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THE INOPERATIVE
COMMUNITY

Jean-Luc Nancy

COMMUNITY

In this powerful work, Jean-Luc Nancy examines community as an idea that has dominated modern thought and traces its relation to concepts of experience, discourse, and the individual. Contrary to popular Western notions of community, Nancy shows that it is neither a project of fusion nor production. Rather, he argues, community can be defined through the political nature of its resistance against immanent power.

"The Inoperative Community contains philosophical developments of the most original kind on the theme of community, the role of myth in the establishment of community, and the role of remythization today. In addition it continues a discussion with Blanchot and Bataille, thinkers of the first order."

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"This is a major contribution to the most important current debate in literary theory. It takes an original position and provides strong arguments. This is a book to be reckoned with."

—Wlad Godzich, Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Montreal

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The Inoperative Community

Jean-Luc Nancy

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Foreword

Experiences of Finitude

Christopher Fynsk

A full introduction to Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophical work would require treatment of the *practice of reading* that he has pursued in carrying forward the task of deconstructing the history of metaphysics. Nancy has devoted extensive study to the major texts of modern philosophy, from Descartes through Nietzsche, because he follows Heidegger in assuming that any effort to think the present (the advent of a time that can no longer be thought with any teleological or fundamental schema) presupposes a lucid understanding of philosophy's closure. Heidegger argued that tracing the limit formed by the end of metaphysics entails *repeating* the movements by which philosophy exhausted its possibilities—this, in order to release what philosophy has closed upon in its effort to secure an ideal order of meaning. Nancy (with others: the community to which Jacques Derrida refers in the opening pages of "Violence and Metaphysics")' has recognized that this task of repetition is far from complete, that in principle it cannot be completed, and that it requires repetition in its turn. Heidegger made it clear that we cannot simply have done with philosophy: our language remains the language of metaphysics. He also showed some of the possibilities that lie in thinking the closure of metaphysics (as Nancy reminds us, a border marks an inside *and an outside*). But he restricted and even foreclosed those possibilities in his turn, as we see most dramatically in his political statements. By repeating Heidegger's task of deconstructing metaphysics in close readings of some of the major texts of the tradition, Nancy also deconstructs Heidegger and works toward a new thought of difference.

Much of Nancy's work has thus taken the form of commentary, and continues to do so (as in the case of his essay on the Hegelian monarch).² But over the past ten years, Nancy has also sought to depart from this mode and to pursue in a more independent fashion the notion of difference to which his work has pointed. He has attempted to abandon the commentator's position of relative safety and to elaborate a thought that would answer to the fact that many of the concerns to which fundamental philosophy was addressed continue to *speak* to us today in the form of imperatives (freedom, justice, community), even though the conceptual systems from which these ideas have drawn their meaning are no longer viable. Nancy has pursued aggressively the notion that the end of philosophy is not the end of thought. Indeed, in his view the end of philosophy *demand*s thought, and he is willing to retain the name of philosophy to designate the effort to answer to these obscure imperatives.

Nancy has thus returned to a set of themes that still form the mainstays of political and ethical thought but that are rarely taken up today *as questions* (and are thus largely abandoned to traditional philosophical commentary: the endless recension of philosophy's past positions or points of view). He has done so from the basis of a *thought* of history, a conception of the event of philosophy's end (the collapse of all foundational discourses and the advent of modernity or postmodernity) and of the "eventual" character of history itself. Proceeding from a notion of the finitude of Being—its essential difference from itself, or its historicity—Nancy has sought to rethink our *experience* of history, or what I might call the passions of historically defined existence: among them, freedom, love, community, and religion (the last three form the points of focus in this volume). He has begun to elaborate in this manner a most severe, though also liberating, thought of finitude.

My aim here will be to sketch the basic lines of this thought and some of the questions it raises, with particular reference to the essays contained in this volume. I will neglect in this manner many of Nancy's contributions to philosophical research (work that is frequently at the margins of philosophy, at its intersections with literary theory, psychoanalysis, and political discourse), trusting that the increasing availability of this material in English lessens the need for an introductory overview.¹ But before approaching what Nancy describes as the "singularity" of Being—its singularity implying its multiplicity, and thus a differential structure that forms what Nancy calls the "political space," and the site of community—I would like to pursue a little further the singular character of Nancy's own work. For the *gesture* of thought that animates the work upon which I am focusing here constitutes its true novelty and even its decisive importance for contemporary critical and philosophical thought.

I have alluded to the basic traits of this gesture: it consists in returning to themes that play a crucial role in all discourses concerned with politics or the grounds of social existence but that have become abstract—the prey of ideology—by virtue of the fact that the philosophical presuppositions defining their meaning (Nancy will speak of the metaphysics of subjectivity, referring thereby to the philosophical underpinnings of humanism) have succumbed to the nihilism that inhabits them. A political imperative whose grounds are necessarily obscure nevertheless dictates that themes such as “freedom” and “community” be rethought. These themes still speak to us in some sense; even if political discourses have proven unable to give them a meaning that *holds* for a social practice devoted to sociopolitical needs, we find ourselves unable to do without them, even haunted by them in some sense. Nancy’s gesture is to confront the distress generated by the haunting abstraction of such terms by pushing them toward limits he defines with his understanding of the closure of metaphysics and of what this closure reveals: the finitude of Being. He does this at an astonishing speed, as though all of the traditional themes were crowding into his thought and demanding reconsideration. And he does it untiringly—he exhausts the terms upon which he focuses and the conceptual structures in which they are embedded. There is no piety here, and nothing esoteric (however difficult the thought might be): Nancy’s is a hands-on approach that constructs precarious conceptual formulas only to turn them inside out in an unrelenting effort to expose their limits once more. He is a *laborer* of the concept, carrying to excess what Hegel described as the labor *of the concept*. And this means that he does not shy from risks of redundancy or even outright contradiction—he is aiming for the *chance* exposure of a limit. Grace will come in a sudden turn of the phrase at moments of inspiration or at moments of fatigue (the concept’s fatigue, not his). But he does not pause to search for it; it comes frequently enough, and the imperative to which he is answering urges him on.

One should neither neglect nor give in to the tension created by this conceptual work (a tension experienced sharply by any translator of Nancy’s work). There is no language for what Nancy is trying to think that does not at some point inhibit this thought, reinscribe in it the classical conceptual systems Nancy is trying to work past. The tension keeps us from seizing too easily upon the formulas with which Nancy seeks to define his notion of difference. What Nancy is pointing to can be glimpsed only in the movement of his text and the wake of his conceptual labor (which is also where we will find his signature).

From a political perspective, the gesture of *forcing* terms such as “freedom” and “community”—marking their philosophical limits and reworking them in relation to a thought of finitude—involves marking the gap *and*

the bridge between his thought of community and any existent political philosophy or program, a gap and a bridge that also define the relation between what Nancy calls in the preface to this volume “the political” (*le politique*: the site where what it means to *be* in common is open to definition) and “politics” (*la politique*: the play of forces and interests engaged in a conflict over the representation and governance of social existence).⁴ His gesture is thus to work a term like “community” in such a way that it will come to mark what Heidegger would call the difference between the ontic and the ontological and to oblige us to think from the basis of this difference. I will be approaching Nancy’s use of the term “community” in the pages that follow by focusing on several of his descriptions of the grounds of the social or political bond (a structure of “exposure” that Nancy elaborates from the basis of Heidegger’s notion of finite transcendence and his notion of *Mitsein*). But for the purpose of these initial remarks on Nancy’s philosophical practice, let it suffice to say that community names a relation that cannot be thought as a subsistent ground or common measure for a “being-in-common.” While a singular being may come to its existence as a subject only in this relation (and it is crucial, in a political perspective, to note that Nancy thus starts from the *relation* and not from the solitary subject or individual), this communitary “ground” or condition of existence is an unsublatable differential relation that “is” only in and by its multiple singular articulations (though it is always irreducible to these) and thus differs constantly from itself. It is not something that may be produced and instituted or whose essence could be expressed in a work of any kind (including a *polis* or state): it cannot be the object or the telos of a politics.

Thus anyone seeking an immediate political application of this thought of community risks frustration (and the tension to which I have alluded redoubles, for the task of pursuing a *thought* of community in the face of an unacceptable political reality—which includes an ongoing destruction of much of what we have known as community—is not an unproblematic one). Moreover, this frustration will not entirely dissipate even if one recognizes that Nancy’s engagement with the political (understood, once again, as the site where a being-in-common is at stake) proceeds from an acute sense of the contemporary sociopolitical context and is *indissociable* from a political position-taking.⁵ One does not have to read far to recognize the political character of Nancy’s thought (even when he does not thematize political issues), and it is not difficult to see where Nancy might be situated in the spectrum of political choices. But it is exceedingly difficult to define, for example, how one might move from his definition of a nonorganic, differential articulation of social existence (which he illustrates via Marx in chapter 3) to any currently existing politics. For once again, there is a point

at which this move becomes properly unthinkable in the terms of any traditional conception of the relation between theory and practice: one cannot work to institute or realize this thought of community.

One can, however, attempt to communicate what Nancy calls “community” (though we have to do here with an entirely different sense of communication from the one that is called upon in theories of consensus); one can attempt to favor such communication, and one can attempt to engage in a critique of the ideologies that dissimulate what Nancy calls the absence of community (or the fact of the impossibility of communion or immanence as it appears to us today, after the closure of metaphysics). The impossibility of immediately translating this thought into a political program does not dictate political paralysis. On the contrary, the experience of the political, as Nancy defines it, *demand*s political response—both because it provides a sharp sense of the abstraction of the reigning political ideologies and because it entails the experience of something like an imperative. It requires at the same time that we rethink the very concept of political practice, as Nancy begins to do with his notion of writing (I will turn to this later as I take up the question of language and the community’s exigency).⁶

Nancy’s gesture of thought points to and already involves another practice of writing. But we cannot anticipate any rapid resolution of the tensions to which I have referred, for our access to another thought of community and political practice is through the language of the tradition and requires the kind of work Nancy has undertaken in attempting to mark the limits of the traditional terminology (which is certainly not to say that the deconstruction of the tradition will *suffice* in a political perspective: we cannot afford to neglect questions of immediate political urgency, and the work of deconstruction must also be undertaken in relation to them). Nancy is attempting to expose what still speaks in a term like “community” when we assume the closure of the metaphysics of subjectivity—any communion of the subject with itself, any accomplished self-presence—and with it the closure of representation or signification (a signifying order assured by and for a subject). And if he persists so relentlessly with this impractical conceptual labor, it is because he is trying to work a thought of difference, or a thought of finitude, into political terms that continue to speak to us as imperatives despite their loss of philosophical meaning. The obscurity of these imperatives demands this labor, and the thought demands its communication.⁷

The Experience of Freedom

What is this thought? One of Nancy’s most forceful articulations of it comes in his essay on freedom, in which he retraces the fate of this concept

in Heidegger's work and tries to repeat Heidegger's effort to think the fact of existence, or its facticity, as its freedom. He demonstrates that the concept of freedom gradually recedes in Heidegger's thinking, until it is abandoned not long after the confrontation with Schelling (1936) and replaced with a notion of "the free" (*das Freie*). It recedes, we might say, from being a trait of existence (*the* trait of existence: its ground, or rather *Abgrund*—the abyssal foundation that is its transcendence, its "freedom to found") to a trait of Being that in its "freedom" gives a relation to what is in and by a movement of withdrawal. Heidegger will never dissociate Being's movement of advent/withdrawal, concealment/unconcealment, from a certain intervention by the human Dasein; this is why Being has a history and is nowhere other than in the history of its articulations—this is the finitude of Being. Being *needs* humankind, Heidegger will say,⁶ and in the late essays on language he will reiterate that the speaking of language (that event in which a determination of Being opens in language) can only occur insofar as it is pro-voked by an act of human speaking. But in the course of his thinking (feeling the grip of the metaphysics of subjectivity—particularly after the voluntarism of his own political engagements), Heidegger shifts the focus from the freedom that engages the human Dasein in the "accomplishment of Being" to the freedom (the Open, the "free" region) to which the human Dasein accedes in answering to the event of Being's advent. This shift of focus is not without its effects. Questions are displaced or even closed (including those that Heidegger finds most troubling: those bearing most immediately on politics); others are brought more clearly into view (it becomes impossible to mistake Heidegger's thought for an existentialism). But the shift, or the *Kehre*, as it is commonly referred to, does not alter Heidegger's basic notion of the finitude of Being and therefore does not alter Heidegger's initial understanding that Being must be thought in *its difference from itself*, and thus in its existence, understood as an always singular articulation of its withdrawal. Nancy's gesture consists in carrying this thought of the finitude of Being—its eventual, singular character—back into the questions opened in the existential analytic of *Being and Time*. He folds the later Heidegger (a Heidegger that Derrida has helped us to rethink with his elaboration of the concepts of *différance* and "writing") back into the earlier, and starts from the direction of the experience of the human Dasein—recognizing that thought begins from no other point of departure. Thus he tries to think the event wherein a determination of what it means to be comes about and beings come into their presence (*Ereignis*, Being's advent), in relation to the movement in which existence is delivered to itself in its freedom and comes to know itself in and as an exposure to an alterity that it draws out and communicates. Nancy is perfectly faithful to Heidegger's thought—to at least one, almost unbroken

line of it—in moving the focus back to the latter experience of freedom.⁹ But by pushing the notion of the singularity of Being in this direction, he is able to counter some of the most conservative tendencies of this thought—its piety, the way it gathers to itself in its inclination to stress the gathering or appropriation of Being over its co-originary disappropriation and dissemination. By emphasizing the singular nature of the event wherein Dasein opens to Being, Nancy brings forward Being's necessarily multiple, differential character: if the articulation of Being is always singular, Being cannot be One, and it cannot be thought simply as a gathering or collecting. And if that to which Dasein opens is always already articulated (it could not give itself or "communicate" itself otherwise—it *is* nowhere other than in its articulations) then Being must be thought as differential or relational. Once again, if we read carefully—if we read past a powerful rhetoric of "gathering"—we see that this line of argument is quite consistent with Heidegger's descriptions of the event of *Ereignis*. But by stressing the singular character of the facticity of experience (this also means its strangeness for the subject that knows itself only outside itself and in relation), Nancy undoes some of the abstractness of the Heideggerian discourse and challenges the rhetoric of piety. In large measure, this effect has to do with the fact that by returning to the existential or experiential dimension of the thought of the finitude of Being—without sacrificing anything of Heidegger's critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity—Nancy opens in a new manner the question of the implications of this thought for politics or ethics. And by recognizing that the experience of freedom is indissociable from a political passion (*the* political passion, the experience of the question of political existence), further, by writing out of this recognition, he brings forth the concreteness of a deconstructive approach. He shows that the experience of freedom, and thus the experience of community, is the experience of the *real*, and while he deconstructs the notions of the individual and the subject's presence to itself, he points to the singularity of the self that knows itself as opening to alterity.¹⁰

"Freedom," then, is a name for ecstasis (as is "love," as Nancy argues in "Shattered Love"). It is the exposure of thought to the fact of Being: *that there are beings* (and not nothing, Heidegger adds).¹¹ Or to put it more precisely, it is the opening, *in thought*, to the possibility of meaning, or to the possibility of a world: thought's deliverance or abandonment to the *opening* of a time and space, and the drawing out or articulation of this opening (what Kant approached with his notion of transcendental schematism) whereby it is possible to remark the fact of being as such. To experience beings in their presence is to experience the fact of their having been given or offered to our representation. In that fleeting experience, we remark the fact of the offering itself, or the relation by which we are able

to recognize that a thing is as this or that thing. (Though the relation is not the object of a perception; we remark no more than the fact that beings have been given to our perception—as a pure opening, the relation gives itself in its withdrawal.) Heidegger argued that the human Dasein is singular among beings for precisely the fact that this relation comes into question for it; it is the being for whom its being is at stake, and with it its relation to everything that is (including other human beings). When Dasein is surprised by the fact of being (and this surprise can take the form of an experience of the uncanny, or vertigo), it discovers the fact of its abandonment or exposure, and thus discovers that it is Dasein (the “Da” is the site of its exposure). It experiences its exposure in a kind of *originary* self-affection—originary, because it comes to its being in this experience (its being is defined there) and discovers itself as existing: it *finds itself* as having been exposed to the opening of a relation to what is, and as committed to this relation (or as refusing it).¹²

It is important to emphasize here that the human Dasein does not have freedom as one of its properties: Dasein *comes to itself* in its freedom, originally. It does not discover a pre-existent essence or potential; rather, its being is defined in this experience. The subject of freedom emerges in its freedom, and in this sense freedom (as the initial *coup d'envoi*) precedes itself as the freedom of a self. Freedom is an event, and though this event may be assumed or affirmed, and only *is* as it is assumed (exposed or drawn out in a singular “style” pitch that articulates what the German tradition has thought as a *Stimmung*), it cannot be possessed. We dispose of it only insofar as it has disposed (of) us. Because the subject *comes to itself* in its freedom, Nancy will frequently use the metaphor of birth. Or he will speak of the *syncope* in which existence is delivered to itself and will speak of rhythm as the subject’s articulation of this originary suspension. The human Dasein “delivers” itself in the sense that it draws out and communicates its being exposed. But this communication remains the communication of an exposure—Dasein can communicate its birth and its mortality, but it cannot give birth to itself (as in the metaphysical dream of self-conception), no more that it can possess its death as an object of knowledge.

Nancy consistently suggests that these two latter limits of Dasein’s existence must in fact be thought together: any experience of “birth” or “deliverance” is inseparable from a knowledge of mortality. Heidegger made this point in *Being and Time* by describing freedom as the *passage* to a free assumption of being-toward-death that is both made possible by and makes possible Dasein’s deliverance to the fact of its existence. The experience of mortality is finally indissociable in Heidegger’s text from all limit-experience, and Nancy tends to follow Heidegger in this respect in his

references to death. However, Nancy's writing is not marked by either the celebratory, tragic pathos of *Being and Time* and Heidegger's writings of the early thirties or by the tonality of mourning that characterizes some of Heidegger's later work and many Heideggerian discourses. Above all, he avoids (or simply is not tempted by) the complacency of a mourning that turns to a kind of self-recovery in which the subject "communes" with its loss. He produces in this respect a most severe, rigorous thought of finitude—one that has its precedent in the severity of Hölderlin's late thought of the modern experience of mourning and that turns, as frequently in Hölderlin, to a kind of joy and to a more affirmative or more abandoned experience of dispossession (the reader will note this particularly in "Of Divine Places" and "Shattered Love.")

Nancy also stresses a point about the experience of mortality that is hardly more than implicit in Heidegger's text but that is brought forth powerfully by authors such as Bataille and Blanchot. This is the suggestion that the death of the other calls the subject beyond itself and thus delivers it to its freedom. Freedom is necessarily *shared* (*partagé*), and the experience of the other's mortality constitutes something like a condition of this sharing. Like love (itself inseparable from an experience of mortality), it calls the subject out and beyond itself, exposing it to alterity and to its freedom.¹³ Before turning to Nancy's elaboration of the communication that occurs in Dasein's free assumption of its finitude, I would like to pause to consider Nancy's remarks on death and love and what they indicate of the fundamental sociality of the experience of freedom.

Mortality and Love

In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy follows Bataille (citing also Freud and the notion of a primal murder, as well as Heidegger) in arguing that the individual Dasein first knows community when it experiences the impossibility of communion or immanence (the self-presence of individuals to one another in and by their community) before the dead other. Bataille writes: "If it sees its fellow-being die, a living being can only subsist *outside* itself."¹⁴ In this ecstasis, Dasein discovers the possibility of community. Bataille again, in an essay on Nietzsche: "In the existence of a community, that which is typically religious, in the sure grip of death, has become the thing most foreign to man. No one thinks any longer that the reality of a communal life—which is to say, human existence—depends on the sharing of nocturnal terrors and on the kind of ecstatic spasms that spread death."¹⁵ Nancy concurs (though in less heady terms) and argues that part of the devastation wrought by the technical organization of advanced capitalist

societies (state or private capitalism) lies in the isolation of the individual in its very death and thus the impoverishment of that which resists any appropriation or objectification. Death is an experience that a collectivity cannot make its *work* or its property, in the sense of something that would find its meaning in a value or cause transcending the individual. A society may well use it (in the celebrations of heroes or the sacrificial victims), but there is a point at which death exposes a radical meaninglessness that cannot be subsumed. And when death presents itself as *not ours*, the very impossibility of representing its meaning suspends or breaches the possibility of self-presentation and exposes us to our finitude. Nancy argues with Bataille (and as a *tragic* intuition this is profoundly Nietzschean)¹⁶ that this exposure is also an opening to community: outside ourselves, we first encounter the other.

The problem of death and community should be explored at much greater length and deserves a separate treatment. I would add here simply that the experience of death cannot be thought solely as the experience of the dead other, as the line I have cited from Bataille suggests. We note in Heidegger, for example, that the encounter with the dead other does not offer access to the experience that concerns him in the existential analytic and that is Dasein's experience of the possibility of its own death, its experience of its own mortality.¹⁷ This is not to say that Dasein's access to its mortality (and thus its finitude, for it is in the resolute assumption of the possibility of its death that Dasein knows true anguish and thus opens to the Nothing) does not come to it by way of the other. I believe that an attentive reading of *Being and Time* will suggest (whether Heidegger intended this or not) that Dasein comes to know its mortality precisely by way of the other's relation to its death. It is through its assumption of mortality that Dasein first encounters the other—but Dasein knows its mortality only by way of the other and what the other communicates of its mortality. The very notion of an authentic being-together belies Heidegger's important statement in paragraph 50: "If Dasein stands before itself as this possibility ["no-longer-being-able-to-be-there"], it has been *fully* assigned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. When it stands before itself in this way, all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone. This ownmost non-relational possibility is at the same time the uttermost one."¹⁸ It would seem that only the pressure of a long tradition that thinks the "authentic" individual as isolated could make it possible for Heidegger to reach such a conclusion.¹⁹ For if authentic being-toward-death is the condition of Dasein's knowing itself as existing (that is to say, as transcending, as opening to Being), then it must also be the condition of encountering the other: it is the opening of a relation at the same time that it is the tracing of a singularity. As Heidegger declares explicitly, *Mitsein* and *Dasein* are co-originary; Dasein

must be thought in its very possibility as being-together. I have pursued this argument elsewhere.²⁰ My point here is to emphasize that Dasein knows its mortality only by way of its experience of the other's relation to its death. The other's *existence* (not its death, in the sense of something that has overcome it) first seizes us and draws us beyond ourselves. Blanchot, who has also provided a most extraordinary description of our relation to the cadaver,²¹ makes this point in *The Unavowable Community*:

The "basis of communication" [Blanchot is commenting on Bataille] is not necessarily speech, or even the silence that is its foundation and punctuation, but exposure to death, no longer my own exposure, but someone else's, whose living and closest presence is already the eternal and unbearable absence, an absence that the travail of deepest mourning does not diminish. And it is in life itself that that absence of someone else has to be met. It is with that absence—its uncanny presence, always under the prior threat of disappearing—that friendship is brought into play and lost at each moment, a relation without relation, or without relation other than the incommensurable.²²

What the other *presents* to us, and particularly in moments of the greatest intimacy, is the fact of his/her existence. We encounter the other as existing, that is to say, in their finitude: as opening to us out of their own relation to alterity. And this relation is indissociable from the experience of mortality—the other's presence is marked by its mortality, even when presence appears most vital. This encounter is probably the condition of all knowledge of finitude—the other, as I said above, must *call us out*, call us to our freedom. We know our finitude by way of the other, and by way of the other's finitude. But if all knowledge of finitude has to do with mortality (and this is not an intellection but an experience of the limits of knowledge), this does not imply, once again, that the only relation to the other *as other* takes the form of mourning. Nancy's description of love, as I have suggested, answers to the same schema of encounter.

