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Die Drucklegung dieses Werkes wurde unterstützt mit den Mitteln des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung unter den Förderkennzeichen 1UG0712 und 01UG1412.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

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(Wilhelm Fink GmbH & Co. Verlags-KG, Jühenplatz 1, D-33098 Paderborn)
Internet: www.fink.de

Lektorat: Bettina Moll, Berlin; www.texttiger.de
Satz: Tilo Lothar Rölleke, Berlin
Einbandgestaltung: Evelyn Ziegler, München
Printed in Germany
Herstellung: Ferdinand Schöningh GmbH & Co. KG, Paderborn

ISBN 978-3-7705-5782-0

HYOWON CHO

A Cloud of Words
A Reflection on (Dis)appearing Words
of Benjamin and Wittgenstein

What can disappear necessarily presupposes what can appear. What once appeared, however, may not disappear but instead last for ages in which one can finally confirm neither its duration nor termination. And, as quite often happens in reality, what is supposed to be appearance may turn out to be nothing other than illusion. But this is also not a question about which one can easily pass judgment. That appearance could appear illusionary is a logical fact, too. As concerns the logical status of appearance and, in particular, disappearance, one could fall into a quandary because the possibility of disappearance relies on negative potential, non-potential if you will, of appearance that in turn, or actually in advance, originates from (no)where in reality. The origin of appearance as such never uncovers itself for appearance always already cannot but conceal it once it appears as appearance. Though one might suspect that appearance is actual, it is and remains possible to the last, that is to say, its modus in reality is hypothetical. The possibility of disappearance then becomes the possibility of possibility, i. e. negative possibility.

What we (believe to) know about appearance as such is just the fact that it somehow always already appeared to us (but, to be sure, not all of us). Furthermore, it seems quite symptomatic that in everyday life or even in academic discussions we use the word »appearance« as something transcending the scope of visual perception, although the word, appearance, »apparently« indicates that it is something that exists only when one sees it and as long as one's perception of it is in continuance. The representative example is the ordinary usage of the verb »appear.« People »rightly« say: »It appears (to me) ...« The ground that renders this extravagant use of the word be circulated and settled could be found nowhere else but in language. Indeed, the problematic aspect of the usage of the words »appear« and »appearance« forces us to delve into the appearance and disappearance of/in language.

At the forefront of those who tenaciously pondered this issue are, I would claim, Walter Benjamin and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Benjamin and Wittgenstein both are philosophers of language who tried to establish in unique ways the doctrine of resemblance respectively: »Lehre vom Ähnlichen« and »[Lehre der] Familienähnlichkeit.« What they see and find in language are not communication and mu-

tual understanding but instead one of the weirdest phenomena in/of the world, viz., resemblance (likeness) in/of language. This phenomenon, I would insist, indicates the correlation of appearing and disappearing, of differentiating and integrating, and of dividing and imparting of language as such. For Benjamin and Wittgenstein, to sum up, language is a paradigmatic paradoxical site of (dis)appearance, differentiating integrity, and divisive imparting. For this reason, it is worthwhile to pin down where their thoughts on language converge and where they diverge.

1. Tact (*Takt*): Common Grounds of Benjamin and Wittgenstein

So far, with few exceptions, Benjamin and Wittgenstein are regarded as belonging to fields completely apart from each other. And as far as my knowledge confirms, they did not have a chance to meet each other in their lifetime. The philosopher from Vienna had no acquaintance with the works of the critic from Berlin. By contrast, as Detlev Schöttker suggests,¹ it may well be the case that Benjamin, who had no less an interest in the problem of language than Wittgenstein, felt sick with jealousy at him. In a bizarre interrogation in *One-Way Street* (1928), according to Schöttker, Benjamin reveals his envy; he would have read the first book of Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which is published with an introduction by Bertrand Russell in 1921, with a frown of disapproval and hence interpolated the following statements into a fragment: »What is ›solved [*gelöst*]‹? Do not all the questions of our lives, as we live, remain behind us like foliage obstructing our view?« (SW I, 449). In other words, Schöttker goes on, Benjamin might bring his antipathy, of course stealthily as he often does, into such a literary fight. In particular, it should be noticed here that the word ›solved‹ has quotation marks around it for no discernible reason. It could be in order to target, or at least to refer to, the kernel of a declaration that Wittgenstein inscribed in the preface to his book: »And if I am not mistaken in this, then the value of this work secondly consists in the fact that it shows how little has been done when these problems have been *solved*.«² Benjamin's abrupt question, in this sense, sounds like a mockery of Wittgenstein's seemingly arrogant assertion.

1 This German scholar has dealt with the relation between these two figures in a quite different way from the ones the American philosopher Stanley Cavell and the German philosopher Dieter Thomä took: a personal approach. Cf. Detlev Schöttker: »Benjamin liest Wittgenstein«, in: Sigrid Weigel/Daniel Weidner (eds.): *Benjamin-Studien 1*, München (Wilhelm Fink) 2008, pp. 91–105; Stanley Cavell: »Benjamin and Wittgenstein: Signals and Affinities«, in: *Critical Inquiry* 25 (1999) 2, pp. 235–246; Dieter Thomä: *Vom Glück in der Moderne*, Frankfurt a. M. (Suhrkamp) 2003, pp. 59–87.

