talking?
- Because we are in conversation and conversation is perhaps this: that one does not finish talking. Or that one does not talk oneself into believing that one can finish talking, as preachers and teachers do, whose worth and credibility seems to depend on the fact that they are beyond the pupil, who is "unfinished." In conversation one talks in such a way that the other also has something to say. Does that not mean that one stops talking at some point in order to let the other speak, or that the other speaks up when he has something to say? Conversation is interruption.
- One comes across people—and it is true that many teachers are among them—who talk constantly. Then one says that they lecture. But the unceasing flow of speech does not indicate that someone has more to say than someone else. In the continuous talk the fear of stopping also speaks, the horror at the silence that follows my words and lets the Other [*das Andere*] arise, the Other that one has to take into account without being able to count on it. The chatterer's flood of words is a way to fend off conversation through the Danaid-like effort to fill all of the holes out of which the other person could speak.
- Then only the one who gives up the idea of leading the conversation would be suited to having one. Conversation is always abrupt, whatever efforts we make to connect what we say to what the other has said. In conversation we always work at covering up the breach that allows us to speak to each other. We seek unanimity, as though what matters were not precisely what has no place in unity because it constitutes me or you. True, the fact that you talk and what you say creates, in some respects, a connection between us, but it also undermines the illusion of my integrity, which I, to the extent that I am alone, carry around with me. By the mere fact that it takes place, your talking is an objection against monologue, it is contradiction without your needing to speak against me, in it speaks

what does not belong to me and that to which I don't belong, the disquieting, not assimilable . . . you . . . it . . . what interrupts me . . . into which I break off . . .

- While you were talking, you looked out the window into the rain, and I observed your profile. It is jagged like a shard. Whatever beautiful and comforting things may be said about the human face: it also has the fortuitousness of the breaking point. I mean less a broken cup—which one could glue together again—than a mountainous horizon. No one would think of restoring the mountains to wholeness like an ancient vase, although one also cannot claim that they are whole as they are. The mountain-climber who believes himself to be at the top really is only at the place where it stops—not at the end of the world but where it breaks off. Our noses are mountains, and our faces are to each other like mountain landscapes, but without ever interlocking the way teeth do in a mouth. No one can make it beyond his own skyline, and it is only the unbridgeable gaps between us that talk about what we cannot say to each other.
- Sometimes, though, one believes one is getting beyond the tip of one's nose. Perhaps this happens most readily when one is interrupted. Then one can no longer give in to the temptation to take oneself to be whole. Each interruption opens a crack in the shell that one builds around oneself with sentences, and one is born into one's own unfinishedness. Being unfinished I am finally open to that which never reaches me.
- Behind the unbroken shell Narcissus waits for himself. But the egg that protects him does not let him develop, and when he is born he loses himself unless Sleeping Beauty frees him.