In his discussion of love in *La communauté désœuvrée* (comprising chapters 1 through 3 of this translation) and in "L'amour en éclats" ("Shattered Love"), Nancy attempts to dissociate love from any experience of communion: either as the subject's communion with itself (self-love: "*amour propre*") or with an other, between individuals, or in a community at large. He shows the limits of Bataille's thought of community in the former text by demonstrating that as Bataille loses faith in the possibility of realizing in society a modern form of community that would recover something of the commonality of experience characteristic of more primitive social forms (though without repeating the "immense failure" of prior

hieratic structures), he progressively isolates the community of lovers, separating them from society, and losing sight of the fact that their union communicates in its turn the separation that Nancy sees as (un)grounding community. Love, as Nancy defines it, is once again an experience of finite transcendence: the subject *finds itself* in love, *beyond itself*. This transcendence is not a movement from one being toward another; its transport happens (for all parties) by way of a transgression or effraction—love comes, so to speak, from the outside, and it is not the other subject that touches or exposes the subject in this manner, but what constitutes the otherness of the other. It is the singularity of the other that provokes love, provided we also understand by this term the marking of a certain strangeness or otherness (in love this can take the form of a strange beauty). The subject in love is a subject exposed—exposed (affected) by the other and opening to the other: opening further to its exposure, opening to further exposure. What it knows of love is this exposure and what Nancy calls a “trembling on the edge of being”—always a singular self coming to itself in the presence of the other, enjoying “itself” only as the exposure to an alterity and as the transport of this exposure. One is traversed by the other, and traverses in this movement the limits of one’s identity. But the love experienced in this movement cannot be possessed in any way and does not constitute a higher identity. In a delightful passage, Nancy describes it as a “coming and going.” It comes upon the self and draws the self forth, prompting the self to offer its love to the other (its being-exposed); but as further exposure this love that departs comes back to the self, only to renew its transport. It is a traversal that constantly remarks its passage *as* passage but without ever presenting itself: “It traverses itself,” Nancy writes. “It comes and comes to itself, as that by which nothing comes about other than that there is a coming about” (p. 102). An advent that withholds itself by the return of its very advent, exposing us to our exposure, and further exposure, but never secure in its very return, never returning to the self (as in the investments of narcissism), and never a possession.

There are all kinds of love. What characterizes it in its endless forms is nothing more than its *éclats*—and it *is* nowhere other than in these *éclats*; it has no other essence. We know it by the way it strikes us. But it is always singular: “all loves . . . are superbly singular,” Nancy writes (p. 99). Love is known always singularly, though it is the knowledge of an encounter and a relation. Even when it is shared, it is the knowledge of a differential relation, existing only singularly in the passage from the one to the other. Its singularity does not belong to a self—it is the singularity of the opening of one to another. It exposes the singularity of a being, its finitude, *in its community*—and thus the singularity of Being itself.

(It is interesting to note that for Nancy this singularity presents itself almost always with a certain sharpness and brightness—its inscription is incisive, its limit is always fine. Responding in “Shattered Love” to Lévinas’s critique of Heidegger and his claim concerning the indetermination or generality of “*es gibt*” [which might be translated as “it gives” or “there is,” “*il y a*” in French], Nancy makes the crucial point that for Heidegger there is no generality of Being; what is given, he says, is the “effraction of generality, precise and hard” [p. 105]. Being is at stake in this giving, he argues: “It is bursting there, offered in dazzling multiplicity, sharp and singular.” The same characteristics appear in the descriptions of love and freedom. Nancy says little, for example, about the experience of fascination, as Blanchot explores it, or about the experiences Blanchot describes as “the death that is the impossibility of dying,” the neutral or “fatigue.”²³ Whereas Nancy speaks of limits and their transgression [a transgression that marks a limit or draws it out], Blanchot tends to focus upon the indeterminacy of this same experience of passage. Thus, in their respective understanding of the limit experience, Nancy is closer to Heidegger than to Blanchot [Heidegger, too, likes sharp, clear limits], though in his emphasis upon deliverance, he produces a much freer description of the finitude of Being. These are matters of style and of the singularity of each text. In other words, they are absolutely essential, as each recognizes in their elaboration of the “same” thought of difference.)

The Divided Logos

In this rapid presentation of Nancy’s development of the notion of finitude, I have tried to suggest what Nancy understands by “ecstasy” with his concept of freedom and have tried to bring forth aspects of the “communitary” dimension of this experience by focusing upon his treatment of the motifs of love and death. I would like to add now a third dimension of his thinking by introducing the problematic of language and, by way of conclusion, Nancy’s use of the concept of writing.

Nancy takes up the question of language near the end of *L’oubli de la philosophie* in the context of a discussion of Benjamin’s remark that “truth is the death of intention.”²⁴ Nancy describes the “truth” implied in this phrase as a presentation of “the existence in truth of the thing that is known”²⁵ (a truth that is not grounded in the certitude of the subject of representation). But while he designates it as “simple truth,” he argues that it must be thought in an essential correlation with language and that it thus requires that we distinguish a concept of meaning (*sens*) from what metaphysics has always thought as signification.²⁶ Nancy insists here—and this insistence goes along with his recent references to his thought as a “transcendental materialism”—that to introduce the dimension of language

is not to introduce a mediation between thought and the real (in which case we would reenter the order of signification); the meaning given in language, at the limits of signification and constitutive of its possibility, is of a reality that is “simultaneously empirical and transcendental, material and ideative, physical and spiritual—a kind of unheard-of ‘fact of reason.’”²⁷ This “fact” is what thought opens to (and what opens to thought) in its freedom—what makes freedom an *experience*. Its advent in language, Nancy says, *is* the real, or the thing (*la chose*); it is the irreducibly material condition of a relation to what is and thus the material condition of the possibility of signification or representation.

It is important, I believe, to keep in mind Nancy’s efforts to think this materiality of what he terms “meaning” and his emphasis (following a motif in Kant) on the facticity of the experience of freedom (related to his emphasis on the *force* of an existent being in its freedom).²⁸ This materialist dimension of a thought of writing or difference will have to be pursued as this thought is taken in the direction of politics. But we must bear in mind as well that meaning, in its materiality, constitutes something like the “origin” of language: what Benjamin approached with his references to a “pure language,” what Heidegger defined as “the essence of language” (I will return to this notion), and what Derrida points to with his notions of *différance* and writing. As I will argue, Nancy’s descriptions of a *communication* of force and of the difference of forces that articulates an always communitary meaning of Being require that we understand these material grounds of representation as being in some sense *of language*. Nancy is making this point, I believe, when he defines freedom as “access to the essence of the *logos*,” and even as “the *logos* in its access to its essence.”²⁹

The term *logos* is, of course, heavily charged. Nancy does not hesitate before it because he is describing thought’s access to the event wherein the possibility of representation is given, and thus any possibility of representing an order of concepts. But I would emphasize two further reasons for his recourse to the term. First, it is dictated by the “measuring” Nancy assigns to thought as it draws out the difference to which it is exposed in its freedom and remarks it. The exposure of *Dasein* to the withdrawal of Being (the opening of a relation to what is, difference), is indissociable from the movement in which this withdrawal is articulated (traced or inscribed: drawn out):

Freedom is the specific logic of access to self outside of self in an always singular spacing of Being. It is its *logos*: “reason,” “speech,” “division” [*partage*]. Freedom is the *logos*—not allogical, but open at the heart of the *logos* itself—of divided Being. The ontological division, or the singularity of Being, opens the space that freedom alone can properly “space” (not “fill”). “Spacing

space" means: holding it as space [*le garder en tant qu'espace*] and as the division of Being, in order to share [*partager*] indefinitely the division [*partage*] of singularity.³⁰

Similar statements may be found in relation to the themes of rhythm and measure, and all of them follow in their way Heidegger's meditation on the *legein*—the laying out, gathering, collecting, even "reading"—that is the essence of the *logos*. Thought, in its freedom, opens to and articulates the *logos* as it draws out the opening of a relation to what is: the *logos* comes about (and comes to language as language, as a "saying") only insofar as it is articulated by thought. This is not to say that thought and the *logos* are the same thing. Thought draws out the difference to which it is exposed. Its gesture of inscription brings this difference to language (as what Nancy terms "meaning")—remarks it and articulates it as the difference that separates or divides, lays out, and (Heidegger insists) collects and gathers. But what thought thus articulates remains the *other* of thought. The *logos*, in its essence, is not human, not a human product or possession (thought's articulation is active, it is a praxis, but it is not a production or "work" in the metaphysical sense of these terms). Nancy will make this point repeatedly in discussing the grounds of community and all communication, and though it will sometimes take a surprising and even mystifying form, the declaration means simply that thought, in its finitude, is exposed to alterity. Its opening to the withdrawal of Being (difference) allows this withdrawal to come about as the event in which a relation to what is is given. We might even say that it *provokes* the speaking that occurs in this event (the advent of the *logos*) and defines it or determines it by tracing out a site of reception. Thought thus contributes to setting a measure (always finite, always singular). But while it plays an initiatory and "provocative" role, it also consists in answering to what it lets happen—it takes its measure from the event that it allows to unfold: "The experience of freedom . . . is nothing other than the knowledge that in all thought there is an *other* thought, a thought that is no longer thought by thought, but that thinks it (that gives it, gives it prodigally, and weighs it [*peser*])—this is what thinking [*penser*] means."³¹ The "other" thought is a thought because it measures thought—but it is the *other* of thought because even while it opens only in and by thought in an always singular gesture (it is nowhere other than in its singular articulations—this is the point of a thought of finitude), it remains that to which thought *answers*: what addresses itself to thought and addresses thought to itself.

The experience of the "other" thought, Nancy says, is the experience of freedom. But we have also seen that it is the experience of language (what Heidegger would call an "experience with language"), and this brings

me to my second suggestion regarding Nancy's use of the term "*logos*." When Nancy defines freedom as "the *logos* in its access to its essence," he is defining very precisely what Heidegger attempts to describe as the "speaking" of language: the movement wherein language gives itself originally in its essence (comes into its essence, "essences," we might say, *west*), and gives thereby the possibility of signification.² Heidegger's most extensive development of this notion (or his most lengthy attempt to engage with the movement in question) comes in his essay, "The Essence of Language." There, he attempts to think the essence of language out of what he terms the language of essence, defining essence as difference (the relation of relations that gathers the "fourfold") and as what "counters" (*gegnet*) thought and "sues" it in the always singular acts by which thought answers to (this is itself a "rejoinder," an *entgegenen*) and thus articulates its address. Essence, as difference, is the "country" (*Gegend*) or "free region" in which thought moves in those responses by which thought draws out the saying of difference—responses that always pass by way of a relation to other responses (as in the case of philosophy's relation to poetic speech). Each mode of thoughtful saying (and this includes poetry) bears a particular and unique relation to its origin in the opening of language that occurs with the saying of difference. But this always singular relation opens only in relation to other modes of saying. The interrelation of these modes, their interweaving, forms what Heidegger calls the *Geflecht*, and the essence of language—what gathers or joins these modes—cannot be thought apart from this interweaving.³ The essence of language is *one*, Heidegger argues—it gathers the modes of saying into a harmony or a singular measure (it *is* this gathering), but it proceeds from the irreducibly multiple instances of saying that articulate it.

Nancy will concur that the *logos* is originally articulated in the irreducibly singular modes of speaking that constitute its web. But he will diverge from Heidegger by denying that this originary articulation or division (what Nancy names a *partage*) gathers in *one* speaking, the speaking of a difference that gathers all instances of speech into the single fold of a unitary *logos*. The *logos*, Nancy argues, is irreducibly divided, *partagé*; it is characterized by a radical historicity in that its always singular articulations never voice the *same* origin. Of course, as articulations, the single instances of speech must in some sense be articulations of the *same*; but Nancy wants to argue that this "same" differs radically from itself and is in a movement that does not answer to a single measure or rhythm and cannot be gathered in a single saying. There is a "voice" of the community, Nancy argues, and this voice announces a law (I will return to these points)—there is a *logos* of the community. But this voice is always divided from itself, always different. The *logos* accedes to its essence and thereby "speaks" (as the

speech of essence) in singular acts of speaking that divide it out irreducibly. To put this in the terms from which we started: the *logos* of the community exists only in its communication, in the singular acts by which Dasein sets out difference in the accomplishment of its freedom. Every free act communicates or “speaks” in that it answers to the *logos*. And insofar as Dasein *is* in and by the free acts in which it defines its being (each time, and each time differently—but always in relation), we may say that when Dasein communicates, when it “says” or articulates difference, it communicates itself. It communicates itself as an opening to alterity. This is the always singular, always different opening of the *logos*.

Nancy sketches the logic of this communication in *Le partage des voix*, and then proceeds to define community (and its communication) on its basis in *La communauté désœuvrée*. The reader will find a correction of the argument of the former text in a footnote to the latter (p. 158, n. 24). Nancy maintains here that the “exposition” of singular beings in their finitude constitutes a “communication” of Being (in its singularity) that is in some sense prior to, or more originary than, the communication he described in *Le partage des voix* as a *hermeneuein*. The exposition of a singular being, he argues, is always the exposition to another being or other beings in their singularity (another Dasein, or other Dasein). Thus when Dasein opens in its freedom to the withdrawal of Being and receives a relation to what is, it does so in relation, and the address to which it answers is always the address of an other. This address, or this “mutual interpellation” (Dasein’s answer is itself an address, a response that articulates anew the alterity that speaks in the other), is “prior,” Nancy argues, “to any address in language (though it gives to this latter its first condition of possibility).” In this sense, Nancy continues in his footnote, the exposure of singular beings is prior to the “division of voices” he described in *Le partage des voix*, unless “voice” is understood as prelinguistic.

Nancy would be suggesting in his footnote that the mutual interpellation of singularities is prior to what Heidegger names “discourse” (*Rede*) in *Being and Time* and prior even to what Heidegger calls in that volume the “voice of conscience” (itself prelinguistic in any strict sense of the term). But without entering into a detailed discussion of *Being and Time*, I would like to suggest that what Nancy described in *Le partage des voix* with his interpretation of Heidegger’s concept of *Auslegung*³⁴ is precisely what he is describing as “communication” in *La communauté désœuvrée*. The point of *Le partage*, as I read it, was to think together the singular act of speaking that occurs in the *hermeneuein* of Dasein’s self-understanding with the *hermeneuein* Heidegger describes in his dialogue with the Japanese student³⁵ as a speaking of language occurring in and by dialogue. As in his essay on freedom (and I consider this to be one of the crucial moves in his

thinking), Nancy was attempting to articulate Heidegger's earlier thought of the facticity of existence with his later meditation on the "giving" that occurs in the speaking of language. The "relay" in this argument was the word *hermeneuein*, which Nancy interpreted as an originary annunciation (*annonce*, translating *Kundgebung*) or address of meaning. In an effort to follow Heidegger and to recover a more originary sense of hermeneutics—countering the versions of hermeneutics that claim a descent from Heidegger, principally those of Gadamer and Ricoeur—Nancy argued that the *hermeneuein* of existence (which also grounds the *hermeneuein* of the existential analytic itself—Heidegger's interpretation of "existence") consists not in the interpretation of a prior meaning to which Dasein would have access, but in the opening of meaning that occurs as Dasein projects for itself a horizon of significations. He suggested further that Heidegger recalls and develops this notion of an *active reception* (both passive and active, both a reception and a kind of *performance*) when he alludes to Plato's *Ion* in the dialogue with the Japanese student, introducing thereby a mimetic dimension in the concept of communication. Finally, he suggested that Heidegger's description of this dialogue itself as a *hermeneuein* that articulates the speaking of language (*die Sprache*) should be thought together with Heidegger's earlier elaboration of this concept in such a way as to permit us to define the *logos* as a *partage des voix*. In short, he demonstrated that Heidegger takes the hermeneutic relation to proceed from a *hermeneuein* that is the speaking of language as it is originally drawn out in always singular voices that open only in relation to one another and as the differential articulation of a *partage*. The hermeneutic annunciation is (in) a difference of voices.

When Nancy qualifies his argument from *Le partage* by saying that community, as a differential relation of singular beings, is prior to what he called "the division of voices," because it is prior to *voice* in any linguistic sense, he is suggesting that the opening of the possibility of signification that is the "access of the *logos* to its essence" is something like a transcendental condition of language. The "event" of this opening is logically prior (being its condition of possibility) to any instance of speech. Heidegger, as I have noted, named the event of this opening *Ereignis*; Nancy's point would be that *Ereignis* is the *limit* of language and in itself nothing linguistic. He would be emphasizing further (though this point was clear in *Le partage des voix*) that what a singular being articulates by its exposure is a "common" space that, while existing only by these articulations, remains nevertheless the articulation of a "between" that joins them and defines them (even as they define it). Again, the otherness of the voice is the always different voice of community.

My disagreement with this qualification is a minor one, and finally only of the order of a terminological clarification. But I would like to suggest that while the limits of language cannot be understood as linguistic in a restricted sense (that is, in the sense that they might form the object of linguistic science), they cannot be understood as other than language. As soon as we have to do with articulation, as soon as we have to do with meaning, we have to do with what Heidegger called *die Sprache*. "Language," taken in this extended sense (a sense that includes what Jean-François Lyotard terms "*phrase*," and beyond this, what Derrida terms "writing"), is a threshold we cannot cross in thought (though it is a *threshold*). I speak of a threshold because we are designating a limit, and a limit, by its very nature, marks a relation to an "outside." But for thought, this outside is nothing (in a phrase that is now well known, "There is no *hors-texte*"). There "is" an other of language, but it is given to us in its alterity only insofar as it is written. And this writing occurs always in a singular voice (or "signs" with a distinctive signature). The mutual interpellation of singularities is not prior to any address in language, it is the address of language.

But Nancy is implicitly recognizing that the limits he is defining are the limits of language simply by speaking of a "mutual interpellation" and by defining this reciprocal address as a communication, and even as "literature." The imperative to which he claims to answer in asserting that *we must continue to write the community* also presupposes that community is something that can be communicated. What Nancy defines as community lies at the limits of language—it is even the "origin" of language (in a Heideggerian sense of the term), but is always *of language*. Otherwise, there would be no *need* to write and no way to write it.

The Community's Demand

There is a need to *write* it, because the communication that is community exceeds the horizon of signification. As the very possibility of signification or representation, it escapes representation and any theoretical grasp. Something other than a theoretical discourse is required to answer to the exigency of community, even if this necessity can be glimpsed only through a discourse that "labors" the concept:

Perhaps we should not seek a word or a concept for it, but rather recognize in the thought of community a theoretical excess (or more precisely, an excess in relation to the theoretical) that would oblige us to adopt another *praxis* of discourse and community. But we should at least try to say this, because "language alone

indicates, at the limit, the sovereign moment where it is no longer current." Which means here that only a discourse of community, exhausting itself, can indicate to the community the sovereignty of its sharing. . . . An ethics and a politics of discourse and writing are evidently implied here. (p. 26)

I cite these lines in part in order to recall the points from which I started concerning Nancy's own practice of exhausting his guiding concepts. As he notes in his essay "Of Being-in-Common," he will exhaust both "literature" and "communism" in *La communauté désœuvrée* (to the point of abandoning a phrase such as "literary communism," though not without having remarked with these terms the necessity of a writing practice that would constitute the other praxis of discourse and community for which he is calling).³⁶ Nancy is describing here the necessity of a theoretical discourse that would point beyond itself, just as the politics this discourse would answer to would go beyond any given "politics" of discourse. He understands this other politics initially as one that would facilitate the writing of the community ("literary communism"). Following Nancy's emphasis on the arts (in a broad sense), we might understand this as a kind of cultural politics—though it would not seek a reflection or representation of itself in the creative acts it would seek to favor. It could not answer to a cultural program or project of any kind (at some point it would have to resist all *programmatic* imperatives), since its aim would be to answer to an unforeseeable event that escapes any instituted order of meaning and constitutes the site where the question of the very meaning of political existence is reopened. It would be a politics seeking to answer to the limit of the political—a limit, as Nancy puts it, "where all politics stops and begins."

While describing this limit in "Literary Communism," and in relation to its tracing by the work of art, Nancy writes, "The work, as soon as it becomes a work, . . . must be abandoned at this limit" (p. 121). He then adds in parentheses, "I say 'must'—but this cannot be dictated by any will, to any will. It cannot be the objective either of a morality or of a politics of community. And yet, it is prescribed. And a politics, in any case, can adopt the objective that this prescription should always be able to open a free way of access." The "cultural politics" in question would seek to let the "unworking" communication of community occur, or prevent its inhibition, even by a "democratic" politics of consensus that cannot tolerate a "communication" that speaks to an experience of community as difference.³⁷ But of course such a politics of community would be *blind* if it could not read, in some sense, the prescription to which it would answer, or whose paths it would try to keep open. Thus, if it is even possible to

speak of a politics in this context, we would have to entertain the notion of a politics *of community*—a politics that would *proceed* from the imperative to which the work itself answers and that is inscribed there.³⁸ Nancy does in fact propose such a politics in *The Inoperative Community*. The first instance:

If the political is not dissolved in the sociotechnical element of forces and needs (in which, in effect, it seems to be dissolving under our eyes), it must inscribe the sharing of community. The outline of singularity would be “political”—as would be the outline of its communication and its ecstasy. “Political” would mean a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication, or destined to this unworking: a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing. To attain to such a signification of the “political” . . . implies being already engaged in community, that is to say, undergoing, in whatever manner, the experience of community as communication: it implies writing. We must not stop writing, or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself. (pp. 40–41)

Nancy is cautious to avoid speaking of *a* politics here, and aims rather at redefining the nature of the political and what would constitute the “political” moment in the self-definition of a community. In his conclusion, however, he suggests that it is possible to speak of a political activity that would answer to this essence of the political:

But it defines at least a limit, at which all politics stops and begins. The communication that takes place on this limit, and that, in truth, constitutes it, demands that way of destining ourselves in common that we call a politics, that way of opening community to itself, rather than to a destiny or to a future. “Literary communism” indicates at least the following: that community, in its infinite resistance to everything that would bring it to completion (in every sense of the word *achever*—which can also mean “finish off”), signifies an irrepressible political exigency, and that this exigency in its turn demands something of “literature,” the inscription of our infinite resistance. (p. 80–81)

A politics of community is possible (though again, this could not be a program) because community *demands* it. A “prescription” occurs in the writing of the community that makes all *writing* political (it *is* writing, or what Nancy also calls “literature,” to the extent that it draws out this prescription and brings it to speak as the exigency of community).³⁹ And the discourse that brings forth this exigency as such—that would engage “consciously” in the politics of community, “opening community to itself,”

must itself be conceived as a kind of writing answering to and repeating in its fashion this exigency.