2 Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London (Routledge & Kegan Paul) 1981, p. 21 (emphasis H. C.).

If one accepts this hypothesis of Benjamin's jealousy, he might be surprised that it is hardly observed that a telling resemblance exists between their theories of linguistic resemblance (likeness). Schöttker unfortunately has stopped researching at the very moment when a proper question should be raised. (And neither Stanley Cavell nor Dieter Thomä acknowledges an important link between Benjamin and Wittgenstein, aside from their contributions to illuminating some momentous aspects of the constellation between Benjamin's and Wittgenstein's theories.) However, assuming Benjamin's pangs of jealousy still seems to be a stepping stone for further researching. One could thereupon propose that the masterwork of the later Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, gives a belated answer to the late Benjamin, as if the philosopher had heard (or read) the mocking questions of the critic through one channel or another. And if this response could be imagined, it is still to be conceived that Benjamin for his part already prepared the reciprocation, as though he had anticipated that someday there would be an echo from the author of *Tractatus*. This sort of fabrication at first glance could appear a mere fancy. In what follows, however, the appearance of this fabrication will take shape, being supported by philological complements.

As a first step, it would be worth looking for the common grounds that propelled both Benjamin and Wittgenstein to devote themselves to the theory of resemblance of/in language. The foremost author in this regard is the idiosyncratic Viennese critic of language (*Sprachkritiker*), Karl Kraus. It is widely acknowledged that Kraus had a huge influence on both of them. Benjamin was not only a subscriber and an eager reader of Kraus' journal, *Die Fackel*, which for over thirty years Kraus had composed and edited almost entirely alone, but also wrote some significant articles on Kraus that might cast light on the whole configuration of Benjamin's »Historiosophy.« Likewise, Wittgenstein for his part admired Kraus as a mentor, as Stephen Toulmin and Allen Janik convincingly assert.³ These two scholars go so far as to call Wittgenstein »the most eminent Krausian.«⁴ Regarding this labeling, it is revealing that Wittgenstein solicited Kraus for advice when he had to make an important decision whether to donate his fortune to sponsor artists and poets. Yet, above all, the substantial influence of Kraus on Benjamin and Wittgenstein must be found in the radical attitude, or better, extreme meticulousness and sharpness that Kraus showed in his *Sprachkritik*. There are numerous sources we can find in his texts that reveal his radical perspective on language. To take one example from his works, one might select the following passage which is notable for its apocalyptic mood: »One must always write so, as if he wrote for the first time and for the last time [*Man muss jedes Mal so schreiben,*

3 Allan Janik/Stephen Toulmin: *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, New York (Simon and Schuster) 1973, pp. 67–91.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

als ob man zum ersten und zum letzten Male schriebe].⁵ Kraus not only belongs to those who focus on language as such, but who also deserves to be representative for their preoccupation. For he, as Benjamin once insinuated, is a provocative, or indeed, ›destructive character‹ to the extent that his writings never let any realm remain safe and exempt from harsh criticism. Because for Kraus, every domain in culture, society, and politics that are primarily and fundamentally structured by language is supposed to irretrievably crumble if people misuse and contaminate language. All those who disgrace language are doomed to be an arch-enemy to him and to be symbolically executed by his criticism. So Benjamin describes Kraus' personal Armageddon against the decay of language as ›fire-eating, sword-swallowing philology of journal.‹ (SW II, 443; trans. slightly modified by H. C.). Wittgenstein too appreciates Kraus' overman-like endeavor to purify contaminated language, viz., flamboyant ornaments of Vienna feuilletons and therewith to seek a true unity of ethics and aesthetics.⁶ The influence of Kraus, as many literatures already proved and confirmed, contributed to the formation of Wittgenstein's thoughts no less than that from philosophical discipline. In short, the reflections on language of Benjamin and Wittgenstein each must have much to do with the ›Absolutism of Language‹ of which Kraus should be a maestro.

The second but equally important author is Johann Peter Hebel, whose *Treasure Chest of the Family Friend from the Rhine* (*Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes*) signifies a real and genuine treasure for Benjamin and Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein remarkably adored this Prussian priest-author and so often repeatedly read (out) his work (to his visitors, even on his sickbed).⁷ Furthermore, he bought Hebel's works over and over again for different purposes, including to use them as a textbook for school children. Benjamin also credited Hebel with literary virtuosity. His approach to Hebel takes two different angles. On the one hand, he assigns Hebel a place in the genealogy from Herodotus via Montaigne to Leskov, that is, he regards him as one of the greatest storyteller. »Hebel is,« Benjamin identifies, »casuist like all other real moralist. [...] For him the whole earth became the Rhodos of divine justice« (GS III, 205). On the other hand, Benjamin – this is one of the key points for our investigation – compared him with Kraus. »If in Johann Peter Hebel we find, developed to the utmost, the constructive, creative side of tact, in Kraus we see its most destructive and critical face. But for both, tact is moral alertness [...] and the expression of an unknown convention more important than the acknowledged one« (SW II, 436).