Nancy does not attempt to describe the traits of such writing in *La communauté désœuvrée*, or the forms it might take (he notes, but leaves aside, the important question of Bataille's use of language). But he returns repeatedly to the "exigency" that speaks in what I have called the divided logos of the community. This demand, as yet "unheard" and "unheard of" (*inouïe*), Nancy says, manifests itself first in an expression of need, a testimony that "involves," he says, all other testimony of this time: "the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community" (p. 1). All writing of this time, he suggests, is part of this testimony: what is said in our time is the absence of community. But an answer to this largely unheard and barely articulated testimony (one that brings it to speak precisely as a *demand*) is not lament, and it is something more than protestation. Bataille answers to it, Nancy argues, in writing out of (and attempting to communicate, in the sense now almost of contagion) what Nancy calls the passion of the absence of community: the ecstatic experience of the impossibility of communion or fusion in a shared, immanent Being, and the impossibility of a "mythic" logos that would be the saying of such immanence. This passion, as we have seen, is the passion of finitude: the passion of a singular being drawn to its limits and drawing out those limits, communicating them as the limits of community itself. Every such communication interrupts, or repeats the rupture of, the mythic space of communion (recast in various forms in the West's constant recourse to myth)—it marks a break or caesura. What Nancy means by "literature" is precisely a communication that does not pass by the relays of the mythic word and thereby interrupts the scene of myth (or the scene of "Literature"—since the myth of the author and the book perpetuates the dream of communion). But in exposing this break, it exposes the singularity of Being (its essence as "*partagé*": divided and shared) and calls upon us, by exposing us to this limit that is the limit of our singular/common being. The address is always singular, but the other that demands our response is always the community. Its address bespeaks a need, but also an invitation and a perpetually renewed, perpetually deferred (or perpetually relayed) promise:

Community without community is *to come*, in the sense that it is always *coming*, endlessly, at the heart of every collectivity. . . . It is no more than this: to come to the limit of compearance, to that limit to which we are in effect convoked, called, and sent. . . . The call that convokes us, as well as the one we address to one another. . . (this call from one to the other is no doubt the same

call, and yet not the same) can be named, for want of a better term, writing, or literature. (p. 71)

Derrida describes this address with the “*viens*” he reads in Blanchot’s texts (and elsewhere).⁴⁰ Heidegger, for his part, describes it as the countering word of an injunction or command that he calls a *Geheiss*: a calling that gathers all acts of calling (all speech in which the address of language itself is articulated) and that enjoins that all speech should answer to its call.⁴¹ When difference speaks, he says, it commands: its command is that all should answer to its command (all answering being the articulation of this command, which can only speak in its articulations). But if, as I have tried to suggest, Nancy is in fact describing the same exigency of language, he makes it clear that this exigency cannot be thought as an injunction that *gathers* all acts that answer to it. Rather it would enjoin further acts of speech that will articulate it differently, in always singular, always different forms. The community enjoins its own dissemination—it enjoins writing: this is the law of community.

Divine Writing

I have referred Nancy’s remarks on the communicative nature of exposure (of the exposure that occurs in all forms of ecstasis) to Heidegger’s understanding of the *logos* and its “communication” in order to suggest how close Nancy’s thinking is to Heidegger’s, but also to mark the distance that lies between them. The distance, we might say now, is one that opens precisely through Nancy’s effort to rethink Heidegger’s notion of a distance and proximity that is measured by the speaking of language (the distance and proximity being the nearness of the word itself as it withdraws and traces out the defining limits of what it means “to be,” and thus the distance—both temporal and spatial—that marks everything that is). The distance between the two texts becomes an extreme proximity if we push Heidegger’s thought of finitude in the direction of some of its most radical formulations. And yet there is a point, or a limit, where Heidegger’s texts resist (rhetorically, if not conceptually): they consistently draw back before the description of the dislocation, the dispersion that Nancy tries to think with the term “writing.” It is not difficult to show that Heidegger himself pursues quite consciously a thought of writing; long before he ostentatiously crosses out the word Being, he points to the necessity of the tracing and retracing of difference. What Heidegger terms the “speaking of language” is in fact the tracing of what he calls the *Riss*: the speech of language is a silent, invisible inscription. But while he recognizes, as I have suggested, that such a tracing can only occur insofar as it is drawn out in singular,

finite acts of speech, he will always attempt to think their gathering in *one* speaking. The *Ge* of terms such as *Gespräch*, *Geheiss*, *Geläut*, *Geflecht*, sounding repeatedly in his texts, signifies precisely this gathering. Heidegger's difference differentiates and spaces, but Heidegger will always emphasize the way it opens a space of the same. Nancy tries to think the same spacing (even the "same" of this spacing)—but he tries to think it as a constant dislocation.

I have stressed this point sufficiently by now. But I reemphasize it as I approach the conclusion of this foreword because I would like to suggest that Nancy's "Of Divine Places"—in many ways his most beautiful, but also his most challenging piece of writing—is articulated around it. A brief exposition of the Chapter's movement will provide a final illustration of the point, and serve, I hope, to bring forth the precariousness of both Nancy's stance *vis-à-vis* Heidegger and of this extraordinary essay itself as it explores a notion of the divine in relation to the concept of writing. To designate the articulation Nancy proposes, I am tempted by a phrase prompted by Pasolini's "divine mimesis"—though "divine writing" is really too awkward. The phrase would signify, however, a kind of divine abandon of the ontotheological tradition and a reopening of the question of a non-secular experience that would be without a Book, without a Temple, and without God, and for which even the epithet "divine" would no longer be suitable.

Nancy begins, as in his meditation on community, with the fact of an absence. In *La communauté désœuvrée*, this was the absence of community and the absence of myth. In "Of Divine Places," it is the absence of the divine, its desertion of all names and all temples, all sites where the presence of the divine was once received and celebrated. Nancy, like Heidegger, takes Hölderlin's testimony as exemplary here. "Holy names are lacking," Hölderlin wrote in "Homecoming," and when he writes "*der Gott*," it is as though he is using a common noun, signifying by its very abstraction the lack of names that would manifest the divine presence. The holy names no longer hold, they no longer give the possibility of a relation to a divine presence; and prayer, by which even the improper name "God" would invoke a singular relation to the divine ("my God") is now impossible. The divine not only withholds itself from all names, Nancy suggests; its withholding is to be thought as a cessation.

Nancy makes this point with a stunning radicality in the face of the resurgence of religious experience in the West and the challenging insistence of it at the West's increasingly undefineable borders. Once again, Nancy is describing what he takes to be a historical event: religion in the West, and even beyond the West, is exhausted. The experience of the divine has emptied out as it has been charged with meaning (or gives way to meaning)

in the long history of morality described variously by Nietzsche, Hegel, and Heidegger. Nancy *assumes* this history (as the history of Being to which the divine also belongs) and assumes its culmination in “the death of God.” He denounces in the strongest terms all thought that forgets this “historical” fact and refuses the temptation to *rebaptize* the abysses or extremities revealed by thought’s abandonment to an experience no longer guaranteed by God. There is nothing we can say about God (about his being or essence), or designate with the name of God, that cannot be ascribed to another term: love, community, the sublime, the other, Being. To smuggle back the name of God, or to speak of divinity in relation to these limits revealed to and by thought in its work over the past two centuries, could only inhibit its efforts to confront its history.

Nancy will pass very close to this latter temptation, but will try to avoid it by asking whether a different approach to the problem of the divine might be conceived, a different *topic* that does not go by way of the question of the divine essence. The point of fragmenting his text, he suggests, is to approach the question of divine places. He takes his clue here (section 14, after his “polemical note” against all trafficking of the supposed “return” of spirituality in the West) from Heidegger’s commentary on lines from Hölderlin’s “In lovely blueness. . . .” Having already suggested (section 10) that we must resist the dialectical urge to turn the signs of the withdrawal of the sacred into signs that would manifest the sacred as withdrawn (dis-simulated and held in reserve), he entertains the possibility of an entirely different understanding of divine manifestation or divine presence from that of the ontotheological tradition. Hölderlin wrote in his poem, “Is God unknown? Is he manifest like the sky? This, rather, is what I believe.” Heidegger interpreted these lines to suggest that God manifests himself in the “open face” of the sky *as unknown*. Nancy qualifies Heidegger’s interpretation by arguing that Hölderlin does not speak of a manifestation through the intermediary of the sky, but rather of an im-mediate manifestation like that of the sky. Such a manifestation might be conceived as taking place *against* the open aspect of the sky, on its face, so to speak—as it might occur against the face of anything as it is given to us in its simple presence (as Nancy consistently describes the ecstatic experience of phenomenal presence when beings are given in the event of *Ereignis*)—but not *by way of* this aspect. This manifestation would not take the structure of a mediation or representation. It would be *here, against* the surface of what is: an im-mediate manifestation that would not be the revelation of the divine itself, Nancy adds (still following Heidegger), but the evidency of the possibility of a relation to it as absent or unknown, the possibility of a “being-unto-God.”

The structure of this “im-mediately against” is the structure of writing as Heidegger conceives of it: the tracing of a difference that is the *opening* of God to humankind (this is how Heidegger defines the sacred) and their respective discovery or unconcealment as being of the same domain or region, but as radically strange in their being. Heidegger will consistently describe such a differential relation as one of a “countering” (again, the preposition is *gegen*), and Nancy is essentially working through Heidegger’s terms when he describes the relation of humankind and God (or the gods) in terms of a face-to-face encounter that remains “blind” and unavowable inasmuch as gods and humans are present to one another in utter strangeness:

Men and women are men and women and the gods are the gods. . . . Living in the same world, they are always face to face with each other, on either side of a dividing—and a retreating—line. They are, together, the vis-à-vis itself, the face-to-face encounter in which the unreserved appearing [*paraître*] of one to the other engages them in an irredeemable strangeness. The gesture of the gods is to conceal themselves, on this very line, from the face of men. The gesture of men is to stand back from this line where it encounters the face of the god. (p. 142)

Elsewhere, he writes, still working with this empty signifier “gods”, “Face to face, but without seeing each other from now on, the gods and men are abandoned to writing” (p. 135).

Hölderlin described in his “Remarks on ‘Oedipus’” and his “Remarks on ‘Antigone’” a similar abandon in defining a properly modern tragic experience, though he described the separation of the human and the divine in temporal rather than spatial terms.⁴² The tragedy manifests, he wrote, indeed it articulates with its “caesura,” a veering of time by which the god and the tragic hero turn aside from each other. The “face to face” of the human being and god is a “monstrous coupling,” a “limitless becoming-one” that is “purified” (this is Hölderlin’s interpretation of catharsis) by a limitless separation: they finish back to back. Nancy describes the same immediacy (even the same forgetting—this is Nancy’s “*syncope*”) and the same separation; but whereas the god appears in Hölderlin’s account in the figure of time, it appears in Nancy’s in a spatial dispersion. In either case, however, the event of separation defines a radical impossibility of self-appropriation. For Hölderlin, the modern experience of the divine as revealed in tragedy is one of an irreversible time (“beginning and end cannot rhyme whatsoever”); for Nancy, the experience of the sacred is one of dislocation: a dispersion in multiple sites. In both cases, all self-gathering, or

all gathering of the divine itself, is impossible: "What remains of the divine henceforth . . . is an errancy" (p. 134).

Nancy makes this assertion immediately after clarifying how one must not confuse God and Being in Heidegger's thought and before introducing the theme of writing. Though he does not take his distance explicitly from Heidegger with this term (in fact he will never signal this distance explicitly), it appears to mark in his essay the point where he separates from him. Nancy goes very far in following Heidegger's description of a mutual event of appropriation (*Ereignis*) defining the relation of the human and the divine. In fact, he nearly goes farther than Heidegger. Of the human "being-into-god," and the god's invisible revelation to humankind, Nancy remarks, "I should like to write: always, whatever happens, a god protects mortals, that is to say, exposes them to what they are; and in so doing the gods expose themselves to the eyes of everyone, withdrawn like the sky. But this is to write more than I can" (p. 126). It is to write more than he can because he asserts consistently that we can know of the divine only its abandonment—and he adds that we must not hasten to read this abandonment as the sign of the divine. He will do so in fact, but only in the mode of possibility—in a kind of *experiment* of writing.⁴³

We know of the divine only its abandon, and we know this abandon as dispersion. "This is our share [*partage*]," Nancy writes, "that the divine is no longer gathered anywhere. There is no longer any gathering." What there is is open space:

Space is everywhere open, there is no place in which to gather either the mystery or the splendor of a god. It has been granted to us to see the limitless opening of that space, it falls to our time to know—with a knowledge more acute than even the most penetrating science, more luminous than any consciousness—how we are delivered up to that gaping naked face. It reveals only us—*neither men nor gods*. (p. 148–49)

What we are given, then, or what is revealed, is our abandon. "The only thing we might still gather for ourselves, apart from all the rest (the erotic, the political, the poetic, the philosophical, the religious) is this abandonment" (p. 149). At the start of his essay, he asked whether there might be any place for God that cannot already be designated with another term. He ends by suggesting that the only thing "apart from all the rest" is our *apart*—neither divine nor human, and "sacred" perhaps only in the etymological sense. This "apart" has the structure of writing, and as such, Nancy asserts, it is multiple and dispersed. We are exposed, in the face of an im-mediate presence, but this exposure is always singular: "The face of the divine is not a countenance (it is not the other [*autrui*]). But it is the

material, local presence—*here* or *there*, against somewhere—of the coming or non-coming of the god. Its presence is a face, it is that in the face of which we are offered, and this is inscribed in space, as so many divine places” (p. 146). “Writing” means for Nancy precisely that there is no region (*Gegend*) that would gather all face-to-face relations (by which we would stand *Gegeneinanderüber*)—there is only the *gegen*.

Merely “apart” and “against”—and this “against” is itself drawn out only in singular acts of exposure (in a gesture, in speech, in acts). Nancy makes it clear that we finally know no “face” other than the face of our exposure, which we draw out in receiving and defining a relation to what is. This is why Nancy’s relation to Heidegger on the problem of the divine remains one of “indecision” (the term appears in section 28) and a willingness to entertain the possibility of emptying Heidegger’s “being-to” (itself conceived only in the mode of possibility) of any divinity. Our “being-to,” he suggests, may be the relation to “no god” [*pas de dieu*]. “No god” designates at once an extreme experience of the death of god (“the place of God truly and broadly open, vacant, abandoned”) and, proceeding from this, an experience of im-mediate presence—a presence that would escape all schematization by a conscious subject and would thereby represent in its turn a death of subjectivity:

It would be the death that is not the *Aufhebung* of life, but its suspension: life suspended at every instant, *hic et nunc*, suspended in its exposure to things, to others, to itself, existence as the presence of no subject, but the presence to an entire world. An invisible presence everywhere offered im-mediatly with being-there [*à même l'être-là*—again, im-mediatly against], im-mediatly with the *there* of being, irrefutable and naked like the brilliance of the sun on the sea: millions of scattered places. (p. 137)

This is the same suspension that Nancy described in his essay on freedom—the same experience of ecstasis, the same abandon. It is the experience of the world as offered, and of existence as a reception and articulation of this offering. Nancy merely adds now (again, in pure indecision, and in a kind of experiment in writing) that as the experience of what is other than humankind, and as an opening, it may be the experience of an opening to God: “The presence of no god could however carry with it the enticement, the call, the *Wink* of an *à-dieu*: a going to God or an adieu to all gods. Together, inextricably, divine presence and the absence of all gods” (p. 137). Elsewhere, writing of mortal abandon, the “supreme indecision” that constitutes the distinctive trait of humanity and by which the human being “risks itself beyond itself,” Nancy says: “There is this, there is this generosity and freedom outside of religion, and I don’t know if this abandon

would be still to gods, to another god that would come, or to no god" (p. 136). Religion, all religion, has blocked and sought to measure this abandon of humanity to what is other than itself. Nancy's effort is to preserve the indecision. So he holds open the possibility of a being-unto-god even as he describes it as a being to no god.

It may well be that Nancy entertains the possibility of an *à-dieu* (though from what position could we refuse this possibility?) because his experience of "abandon" is essentially joyous, and because for Nancy, joy is the mark of the divine ("when what concerns us is the gods, or no god, then we are concerned with nothing else but joy" [p. 142]). The inscription of the "divine place" of exposure is the outline of a divine smile, he says.⁴⁴ Again, the tonality of Nancy's writing as he attempts to think the death of God is anything but mourning. Or it is something in mourning that both exceeds and succeeds the *work* of mourning. Our abandonment is given to us in a measureless opening of space, in the face of which no complete gathering or collecting is possible (though we must measure ourselves against it). Nancy will speak of the gods or "no god" because he sees a smile in this naked "face"—nowhere but *here*, inscribed against this infinitely dispersed opening by which we have a relation to what is. Of course, this smile is properly invisible; but smiles, Nancy would probably hasten to say, are communicable. Our joy must be in response. This assumption, together with a desire to call into question and dismantle everything that blocks access to the communitary experience from which it proceeds, prompts Nancy to write.

Preface

Translated by Peter Connor

Where do the texts gathered here come from—and, in particular, where does the text come from that provides the title for this collection and that, as its primary text and its primary preoccupation, governs *The Inoperative Community*?¹

I do not need to speak here about the circumstances surrounding the composition of this text: these are in fact explained within the text itself, in a note at the end of chapter 1, where one can see how these circumstances, this community of circumstances, form the symptom of a unique convergence that must rightly be called *political* rather than merely anecdotal. It is this political origin that I wish to address here.

The place where these texts originate² is not one political place among others. It is not a question of a political position that I hold, or might like to hold, in accordance with a political option or ideal, or even a political ideology and program. However, it is not independent from an unchanging and definite political determination, which I would say, to be simple and direct, while not wishing to be simplistic, comes *from the left*. But as we know, the task that now befalls us is to elucidate, to review, indeed to revolutionize what the term “left” means.

In order to speak of the site that we are dealing with, I might venture the following thought: “left” means, *at the very least*, that the political, as such, is receptive to what is at stake in community. (On the other hand, “right” means, at least, that the political is merely in charge of order and administration.) In this sense, and provided we remain open to all the

reelaborations and all the theoretical and practical rethinking that might be necessary, the political is indissociable from something that the word "communism" has expressed all too poorly, even as it remains the only word to point toward it, albeit very obscurely, even confusedly.

I make no claim to dissipate this obscurity entirely. But we should begin with this much: the political is the place where community as such is brought into play. It is not, in any case, just the locus of power relations, to the extent that these relations set and upset the necessarily unstable and taut equilibrium of collectivity. I do not wish to neglect the sphere of power relations: we never stop being caught up in it, being implicated in its demands. On the contrary, I seek only to insist on the importance and gravity of the relations of force and the class and/or party struggles of the world at a moment when a kind of broadly pervasive democratic consensus seems to make us forget that "democracy," more and more frequently, serves only to assure a play of economic and technical forces that no politics today subjects to any end other than that of its own expansion. A good part of the human community is paying the price for this. The cruelty of this game is what defines the intolerable, which will destroy "democracy" if "democracy" persists in tolerating it.

But there would be no power relations, nor would there be such a specific unleashing of power (there would merely be a mechanics of force), if the political were not the place of community—in other words, the place of a specific existence, the existence of being-in-common, which gives rise to the existence of being-self. This presupposes that we are brought into the world, each and every one of us, according to a dimension of "in-common" that is in no way "added onto" the dimension of "being-self," but that is rather co-originary and coextensive with it. But this does not mean that the "common" is a substance uniformly laid out "under" supposed "individuals," nor is it uniformly shared out among everyone like a particular ingredient. No: this means that the mode of existence and appropriation of a "self" (which is not necessarily, nor exclusively, an individual) is the mode of an exposition in common and to the in-common, and that this exposition exposes the self even in its "in itself," in its "ipseity," and in its own distinctiveness, in its isolation or in its solitude. Only a being-in-common can make possible a being-separated.

"To be exposed" means to be "posed" in exteriority, according to an exteriority, having to do with an outside *in the very intimacy* of an inside. Or again: having access to what is *proper* to existence, and therefore, of course, to the proper of *one's own* existence, only through an "expropriation" whose exemplary reality is that of "my" face always exposed to others, always turned toward an other and faced by him or her, never facing

myself. This is the archi-original impossibility of Narcissus that opens straight away onto the possibility of the political.

This is the one thing the Western tradition has always known. Aristotle says that we live in cities—this is the *political* way of life—not for reasons of need, but for a higher reason, itself without reason, namely to “live well” (*eu zein*): here “well” means neither a comfort, nor a having; it is the ownmost difference of man, which means also, for Aristotle (but for Plato as well), the sharing of a *logos*. *Logos* means many things. But one of its meanings is this: something (that one can at times determine as “language,” at times as “reason,” and in many other ways as well) whose only worth lies in being exposed (among other ways, as when a face lights up, opening), that is, in being shared.

But this same tradition, which never envisioned anything else for the political, represented by Spinoza, Rousseau, and Marx (here is the “left,” limited to a few names: as for the rest, they are not dealing with the thinking of the political but with working out a *political economy*, which is quite different)—this same tradition ended up giving us only various programs for the realization of an *essence* of community. Exposition and sharing do not make up an essence. And (Western) philosophy’s political programs have come to a close.

The acute awareness, which is our own, of the closure of these programs governs the movement of this book. We often call this “the end of ideology,” and we silently and insidiously add “the end of political options” in order to substitute the consensus of a single program that we call “democracy.” And we fail to notice that this is how one loses sight of community as such, and of the political as the place of its exposition.

How and why the tradition has folded and closed the thinking of being-in-common within the thinking of an essence of community is not something I seek to examine. But I start out from the idea that such a thinking—the thinking of community as essence—is in effect the closure of the political. Such a thinking constitutes closure because it assigns to community a *common being*, whereas community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of existence inasmuch as it is *in* common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance. Being *in* common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. Being *in* common means, to the contrary, *no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity, and sharing this* (narcissistic) “*lack of identity.*” This is what philosophy calls “finitude,” and the following texts are entirely and uniquely devoted to an understanding of it.

Finitude, or the infinite lack of infinite identity, if we can risk such a formulation, is what makes community. That is, community is made or is

formed by the retreat or by the subtraction of something: this something, which would be the fulfilled infinite identity of community, is what I call its "work." All our political programs imply this work: either as the product of the working community, or else the community itself as work. But in fact it is the work that the community does *not* do and that it *is* not that forms community. In the work, the properly "common" character of community disappears, giving way to a unicity and a substantiality. (The work itself, in fact, should not be understood primarily as the exteriority of a product, but as the interiority of the subject's operation.) The community that becomes *a single* thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader . . .) necessarily loses the *in* of being-*in*-common. Or, it loses the *with* or the *together* that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being *of* togetherness. The truth of community, on the contrary, resides in the retreat of such a being. Community is made of what retreats from it: the hypostasis of the "common," and its work. The retreat opens, and continues to keep open, this strange being-the-one-with-the-other to which we are exposed. (Nothing indicates more clearly what the logic of this being of togetherness can imply than the role of *Gemeinschaft*, of community, in Nazi ideology.)

If I had to attempt to state the principle guiding the analyses in these texts, I might do so by saying this: community does not consist in the transcendence (nor in the transcendental) of a being supposedly immanent to community. It consists on the contrary in the immanence of a "transcendence"—that of finite existence as such, which is to say, of its "exposition." Exposition, precisely, is not a "being" that one can "sup-pose" (like a sub-stance) to be in community. Community is presuppositionless: this is why it is haunted by such ambiguous ideas as foundation and sovereignty, which are at once ideas of what would be completely suppositionless and ideas of what would always be presupposed. But community cannot be presupposed. It is only exposed. This is undoubtedly not easy to think. But such thinking, which is perhaps inaccessible (inaccessible without the being-in-common of thinking, without the sharing of reading, without the politics within which all writing and reading are inscribed), forms a point of essential convergence and solidarity among the studies here dedicated to community properly speaking, to myth, to love, and to the retreat of the divine.

* * *

By inverting the "principle" stated a moment ago, we get totalitarianism. By ignoring it, we condemn the political to management and to power (and to the management of power, and to the power of management). By taking it as a rule of analysis and thought, we raise the question: how can the community without essence (the community that is neither "people" nor

“nation,” neither “destiny” nor “generic humanity,” etc.) be presented as such? That is, what might a politics be that does not stem from the will to realize an essence?

I shall not venture into the possible forms of such a politics, of this politics that one might call the politics of the political, if the political can be taken as the *moment*, the *point*, or the *event* of being-in-common. This would be beyond my competence. But I do enter into the bond (not only the “social bond,” as one says today, all too readily, but the properly political bond) that binds the political, or in which the political is bound up.

When I speak, in the studies that follow, of “literature,” of a “voice of interruption,” of “shattered” love, of “coming,” of “joy,” and finally of “places” of “dislocation,” it is always of the same bond that I shall be speaking: of a bond that forms ties without attachments, or even less fusion, of a bond that unbinds by binding, that reunites through the infinite exposition of an irreducible finitude. How can we be receptive to the *meaning* of our multiple, dispersed, mortally fragmented existences, which nonetheless only make sense by existing in common?

In other words, perhaps: how do we communicate? But this question can be asked seriously only if we dismiss all “theories of communication,” which begin by positing the necessity or the desire for a consensus, a continuity and a transfer of messages. It is not a question of establishing rules for communication, it is a question of understanding before all else that in “communication” what takes place is an *exposition*: finite existence exposed to finite existence, co-appearing before it and with it.

To think this point, or rather this limit that exposition “is,” is necessarily to think the point or the limit at which the moment of *revolution* presents itself. The idea of revolution has perhaps still not been understood, inasmuch as it is the idea of a new foundation or that of a reversal of sovereignty. Of course, we need gestures of foundation and reversal. But their reason lies elsewhere: it is in the incessantly present moment at which existence-in-common resists every transcendence that tries to absorb it, be it in an All or in an Individual (in a Subject in general). This moment cannot be “founded,” and no foundation, therefore, can be “reversed” in it. This moment—when the in of the “in-common” erupts, resists, and disrupts the relations of need and force—annuls collective and communal hypostases; this violent and troubling moment resists murderous violence and the turmoil of fascination and identification: the intensity of the word “revolution” names it well, a word that, undoubtedly, has been bequeathed or delegated to us by an ambiguous history, but whose meaning has perhaps still to be revolutionized.

One thing at least is clear: if we do not face up to such questions, the political will soon desert us completely, if it has not already done so. It will abandon us to political and technological economies, if it has not already done so. And this will be the end of our communities, if this has not yet come about. Being-*in*-common will nonetheless never cease to resist, but its resistance will belong decidedly to another world entirely. Our world, as far as politics is concerned, will be a desert, and we will wither away without a tomb—which is to say, without community, deprived of our finite existence.

Chapter 1

The Inoperative Community

The gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world, the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer (by virtue of some unknown decree or necessity, for we bear witness also to the exhaustion of thinking through History), is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community. Communism, as Sartre said, is “the unsurpassable horizon of our time,” and it is so in many senses—political, ideological, and strategic. But not least important among these senses is the following consideration, quite foreign to Sartre’s intentions: the word “communism” stands as an emblem of the desire to discover or rediscover a place of community at once beyond social divisions and beyond subordination to technopolitical dominion, and thereby beyond such wasting away of liberty, of speech, or of simple happiness as comes about whenever these become subjugated to the exclusive order of privatization; and finally, more simply and even more decisively, a place from which to surmount the unraveling that occurs with the death of each one of us—that death that, when no longer anything more than the death of the individual, carries an unbearable burden and collapses into insignificance.

More or less consciously, more or less deliberately, and more or less politically, the word “communism” has constituted such an emblem—which no doubt amounted to something other than a concept, and even something other than the *meaning* of a word. This emblem is no longer in circulation, except in a belated way for a few; for still others, though very rare nowadays,

it is an emblem capable of inferring a fierce but impotent resistance to the visible collapse of what it promised. If it is no longer in circulation, this is not only because the States that acclaimed it have appeared, for some time now, as the agents of its betrayal. (Bataille in 1933: "The Revolution's minimal hope has been described as the decline of the State: but it is in fact the revolutionary forces that the present world is seeing perish and, at the same time, every vital force today has assumed the form of the totalitarian State.")¹ The schema of betrayal, aimed at preserving an originary communist purity of doctrine or intention, has come to be seen as less and less tenable. Not that totalitarianism was already present, as such, in Marx: this would be a crude proposition, one that remains ignorant of the strident protest against the destruction of community that in Marx continuously parallels the Hegelian attempt to bring about a totality, and that thwarts or displaces this attempt.

But the schema of betrayal is seen to be untenable in that it was the very basis of the communist ideal that ended up appearing most problematic: namely, human beings defined as producers (one might even add: human beings *defined* at all), and fundamentally as the producers of their own essence in the form of their labor or their work.

That the justice and freedom—and the equality—included in the communist idea or ideal have in effect been betrayed in so-called real communism is something at once laden with the burden of an intolerable suffering (along with other, no less intolerable forms of suffering inflicted by our liberal societies) and at the same time politically decisive (not only in that a political strategy must favor resistance to this betrayal, but because this strategy, as well as our thought in general, must reckon with the possibility that an entire society has been forged, docilely and despite more than one forum of revolt, in the mold of this betrayal—or more plainly, at the mercy of this abandonment: this would be Zinoviev's question, rather than Solzhenitsyn's). But these burdens are still perhaps only relative compared with the absolute weight that crushes or blocks all our "horizons": there is, namely, no form of communist opposition—or let us say rather "communitarian" opposition, in order to emphasize that the word should not be restricted in this context to strictly political references—that has not been or is not still profoundly subjugated to the goal of a *human* community, that is, to the goal of achieving a community of beings producing in essence their own essence as their work, and furthermore producing precisely this essence *as community*. An absolute immanence of man to man—a humanism—and of community to community—a communism—obstinately sub-tends, whatever be their merits or strengths, all forms of oppositional communism, all leftist and ultraleftist models, and all models based on the workers' council.² In a sense, all ventures adopting a communitarian

opposition to "real communism" have by now run their course or been abandoned, but everything continues along its way as though, beyond these ventures, it were no longer even a question of thinking about community.

Yet it is precisely the immanence of man to man, or it is *man*, taken absolutely, considered as the immanent being par excellence, that constitutes the stumbling block to a thinking of community. A community presupposed as having to be one of *human beings* presupposes that it effect, or that it must effect, as such and integrally, its own essence, which is itself the accomplishment of the essence of humanness. ("What can be fashioned by man? Everything. Nature, human society, humanity," wrote Herder. We are stubbornly bound to this regulative idea, even when we consider that this "fashioning" is itself only a "regulative idea.") Consequently, economic ties, technological operations, and political fusion (into a *body* or under a *leader*) represent or rather present, expose, and realize this essence necessarily in themselves. Essence is set to work in them; through them, it becomes its own work. This is what we have called "totalitarianism," but it might be better named "immanentism," as long as we do not restrict the term to designating certain types of societies or regimes but rather see in it the general horizon of our time, encompassing both democracies and their fragile juridical parapets.

* * *

Is it really necessary to say something about the individual here? Some see in its invention and in the culture, if not in the cult built around the individual, Europe's incontrovertible merit of having shown the world the sole path to emancipation from tyranny, and the norm by which to measure all our collective or communitarian undertakings. But the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community. By its nature—as its name indicates, it is the atom, the indivisible—the individual reveals that it is the abstract result of a decomposition. It is another, and symmetrical, figure of immanence: the absolutely detached for-itself, taken as origin and as certainty.

But the experience through which this individual has passed, since Hegel at least, (and through which he passes, it must be confessed, with staggering opinionatedness) is simply the experience of this: that the individual can be the origin and the certainty of nothing but its own death. And once immortality has passed into its works, an *operative* immortality remains its own alienation and renders its death still more strange than the irremediable strangeness that it already "is."

Still, one cannot make a world with simple atoms. There has to be a *clinamen*. There has to be an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other. Community is at

least the *clinamen* of the "individual." Yet there is no theory, ethics, politics, or metaphysics of the individual that is capable of envisaging this *clinamen*, this declination or decline of the individual within community. Neither "Personalism" nor Sartre ever managed to do anything more than coat the most classical individual-subject with a moral or sociological paste: they never *inclined* it, outside itself, over that edge that opens up its being-in-common.

An inconsequential atomism, individualism tends to forget that the atom is a world. This is why the question of community is so markedly absent from the metaphysics of the subject, that is to say, from the metaphysics of the absolute for-itself—be it in the form of the individual or the total State—which means also the metaphysics of the *absolute* in general, of being as ab-solute, as perfectly detached, distinct, and closed: being without relation. This ab-solute can appear in the form of the Idea, History, the Individual, the State, Science, the Work of Art, and so on. Its logic will always be the same inasmuch as it is without relation. A simple and redoubtable logic will always imply that within its very separation the absolutely separate encloses, if we can say this, more than what is simply separated. Which is to say that the separation itself must be enclosed, that the closure must not only close around a territory (while still remaining exposed, at its outer edge, to another territory, with which it thereby communicates), but also, in order to complete the absoluteness of its separation, around the enclosure itself. The absolute must be the absolute of its own absoluteness, or not be at all. In other words: to be absolutely alone, it is not enough that I be so; I must also be alone being alone—and this of course is contradictory. The logic of the absolute violates the absolute. It implicates it in a relation that it refuses and precludes by its essence. This relation tears and forces open, from within and from without at the same time, and from an outside that is nothing other than the rejection of an impossible interiority, the "without relation" from which the absolute would constitute itself.

Excluded by the logic of the absolute-subject of metaphysics (Self, Will, Life, Spirit, etc.), community comes perforce *to cut into* this subject by virtue of this same logic. The logic of the absolute *sets it in relation*: but this, obviously, cannot make for a relation between two or several absolutes, no more than it can make an absolute of the relation. It undoes the absoluteness of the absolute. The relation (the community) is, if it *is*, nothing other than what undoes, in its very principle—and at its closure or on its limit—the autarchy of absolute immanence.

Bataille constantly experienced this violent logic of being-separated. For example:

But if the ensemble of men—or more simply their integral existence—WAS INCARNATED in a single being—obviously just as solitary and as abandoned as the ensemble—the head of the INCARNATED one would be the place of an unappeasable combat—and one so violent that sooner or later it would shatter into pieces. For it is difficult to see what degree of storming and unleashing the visions of the one incarnated would attain since it ought to see God but in the same instant kill him, then become God himself but only to rush straightway into nothingness: what would come about then would be a man just as deprived of meaning as the first passerby, but deprived of all possibility of rest. (*O.C.* 1:547)

Such an incarnation of humanity, aggregating its absolute being beyond relation and community, depicts the destiny willed by modern thought. We shall never escape the “unappeasable combat” as long as we remain unable to protect community from this destiny.

Carrying this logic into the sphere of knowledge, Bataille, in another text, asserts:

If I “mimic” absolute knowledge, I am at once, of necessity, God myself (in the system, there can be no knowledge, not even in God, which goes beyond absolute knowledge). The thought of this self—of *ipse*—could only make itself absolute by becoming everything. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* comprises two essential movements completing a circle: it is the completion by degrees of the consciousness of the self (of human *ipse*) and the becoming everything (the becoming God) of this *ipse* completing knowledge (and by this means destroying the particularity within it, thus completing the negation of oneself, becoming absolute knowledge). But if in this way, as if by contagion and by mime, I accomplish in myself Hegel’s circular movement, I define—beyond the limits attained—no longer an unknown, but an unknowable. Unknowable not on account of the insufficiency of reason, but by its nature (and even, for Hegel, one could only have concern for this beyond for lack of possessing absolute knowledge . . .). Supposing then that I were to be God, that I were to have in the world the assurance of Hegel (suppressing shadow and doubt)—knowing everything and even why fulfilled knowledge required that man, the innumerable particularities of *selves*, and history produce themselves—at precisely that moment, the question is formulated which allows human, divine existence to enter . . . the deepest foray into darkness without return; why must there be *what I know*? Why is it a necessity? In this question is hidden—it doesn’t appear at first—an extreme rupture, so deep that only the silence of ecstasy answers it.’

The rupture (*déchirure*) hidden in the question is occasioned by the question itself, which breaks up the totality of things that are—considered in terms of the absolute, that is to say, separate from every other “thing”—and *Being* (which is not a “thing”), through which or in the name of which these things, in their totality, are. This rupture (analogous, if not identical, to Heidegger’s distinction between the ontical and the ontological) defines a *relation* to the absolute, imposing on the absolute a relation *to* its own Being instead of making this Being immanent to the absolute totality of beings. And so, Being “itself” comes to be defined as relational, as non-absoluteness, and, if you will—in any case this is what I am trying to argue—as *community*.

Ecstasy answers—if it is properly speaking an “answer”—to the impossibility of the absoluteness of the absolute, or to the “absolute” impossibility of complete immanence. Ecstasy, if we understand it according to a rigorous strain of thinking that would pass, were we to trace its philosophical history before Bataille and during his time, by way of Schelling and Heidegger, implies no effusion, and even less some form of effervescent illumination. Strictly speaking, it defines the impossibility, both ontological and gnological, of absolute immanence (or of the absolute, and therefore of immanence) and consequently the impossibility either of an individuality, in the precise sense of the term, or of a pure collective totality. The theme of the individual and that of communism are closely bound up with (and bound together in) the general problematic of immanence.⁴ They are bound together in their denial of ecstasy. And for us the question of the community is henceforth inseparable from a question of ecstasy—which is to say, as we are beginning to understand, from the question of Being considered as something other than the absoluteness of the totality of beings.

Community, or the being-ecstatic of Being itself? That would be the question.

* * *

I would like to introduce a qualification, to which I will return later: behind the theme of the individual, but beyond it, lurks the question of singularity. What is *a* body, *a* face, *a* voice, *a* death, *a* writing—not indivisible, but singular? What is their singular necessity in the sharing that divides and that puts in communication bodies, voices, and writings in general and in totality? In sum, this question would be exactly the reverse of the question of the absolute. In this respect, it is constitutive of the question of community, and it is in this context that it will have to be taken into account later on. But singularity never has the nature or the structure of individuality. Singularity never takes place at the level of atoms, those identifiable if not identical identities; rather it takes place at the level of the *clinamen*,

which is unidentifiable. It is linked to ecstasy: one could not properly say that the singular being is the subject of ecstasy, for ecstasy has no "subject"—but one must say that ecstasy (community) happens *to* the singular being.

* * *

The solidarity of the individual with communism at the heart of a thinking of immanence, while neglecting ecstasy, does not however entail a simple symmetry. Communism—as, for example, in the generous exuberance that will not let Marx conclude without pointing to a reign of freedom, one beyond the collective regulation of necessity, in which surplus work would no longer be an exploitive *work*, but rather art and invention—communicates with an extremity of play, of sovereignty, even of ecstasy from which the individual as such remains definitively removed. But this link has remained distant, secret, and most often unknown to communism itself (let us say, to lend concreteness, unknown to Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky), except in the fulgurating bursts of poetry, painting, and cinema at the very beginning of the Soviet revolution, or the motifs that Benjamin allowed as reasons for calling oneself a Marxist, or what Blanchot tried to bring across or propose (rather than signify) with the word "communism" ("Communism: that which excludes [and excludes itself from] every community already constituted").⁴ But again even this proposal in the final analysis went unrecognized, not only by "real" communism, but also, on close inspection, by those singular "communists" themselves, who were perhaps never able to recognize (until now at least) either where the metaphor (or the hyperbole) began and ended in the usage they made of the word, or, especially, what other trope—supposing it were necessary to change words—or what effacement of tropes might have been appropriate to reveal what haunted their use of the word "communism."

By the usage to which this word was put, they were able to communicate with a thinking of art, of literature, and of thought itself—other figures or other exigencies of ecstasy—but they were not truly able to communicate, explicitly and thematically (even if "explicit" and "thematic" are only very fragile categories here), with a thinking of community. Or rather, their communication with such a thinking has remained secret, or suspended.

The ethics, the politics, the philosophies of community, when there were any (and there always are, even if they are reduced to chatter about fraternity or to laborious constructions around "intersubjectivity"), have pursued their paths or their humanist deadends without suspecting for an instant that these singular voices were speaking about community and were perhaps speaking about nothing else, without suspecting that what was taken for a "literary" or "aesthetic" experience was entrenched *in* the ordeal of

community, was at grips with it. (Do we need to be reminded, to take a further example, what Barthes's first writings were about, and some of the later ones as well?)

Subsequently, these same voices that were unable to communicate what, perhaps without knowing it, they were saying, were exploited—and covered up again—by clamorous declarations brandishing the flag of the “cultural revolutions” and by all kinds of “communist writing” or “proletarian inscriptions.” The professionals of society saw in them (and not without reason, even if their view was shortsighted) nothing more than a bourgeois Parisian (or Berliner) form of *Proletkult*, or else merely the unconscious return of a “republic of artists,” the concept of which had been inaugurated two hundred years earlier by the Jena romantics. In one way or another, it was a matter of a simple, classical, and dogmatic system of truth: an art (or a thought) adequate to politics (to the form or the description of community), a politics adequate to art. The basic presupposition remained that of a community effectuating itself in the absolute of the work, or effectuating itself as work. For this reason, and whatever it may have claimed for itself, this “modernity” remained in its principle a humanism.

We will have to return to the question of what brought about—albeit at the cost of a certain naïveté or misconception—the exigency of a literary⁴ experience of community or communism. This is even, in a sense, the only question. But the terms of this question all need to be transformed, to be put back into play in a space that would be distributed quite differently from one composed of all-too-facile relations (for example, solitude of the writer/collectivity, or culture/society, or elite/masses—whether these relations be proposed as oppositions, or, in the spirit of the “cultural revolutions,” as equations). And for this to happen, the question of community must first of all be put back into play, for the necessary redistribution of space depends upon it. Before getting to this, and without rescinding any of the resistant generosity or the active restlessness of the word “communism” and without denying anything of the excesses to which it can lead, but also without forgetting either the burdensome mortgage that comes along with it or the usury it has (not accidentally) suffered, we must allow that *communism* can no longer be the unsurpassable horizon of our time. And if in fact it no longer is such a horizon, this is not because we have passed beyond any horizon. Rather, everything is inflected by resignation, as if the new unsurpassable horizon took form around the disappearance, the impossibility, or the condemnation of communism. Such reversals are customary; they have never altered anything. It is the *horizons* themselves that must be challenged. The ultimate limit of community, or the limit that is formed by community, as such, traces an entirely different line. This is why, even as we establish that communism is no longer our unsurpassable

horizon, we must also establish, just as forcefully, that a communist exigency or demand communicates with the gesture by means of which we must go farther than all possible horizons.

* * *

The first task in understanding what is at stake here consists in focusing on the horizon *behind* us. This means questioning the breakdown in community that supposedly engendered the modern era. The consciousness of this ordeal belongs to Rousseau, who figured a *society* that experienced or acknowledged the loss or degradation of a communitarian (and communicative) intimacy—a society producing, of necessity, the solitary figure, but one whose desire and intention was to produce the citizen of a free sovereign community. Whereas political theoreticians preceding him had thought mainly in terms of the institution of a State, or the regulation of a society, Rousseau, although he borrowed a great deal from them, was perhaps the first thinker of community, or more exactly, the first to experience the question of society as an uneasiness directed toward the community, and as the consciousness of a (perhaps irreparable) rupture in this community. This consciousness would subsequently be inherited by the Romantics, and by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: the last figure of spirit, before the assumption of all the figures and of history into absolute knowledge, is that which cleaves community (which for Hegel figures the split in religion). Until this day history has been thought on the basis of a lost community—one to be regained or reconstituted.