5 Karl Kraus: *Aphorismen*, Frankfurt a. M. (Suhrkamp) 1986, p. 134 (trans. H. C.).

6 Cf. Luis Miguel Isava: *Wittgenstein, Kraus, and Valéry*, New York (Peter Lang) 2002; Mirko Gemmel: *Die Kritische Wiener Moderne*, Berlin (Parerga) 2005.

7 Cf. Joachim Schulte: *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Leben. Werk. Wirkung*, Frankfurt a. M. (Suhrkamp) 2005.

Hebel, for him, was a unique moralist who beheld this earthly world with agonizing pity, yearned for divine justice but without any positive hope, and most significantly wrote about events in the world, large or small, with maximal sobriety. Benjamin names this demeanor (creative) ›tact‹ (*Takt*). And for Benjamin and Wittgenstein, presumably, all this originated from Hebel's ›creaturely perspective‹ which, with his inimitable satirical style and horrifying strategy of citing, Kraus developed in his own way, albeit toward opposite end: the wrathful destructive philology of journals. The word ›tact,‹ which implies necessity to cope with concrete situations, signals that the approaches to language that Benjamin and Wittgenstein took would be distinct from Russellian logics or Saussurean linguistics, although Wittgenstein did not speak of it. So, the task here is to tease out how similarly and dissimilarly Benjamin and Wittgenstein construct their notions of (speech-)tact.

2. Word and Site

As a second step in the exposition of their respective theories of resemblance (likeness), it is of use to observe the framework for their conceptions of language, by focusing on the analogy between word and site. In »On Language as Such and the Language of Man,« the article Benjamin wrote when he was engaged in the logical problems such as Russell's paradox, one can find an argument for ›language-room doctrine‹ unfolded. This doctrine, I would claim, is to be compared to the model of ›language-city‹ presented in *Philosophical Investigations*.

The existence of language [Benjamin writes] is coextensive not only with all the areas of human mental expression in which language is always in one sense or another inherent, but with absolutely everything. There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is in the nature of each one to communicate its mental contents. (SW I, 62)

It is noteworthy that here a quite excessive expression »absolutely everything« is used for expounding the issue of language. To recapitulate this paragraph, one might set down a sort of equation: Language = Everything. In addition to this assertion, Benjamin suggests that language is »in the purest sense ›the medium‹ of communication.« (64) The medium in the purest sense, however, must be nothing other than ›room‹ (*Raum*; not space in the Newtonian sense!); it really is: we cannot convey, or better, impart (*mitteilen*)⁸ at all in any form or way unless

8 Cf. Samuel Weber: *Benjamin's -abilities*, Cambridge (Harvard UP) 2008, pp. 44–45.

it is presupposed that there be room in the most fundamental sense of the word. The equation hence can and must be upgraded as following: Language = Everything = Room. This expanded equation, as may easily be surmised, can serve as a motto for the absolutism of language.

Just as the critic presents the language as such a room, so too the philosopher establishes an analogy between language and the city. To prove that the essence of language is only constituted by its usage, which is Wittgenstein's primary argument in the *Philosophical Investigations*, he suggests as a model for argument not assertive sentences but imperative ones.⁹ And related to this argument, the metaphor of language-city appears:

18. Don't let it bother you that languages (2) and (8) [the sentences that he chose as examples for explanation] consist only of orders. If you want to say that they are therefore incomplete, ask yourself whether our own language is complete – whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in to it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. (And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our language can be regarded as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, of houses with extensions from various periods, and all this surrounded by a multitude of new suburbs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses.¹⁰

The ancient city with the old streets and the new streets, the bustling place and the outskirts: language. Wittgenstein claims that the everyday speech being represented by the imperative sentence must appropriate the center region of the language-city as a ground for our life, while, nevertheless, most people first bring into mind assertive and explanatory sentences when they hear the word 'language.' «Many new outskirts» which came far later into being, i. e. the languages of mathematics and sciences, according to him, should never claim priority over the hub of everyday speech. But, strictly speaking, neither the latter nor the former can predominate entirely, because they are equally components of the city. Rather, we ought to pay attention to the fact that they all are subject to the room of the »language-city.« This reminds us of Benjamin's assertion that »language relates to one another as do media of varying densities« as well as the metaphor of thread that Wittgenstein himself invented »the strength of the thread resides not

9 This choice is not inconsiderable at all. Such an approach seems to be worth being compared with the »Speech-Thinking [*Sprachdenken*]« of his two contemporaries, Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy.

10 Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigation* (1953), trans. G. E. M. Anscombe/P. M. S. Hacker/Joachim Schulte, London (Blackwell) 2009, p. 11.

in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.«¹¹ Benjamin's language, not unlike Wittgenstein's city and thread, consists of different modalities and intensities of room as ›medium.‹ And Wittgenstein suggests that this room be metamorphosed into a unique labyrinth in which different times almost infinitely double and overlap. »Language is,« he asserts, »a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.«¹²

The word ›place‹ would not be apposite to identify this singular city-room of language, although it is the most familiar word among synonyms. ›Site‹ instead seems more appropriate because it implies motility of association, relation, and communication. Their perspectives on language, in other words, can be recapitulated by the composite ›word-site.‹ This concept centers around the following hypothesis: »In an unidentifiable but immediate way words create site.« Let me present the philological evidence. In a fragment titled »Mummerehlen« which Benjamin included in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, he notes a symptomatic case of the misunderstanding of language. (SW III, 410)¹³

Thus, on one occasion, chance willed that Kupfersticken [copperplate engravings] were discussed in my presence. The next day, I stuck my head out from under a chair; that was a Kopf-verstich [a head-stickout]. If, in this way, I distorted both myself and the word [...]. Early on, I learned to disguise myself in words, which really were clouds. The gift of perceiving similarities is, in fact, nothing but a weak remnant of the old compulsion to become similar and to behave mimetically. In me, however, this compulsion acted through words. Not those that made me similar to models of good breeding, but those that made me similar to dwelling places, furniture, clothes. (390–391)

To confuse one word with another that has a similar pronunciation, such a very quotidian and unintentional error is, according to Benjamin, a necessary task for life. »I did only,« he says, »what I must do to gain a foothold in life« (390). For it wins him »the path to the world's interior« (ibid). Such a misunderstanding, Benjamin goes on, compelled him to disguise himself under/behind/in words. Benjamin calls it a remnant of the mimetic faculty (*Mimesisvermögen*) that human being had once upon a time:

His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps

11 Ibid., p. 36.

12 Ibid., p. 88.

13 The title of the fragment itself also results from the misunderstanding of language.

there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role. (SW II, 420)

What forced (young) Benjamin to resemble things around him is the mighty authority of words. Moreover – and this should be the most significant point – he alleges that words are actually clouds. »Early on, I learned to disguise myself in words, which really were clouds« (SW III, 390). How can we grasp this bizarre metaphor? We cannot recognize what the essence of clouds is, because clouds do not, or cannot, possess essence. Thus we ought to ask: What is then the function of Benjaminian cloud-words? It is no exaggeration to assume that the cloud-words can be quite well identified with *Stimmung* which Heidegger first introduced in philosophical discourse. A cloud truly can be regarded a matching paragon of *Stimmung*, for both create site, situation, and ultimately life as such on earth and under the sky. And it needs no great effort to understand that we all always already live in a certain atmosphere, whether physical or metaphysical. The atmosphere, *Stimmung*, consists of elements that are a cloud of words. In short, what purveys requisite rooms for human beings and all other things as well is the atmosphere rendered by cloud-words. With regard to this somewhat cloudy speculation, Benjamin lends a hand with a notable idea in the very article that includes his question for Wittgenstein:

If the theory is correct that feelings [*Empfindungen*] are not located in the head, that we sentiently experience a window, a cloud, a tree not in our brains but, rather, in the site we see and feel it, then we are, in looking at our beloved, too, outside ourselves. But in torment of tension and ravishment. (SW I, 449; trans. slightly modified by H. C.)

Feelings, according to Benjamin, have little to do with the activity of the subject. Rather, they come about only after the subject is positioned in a certain site filled with a cloud of words.

Corresponding to our expectations, *The Philosophical Investigations* also present a quite similar notion of sensations (*Empfindungen*) that can be illuminated solely with the theory of »cloudy words«

244. How do words *refer* to sensations? – There doesn't seem to be any problem here; don't we talk about sensations every day, and name them? But how is the connection between the name and the thing named set up? This question is the same as: How does a human being learn the meaning of names of sensations? For example, of the word »pain.« Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, natural, expressions of sensation and used in their site [*Stelle*].¹⁴

¹⁴ Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigation* (note 10), p. 95; trans. slightly modified by H. C.

So the philosopher drafts an amazing statement, as if he would confirm the critic's retrospection and subsequent affirmation that what compelled him to resemble things around also gave birth to the feelings of subject: the cloud-words. He argues furthermore that »it is the *circumstances* [*Umstände*] under which he had such an experience that warrant him saying in such a case that he understands, that he knows how to go on.«¹⁵ And, most notably, he suggests the following situation:

Suppose someone said: every familiar word, in a book for example, actually carries an atmosphere with it in our minds, a ›corona‹ of faintly indicated uses. – Just as if each figure in a painting were surrounded by delicate shadowy drawings of scenes, as it were in another dimension, and in them we saw the figures in different contexts. – Let's take this assumption very seriously! – Then it turns out that it cannot explain *intentionality*.¹⁶

Intentionality, namely the activity of the subject, is not possible at all unless the ›corona (*Dunstkreis*)‹ i. e. *Stimmung* consisting of cloudy words, preexists.