The lost, or broken, community can be exemplified in all kinds of ways, by all kinds of paradigms: the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community, corporations, communes, or brotherhoods—always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds and in which above all it played back to itself, through its institutions, its rituals, and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy, and autonomy. Distinct from society (which is a simple association and division of forces and needs) and opposed to emprise (which dissolves community by submitting its peoples to its arms and to its glory), community is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence. It is constituted not only by a fair distribution of tasks and goods, or by a happy equilibrium of forces and authorities: it is made up principally of the sharing, diffusion, or impregnation of an identity by a plurality wherein each member identifies himself only through the supplementary mediation of his identification with the living body of the community. In the motto of the Republic, *fraternity* designates community: the model of the family and of love.

But it is here that we should become suspicious of the retrospective consciousness of the lost community and its identity (whether this consciousness conceives of itself as effectively retrospective or whether, disregarding the realities of the past, it constructs images of this past for the sake of an ideal or a prospective vision). We should be suspicious of this consciousness first of all because it seems to have accompanied the Western world from its very beginnings: at every moment in its history, the Occident has given itself over to the nostalgia for a more archaic community that has disappeared, and to deploring a loss of familiarity, fraternity and conviviality. Our history begins with the departure of Ulysses and with the onset of rivalry, dissension, and conspiracy in his palace. Around Penelope, who reweaves the fabric of intimacy without ever managing to complete it, pretenders set up the warring and political scene of society—pure exteriority.

But the true consciousness of the loss of community is Christian: the community desired or pined for by Rousseau, Schlegel, Hegel, then Bak-ouine, Marx, Wagner, or Mallarmé is understood as communion, and communion takes place, in its principle as in its ends, at the heart of the mystical body of Christ. At the same time as it is the most ancient myth of the Western world, community might well be the altogether modern thought of humanity's partaking of divine life: the thought of a human being penetrating into pure immanence. (Christianity has had only two dimensions, antinomical to one another: that of the *deus absconditus*, in which the Western disappearance of the divine is still engulfed, and that of the god-man, *deus communis*, brother of humankind, invention of a familial immanence of humanity, then of history as the immanence of salvation.)

Thus, the thought of community or the desire for it might well be nothing other than a belated invention that tried to respond to the harsh reality of modern experience: namely, that divinity was withdrawing infinitely from immanence, that the god-brother was at bottom *himself* the *deus absconditus* (this was Hölderlin's insight), and that the divine essence of community—or community as the existence of a divine essence—was the impossible itself. One name for this has been the death of God: this expression remains pregnant with the possibility if not the necessity of a resurrection that restores both man and God to a common immanence. (Not only Hegel, but also Nietzsche himself, at least in part, bear witness to this.) The discourse of the "death of God" also misses the point that the "divine" is what it is (if it "is") only inasmuch as it is removed from immanence, or withdrawn from it—within it, one might say, yet withdrawn from it. And this, moreover, occurs in the very precise sense that it is not because there is a "divine" that its share would be subtracted from immanence, but on the contrary, it is only to the extent that immanence itself,

here or there (but is it localizable? Is it not rather this that localizes, that spaces?), is subtracted from immanence that there can be something like the "divine." (And perhaps, in the end, it will no longer be necessary to speak of the "divine." Perhaps we will come to see that community, death, love, freedom, singularity are names for the "divine" not just because they substitute for it—and neither sublimate nor resuscitate it under another form—but equally because this substitution is in no way anthropomorphic or anthropocentric and gives way to no becoming-human of the "divine." Community henceforth constitutes the limit of the human as well as of the divine. Through God or the gods communion—as substance and act, the act of communicated immanent substance—has been definitively withdrawn from community.)⁷

The modern, humanist Christian consciousness of the loss of community therefore gives every appearance of recuperating the transcendental illusion of reason when reason exceeds the bounds of all possible experience, which is basically the experience of concealed immanence. *Community has not taken place*, or rather, if it is indeed certain that humanity has known (or still knows, outside of the industrial world) social ties quite different from those familiar to us, community has never taken place along the lines of our projections of it according to these different social forms. It did not take place for the Guayaqui Indians, it did not take place in an age of huts; nor did it take place in the Hegelian "spirit of a people" or in the Christian agape. No *Gesellschaft* has come along to help the State, industry, and capital dissolve a prior *Gemeinschaft*. It would undoubtedly be more accurate to say, bypassing all the twists and turns taken by ethnological interpretation and all the mirages of an origin or of "bygone days," that *Gesellschaft*—"society," the dissociating association of forces, needs, and signs—has taken the place of something for which we have no name or concept, something that issued at once from a much more extensive communication than that of a mere social bond (a communication with the gods, the cosmos, animals, the dead, the unknown) and from much more piercing and dispersed segmentation of this same bond, often involving much harsher effects (solitude, rejection, admonition, helplessness) than what we expect from a communitarian minimum in the social bond. *Society* was not built on the ruins of a *community*. It emerged from the disappearance or the conservation of something—tribes or empires—perhaps just as unrelated to what we call "community" as to what we call "society." So that community, far from being what society has crushed or lost, is *what happens to us*—question, waiting, event, imperative—in the wake of society.

Nothing, therefore, has been lost, and for this reason nothing is lost. We alone are lost, we upon whom the "social bond" (relations, communication), our own invention, now descends heavily like the net of an

economic, technical, political, and cultural snare. Entangled in its meshes, we have wrung for ourselves the phantasms of the lost community.

* * *

What this community has “lost”—the immanence and the intimacy of a communion—is lost only in the sense that such a “loss” is constitutive of “community” itself.

It is not a loss: on the contrary, immanence, if it were to come about, would instantly suppress community, or communication, as such. Death is not only the example of this, it is its truth. In death, at least if one considers in it what brings about immanence (decomposition leading back to nature—“everything returns to the ground and becomes part of the cycle”—or else the paradisaical versions of the same “cycle”) and if one forgets what makes it always irreducibly *singular*, there is no longer any community or communication: there is only the continuous identity of atoms.

This is why political or collective enterprises dominated by a will to absolute immanence have as their truth the truth of death. Immanence, communal fusion, contains no other logic than that of the suicide of the community that is governed by it. Thus the logic of Nazi Germany was not only that of the extermination of the other, of the subhuman deemed exterior to the communion of blood and soil, but also, effectively, the logic of sacrifice aimed at all those in the “Aryan” community who did not satisfy the criteria of *pure* immanence, so much so that—it being obviously impossible to set a limit on such criteria—the suicide of the German nation itself might have represented a plausible extrapolation of the process: moreover, it would not be false to say that this really took place, with regard to certain aspects of the spiritual reality of this nation.

The joint suicide or death of lovers is one of the mythico-literary figures of this logic of communion in immanence. Faced with this figure, one cannot tell which—the communion or the love—serves as a model for the other in death. In reality, with the immanence of the two lovers, death accomplishes the infinite reciprocity of two agencies: impassioned love conceived on the basis of Christian communion, and community thought according to the principle of love. The Hegelian State in its turn bears witness to this, for although it certainly is not established on the basis of love—for it belongs to the sphere of so-called objective spirit—it nonetheless has as its *principle* the reality of love, that is to say the fact “of having in another the moment of one’s own subsistence.” In this State, each member has his truth in the other, which is the State itself, whose reality is never more present than when its members give their lives in a war that the monarch—the effective presence-to-self of the Subject-State—has alone and freely decided to wage.*

Doubtless such immolation for the sake of community—and by it, therefore—could and can be full of meaning, on the condition that this “meaning” be that of a community, and on the further condition that this community not be a ‘community of death’ (as has been the case since at least the First World War, thereby justifying all refusals to “die for one’s country”). Now the community of human immanence, man made equal to himself or to God, to nature, and to his own works, is one such community of death—or of the dead. The fully realized person of individualistic or communistic humanism is the dead person. In other words, death, in such a community, is not the unmasterable excess of finitude, but the infinite fulfillment of an immanent life: it is death itself consigned to immanence; it is in the end that resorption of death that the Christian civilization, as though devouring its own transcendence, has come to minister to itself in the guise of a supreme work. Since Leibnitz there has been no death in our universe: in one way or another an absolute circulation of meaning (of values, of ends, of History) fills or reabsorbs all finite negativity, draws from each finite singular destiny a surplus value of humanity or an infinite superhumanity. But this presupposes, precisely, the death of each and all in the life of the infinite.

Generations of citizens and militants, of workers and servants of the States have imagined their death reabsorbed or sublated in a community, yet to come, that would attain immanence. But by now we have nothing more than the bitter consciousness of the increasing remoteness of such a community, be it the people, the nation, or the society of producers. However, this consciousness, like that of the “loss” of community, is superficial. In truth, death is not sublated. The communion to come does not grow distant, it is not deferred: it was never to come; it would be incapable of coming about or forming a future. What forms a future, and consequently what truly comes about, is always the singular death—which does not mean that death does not come about in the community: on the contrary, I shall come to this. But communion is not what comes of death, no more than death is the simple perpetual past of community.

Millions of deaths, of course, are *justified* by the revolt of those who die: they are justified as a rejoinder to the intolerable, as insurrections against social, political, technical, military, religious oppression. But these deaths are not *sublated*: no dialectic, no salvation leads these deaths to any other immanence than that of . . . death (cessation, or decomposition, which forms only the parody or reverse of immanence). Yet the modern age has conceived the justification of death only in the guise of salvation or the dialectical sublation of history. The modern age has struggled to *close the circle* of the time of men and their communities in an immortal communion

in which death, finally, loses the senseless meaning that it ought to have—and that it has, obstinately.

We are condemned, or rather reduced, to search for this meaning beyond meaning of death elsewhere than in community. But the enterprise is absurd (it is the absurdity of a thought derived from the individual). Death is indissociable from community, for it is through death that the community reveals itself—and reciprocally. It is not by chance that this motif of a reciprocal revelation has preoccupied thought informed by ethnology as well as the thinking of Freud and Heidegger, and at the same time Bataille, that is to say in the time leading from the First to the Second World War.

The motif of the revelation, through death, of being-together or being-with, and of the crystallization of the community around the death of its members, *that is to say around the "loss" (the impossibility) of their immanence* and not around their fusional assumption in some collective hypostasis, leads to a space of thinking incommensurable with the problematics of sociality or intersubjectivity (including the Husserlian problematic of the alter ego) within which philosophy, despite its resistance, has remained captive. Death irremediably exceeds the resources of a metaphysics of the subject. The phantasm of this metaphysics, the phantasm that Descartes (almost) did not dare have but that was already proposed in Christian theology, is the phantasm of a dead man who says, like Villiers' Monsieur Waldemar, "I am dead"—*ego sum . . . mortuus*. If the *I* cannot say that it is dead, if the *I* disappears in effect in *its* death, in that death that is precisely what is most proper to it and most inalienably its own, it is because the *I* is something other than a subject. All of Heidegger's research into "being-for (or toward)-death" was nothing other than an attempt to state this: *I* is not—*am* not—a subject. (Although, when it came to the question of community as such, the same Heidegger also went astray with his vision of a people and a destiny conceived at least in part as a subject,⁹ which proves no doubt that Dasein's "being-toward-death" was never radically implicated in its being-with—in *Mitsein*—and that it is this implication that remains to be thought.)

That which is not a subject opens up and opens onto a community whose conception, in turn, exceeds the resources of a metaphysics of the subject. Community does not weave a superior, immortal, or transmortal life between subjects (no more than it is itself woven of the inferior bonds of a consubstantiality of blood or of an association of needs), but it is constitutively, to the extent that it is a matter of a "constitution" here, calibrated on the death of those whom we call, perhaps wrongly, its "members" (inasmuch as it is not a question of an organism). But it does not make a work of this calibration. Community no more makes a work out of death than it is itself a work. The death upon which community is calibrated

does not *operate* the dead being's passage into some communal intimacy, nor does community, for its part, *operate* the transfiguration of its dead into some substance or subject—be these homeland, native soil or blood, nation, a delivered or fulfilled humanity, absolute phalanstery, family, or mystical body. Community is calibrated on death as on that of which it is precisely impossible to *make a work* (other than a work of death, as soon as one tries to make a work of it). Community occurs in order to acknowledge this impossibility, or more exactly—for there is neither function nor finality here—the impossibility of making a work out of death is inscribed and acknowledged as “community.”

Community is revealed in the death of others; hence it is always revealed to others. Community is what takes place always through others and for others. It is not the space of the *egos*—subjects and substances that are at bottom immortal—but of the *I*'s, who are always *others* (or else are nothing). If community is revealed in the death of others it is because death itself is the true community of *I*'s that are not *egos*. It is not a communion that fuses the *egos* into an *Ego* or a higher *We*. It is the community of *others*. The genuine community of mortal beings, or death as community, establishes their impossible communion. Community therefore occupies a singular place: it assumes the impossibility of its own immanence, the impossibility of a communitarian being in the form of a subject. In a certain sense community acknowledges and inscribes—this is its peculiar gesture—the impossibility of community. A community is not a project of fusion, or in some general way a productive or operative project—nor is it a *project* at all (once again, this is its radical difference from “the spirit of a people,” which from Hegel to Heidegger has figured the collectivity as project, and figured the project, reciprocally, as collective—which does not mean that we can ignore the question of the singularity of a “people”).

A community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth (which amounts to saying that there is no community of immortal beings: one can imagine either a society or a communion of immortal beings, but not a community). It is the presentation of the finitude and the irredeemable excess that make up finite being: its death, but also its birth, and only the community can present me my birth, and along with it the impossibility of my reliving it, as well as the impossibility of my crossing over into my death.

If it sees its fellow-being die, a living being can subsist only
outside itself. . . .

Each one of us is then driven out of the confines of his person and loses himself as much as possible in the community of his fellow creatures. It is for this reason that it is necessary for communal life to maintain itself at a level *equal to death*. The lot

of a great number of private lives is pettiness. But a community cannot last except at the level of intensity of death—it decomposes as soon as it falls shy of danger's peculiar grandeur. It must take upon it what is "unappeasable" and "unappeased," and maintain a need that thirsts for glory. A man among thousands can have an intensity of life that is practically zero throughout the day: he behaves as though death did not exist and holds himself, without harm, beneath its level. (*O.C.* 7:245-46)

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No doubt Bataille has gone farthest into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community. Whatever the interest accorded his thought (and this remains, despite everything, a meagre and all too often frivolous interest), what has not yet been sufficiently remarked¹⁰ is the extent to which his thinking emerged out of a political exigency and uneasiness—or from an exigency and an uneasiness concerning the political that was itself guided by the thought of community.

Bataille first of all went through the ordeal of seeing communism "betrayed." He discovered later that this betrayal was not to be corrected or made up for, but that communism, having taken man as its end, meaning the production of man and man as producer, was linked in its principle to a negation of the sovereignty of man, that is to say to a negation of what in man is irreducible to human immanence, or to a negation of the sovereign excess of finitude:

For a Marxist, value beyond the useful is conceivable, even inevitable; but it is immanent to man, or else it does not exist. What transcends man (living man, of course, here-below), or in the same way what goes beyond common humanity (humanity without privilege) is without question inadmissible. The sovereign value is man: production is not the only value, it is merely the means of responding to man's needs—it serves him, man does not serve it. . . .

But it remains to be determined whether man, to whom communism refers as the producer, has not taken on this sovereign value on one primary condition: namely, having renounced for himself everything that is truly sovereign. . . . For the irreducible desire that man is, *passionately* and *capriciously*, communism has substituted those needs that can be brought into harmony with a life entirely devoted to producing. (*O.C.* 8:352-53)

Meanwhile, in the thirties, two directions had converged in Bataille's thought: a revolutionary impulse that sought to give back to the revolt the incandescence that the Bolshevik State had stolen from it and a fascination

with fascism inasmuch as it seemed to indicate the direction, if not the reality, of an intense community, devoted to excess. (This fascination is not to be taken lightly, no more in Bataille's case than in the case of several others. Ignoble fascism, and fascism as one of the recourses of capitalism, this despicable fascism was *also* an attempt to respond—despicably and ignobly—to the already established, already stifling reign of society. Fascism was the grotesque or abject resurgence of an obsession with communion; it crystallized the motif of its supposed loss and the nostalgia for its images of fusion. In this respect, it was the convulsion of Christianity, and it ended up fascinating modern Christianity in its entirety. No political-moral critique of this fascination holds good if the critic is not at the same time capable of deconstructing the system of communion.)¹¹

But aside from the scorn immediately aroused in him by the foulness of the fascist ringleaders and their methods, Bataille went through the experience of realizing that the nostalgia for a communal being was at the same time the desire for a work of death. He was haunted, as we know, by the idea that a human sacrifice should seal the destiny of the secret community of *Acéphale*. He no doubt understood at the time, as he was later to write,¹² that the truth of sacrifice required in the last analysis the suicide of the sacrificer. In dying, the latter would be able to rejoin the being of the victim plunged into the bloody secret of common life. And thus he understood that this properly divine truth—the operative and resurrectional truth of death—was not the truth of the community of finite beings but that, on the contrary, it rushed headlong into the infinity of immanence. This is not merely horror, it is beyond horror, it is the total absurdity—or disastrous puerility, so to speak—of the death work, of death considered as the work of common life. And it is this absurdity, which is at bottom an excess of *meaning*, an absolute concentration of the will to meaning, that must have dictated Bataille's withdrawal from communitarian enterprises.

Thus he came to understand the ridiculous nature of all nostalgia for communion, he who for a long time—in a kind of exacerbated consciousness of the “loss” of community, which he shared with a whole epoch—had represented archaic societies, their sacred structures, the glory of military and royal societies, the nobility of feudalism, as bygone and fascinating forms of a successful intimacy of being-in-common with itself.

In opposition to this modern, feverish kind of “Rousseauism” (which, nonetheless, he perhaps never completely overcame—I shall come back to this), Bataille made two observations: on the one hand, sacrifice, glory, and expenditure remain simulations as long as they stop short of the work of death, so nonsimulation is the impossible itself; but, on the other hand, in the simulation itself (that is to say, in the simulation of immanent being),

the work of death is nevertheless still accomplished, at least to a relative degree, in the form of the domination, oppression, extermination, and exploitation to which all socio-political systems finally lead, all those in which the excess of a transcendence is, as such, willed, presented (simulated) and instituted in immanence. It was not only the Sun King who mixed the enslavement of the State with radiant bursts of sacred glory; this is true of all royalty that has always already distorted the sovereignty it exhibits into a means of domination and extortion:

The truth is that we can suffer from something we lack, but even if we have a paradoxical nostalgia for it, we cannot, except by some aberration, long for the religious and royal edifice of the past. The effort to which this edifice corresponded was nothing but an immense failure, and if it is true that something essential is missing from the world in which it collapsed, then we can only go farther ahead, without imagining even for a moment the possibility of turning back. (O.C. 8:275)

The reversal of the nostalgia for a lost community into the consciousness of an "immense failure" of the history of communities was linked for Bataille to the "inner experience," whose content, truth, or ultimate lesson is articulated thus: "Sovereignty is NOTHING." Which is to say that sovereignty is the sovereign exposure to an excess (to a transcendence) that does not present itself and does not let itself be appropriated (or simulated), that does not even *give* itself—but rather to which being is abandoned. The excess to which sovereignty is exposed and exposes us *is* not, in a sense quite close to the sense in which Heideggerian Being "*is* not," that is, in the sense in which the Being of the finite being is less what makes it be than what leaves it abandoned to such an ex-position. The Being of the finite being exposes it to the end of Being.

Thus, exposure to the NOTHING of sovereignty is the opposite of the movement of a subject who would reach the limit of nothingness (and this constitutes, at bottom, the permanent movement of the Subject, indefinitely devouring *in itself* the nothingness represented by everything that is not *for itself*; in the end, this is the autophagy of truth). "In" the "NOTHING" or in nothing—in sovereignty—being is "*outside itself*"; it is in an exteriority that is impossible to recapture, or perhaps we should say that it is *of* this exteriority, that it is of an outside that it cannot relate to *itself*, but with which it entertains an essential and incommensurable relation. This relation prescribes the place of the singular being. This is why the "inner experience" of which Bataille speaks is in no way "interior" or "subjective," but is indissociable from the experience of this relation to an incommensurable outside. Only community furnishes this relation its spacing, its rhythm.

In this sense, Bataille is without doubt the one who experienced first, or most acutely, the modern experience of community as neither a work to be produced, nor a lost communion, but rather as space itself, and the spacing of the experience of the outside, of the outside-of-self. The crucial point of this experience was the exigency, reversing all nostalgia and all communal metaphysics, of a "clear consciousness" of separation—that is to say of a "clear consciousness" (in fact the Hegelian *self-consciousness* itself, but *suspended* on the limit of its access to *self*) of the fact that immanence or intimacy cannot, nor are they ever to be, *regained*.

For this very reason, however, the exigency of "clear consciousness" is everything but that abandonment of community that would favor, for example, a reversion to the positions of the individual. The individual as such is only a thing,¹³ and the *thing*, for Bataille, can be defined as the being without communication and without community. Clear consciousness of the communal *night*—this consciousness at the extremity of consciousness that is also the suspension of Hegelian desire (of consciousness's desire for recognition), the finite interruption of infinite desire, and the infinite syncope of finite desire (sovereignty itself: desire outside desire and mastery outside itself)—this "clear" consciousness, then, cannot take place elsewhere than in community, or rather it can only take place as the communication of community: both as what communicates within community, and as what community communicates.¹⁴

This consciousness—or this communication—is ecstasy: which is to say that such a consciousness is never *mine*, but to the contrary, I only have it in and through the community. This resembles, almost to the point that one might confuse it with, what in other contexts one might call a "collective unconscious"—a consciousness that perhaps more closely resembles what can be located throughout Freud as the ultimately collective essence of what he calls the unconscious. But it is not an unconscious—that is to say it is not the reverse side of a subject, nor its splitting. It has nothing to do with the subject's structure as *self*: it is clear consciousness at the extremity of its clarity, where consciousness *of self* turns out to be outside the self of consciousness.

Community, which is not a subject, and even less a subject (conscious or unconscious) greater than "myself," does not *have* or possess this consciousness: community *is* the ecstatic consciousness of the night of immanence, insofar as such a consciousness is the interruption of self-consciousness.

* * *

Bataille knew better than anyone—he alone pioneered the pathways of such a knowledge—what exceeds the formation of a simple connection between

ecstasy and community, what makes each one the locus of the other, or again, according to an atypical topology, why the circumscription of a community, or better its *areality* (its nature as area, as formed space), is not a territory, but the areality of an ecstasy,¹⁵ just as, reciprocally, the form of an ecstasy is that of a community.