3. The Creaturely Perspective

Benjamin and Wittgenstein thus are likely to come to an agreement that language makes site for dividing and imparting life. There is a mediator who invited both of them to the same table. As can be immediately guessed, his name is Johann Peter Hebel. This idiosyncratic moralist appears to them as one of the memorable forefathers who prefigured the minor renaissance of ›creaturely perspective‹ among German(-Jewish) intellectuals in the Weimar period. As regards this renaissance, Eric Santner counts the following figures among its members: Franz Kafka, Franz Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, and Sigmund Freud. »For these writers,« he explains

however, creaturely life – the peculiar proximity of the human to the animal at the very point of their radical difference – is a product not simply of man's thrownness into the (enigmatic) »openness of Being« but of his exposure to a traumatic dimension of political power and social bonds whose structures have undergone radical transformations in modernity.¹⁷

15 Ibid., p. 67.

16 Ibid., p. 190.

17 Eric Santner: *On creaturely life. Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*, Chicago (Chicago UP) 2006, p. 12.

Yet this list lacks Wittgenstein and, moreover, ignores that Benjamin's conception of ›creaturely life‹ differs – if slightly, this is not a major point though – from the others. As mentioned above, Wittgenstein was no less enthusiastic reader of Hebel than other adherents including Benjamin. This surely means that he might also view all worldly things trying to be divine-sober (*heilig-nüchtern*), the attitude of which the storyteller strived to sustain. And, unlike other thinkers and authors with the exception of Wittgenstein, Benjamin deeply sympathized with the Christian Weltanschauung of the Prussian pastor. Hebel's Christian view of the world and its history, however, is on the other side rooted in a profound nihilistic mood that is apparently distant from the Nietzschean one. For, as Benjamin unforgettably has engraved in his *Storyteller*, Hebel's standpoint is aimed not so much at »Umwertung aller Werte« as at suffering martyrdom for »[t]he hierarchy of the creaturely world, which has its apex in the righteous man, reaches down into the abyss of the inanimate through many gradations« (SW III, 159) Where Hebel's unique standpoint best shows up, if one would concur with the view of Benjamin, might be in the story of »Unexpected reunion« (»Unverhofftes Wiedersehen«).

But as far as the resemblance (likeness) in/of language is concerned, another fragment titled »Kannitverstan« seems far more significant. For it broaches the very issue of ›misunderstanding of language (*Sprachmissverständnis*)‹ on the experience of which, as we have already seen, Benjamin has unfolded his unique idea of cloud-words. In this short story, a German artisan who has just arrived in Amsterdam hears the same name of a supposedly oceanic rich man, »(Mr.) Kannitverstan,« all the time when he asks passers-by about the owner of such splendid houses, swaying ships and barrels full of sugar and coffee in the city. Hearing such a great name repeatedly, the young man becomes more and more frustrated. Yet there still remains for this poor artisan one more chance to hear (t)his name.

Now our stranger was seized by that feeling of melancholy which is spared no one whose heart is in the right place when he sees a funeral, and he stood reverently hat in hand until they had all passed by. But he went up to the last person in the procession, who was calculating what he could make from his cotton if the price increased by ten guilders a hundredweight, took him gently by the sleeve and sincerely begged his pardon. »That gentleman,« he said, »for whom the bell tolls, must have been a good friend of yours, you walk behind so downcast and so deep in thought.« »Kannitverstan,« came the reply. Then a pair of large tears welled from the eyes of our good young man from Duttlingen, and he was at once heavy at heart and yet easier in spirit too. »Poor Kannitverstan!« he cried, »what can all your riches bring you now? No more than my poverty will bring

me one day: a shroud and a winding sheet; and of all your lovely flowers a bunch of rosemary perhaps on your cold breast, or a sprig of rue.«¹⁸

What he conceived as a great name is actually a typical phrase in everyday life: »I can't understand you.« But this fact never becomes apparent to him.

Finally, [Hebel continues] with a light heart, he left with the others, made a hearty meal of a portion of Limburg cheese in an inn where they spoke German, and whenever again he was inclined to feel depressed because so many people in the world were so rich and he so poor he just remembered Herr Kännitverstan of Amsterdam, his great mansion, his ship laden with riches, and his narrow grave.¹⁹

This anecdote clearly reveals what connects the idea of a word-site and the perspective of creatureliness: every human being on this earth, so Hebel implies, cannot but live in preposterous ignorance of the fundamental power of words but such a helpless situation, surprisingly enough, can be reversed into the blessed one without calculable reason or ground. However, there is one condition: only when he candidly faces the ultimate impasse of every living thing, death. And the perception of death could not come unless he recedes into the *Sprachmissverständnis*, which means to have much to do with »the infinitely small.« According to Benjamin,

if one is in love, or just intensely preoccupied with another, his portrait will appear in almost every book. Moreover, he appears as both protagonist and antagonist. In stories, novels, and novellas he is encountered in endless metamorphoses. And from this it follows that the faculty of imagination is the gift of interpolating into the infinitely small, of inventing, for every intensity, an extensiveness to contain its new, compressed fullness, in short, of receiving each image as if it were that of the folded fan, which only in spreading draws breath and flourishes, in its new expanse, the beloved features within it. (SW I, 466)

In this fragment, the fan functions like a symbol for the cloud-words that offer us »hideouts« (*Verstecke*). »Here,« Benjamin recollects, »I was enveloped in the world of matter. It became monstrously distinct for me, loomed speechlessly near. In much the same way, a man who is being hanged first comes to know what rope and wood are« (SW III, 375). In this fantasy Benjamin makes the vivid life of the ingenuous child come across in the gruesome possibility of death, which

18 Johann Peter Hebel: *The Treasure Chest*, trans. John Hibberd, London (Libris) 1994, pp. 41–42.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

underlies the existence of the creaturely world. The fan that can all at once be folded and unfolded symbolizes the paradoxical compatibility of childhood and death; the folded fan (death) can swallow the unfolding of life (childhood) at any moment. Life and all things in it, then, might suddenly appear and disappear at random. So it is crucial to know that no life can escape the force of the folding down of death and as well to bear in mind that it is the cloud-words that make room for life or sites of life. This reflection can shed light on why young Benjamin was forced to be like (tiny) things around him. His experience, so to speak, prefigures that he is doomed to be familiar with the perspective of creaturely life. Hence, it is imperative for the cloud-words to impel human beings to resemble things, because it is the only way to enter the interior of the world. The perspective of creatureliness, then, implies the radical anti-anthropomorphism. In »On Mickey Mouse« Benjamin argues:

Property relations in Mickey Mouse cartoons: here we see for the first time that it is possible to have one's own arm, even one's own body, stolen. [...] Mickey Mouse proves that a creature can still survive even when it has thrown off all resemblance to a human being. (SW II, 545)

It is no necessity at all that human beings hold the supreme rank in the hierarchy of all creatures. For Benjamin, and for Hebel as well, even this status quo must be exploded. So Mickey Mouse, the representative of all silent creatures against human being, »disrupts the entire hierarchy of creatures that is supposed to culminate in mankind« (ibid.).

In this regard, Wittgenstein's thought seems less radical than Benjamin's and Hebel's, for he does not want to destroy the hierarchy allegedly governed by mankind; instead he just tries to explain the existence of creaturely feelings. »What gives us *so much as the idea* that beings, things, can feel?«²⁰ Benjamin, by contrast, prefers or even devotes himself to forthrightly jumping into the world of distorted things. One of his primary literary strategies termed »Darstellung« implies this contra-Kierkegaardian leaping-over. »I was,« Benjamin says, »distorted by similarity to all that surrounded me. Like a mollusk in its shell, I had my abode in the nineteenth century, which now lies hollow before me like an empty shell« (SW III, 374).

The underlying stance of Wittgenstein on the creaturely life, nevertheless, hardly differs from that of Benjamin and Hebel. This becomes apparent when we consider, as he might also bear in mind, that the body of human being, not unlike those of other creatures, can be easily thrown away, stolen, and even destroyed. He knows quite well, in other words, that the possibility of the

²⁰ Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigation* (note 10), p. 104.

disfigurement of creaturely life exists pervasively and this is the primary condition of the whole earthly process. One can find the following statement in his *Philosophical Investigations*:

286. But isn't it absurd to say of a *body* that it has pain? – And why does one feel an absurdity in that? In what sense does my hand not feel pain, but I in my hand?

What sort of issue is this: Is it the *body* that feels pain? – How is it to be decided? How does it become clear that it is *not* the body? – Well, something like this: if someone has a pain in his hand, then the *hand* does not say so (unless it writes it), and one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his eyes.²¹

Why does one look into his eyes? For his face contorts with pain. Wittgenstein here seems to keep in mind that the state of contortedness, the disfigurement (*Entstellung*) is the primary mark of all earthly creaturely life; creaturely being itself consisting of the endless disfigurements. Likewise, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* one can see it transfigured into a concave mirror.

The creature is the mirror within whose frame alone the moral world was revealed to the baroque. A concave mirror; for this was not possible without distortion.²²

4. Disfigured Resemblance: the Inverse Empathy

If we concur with the stance of Benjamin and Wittgenstein, it would be a possible verdict that all creatures are disfigured without exception. Given this judgment, the utmost singular figure of Kafka, Odradek, is actually a superb incarnation of the virtual state of the creature as such. We can name this state »disfigured resemblance« (*entstellte Ähnlichkeit*),« in accordance with Sigrig Weigel who chose it as the title of her book. In this book, she explains Benjamin's theory of resemblance by connecting it with Freud's unconscious; it is the disfigurement that functions as pivot within her captivating comments. »The disfigurement is thus the form, in which the lost mimesis is at the same time concealed and recognizable; it is at the same time the premise for the meaning of the ›unsensuous resemblance.«²³ Benjamin describes this paradoxical form as follows: »Mute, porous, flaky, it formed a cloud at the core of things, like the snow flurry in a glass paperweight« (SW III, 392). With this fantastic depiction, Benjamin himself jumps into the

21 Ibid., p. 105.

22 Walter Benjamin: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1977), trans. John Osborne, London/New York (Verso) 1998, p. 91.