However, Bataille himself remained suspended, so to speak, between the two poles of ecstasy and community. The reciprocity of these two poles consists in the fact that, even as they give rise to one another—by arealizing one another—each limits the other, and this produces another “arealization,” a suspension of the immanence that their connection nonetheless implies. This double arealization institutes the resistance to fusion, to the work of death, and this resistance is the fact of being-in-common as such: without this resistance, we would never be in common very long, we would very quickly be “realized” in a unique and total being. For Bataille the pole of ecstasy remained linked to the fascist orgy, however, or at least to the festival (whose element of ambiguous nostalgia returned, after him, in 1968) to the extent that it represented ecstasy in terms of the group and the political order.

The pole of community was, for Bataille, bound up with the idea of communism. This included, in spite of everything, themes of justice and equality; without these themes, regardless of the way one chooses to transcribe them, the communitarian enterprise can only be a farce. In this respect at least, communism remained an unsurpassable exigency, or, as Bataille wrote, “In our times the moral effect of communism is predominant” (*O.C.* 8:367). Nor did he ever stop saying, even as he was analyzing communism’s negating relation to sovereignty, “It is without doubt desirable that differences be effaced; it is desirable that a genuine equality, a genuine indifferentiation be established,” and he added right away, “But if it is possible that in the future men will be less and less interested in their difference from others, this does not mean that they will stop being interested in what is sovereign” (*O.C.* 8:323).

Now, other than by way of a clause of this kind, it was impossible for him to link the forms of sovereignty—or ecstasy—to the egalitarian community, indeed to community in general. These forms—essentially the sovereignty of lovers and that of the artist, the one and the other and the one *in* the other set apart from the orgiastics of fascism, but also from communist equality—could not but appear to him as ecstasies, and if not properly speaking “private” (what could such a thing mean?), then at least isolated, without any hold—any noticeable or articulable hold in any case—on the community into which they nonetheless had to be woven, arealized, or inscribed, lest they lose, fundamentally, their sovereign value.

Community refusing itself ecstasy, ecstasy withdrawing from community, and both in the very gesture through which each effects its own communication: one might suppose that this decisive difficulty explains the fact that *La Souveraineté* remained unfinished and that *The Theory of Religion* went unpublished. In both cases, the enterprise ended up falling short of the ecstatic community it had set out to think. Of course, to not *reach an end* was one of the exigencies of Bataille's endeavor, and this went hand in hand with the refusal of *project* to which a thinking of community seems inexorably linked. But he himself knew that there is no pure nonproject ("One cannot say outright: this is play, this is a project, but only: the play, the project dominates in a given activity" [O.C. 7:220]). And in *La Souveraineté*, even if play strives for dominance, Bataille indeed sets himself a project, one that never gets formulated as such. As for the share of play, it tends inevitably away from the project and in general from the very thinking of community. Although the latter was Bataille's sole concern, in accordance with his experience (with that terminal experience of the modern age, which marks its limit, and which might be summarized as follows: outside of community, there is no experience), he was in the end, in the face of the "immense failure" of political, religious, and military history, able to oppose only a *subjective* sovereignty of lovers and of the artist—and with this, also the exception of darting "heterogenous" flashes cleanly split from the "homogenous" order of society, with which they do not communicate. In parallel fashion, without wanting to and without thematizing it, he arrived at an almost pure opposition between "desirable" *equality* and an imperious and capricious *freedom* quite like sovereignty, with which in fact it could be confused.¹⁶ It could never really be a question, for example, of freedom desiring desirable equality. That is, it was not a question of a community that would open up, in and of itself, at the heart of being-in-common, the areality of an ecstasy.

Bataille had nonetheless written, much earlier (before 1945 in any case):

I can imagine a community with as loose a form as you will—even formless: the only condition is that an experience of moral freedom be shared in common, and not reduced to the flat, self-cancelling, self-denying meaning of particular freedom. (O.C. 6:252)

He also wrote:

There can be no knowledge without a community of researchers, nor any inner experience without the community of those who live it. . . . Communication is a fact that is not in any way added onto human reality, but rather constitutes it. (O.C. 5:37)

(These lines follow a quotation from Heidegger, and the term “human reality” repeats Corbin’s translation of *Dasein* as “*réalité humaine*.”)

And yet, in a paradoxical but apparently ineluctable way, the theme of community grows indistinct in his writings from the period of *La Souveraineté*. At a profound level, the problematic no doubt remains the same as in the earlier texts. But it is as though the communication of each being with NOTHING were beginning to prevail over the communication between beings, or as if it were necessary to give up trying to show that in both cases it was a question of *the same thing*.

It is as though Bataille, despite the constancy of his concern and intentions, was led nonetheless to endure the extremity of the distressed world in which he lived—this world at war, torn apart by an atrocious negation of community and a mortal conflagration of ecstasy. In this severe affliction he no longer saw any face, any schema, or even any simple point of reference for community, now that the figures of religious or mystical communities belonged to the past and the too human face of communism had crumbled.

In a certain way, this world is still our world, and the hasty variations, often rough drafts, always heavily humanistic, that have been sketched out around the theme of community since the war have not changed the essential givens, and may in fact have aggravated them. The emergence and our increasing consciousness of decolonized communities has not profoundly modified this state of affairs, nor has today’s growth of unprecedented forms of being-in-common—through channels of information as well as through what is called the “multiracial society”—triggered any genuine renewal of the question of community.

But if this world, even though it has changed (and Bataille, among others, was no stranger to the change), proposes no new figure of community, perhaps this in itself teaches us something. We stand perhaps to learn from this that it can no longer be a matter of figuring or modeling a communitarian essence in order to present it to ourselves and to celebrate it, but that it is a matter rather of thinking community, that is, of thinking its insistent and possibly still *unheard* demand, beyond communitarian models or remodelings.

Moreover, this world no longer even refers back to the closure of communist humanism that Bataille was analyzing. It refers to a “totalitarianism” that Bataille could never have suspected as such, limited as he was by the conditions of the cold war and haunted as he was by the obscure but persistent idea that in spite of everything the promise of community lay in the direction of communism. But for us, by now beyond even the “totalitarianism” that was to be the monstrous realization of this promise,

there remains only the play of imperialisms against the background of still another empire, or another techno-economical imperative, and the social forms that such an imperative creates. It is no longer even a question of community. But this is also because the techno-economical organization or "making operational" of our world has taken over, even inherited, the plans for a communitarian organization. It is still essentially a matter of work, of operation or operativity.

It is in this sense that the exigency of community is still unheard and remains to be discovered and thought. We know at least that the very terms of the promise of communitarian work already, in themselves, missed the unheard "meaning" of "community,"¹¹ and that in sum *the communitarian project as such participates in the "immense failure."*

We know this in part thanks to Bataille—but we must henceforth also know it in part against him. But this time it is not a question of measuring our experience against the different experience of Bataille's time, but rather against a limit we must ultimately acknowledge, a limit that prescribed the difficulty and the paradox at which his thinking came to a halt. This limit is itself the paradox: namely, the paradox of a thinking magnetically attracted toward community and yet governed by the theme of the sovereignty of a *subject*. For Bataille, as for us all, a thinking of the subject thwarts a thinking of community.

Of course, the word "subject" in Bataille's text might be no more than a word. And, no doubt, the concept he had of it was neither the ordinary notion of "subjectivity" nor the metaphysical concept of a self-presence as the *subjectum* of representation. In *Inner Experience*, indeed, he defines it thus: "Oneself is not the subject isolating itself from the world, but a place of communication, of fusion of the subject and the object" (*O.C.* 5:21). This will not prevent him, in *La Souveraineté*, from speaking, for example, of "that instantaneous *jouissance* from which proceeds the subject's presence of itself" (*O.C.* 8:395). The first of these sentences does not suffice to correct or complicate the second in a way that is commensurate with what is at stake. The "place of communication" can in the last analysis still be determined as presence-to-self: for example, as the presence-to-self of communication itself, something that would find an echo in certain ideologies of communication. What is more, the equivalence between this place and a "fusion of the subject and the object"—as if there were never communication between subject and object—leads Bataille back to the core of a constant thematic in speculative idealism. With "object" and "fusion," with "the object of consciousness" becoming "the object of self consciousness, that is to say an object also suppressed as object, as concept,"¹² what disappears, or rather *what cannot appear* is both the *other* and *communication*. For the other of a communication becomes the object of a

subject—even and perhaps especially as “suppressed object or concept”—as in the Hegelian relation between consciousnesses (unless one undertakes, with Bataille and beyond him, a reading that strains the text). This other is no longer an other, but an object of a subject’s representation (or, in a more complicated way, the representative object of another subject for the subject’s representation). Communication and the alterity that is its condition can, in principle, have only an instrumental and not an ontological role and status in a thinking that views the subject as the negative but specular identity of the object, that is, as an exteriority without alterity. The subject cannot be outside itself: this is even what ultimately defines it—that its outside and all its “alienations” or “extraneousness” should in the end be suppressed by and *sublated* in it. It is altogether different with the being of communication. The being-communicating (and not the subject-representing), or if one wants to risk saying it, communication as the predicament of being, as “transcendental,” is above all *being-outside-itself*.

The “Hegelianism without reserve” that Derrida finds in Bataille¹⁹ cannot not be subject, in the end, to the Hegelian law of a reserve always more powerful than any abandonment of reserve; a reserve that is in fact the *sublation* of the Subject reappropriating itself in presence—this is its *jouissance*, and its *instant*—until it attains to sovereignty, NOTHING, and community.

Properly speaking, Bataille had no *concept* of the subject. But, at least up to a certain point, he allowed the communication exceeding the subject to relate back to a subject, or to institute *itself* as subject (for example—at least this is a hypothesis that will have to be examined as contradicting the one that I will treat later in regard to Bataille’s writing—as subject of the literary production and communication of Bataille’s own texts).

The historical and the theoretical limits are intertwined. It is not surprising that *at this limit* the only thing to respond to the communal obsession was an accursed isolation of lovers and of the artist. The sole answer, in a tragic mode, to the haunting experience of a communality that had just proven to lead directly to works of death. Bataille’s lovers are also, at the limit, a subject and an object—where the subject, moreover, is always the man, and the object always the woman, due no doubt to a very classical manipulation of sexual difference into an appropriation of self by self. (However, on another register and in another reading of Bataille’s text, it is not certain that love and *jouissance* do not pertain essentially to the woman—and to the woman in man. To discuss this it would be necessary to consider Bataille’s writing [*écriture*]²⁰, something I cannot do here, inasmuch as I am for the moment considering only its “themes.”) Community could only obey an analogous model, and consequently, albeit simplifying a little, though barely, either a fascist or a communist model. Bataille must

have sensed this, and having sensed it he secretly, discretely, and even without knowing it himself, gave up the task of thinking community in the proper sense.

That is to say he gave up thinking the *sharing* [*partage*] of community and the sovereignty in the sharing or *shared sovereignty*, shared *between Daseins*, between singular existences that are not subjects and whose relation—the sharing itself—is not a communion, nor the appropriation of an object, nor a self-recognition, nor even a communication as this is understood to exist between subjects. But these singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather *spaced*, by the sharing that makes them *others*: other for one another, and other, infinitely other for the Subject of their fusion, which is engulfed in the sharing, in the ecstasy of the sharing: “communicating” by not “communing.” These “places of communication” are no longer places of fusion, even though in them one *passes* from one to the other; they are defined and exposed by their dislocation. Thus, the communication of sharing would be this very dis-location.

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In what would appear to be a dialectical move, I might say the following: Bataille thought nothing else but this very thing he gave up thinking. Which would mean that in the end he thought it *to the limit*—at and to its limit, and at the limit of his thought (and one never thinks anywhere else). And what he thus had to think at his limit is what he leaves for us to think in our turn.

In reality, my observations constitute neither a critique of nor a reservation about Bataille, but an attempt to communicate with his experience rather than simply draw from the stock of his knowledge or from his theses. This involved simply moving along a limit that is our own: his, mine, that of our time, that of our community. At the place where Bataille assigned the subject, at this place of the subject—or on its reverse side—in place of communication and in the “place of communication,” *there is* indeed something, and not nothing: our limit lies in not really having a name for this “something” or for this “someone.” Is it even a question of having a true name for this singular being? This is a matter that can be raised only much later on. For the moment, let us say that in lieu of a name it is necessary to mobilize words, so as to set the limit of our thinking back in motion. What “there is” in place of communication is neither the subject nor communal being, but community and sharing.

But this still says nothing. Perhaps, in truth, there is nothing *to say*. Perhaps we should not seek a word or a concept for it, but rather recognize in the thought of community a theoretical excess (or more precisely, an

excess in relation to the theoretical) that would oblige us to adopt another *praxis* of discourse and community. But we should at least try to say this, because “language alone indicates, at the limit, the sovereign moment where it is no longer current.”²¹ Which means here that only a discourse of community, exhausting itself, can indicate to the community the sovereignty of its sharing (that is to say *neither present* to it nor *signify* to it its *communion*). An ethics and a politics of discourse and writing are evidently implied here. What such a discourse should or can be, how and by whom in society it should and can be held, indeed what holding such a discourse would call for in terms of the transformation, revolution, or resolution of that society (for example, who is writing here? where? for whom? a “philosopher,” a “book,” a “publishing house,” “readers”—are these suited, as such, to communication?): this is what we will have occasion to look into. This is nothing other than the question of *literary communism*, or at least of what I am trying to designate with this clumsy expression: something that would be the sharing of community in and by its writing, its literature. I shall come to this in the second part of the book.

From here on, our aim will be to approach this question with Bataille, because of Bataille—as well as others; but as you will have understood, it is not a question of producing a commentary on Bataille, nor a commentary on anyone: for community has still not been thought. Nor am I claiming, on the contrary, to forge alone the new discourse of community. Neither discourse nor isolation is what is at stake here. I am trying to indicate, at its limit, an experience—not, perhaps, an experience that we have, *but an experience that makes us be*. To say that community has not yet been thought is to say that it tries our thinking, and that it is not an object for it. And perhaps it does not have to become one.

In any case, what resists commentary in Bataille’s thought is what exceeded his thought and exceeds ours—and what for this reason demands our thought: the sharing of community, the mortal truth that we share and that shares us. Thus, what Bataille wrote of our relation to “the religious and royal edifice of the past” is valid of our relation to Bataille himself: “We can only go farther.”²² Nothing has yet been said: we must expose ourselves to what has gone unheard in community.

* * *

Sharing comes down to this: what community reveals to me, in presenting to me my birth and my death, is my existence outside myself. Which does not mean my existence reinvested in or by community, as if community were another subject that would sublimate me, in a dialectical or communal mode. *Community does not sublimate the finitude it exposes. Community itself, in sum, is nothing but this exposition.* It is the community of finite

beings, and as such it is itself a *finite* community. In other words, not a limited community as opposed to an infinite or absolute community, but a community of finitude, because finitude “is” communitarian, and because finitude alone is communitarian.

Being-in-common does not mean a higher form of substance or subject taking charge of the limits of separate individualities. As an individual, I am closed off from all community, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the individual—if an absolutely individual being could ever exist—is infinite. The limit of the individual, fundamentally, does not concern it, it simply surrounds it (and escapes the logic of the limit I was describing above: but since one cannot escape this logic, because it resists and because it makes community resist, there is no individual).

However, the *singular being*, which is not the individual, is the finite being. What the thematic of individuation lacked, as it passed from a certain Romanticism to Schopenhauer and to Nietzsche,²³ was a consideration of singularity, to which it nonetheless came quite close. Individuation detaches closed off entities from a formless ground—whereas only communication, contagion, or communion constitute the being of individuals. But singularity does not proceed from such a detaching of clear forms or figures (nor from what is linked to this operation: the scene of form and ground, appearing [*l'apparaître*] linked to appearance [*l'apparence*] and the slippage of appearance into the aesthetizing nihilism in which individualism always culminates). Singularity perhaps does not *proceed* from anything. It is not a work resulting from an operation. There is no process of “singularization,” and singularity is neither extracted, nor produced, nor derived. Its birth does not take place *from out of* or as an *effect of*: on the contrary, it provides the measure according to which *birth*, as such, is neither a production nor a self-positioning, the measure according to which the infinite birth of finitude is not a process that emerges from a ground (*fond*) or from a fund (*fonds*) of some kind. The “ground” is itself, through itself and as such, *already* the finitude of singularities.

It is a groundless “ground,” less in the sense that it opens up the gaping chasm of an abyss than that it is made up only of the network, the interweaving, and the sharing of singularities: *Ungrund* rather than *Abgrund*, but no less vertiginous. There is nothing *behind* singularity—but there is, outside it and in it, the immaterial *and* material space that distributes it and shares it out as singularity, distributes and shares the confines of other singularities, or even more exactly distributes and shares the confines of singularity—which is to say of alterity—between it and itself.

A singular being does not emerge or rise up against the background of a chaotic, undifferentiated identity of beings, or against the background of their unitary assumption, or that of a becoming, or that of a will. A

singular being *appears*, as finitude itself: at the end (or at the beginning), with the contact of the skin (or the heart) of another singular being, at the confines of the *same* singularity that is, as such, always *other*, always shared, always exposed. This appearing (*apparaître*) is not an appearance (*apparence*); it is on the contrary the at once glorious and destitute appearing (*paraître*) of being-finite itself. (The “ground” is the finitude of Being: it is what Bataille was not entirely in a position to understand in Heidegger—and it is why Heidegger, with or without a reading of Bataille, was never quite in a position to be troubled by “communication.”) The essence of Being as being-finite is inscribed by finitude a priori as the sharing of singularities.

Community means, consequently, that there is no singular being without another singular being, and that there is, therefore, what might be called, in a rather inappropriate idiom, an originary or ontological “sociality” that in its principle extends far beyond the simple theme of man as a social being (the *zoon politikon* is secondary to this community). For, on the one hand, it is not obvious that the community of singularities is limited to “man” and excludes, for example, the “animal” (even in the case of “man” it is not a fortiori certain that this community concerns only “man” and not also the “inhuman” or the “superhuman,” or, for example, if I may say so with and without a certain *Witz*, “woman”: after all, the difference between the sexes is itself a singularity in the difference of singularities). On the other hand, if social being is always posited as a predicate of man, community would signify on the contrary the basis for thinking only something like “man.” But this thinking would at the same time remain dependent upon a principial determination of community, namely, that there is no communion of singularities in a totality superior to them and immanent to their common being.

In place of such a communion, there is communication. Which is to say, in very precise terms, that finitude itself *is* nothing; it is neither a ground, nor an essence, nor a substance. But it appears, it presents itself, it exposes itself, and thus it *exists* as communication. In order to designate this singular mode of appearing, this specific phenomenality, which is no doubt more originary than any other (for it could be that the world appears to the community, not to the individual), we would need to be able to say that finitude *co-appears* or *compears* (*com-paraître*) and can only *compear*: in this formulation we would need to hear that finite being always presents itself “together,” hence severally; for finitude always presents itself in being-in-common and as this being itself, and it always presents itself at a *hearing* and before the judgment of the law of community, or, more originally, before the judgment of community as law.

Communication consists before all else in this sharing and in this compearance (*com-parution*) of finitude: that is, in the dislocation and in the interpellation that reveal themselves to be constitutive of being-in-common—precisely inasmuch as being-in-common is not a common being. The finite-being exists first of all according to a division of sites, according to an extension—*partes extra partes*—such that each singularity is extended (in the sense that Freud says: “The psyche is extended”). It is not enclosed in a form—although its whole being touches against its singular limit—but it is what it is, singular being (singularity of being), only through its extension, through the areality that above all extroverts it in its very being—whatever the degree or the desire of its “egoism”—and that makes it exist only by *exposing it to an outside*. This outside is in its turn nothing other than the exposition of another areality, of another singularity—the same other. This exposure, or this exposing-sharing, gives rise, from the outset, to a mutual interpellation of singularities prior to any address in language (though it gives to this latter its first condition of possibility).²⁴ Finitude compears, that is to say it is exposed: such is the essence of community.

Under these conditions, communication is not a bond. The metaphor of the “social bond” unhappily superimposes upon “subjects” (that is to say, objects) a hypothetical reality (that of the “bond”) upon which some have attempted to confer a dubious “intersubjective” nature that would have the virtue of attaching these objects to one another. This would be the economic link or the bond of recognition. But compearance is of a more originary order than that of the bond. It does not set itself up, it does not establish itself, it does not emerge among already given subjects (objects). It consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us)—a formula in which the *and* does not imply juxtaposition, but exposition. What is exposed in compearance is the following, and we must learn to read it in all its possible combinations: “you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I” (“*toi [e(s)t] [tout autre que] moi*”). Or again, more simply: *you shares me* (“*toi partage moi*”).

Only in this communication are singular beings given—without a bond *and* without communion, equally distant from any notion of connection or joining from the outside and from any notion of a common and fusional interiority. Communication is the constitutive fact of an exposition to the outside that defines singularity. In its being, as its very being, singularity is exposed to the outside. By virtue of this position or this primordial structure, it is at once detached, distinguished, and communitarian. Community is the presentation of the detachment (or retrenchment) of this distinction that is not individuation, but finitude compearing.

(Rousseau was the first to conceive of this: in his thinking, society comes about as the bond *and* as the separation between those who, in “the state

of nature," being without any bond, are nonetheless not separated or isolated. The "societal" state exposes them to separation, but this is how it exposes "man," and how it exposes him to the judgment of his fellows. Rousseau is indeed in every sense the thinker par excellence of compearance: it may be that a paranoiac obsession is merely the reverse side—morbid because detained in subjectivity—of the communitarian assignation.)

What makes singularities communicate is not to be confused with what Bataille calls their lacerations. True, what tears apart is the presentation of finitude in and by community—the presentation of the triple mourning I must go through: that of the death of the other, that of my birth, and that of my death. Community is the carrying out of this triple mourning (I would not go so far as to say that it is the "work" of this triple mourning, or in any case it is not simply this: there is something broader and less productive to the carrying through of mourning). What is lacerated in this way is not the singular being: on the contrary, this is where the singular being compears. Rather, it is the communal fabric, it is immanence that is lacerated. And yet this laceration does not happen *to* anything, for this fabric does not exist. There is no tissue, no flesh, no subject or substance of common being, and consequently there is no laceration of this being. But there *is* sharing out.

Properly speaking, there is no laceration of the singular being: there is no open cut in which the inside would get lost in the outside (which would presuppose an initial "inside," an interiority). The laceration that, for Bataille, is exemplary, the woman's "breach," is ultimately not a laceration. It remains, obstinately, and in its most intimate folds, the surface exposed to the outside. (While the obsession with the breach in Bataille's text indeed indicates something of the unbearable extremity at which communication comes into play, it also betrays an involuntarily metaphysical reference to an order of interiority and immanence, and to a condition involving the passage of one being into an other, rather than the passage of one through the exposed limit of the other.)

"Laceration" consists only in exposure: the entire "inside" of the singular being is exposed to the "outside" (and it is thus that the woman serves as an example, or limit—which is the same thing here—of community). There is laceration of nothing, with nothing; there is rather compearance before NOTHING (and, before NOTHING, one can only compear). Once again, neither being nor community is lacerated: the being of community *is* the exposure of singularities.

The open mouth is not a laceration either. It exposes to the "outside" an "inside" that, without this exposition, would not exist. Words do not "come out" of the throat (nor from the "mind" "in" the head): they are formed in the mouth's articulation. This is why speech—including silence—

is not a *means* of communication but communication itself, an exposure (similar to the way the Inuit Eskimos sing by making their own cries resonate in the open mouth of a partner). The speaking mouth does not transmit, does not inform, does not effect any bond; it is—perhaps, though taken *at its limit*, as with the kiss—the beating of a singular site against other singular sites: “I speak, and from then on I am—the being in me is—outside myself and in myself.” (O.C. 8:197)

No doubt the Hegelian desire for recognition is already operative here. Nevertheless, before recognition, there is knowing: knowing without knowledge, and without “consciousness,” that *I* am first of all exposed to the other, and exposed to the exposure of the other. *Ego sum expositus*: on closer inspection one might discern here a paradox, namely that behind Cartesian *évidence*—that *évidence* so certain that the subject cannot not have it and that it need not be proven in any way—there must lie not some nocturnal bedazzlement of the *ego*, not some existential immanence of a self-affection, but solely community—the community about which Descartes seems to know so little, or nothing at all. In this respect the Cartesian subject would form the inverse figure of the experience of community and of singularity. The Cartesian subject knows himself to be exposed, and he knows himself because he is exposed (does not Descartes present himself as his own portrait?).²⁴

* * *

This is why community cannot arise from the domain of *work*. One does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude. Community understood as a work or through its works would presuppose that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and producible (in sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols: in short, in subjects). Products derived from operations of this kind, however grandiose they might seek to be and sometimes manage to be, have no more communitarian existence than the plaster busts of Marianne.

Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called “unworking,” referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension. Community is made of the interruption of singularities, or of the suspension that singular beings *are*. Community is not the work of singular beings, nor can it claim them as its works, just as communication is not a work or even an operation of singular beings, for community is simply their being—their being suspended upon its limit. Communication is the unworking of work that is social, economic, technical, and institutional.²⁶

The unworking of community takes place around what Bataille for a very long time called the sacred. Yet he came around to saying, "What I earlier called the sacred, a name that is perhaps purely pedantic . . . is fundamentally nothing other than the unleashing of passions" (*O.C.* 7:371).

If this "unleashing of passions" is only partially represented by the violent and unbridled movement of a free subjectivity disposed toward the sovereign destruction of all *things* as toward its consumption in NOTHING, and even though as a characterization of the sacred it fails to illuminate the community through which passion is unleashed, it nevertheless remains the direction always privileged by Bataille. It furnishes, as *Erotism* puts it, the "awful sign" by which our impossible truth might be recognized, at least from afar. But it is not at all sure that this privilege is not itself submitted to an ultimate reserve (or sublation) of the Subject: the sovereignly subjective annihilation of subjectivity itself. A kind of incandescent nihilism carries the subject to its point of fusion. This still recalls Hegel, and yet it is no longer Hegel. It is no longer the State, but it is still a work of death. Bataille sees its fascinating aspect in Sade, who proposed community as the republic of crime. But the republic of crime must also be the republic of the suicide of criminals, and down to the last among them—the sacrifice of the sacrificers unleashed in passion. Thus, even though Bataille very often affirmed a community founded in sacred separation, separation representing the rupture of passion, he was nonetheless led (because he felt all too strongly the at once liberating and overwhelming exigency of communication) to recognize in community, to the contrary, Sade's limit: the phrase "I speak, and from then on I am . . . outside myself and in myself" is the phrase that decides irrevocably and fundamentally Bataille's refutation of Sade's "crude error," which he states as follows: "The world is not, as Sade ultimately represented it, composed of himself and things" (*O.C.* 8:297).

Hence, if the inoperative community is to be found in the vicinity of the "sacred," it is only inasmuch as the "unleashing of passions" is not the free doing of a subjectivity and freedom is not self-sufficiency. (Up to a certain point, Bataille failed to recognize to what extent a very classical and very subjective concept of freedom weighed on his thought.) But the "unleashing of passions" is of the order of what Bataille himself often designated as "*contagion*," another name for "communication." What is communicated, what is contagious, and what, in this manner—and only in this manner—is "unleashed," is the *passion* of singularity as such. The singular being, because it is singular, is in the passion—the passivity, the suffering, and the excess—of sharing its singularity. The presence of the other does not constitute a boundary that would limit the unleashing of "my" passions: on the contrary, only exposition to the other unleashes my

passions. Whereas the individual can know another individual, juxtaposed to him both as identical to him and as a thing—as the identity of a thing—the singular being does not know, but rather experiences his *like (son semblable)*: “Being is never me alone, it is always *me and those like me*” (*O.C.* 8:297). This is its passion. Singularity is the passion of being.

The like-being bears the revelation of sharing: he or she does not resemble me as a portrait resembles an original. It was this type of resemblance that constituted the initial given of the classic and tortuous problematic (or *impasse*) of the “recognition of the other” (supposedly opposed to the “knowledge of the thing”). And one has to ask whether, above and beyond the Husserlian alter ego, one might not still pick up traces of this problematic and this *impasse* in Freud, Heidegger, and Bataille, restraining thought, as it were, at the threshold of community, in a certain specularity of the recognition of the other through death. However, it is in the death of the other, as I have said, that community enjoins me to its ownmost register, but this does not occur through the mediation of specular recognition. For *I* do not recognize *myself* in the death of the other—whose limit nonetheless exposes me irreversibly.

Heidegger leads us farthest here: “The dying of Others is not something that we experience in an authentic sense; at most we are always just “there-alongside.” . . . By its very essence, death is in every case mine.”²⁷ Here, the specular arrangement (of recognition of the self in the other, which presupposes the recognition of the other in oneself, and, consequently, the agency of the subject) is—if I may say so—turned inside out like a glove: I recognize that in the death of the other there is nothing recognizable. And this is how sharing—and finitude—can be inscribed: “The ending implied in death does not signify a *Dasein*’s Being-at-an-end, but a *Being-toward-the-end* of this entity.”²⁸ The similitude of the like-being is made in the encounter of “beings toward the end” that this end, *their* end, in each case “mine” (or “yours”), *assimilates and separates in the same limit*, at which or on which they compare.

A like-being resembles me in that I myself “resemble” him: we “resemble” together, if you will. That is to say, there is no original or origin of identity. What holds the place of an “origin” is the sharing of singularities. This means that this “origin”—the origin of community or the originary community—is nothing other than the limit: the origin is the tracing of the borders upon which or along which singular beings are exposed. We are alike because each one of us is exposed to the outside that *we are for ourselves*. The like is not the same (*le semblable n’est pas le pareil*). I do not rediscover *myself*, nor do I recognize *myself* in the other: I experience the other’s alterity, or I experience alterity in the other together with the alteration that “in me” sets my singularity outside me and infinitely delimits

it. Community is that singular ontological order in which the other and the same are alike (*sont le semblable*): that is to say, in the sharing of identity.

The passion that is unleashed is nothing other than the passion of and for community, and this passion emerges as the desubjectivization of the passion for death—that is, as its reversal: for it does not seek *jouissance*, being neither the Hegelian desire for recognition, nor the calculated operation of mastery.²⁹ It does not seek the self-appropriation of subjective immanence. Rather, it is what is designated by the doublet of the word “*jouissance*,” namely joy (*joie*). The practice of “joy before death” that Bataille tried to describe is a ravishing of the singular being that does not cross over into death (it is not the joy of resurrection, which is the subject’s most inward mediation; it is not a triumph; it is a splendor—this is the etymological meaning of the word “joy”—though it is a nocturnal splendor), but rather attains, to the point of touching but without appropriating it to itself, the extreme point of its singularity, the end of its finitude; that is to say the confines upon which compearance with and before the other occurs, without respite. Joy is possible, it has meaning and existence, only through community and as its communication.

* * *

What is currently in the air—if one is speaking of collective existence—is the poorest thing one can imagine, and no representation can be more disconcerting than one that presents death as the fundamental object of the *communal* activity of men, death and not food or the production of the means of production. . . . What is tragically religious in the existence of a community, in formal embrace with death, has become the thing the most alien to man. No one thinks any longer that the reality of a common life—which is to say, human existence—depends on the sharing of nocturnal terrors and the kind of ecstatic spasms that are spread by death. . . .

THE EMOTIONAL ELEMENT WHICH GIVES AN OBSESSIVE VALUE TO COMMUNAL EXISTENCE IS DEATH.³⁰

* * *

Yet just as we must not think that community is “lost”—just as Bataille himself had to tear himself away from this mode of thinking—so it would be foolish to comment upon and to deplore the “loss” of the sacred only then to advocate its return as a remedy for the evils of our society (something Bataille never did, following in this Nietzsche’s most profound exigency—nor did Benjamin, nor Heidegger nor Blanchot, in spite of certain appearances to the contrary here and there). What has disappeared from the

sacred—and this means finally *all* of the sacred, engulfed in the “immense failure”—reveals rather that community itself now occupies the place of the sacred. Community is the sacred, if you will; but the sacred stripped of the sacred. For the sacred—the separated, the set apart—no longer proves to be the haunting idea of an unattainable communion, but is rather made up of nothing other than the sharing of community. There is neither an entity nor a sacred hypostasis of community—there is the “unleashing of passions,” the sharing of singular beings, and the communication of finitude. In passing to its limit, finitude passes “from” the one “to” the other: this passage makes up the sharing.

Moreover, there is no entity or hypostasis of community because this sharing, this passage cannot be completed. Incompletion is its “principle,” taking the term “incompletion” in an active sense, however, as designating not insufficiency or lack, but the activity of sharing, the dynamic, if you will, of an uninterrupted passage through singular ruptures. That is to say, once again, a workless and inoperative activity. It is not a matter of making, producing, or instituting a community; nor is it a matter of venerating or fearing within it a sacred power—it is a matter of incompleting its sharing. Sharing is always incomplete, or it is beyond completion and incompletion. For a complete sharing implies the disappearance of what is shared.

Community is given to us with being and as being, well in advance of all our projects, desires, and undertakings. At bottom, it is impossible for us to lose community. A society may be as little communitarian as possible; it could not happen that in the social desert there would not be, however slight, even inaccessible, some community. We cannot not compare. Only the fascist masses tend to annihilate community in the delirium of an incarnated communion. Symmetrically, the concentration camp—and the extermination camp, the camp of exterminating concentration—is in essence the will to destroy community. But even in the camp itself, undoubtedly, community never entirely ceases to resist this will. Community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence. Consequently, community is transcendence: but “transcendence,” which no longer has any “sacred” meaning, signifying precisely a resistance to immanence (resistance to the communion of everyone or to the exclusive passion of one or several: to all the forms and all the violences of subjectivity).¹¹

Community is given to us—or we are given and abandoned to the community: a gift to be renewed and communicated, it is not a work to be done or produced. But it is a task, which is different—an infinite task at the heart of finitude.¹² (A task and a struggle, one that Marx grasped and Bataille understood. The imperative of the struggle, not to be confused with a “communist” teleology, intervenes at the level of communication, as when Lyotard, for example, speaks of the “absolute wrong” done to

the one who is exploited and who does not even have the language to express the wrong done to him,"³³ but also—and fundamentally the stakes are no doubt the same—the imperative emerges at the level of the incommensurable "literary" communication of which I will be speaking.)

* * *

For Bataille, community was first and finally the community of lovers.³⁴ Joy is the joy of lovers. This conclusion, if it is one, is ambiguous. As I have already said, in the face of society, Bataille's lovers present in many respects the figure of a communion, or of a subject that, if not precisely Sadian, nonetheless ends up being engulfed alone in its own ecstasy. To this extent, Bataille's celebration of lovers, or what one might call his passion for lovers, reveals the inaccessible character both of their own community and of another community, one shared not by one couple, but by all couples and all the love in a society. As either one of these figures, lovers in Bataille thus represent, aside from themselves and their joy, the despair of "the" community and of the political.³⁵ Ultimately, it is possible that these lovers remain trapped in the opposition of the "private" and the "public"—in principle so foreign to Bataille, and yet perhaps insidiously recurrent in his texts precisely insofar as love seems to expose, in the end, the whole truth of community, but only by opposing it to every other plural, social, or collective relation—unless, and this comes down to the same thing, love is opposed fundamentally to itself, its own communion being inaccessible to it (according to a tragic dialectic of love conceived on the ground of immanence and visibly connected to the thinking of the political that works from the same ground). Thus, love would seem to expose what "real" communism renounced, and that for the sake of which this communism had to be renounced, but it would thereby leave social community with only the exteriority of things, of production, and of exploitation.

In spite of Bataille, and yet with him, we should try to say the following: love does not expose the entire community, it does not capture or effect its essence purely and simply—not even as the impossible itself (this model would still be Christian and Hegelian, although minus the assumption of love into the objectivity of the State). The kiss, in spite of everything, is not speech. Of course, lovers speak. But their speech is ultimately impotent, excessive in that it is excessively poor, a speech in which love is already mired: "Lovers speak, and their overwhelmed words deflate and inflate at the same time the sentiment that moves them. For they transfer into duration something whose truth holds for the instant of a flash" (*O.C.* 8:500). In the City, on the other hand, men do not embrace. The religious or political symbolism of the kiss of peace and of the accolade indeed indicates some-

thing, but merely a limit, and most often a comical one. (Nevertheless, social speech—cultural, political, and the like—seems as impoverished as that of lovers. It is at this point that we should revive the question of “literature.”)

Lovers form neither a society, nor its negative, nor its assumption, and it is indeed in their distance from society in general that Bataille conceives them: “I can conceive of man as open since the most ancient times to the possibility of individual love. I need only imagine the subtle relaxing of the social bond” (*O.C.* 8:496). Nevertheless, he also represented them as a society, as another society, one that harbors the impossible and communal truth that simple society despairs of attaining: “Love unites lovers only in order to expend, to go from pleasure to pleasure, from delight to delight: their society is one of consumption, the inverse of the State’s, which is one of acquisition” (*O.C.* 8:140). The word “society” here is not—not only, in any case—a metaphor. It sounds a belated echo (1951), as if stifled or resigned, of the motif of a society of festival, of expenditure, one of sacrifice and glory. As if the lovers had preserved this motif, rescuing it in extremis from the immense failure of the politico-religious, and thus offering love as a refuge or substitute for lost community.

Now, just as community is not “lost,” so there is doubtless no “society of consumption.” There are not two societies, nor is there a more or less sacred ideal of society in community. *In* society, on the other hand, in every society and at every moment, “community” is in fact nothing other than a consumption of the social bond or fabric—but a consumption that occurs in this bond, and in accordance with the sharing of the finitude of singular beings. Thus lovers are neither a society, nor *the* community effected through fusional communion. If lovers harbor a truth of the social relation, it is neither at a distance from nor above society, but rather in that, as lovers, they are exposed in the community. They are not the communion that is refused to or purloined from society; on the contrary, they expose the fact that communication is not communion.

And yet in the Batailleian representation of lovers, indebted as it is in this respect to a long tradition—perhaps the entire Western tradition of amorous passion, but since Romanticism at least clearly in confrontation with and opposition to the collapse of the politico-religious—communion remains a muted but obsessive theme. The sovereignty of lovers is no doubt nothing other than the ecstasy of the instant; it does not *produce* a *union*, it is *NOTHING*—but this nothing itself is also, in its “consummation,” a communion.

Bataille knew, however, the limit of love—opposing it, at least at certain moments, and by a paradoxical reversal, to the sovereign capacity of the City:

The mortal individual is nothing and the paradox of love would keep him limited to the lie that the individual is. For us, only the State (the City) assumes by right a meaning beyond the individual, it alone holds the sovereign truth that neither death nor the error of private interest can alter. (O.C. 8:497)

But immediately after this, Bataille comes back to the impotence in which the State nonetheless finds itself (today, at least, he says in a still nostalgic logic) when it comes to giving “the *totality* of the world,” which must therefore finally be considered as accessible only in love. Lost totality, or totality accomplished in the lie of the individual: there is no way out of the circle of disenchantment.

It should be possible to think otherwise. Not in terms merely of an ultimately successful access to this “totality” (which serves here as another name for immanence or the Subject), but according to another articulation both of love and of community.

The death of lovers, indeed, exposes them, both between themselves as well as outside of themselves, to community. The acknowledged limit of love is not an external limit—it is not, as Bataille seems to think, the limit of the “private” and deceitful insufficiency of the “individual”: it is rather the sharing of community precisely inasmuch as the individual also passes through love, and precisely because he exposes himself to it. Love does not *complete* community (neither against the City, nor outside of it, nor on its fringes): in that case it would be its work, or it would put it to work. On the contrary, love, provided it is not itself conceived on the basis of the politico-subjective model of communion in one, exposes the unworking and therefore the incessant *incompletion* of community. It exposes community *at its limit*.

Lovers form the extreme though not external limit of community. They are poised at the extremity of sharing (and the extremity of sharing is perhaps lodged in its midst rather than at its outer edge, which moreover does not exist). The “unleashing of passions” confronts lovers with community not because it would place them at a simple remove from community (there is occasionally in Bataille something of this facile view: accursed lovers, censored passion . . .), but rather because lovers expose to the community, in its midst, and in sum even unto it, the extremity of compearance. For their singularities share and split them, or share and split each other, in the instant of their coupling. Lovers expose, at the limit, the exposition of singular beings to one another and the pulse of this exposition: the compearance, the passage, and the divide of sharing. In them, or between them—this is exactly the same thing—ecstasy, joy *touches* its limit. Lovers touch each other, unlike fellow citizens (unless, once again, in the delirium

of a fanaticized mass or in the piling up of exterminated bodies—wherever it is a matter of a work). This banal and fairly ridiculous truth means that touching—immanence not attained but close, as though promised (no longer speech, nor gaze)—is the limit.

Touching the limit—which is the possibility of touch itself—the lovers, however, defer it: except in the case of a common suicide, an old myth and an old desire that abolishes limit and touch at the same time. Joy self-defers. Lovers know joy in drowning in the instant of intimacy, but because this foundering is also their sharing and dividing since it is neither death nor communion—but joy—*even this in its turn is a singularity that exposes itself to the outside*. In the instant, the lovers are shared, their singular beings—which constitute neither an identity nor an individual, which effect nothing—share each other, and the singularity of their love is exposed to community. Community in turn compears: for example in literary communication.

But this is not an example: “literature” does not designate here what this word ordinarily indicates. What is in fact involved is the following: that there is an *inscription* of the communitarian exposition, and that this exposition, as such, can *only* be inscribed, or can be offered only by way of an inscription.

It is not only, or even primarily, a matter of amorous or “literary” literature here, but solely of the unworking of literature—all unworked “communication,” literary as well as philosophical, scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and political. This communication would be the inverse of lovers’ discourse such as Bataille presents it, and in this respect, at least, one would have to call it, if not “literature,” then “writing.” While lovers’ speech seeks a duration for their joy that joy eludes, “writing,” in this sense, would on the contrary *inscribe* the collective and social duration of time in the instant of communication, in the sharing. “Literary communism” would be the sharing of the sovereignty that lovers, in their passion, expose to the outside rather than produce: they expose it first of all to themselves, to their singular beings, but as singular beings these beings already, as soon as the lovers embrace, compear in and before an entire community. Be it for them or for the community, in love or in writing, this does not occur without anguish—nor without joy. But ecstasy comes at a price: at the risk of being nothing more than an erotic or fascist work of death, ecstasy passes through the inscription of finitude and its communication. Which is to say that it also presupposes, necessarily, *works* (literary, political, etc.). But what is inscribed, and what passes to the limit in inscribing itself, exposes and communicates itself (instead of trying to accomplish a meaning, like speech): what is shared is the unworking of works.

Lovers expose above all the unworking of community. Unworking is what they show in their communal aspect and intimacy. But they expose it *to* the community, which already *shares their intimacy*. For the community, lovers are on its limit, they are outside and inside, and at this limit they have no meaning without the community and without the communication of writing: this is where they assume their senseless meaning. Reciprocally, it is the community that presents to them, in their very love, their singularities, their births, and their deaths. Their births and their deaths escape them, although their joy touches these for an instant. In the same way, the birth of their child, should it take place, escapes them: this birth occurs as a sharing of another singularity, which does not amount to the production of a work. The child might well be a love child, but it is not love's work, it is not, as Hegel would have it, "a seed of immortality, a seed of what develops and produces itself from out of itself," "suppressing (sublating) all distinction between the lovers." When the infant appears, it has already compeared. It does not complete the love, it shares it again, making it pass again into communication and exposing it again to community.³⁶

This does not mean that, beyond or above the lovers, there would be a City or a State in possession of their truth: there is nothing to possess here, and what communication writes, what writing communicates, is in no way a truth possessed, appropriated or transmitted—even though it is, absolutely, the truth of being-in-common.

There is community, there is sharing, and there is the exposition of this limit. Community does not lie beyond the lovers, it does not form a larger circle within which they are contained: it traverses them, in a tremor of "writing" wherein the literary work mingles with the most simple public exchange of speech. Without such a trait traversing the kiss, sharing it, the kiss is itself as despairing as community is abolished.

* * *

The political, if this word may serve to designate not the organization of society but the disposition of community as such, the destination of its sharing, must not be the assumption or the work of love or of death. It need neither find, nor regain, nor effect a communion taken to be lost or still to come. If the political is not dissolved in the sociotechnical element of forces and needs (in which, in effect, it seems to be dissolving under our eyes), it must inscribe the sharing of community. The outline of singularity would be "political"—as would be the outline of its communication and its ecstasy. "Political" would mean a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication, or destined to this unworking: a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing. To attain such a signification of the "political" does not depend, or in any case not simply,

on what is called a “political will.” It implies being already engaged in the community, that is to say, undergoing, in whatever manner, the experience of community as communication: it implies writing. We must not stop writing, or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself.

Not only will this have been written after Bataille, but also to him, just as he wrote to us—because one always writes *to*—communicating to us the anguish of community, writing from a solitude prior to any isolation, invoking a community that no society contains or precedes, even though every society is implied in it:

The reasons for writing a book can be brought back to the desire to modify the existing relations between a man and his fellow beings. These relations are judged unacceptable and are perceived as an atrocious misery. (*O.C.* 2:143)

Or else, it is community itself—though it *is* nothing, *it* is not a collective subject—that never stops, in writing, sharing itself.