23 Sigrig Weigel: *Entstellte Ähnlichkeit*, Frankfurt a. M. (Fischer) 1997, p. 92 (trans. H. C.).

snow flurry in the crystal ball. And we have already confirmed that this jump is caused and impelled by the force of the cloud-words. At this point, it is possible to suggest another nomenclature for the circumstances of this case (*Sachverhalt*): the inverse empathy. This naming is, in fact, based upon a reflection that Benjamin himself noted down during his stay in Moscow. In *Moscow Diary* he touchingly confesses:

As I was looking at an extraordinarily beautiful Cézanne, it suddenly occurred to me that it is even linguistically fallacious to speak of »empathy.« It seemed to me that to the extent that one grasps a painting, one does not in any way enter into its room; rather, this room thrusts itself forward, especially in various specific spots. It opens up to us in concerns and angles in which we believe we can localize crucial experience of the past; there is something inexplicably familiar about these spots.²⁴

The word ›empathy‹ (*Einfühlung*) is linguistically incorrect because the direction should be reversed. It is not the subject who puts his feelings into objects, but he is engulfed by things which are thrust back, as if it were their wish to swallow him. Cézanne's drawing made Benjamin think of the ›empathy‹ in such an inverse way. And, surprisingly, Wittgenstein makes observations that correspond to the idea of ›inverse empathy‹:

200. I could say: a picture is not always *alive* for me while I am seeing it.
»Her picture smiles down on me from the wall.« It need not always do so, whenever my glance lights on it.²⁵

Wittgenstein empathically points out that the picture lives its own life. Granted that things also have their own rights for life, their figures principally have nothing to do with the perspective of human beings. Nevertheless, it may not be enough to identify this idea with the Benjaminian ›inverse empathy‹. But Wittgenstein, to be sure, seems to have the closest thought to Benjamin's in mind. The following shows the evidence for that:

206. And does the child now see the chest as a house?
»He quite forgets that it is a chest; for him it actually is a house.« (There are certain signs of this.) Then would it not also be correct to say he sees it as a house?²⁶

24 Walter Benjamin: *Moscow Diary*, ed. by Gary Smith, trans. Richard Sieburth Gary Smith, Cambridge (Harvard UP) 1986, p. 42 (the word »space,« the translation of *Raum*, is replaced with »room« by H. C.).

25 Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigation* (note 10), p. 216.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

Would it be sheer whimsy, if we consider (the young) Benjamin as »the child« in the above paragraph? Doesn't it, indeed, recall the fragment titled *Mummerehlen* in which Benjamin was compelled to metamorphose himself into things via the cloud-words? This fragment, sure enough, ends in a revealing legend:

The story comes from China, and tells of an old painter who invited friends to see his newest picture. This picture showed a park and a narrow footpath that ran along a stream and through a grove of trees, culminating at the door of a little cottage in the background. When the painter's friends, however, looked around for the painter, they saw that he had left them – that he was in the picture. There, he followed the little path that led to the door, paused before it quite still, turned, smiled, and disappeared through the narrow opening. In the same way, I too, when occupied with my paintpots and brushes, would be suddenly displaced into the picture. I would resemble the porcelain which I had entered in a cloud of colors. (SW III, 393)

5. Resemblance or Affinity

We have finally reached a point where the resemblance (likeness) between the resemblance theories of two virtuosi of the philosophy of language should become apparent. As we have seen, the experts for ›inverse empathy‹ are children. »The child plays,« Benjamin observes, »at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher, but also a windmill and a train« (SW II, 720). This means that child does not need distinguish between himself and the world of things; indeed, the most essential characteristic of child lies in his not-yet-knowing about death and this very naiveté, paradoxically, leads him into a peerless proximity to death; due to even its proximity to death, the child can look at, of course unbeknownst, all things and events in this world under the perspective of the creature. By contrast, adults must struggle to fix the supremacy of death in mind and thereupon strive to translate the mute language of infinitesimally small things into the articulated voice of human being in order to maintain that perspective; with such mindfulness, the adult has to notice the ›unsensuous resemblance‹ concealed (and preserved) in language. This task, however, cannot be accomplished, »were not the name-language of man and the nameless language of things related [*verwandt*] in God and released from the same creative word« (SW I, 70). Regarding this idea, astonishingly again, Wittgenstein uses the exactly same term – though it cannot be straightly discerned in English translation – ›related/affinitive‹ (*verwandt*) to give an explanation for the relation between languages:

And this is true. – Instead of pointing out something common to all that we call language, I'm saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common in

virtue of which we use the same word for all – but there are many different kinds of affinity between them. And on account of this *affinity*, or these affinities, we call them all »languages.«²⁷

This very concept does lead him to suggest the famous term »family resemblance« (*Familienähnlichkeit*):

67. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than »family resemblances«; for the various resemblances between members of a family – build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth – overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: »games« form a family.²⁸

Those statements, I would insist, make us consider them Wittgenstein's response to the cross-examination of Benjamin. And, as already insinuated above, Benjamin in advance would have prepared a repartee to Wittgenstein:

Analogy never provides a sufficient reason for resemblance/affinity. Thus, children are not related to their parents *through* their similarities (here there is a failure to distinguish between analogy and similarity!), nor are they related to them *in* their similarities. Instead the resemblance/affinity refers undivided to the whole being, without the need for any particular expression of it. (Expressionlessness of resemblance/affinity.) Nor does a causal nexus form the basis of a resemblance/affinity any more than of an analogy. A mother is related to her child because she has given birth to it – but that is no causal connection. The father is related to the child because he has begotten it, but certainly not by virtue of that aspect of the act of begetting which is, or seems to be, the cause of birth. That is to say, what has been begotten (the son) is determined by the begetter (the father) in a manner different from the way an effect is determined by its cause – not by causality, but by resemblance/affinity. (SW I, 207)²⁹

This article is, as a matter of fact, written in 1919, that is, even before the publishing of *Tractatus*. Our hypothesis of reciprocations, accordingly, seems to be untrustworthy, but it does so only on the ground of positivity. In a certain ›cloudy‹ dimension we can think of this case as taking the place of genuine resemblance/affinity, just as Benjamin and Wittgenstein find out that the relationship between languages, or better, between all creaturely lives can be expressed in distortion,

27 Ibid., p. 35.

28 Ibid., p. 36.

29 The translation of the word *Verwandschaft* is mostly replaced with »resemblance/affinity« by H. C.

that is, at the same time appearing and disappearing, being differentiated and integrated, and finally being divided and imparted, only in (not through!) language. Indeed, »[t]he nature of resemblance/affinity is enigmatic« (ibid.). The resemblance/affinity, therefore, »can be directly perceived only in feeling (neither in intuition, nor in reason), but can be rigorously and modestly comprehended by reason« (208). Benjamin, again, employs the term ›feeling‹ that is located not in the head (reason) but only in the very site created by the cloud-words: in *Stimmung*. Feelings appear in *Stimmung* and disappear into *Stimmung*.

This reflection, I would like to say, sheds light on the question about how to »solve« the enigma of resemblance/affinity. With regard to this enigma, it is inevitable to introduce another metaphor of speech that already won renown by virtue of Benjamin's »The Task of Translator«: *the broken vessel*.

Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. (260)

This paragraph explains with a great clarity why feeling cannot be located anywhere but in the words-clouds and why resemblance/affinity radically is different from analogy. Fragments, broken pieces, resemble each other not because their appearances really look alike but because they all are in a state of brokenness. What common to all creatures is this very brokenness. And only brokenness can endure the utmost tension between appearance and disappearance, differentiation and integration, and division and impartation. The genuine feeling, hence, can originate only from the perception of the brokenness of all creatures, just as we can guess that the preexistence of a vessel exclusively through the resemblance/affinity of broken fragments. This is also why Benjamin accounts that »the resemblance/affinity refers undivided to the whole being«. What makes every part of the whole being resemble and match one another in the smallest details is the ›unsensuous resemblance‹ and the ›family resemblance,‹ or if you will, ›the unsensuous family resemblance‹ (*unsinnliche Familienähnlichkeit*). As regards this idea, the philosopher who at the beginning has studied engineering suggests a more resolute metaphor: »Here I'd like to say: a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it is not part of the mechanism.«³⁰ Granted, it is to say that a creature that cannot be glued and matched with others is not a part of the

30 Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigation* (note 10), p. 101.

whole being, just as the cloud-words are always already being glued together (and, unfortunately, so often fallen apart, too) and thereby incessantly make *Stimmung* for creaturely life.

All this is a cloud of words. Like clouds, words always already scatter and disperse when(ever) they gather and lump. In not yet completely appearing, cloudy words are also always already disappearing. A cloud of words thus is nothing other than what (dis)appears. The appearance of a cloud of words is like Dis-, not »this.« Remarking on the German word *Wolke* (clouds), Werner Hamacher suggests one way to resemble cloudy words, that is, to (dis)appear: »When he writes *Wolke*, it is only as that word which hinders him from knowing what a word is and whether he even writes it. If he reads it, he along with everything that is life for him, is lost in its snow flurry, in which no figure entirely develops before it dissolves into another.«³¹

31 Werner Hamacher: »The Word *Wolke*. If It Is One«, in: Rainer Nägele (ed.): *Benjamin's Ground*, Detroit (Wayne State UP) 1988, p. 147.