The anguish which you do not *communicate* to your fellow being is in some way scorned and mistreated. It has only to the weakest extent the power to reflect the glory that comes from the depth of the heavens. (*O.C.* 5:444)

In *My Mother*, Hélène, the mother, writes to her son:

I admire myself for writing to you like this, and I marvel to think that my letter is worthy of you. (*O.C.* 4:260)

But this hand that writes is *dying*, and through this death promised to it, it escapes accepted limits by writing. (*O.C.* 3:12)

I would say, rather: it exposes these limits, it never passes beyond them, nor passes beyond community. But at every instant singular beings share their limits, share each other on their limits. They escape the relationships of society (“mother” and “son,” “author” and “reader,” “public figure” and “private figure,” “producer” and “consumer”), but they are in community, and are unworked.

I have spoken of a community as existing: Nietzsche brought his affirmations to this, but remained alone. . . . The desire to communicate is born in me out of a feeling of community binding me to Nietzsche, and not out of an isolated originality. (*O.C.* 5:39)

We can only go farther.

Note: A first version of “La communauté désœuvrée” was published in the spring of 1983 in issue number 4 of *Aléa*, which editor Jean-Christophe Bailly had devoted to the theme of community. Preceding my text was

Bailly's minimal text, stating the title for the issue: "the community, the number." Already a text, already an act of writing, increasing in number, summoning writing.

At the end of the same year Maurice Blanchot's *La communauté inavouable* appeared. The first part of this book engaged "La communauté désœuvrée," in order to "take up a reflection never in fact interrupted concerning the communist exigency" and "the flaw in language such words as *communism* or *community* seem to contain, if we sense that they carry something completely other than what could be *common* to those who would belong to a whole, to a group."

Nothing is more *common* to the members of a community, in principle, than a myth, or a group of myths. Myth and community are defined by each other, at least in part—but perhaps in totality—and this motivates a reflection on community according to myth.

A little later, from Berlin, Werner Hamacher asked me to contribute to a series of works devoted to the question of myth. This resulted in the first version of "Myth Interrupted." It soon became evident that this was simply another way of returning to Bataille's "communitarian" exigency, and of further prolonging Blanchot's "uninterrupted reflection."

This reflection cannot be interrupted—indeed, in this it is unlike myth. Reflection is the resistance and the insistence of community. Many other names should be added to those just mentioned. Their presence must be inferred, or rather what has been written under their names, intercalated here—a community *unavowable* because too *numerous* but also because it does not even know itself, and does not need to know itself—intercalated, alternating, shared texts, like all texts, offering what belongs to no one and returns to everyone: the community of writing, the writing of community.

Including—one day I will try to articulate this, I must—those who neither write nor read and those who have nothing in common. For in reality, there is no such person.

Translated by Peter Connor

Chapter 2

Myth Interrupted

We know the scene: there is a gathering, and someone is telling a story. We do not yet know whether these people gathered together form an assembly, if they are a horde or a tribe. But we call them brothers and sisters because they are gathered together and because they are listening to the same story.

We do not yet know whether the one speaking is from among them or if he is an outsider. We say that he is one of them, but different from them because he has the gift, or simply the right—or else it is his duty—to tell the story.

They were not assembled like this before the story; the recitation has gathered them together. Before, they were dispersed (at least this is what the story tells us at times), shoulder to shoulder, working with and confronting one another without recognizing one another. But one day, one of them stood still, or perhaps he turned up, as though returning from a long absence or a mysterious exile. He stopped at a particular place, to the side of but in view of the others, on a hillock or by a tree that had been struck by lightning, and he started the narrative that brought together the others.

He recounts to them their history, or his own, a story that they all know, but that he alone has the gift, the right, or the duty to tell. It is the story of their origin, of where they come from, or of how they come from the Origin itself—their, or their mates, or their names, or the authority figure among them. And so at the same time it is also the story of the beginning

of the world, of the beginning of their assembling together, or of the beginning of the narrative itself (and the narrative also recounts, on occasion, who taught the story to the teller, and how he came to have the gift, the right, or the duty to tell it).

He speaks, he recites, sometimes he sings, or he mimes. He is his own hero, and they, by turns, are the heroes of the tale and the ones who have the right to hear it and the duty to learn it. In the speech of the narrator, their language for the first time serves no other purpose than that of presenting the narrative and of keeping it going. It is no longer the language of their exchanges, but of their reunion—the sacred language of a foundation and an oath. The teller shares it with them and among them.

* * *

It is an ancient, immemorial scene, and it does not take place just once, but repeats itself indefinitely, with regularity, at every gathering of the hordes, who come to learn of their tribal origins, of their origins in brotherhoods, in peoples, or in cities—gathered around fires burning everywhere in the mists of time. And we do not yet know if the fires are lit to warm the people, to keep away wild beasts, to cook food, or to light up the face of the narrator so that he can be seen as he speaks, sings, or mimes the story (perhaps wearing a mask), or else to burn a sacrifice (perhaps with his own flesh) in honor of the ancestors, gods, beasts, or men and women celebrated in the story.

The story often seems confused; it is not always coherent; it speaks of strange powers and numerous metamorphoses; it is also cruel, savage, and pitiless, but at times it also provokes laughter. It names things unknown, beings never seen. But those who have gathered together understand everything, in listening they understand themselves and the world, and they understand why it was necessary for them to come together, and why it was necessary that this be recounted to them.

* * *

We know this scene well. More than one storyteller has told it to us,¹ having gathered us together in learned fraternities intent on knowing what our origins were. Our societies, they have told us, derive from these assemblies themselves, and our beliefs, our knowledge, our discourses, and our poems derive from these narratives.

They have called these narratives *myths*. The scene that we know so well is the scene of myth, the scene of its invention, of its recital and its transmission.

It is not just any scene: it is perhaps the essential scene of all scenes, of all scenography or all staging; it is perhaps the stage upon which we

represent everything to ourselves or whereupon we make appear all our representations, if myth, as Lévi-Strauss would have it, is primarily defined as that with which or in which time turns into space.² With myth, the passing of time takes shape, its ceaseless passing is fixed in an exemplary place of showing and revealing.

* * *

And so we also know that this scene is itself mythic.

And much more evidently so, it seems, when it is the scene of the very birth of myth, for this birth is identical with nothing less than the origin of human consciousness and speech—Freud himself, whom one might single out as the last inventor, or rather the last dramatist of this scene, declares it to be mythic.³ But the scene is equally mythic when it is simply the apparently less speculative, more positive scene of the transmission of myth, or when it is what one might call the ethnologico-metaphysical scene of a humanity structured in relation to its myths: for what is in question is always, definitively, the original or principal function of myth. Myth is of and from the origin, it relates back to a mythic foundation, and through this relation it founds itself (a consciousness, a people, a narrative).

It is this foundation that we know to be mythic. We now know that not only is any “reconstitution” of the initial surging forth of mythic power itself “a myth,” but also that mythology is our invention, and that myth as such is an “unlocatable genre.”⁴ We know—at least up to a certain point—what the contents of the myths are, but what we do not know is what the following might mean: *that they are myths*. Or rather, we know that although we did not invent the stories (here again, up to a certain point), we did on the other hand invent the function of the myths that these stories recount. Humanity represented on the stage of myth, humanity being born to itself in producing myth—a truly *mything* humanity becoming truly human in this *mythation*: this forms a scene just as fantastical as any primal scene. All myths are primal scenes, all primal scenes are myths (it is still Freud playing the role of inventor here). And we also know that the idea of a “*new mythology*,” the idea of moving on to a new, poetico-religious foundation, is contemporaneous with the invention or the modern reinvention of mythology in the romantic epoch. Romanticism itself could be defined as the invention of the scene of the founding myth, as the simultaneous awareness of the loss of the power of this myth, and as the desire or the will to regain this living power of the origin and, at the same time, the origin of this power. For Nietzsche, who is at least in part heir to this romantic desire for a “*new mythology*,” the freely creative power he likes to credit to the Greeks more than to anyone else stems from the “*mythic feeling of lying freely*”:⁵ the desire for myth is expressly directed

toward the mythic (fictive) nature of (creative) myth—romanticism, or the will to (the) power of myth.

This formulation in fact defines, beyond romanticism and even beyond romanticism in its Nietzschean form, a whole modernity: the whole of that very broad modernity embracing, in a strange, grimacing alliance, both the poetico-ethnological nostalgia for an initial *mything* humanity and the wish to regenerate the old European humanity by resurrecting its most ancient myths, including the relentless *staging* of these myths: I am referring, of course, to Nazi myth.⁶

We know all this: it is a knowledge that takes our breath away, leaving us speechless, as we always are when faced with humanity at such a point of extremity. We shall never return to the mythic humanity of the primal scene, no more than we shall ever recover what was signified by the word “humanity” before the fire of the Aryan myth. We know, moreover, that these two extremities are bound up with one another, that the invention of myth is bound up with the use of its power. This does not mean that from the nineteenth century onward thinkers of myth are responsible for Nazism, but it means that the thinking of myth, of mythic scenography, belongs with the staging and setting to work (*mise en oeuvre*) of a “Volk” and of a “Reich,” in the sense that Nazism gave to these terms. Myth, in fact, is always “popular” and “millenary”—at least according to our version, according to the version that our mythic thought gives of the thing called “myth” (for it may be that for others, for “primitives,” for example, this same thing is quite aristocratic and ephemeral).

In this sense, we no longer have anything to do with myth. I would be tempted to say we no longer even have the right to speak about it, to be interested in it. Comprised within the very idea of myth is what one might call the entire hallucination, or the entire imposture, of the self-consciousness of a modern world that has exhausted itself in the fabulous representation of its own power. Concentrated within the idea of myth is perhaps the entire pretension on the part of the West to appropriate its own origin, or to take away its secret, so that it can at last identify itself, absolutely, around its own pronouncement and its own birth. The idea of myth alone perhaps presents the very Idea of the West, with its perpetual representation of the compulsion to return to its own sources in order to re-engage itself from them as the very destiny of humanity. In this sense, I repeat, we no longer have anything to do with myth.

* * *

Unless this is, as often happens, the surest way to let that which we wanted to be done with proliferate and become even more threatening. It is perhaps not enough to know that myth is mythic. This knowledge is perhaps too

scant, and is perhaps even—this will have to be verified—strictly speaking already contained in myth. Perhaps this logic of myth still needs to be demonstrated in order to understand how it can lead to that extremity of myth's knowledge of itself and in order to try to conceive what we might still have to do not with myth, but rather with the end to which myth inexorably seems to lead. For whether one laments that mythic power is exhausted or that the will to this power ends in crimes against humanity, everything leads us to a world in which mythic resources are profoundly lacking. To think our world in terms of this "lack" might well be an indispensable task.

Bataille named this state, to which we are doomed, *the absence of myth*. For reasons that I shall explain later, I will substitute for this the expression *the interruption* of myth. It is nonetheless true that "the absence of myth" (the "interruption" of which will designate rather its provenance and its modality) defines what it is we have arrived at, and what we are confronted with. But what is at stake in this confrontation is not simply an alternative between the absence of myth and its presence. If we suppose that "myth" designates, beyond the myths themselves, even beyond myth, something that cannot simply disappear, the stakes would then consist in myth's passage to a limit and onto a limit where myth itself would be not so much suppressed as suspended or interrupted. This hypothesis perhaps says nothing more than what Bataille had in mind when he proposed considering the absence of myth itself as a myth. Before examining this statement more closely, one might say at least that it defines, on a formal level, an extremity, an interrupted myth, or a myth in the process of being interrupted.

• • •

We must try to proceed to the outermost bounds of this extremity; henceforth, we must try to perceive this interruption of myth. Once we have touched the blinding spot—*Blut und Boden, Nacht und Nebel*—of myth set to work (*mis en oeuvre*), all that remains is to move on to the interruption of myth. This is not the same thing as what has been called "demythologizing," an activity that distinguishes between "myth" and "faith" and that depends, moreover, on the possibility of positing something like "faith," while leaving untouched the essence of myth itself.⁷ The notion of interruption proceeds quite differently.

But before getting to this notion, and in order to get to it, we must first map out the terrain that leads to the extremity at which it is interrupted. What needs to be asked, then, is not what myth is (and who knows the answer to this question? Mythologists discuss it endlessly),⁸ but rather what is involved in what we have been calling "myth" and in what we have invested, with or without the support of positive, historical, philological,

or ethnological mythologies, in what must be called, once again, a myth of myth, in whatever sense we take the word. (Moreover, the formation of an abyssal myth—myth of myth, myth of its absence, and so on—is no doubt inevitable and inherent in myth itself in that myth, as we have come to think of it, perhaps *says nothing*, but says that it says this: myth says that it says, and says that this is what it says, and in this way organizes and distributes the world of humanity with its speech.)

We might begin with what myth ended up becoming. After being stripped simultaneously of its mystery and its absurdity, of its magic and its savagery, by means of a formidable structural synthesis—which cannot be said to have “emptied myth of its meaning” unless we add straight away that this “emptiness of meaning” surely belongs to myth itself—the totality of the mythic system of humanity then instantly regained, through a kind of paradoxical reinstatement in the form of a systematic, organizational, combinative, and articulative totality, a position or a function that one could rightfully call “of mythic status.” No doubt the language of this system of myths is of another order (as is the language of each myth inasmuch as a myth is “the totality of its versions”),⁹ but it is still a primordial language: the element of an inaugural communication in which exchange and sharing in general are founded or inscribed.¹⁰

It may be that we have not yet grasped the full extent of the extremity to which this structural myth of myth has brought us: in the manifold ambiguity of this appellation lurks at least the suggestion of an ultimate stage where myth touches its limit and can do away with itself. But if we have not grasped this it is because the event has remained in some way hidden within itself, disguised by the “mythic status” that the structural myth persisted in giving to myth (or else to structure).

What is “mythic status?” What privileges has a tradition of thinking about myth attached to myth—privileges that the structural analyses of myth reintroduced, intact or pretty nearly so?

Myth is above all full, original speech, at times revealing, at times founding the intimate being of a community. The Greek *muthos*—Homer’s *muthos*, that is, speech, spoken expression—becomes “myth” when it takes on a whole series of values that amplify, fill, and ennoble this speech, giving it the dimensions of a narrative of origins and an explanation of destinies (in the post-Homeric, and then modern, definition of “myth,” it matters little whether one believes in the myth or not, whether one views it distrustfully or not). This speech is not a discourse that would come in response to the inquisitive mind: it comes in response to a waiting rather than to a question, and to a waiting on the part of the world itself. In myth the world makes itself known, and it makes itself known through declaration or through a complete and decisive revelation.

The greatness of the Greeks—according to the modern age of mythology—is to have lived in intimacy with such speech and to have founded their *logos* in it: they are the ones for whom *muthos* and *logos* are “the same.”¹¹ This sameness is the revelation, the hatching or blossoming of the world, of the thing, of being, of man in speech. Such speech presupposes *panta plērē thēōn*, “all things filled with gods,” as Thales is supposed to have said. It presupposes an uninterrupted world of presences or an uninterrupted world of truths, or else, for this is already saying too much, it presupposes neither “presence” nor “truth,” nor at times even “gods,” but rather a way of binding the world and attaching oneself to it, a *religio* whose utterances would be “great speech” (*grand parler*).¹²

The enunciation of this mythic “great speech”—the “anonymous great voice”—belongs in turn to a space in which “exchange, the symbolic function . . . play the part of a second nature.”¹³ There may be no better way of defining myth in brief than by saying that it constitutes *the second nature of a great speech*. As Schelling put it, myth is “*tautegorical*” (borrowing the word from Coleridge) and not “allegorical”: that is, it says nothing other than itself and is produced in consciousness by the same process that, in nature, produces the forces that myth represents. Thus, it does not need to be interpreted, since it explains itself: “*die sich selbst erklärende Mythologie*,”¹⁴ the mythology that explains or interprets itself. Myth is nature communicating itself to man, both immediately—because it communicates *itself*—and in a mediated way—because it communicates (it speaks). It is, in sum, the opposite of a dialectic, or rather its completion; it is beyond the dialectic element. Dialectics, in general, is a process that arises from some given. The same could be said of its twin, dialogics. And the given is always in some way the *logos* or a *logos* (a logic, a language, any kind of structure). But myth, being immediate and mediated, is itself the rendition of the *logos* that it mediates, it is the emergence of its own organization. One might even say—thereby doing justice to the structural analysis of myth—that from its birth (whether one locates this birth in Plato, in Vico, in Schlegel, or elsewhere) myth has been the name for *logos structuring itself*, or, and this comes down to the same thing, the name for the *cosmos structuring itself in logos*.

Even before entering into narrative, myth is made up of an emergence, it is inaugural. “It is,” wrote Maurice Leenhardt, “the speech, the figure, the act that circumscribes the event at the heart of man, emotive like an infant, before it is a fixed narrative.”¹⁵ Thus its initial act (but myth is always initial, always about the initial) is to represent or rather to present the *living heart of logos*. Mythology, understood as the invention and the recitation of myths (though the recitation cannot be distinguished from its invention), is “*lived and living*”; in it “are heard words springing from the

mouth of a humanity present to the world."¹⁶ It is speech live from the origin, live because it is original and original because it is live. In its first declamation there arises the dawn, simultaneously, of the world, of gods, and of men. Myth is therefore much more than a kind of first culture. Because it is the "original culture," it is infinitely more than a culture: it is transcendence (of gods, of man, of speech, of the cosmos, and so on) presented immediately, immediately immanent to the very thing it transcends and that it illuminates or consigns to its destiny. Myth is the opening of a mouth immediately adequate to the closure of a universe.

Thus myth is not composed of just any speech, and it does not speak just any language. It is the speech and the language of the very things that manifest themselves, it is the communication of these things: it does not speak of the appearance or the aspect of things; rather, in myth, their rhythm speaks and their music sounds. It has been written that "myth and *Sprachgesang* (the song of language) are fundamentally one and the same thing."¹⁷ Myth is very precisely the *incantation* that gives rise to a world and brings forth a language, that gives rise to a world in the advent of a language. It is therefore indissociable from a rite or a cult. Indeed, its enunciation or recital is itself already a ritual. Mythic ritual is the communitarian articulation of mythic speech.

* * *

This articulation is not something added on to myth: mythic speech is communitarian in its essence. A private myth is as rare as a strictly idiomatic language. Myth arises only from a community and for it: they engender one another, infinitely and immediately.¹⁸ Nothing is more common, nothing is more absolutely common than myth. Dialogics can only occur between those who are situated in the space of exchange or the symbolic function or both. It is myth that arranges the spaces, and/or symbolizes. Myth works out the shares and divisions that distribute a community and distinguish it for itself, articulating it within itself. Neither dialogue nor monologue, myth is the unique speech of the many, who come thereby to recognize one another, who communicate and commune in myth.

This is because myth necessarily contains a pact, namely, the pact of its own recognition: in a single gesture, in a single sentence, in sum, myth says what is and says that we agree to say that this is (it also says, therefore, what saying is). It does not communicate a knowledge that can be verified from elsewhere: it is self-communicating (in this respect it is again *tautological*). In other words, along with knowledge, about whatever object it might be, it communicates also the communication of this knowledge.

Myth communicates the common, the *being-common* of what it reveals or what it recites. Consequently, at the same time as each one of its reve-

lations, it also reveals the community to itself and founds it. Myth is always the myth of community, that is to say, it is always the myth of a communion—the unique voice of the many—capable of inventing and sharing the myth. There is no myth that does not at least presuppose (when it does not in fact state it) the myth of the communitarian (or popular) revelation of myths.

The community of myth is thus properly speaking *mything* humanity, humanity acceding to itself. The myth of communion, like communism—“as the real appropriation of human essence by man and for man, man’s total return to himself as social man”¹⁹—is myth, absolutely and rigorously, in a total reciprocity of myth and community at the heart of mythic thought or the mythic world.

(This does not contradict, indeed the contrary is the case, the fact that myths are at the same time most often about an isolated hero. In one way or another, this hero makes the community commune—and ultimately he always makes it commune in the communication that he himself effects between existence and meaning, between the individual and the people: “The canonical form of mythic life is precisely that of the hero. In it the pragmatic is at the same time symbolic.”)²⁰

Thus there can be no humanity that does not incessantly renew its act of *mythation*. The notion of a “new mythology,” which appeared in Jena around 1798,²¹ contains both the idea of a necessary innovation in order to create a new human world on the ground of the finished world of ancient mythology, and at the same time the idea that mythology is always the obligatory form—and perhaps the essence—of innovation. A new humanity must arise from/in its new myth, and this myth itself must be (according to Schlegel) nothing less than the totalization of modern literature and philosophy, as well as ancient mythology, revived and united with the mythologies of the other peoples of the world. The totalization of myths goes hand in hand with the myth of totalization, and the “new” mythology essentially consists in the production of a speech that would unite, totalize, and thereby put (back) into the world the totality of the words, discourses, and songs of a humanity in the process of reaching its fulfillment (or reaching its end).

* * *

It can therefore be said that romanticism, communism, and structuralism, through their secret but very precise community, constitute the last tradition of myth, the last way for myth to invent itself and to transmit itself (which, for myth, is one and the same thing). This is the tradition of the *mythation* of myth itself: myth becomes (wants to become, through the will to its own power) its own enunciation, its own *tautegory*, equivalent to its own

truth and its own realization, its own suppression and entirely new inauguration, and hence the final inauguration of the inaugural itself that myth has always been. Myth realizes itself dialectically; it exceeds all its "mythic" figures to announce the pure mythology of an absolutely foundational, symbolizing, or distributive speech."

* * *

It is here that things are interrupted.

The tradition is suspended at the very moment it fulfills itself. It is interrupted at that precise and familiar point where we know that it is all a myth.

It is true that we do not know very much about what mythic truth was or is for men living in the midst of what we call "myths." But we know that we—our community, if it is one, our modern and postmodern humanity—have no relation to the myth of which we are speaking, even as we fulfill it or try to fulfill it. In a sense, for us all that remains of myth is its fulfillment or its will. We no longer live in mythic life, nor in a time of mythic invention or speech. When we speak of "myth" or of "mythology" we mean the negation of something at least as much as the affirmation of something. This is why our scene of myth, our discourse of myth, and all our mythological thinking make up a myth: to speak of myth has only ever been to speak of its absence. And the word "myth" itself designates the absence of what it names.

This is what constitutes the interruption: "*myth*" is cut off from its own meaning, on its own meaning, by its own meaning. If it even still has a proper meaning.

In order to say that myth is a myth (that myth is *a myth*, or that "myth" is a myth), it has been necessary to play on two quite distinct and opposite meanings of the word "myth." The phrase "myth is a myth" means in effect that myth, as inauguration or as foundation, is a myth, in other words, a fiction, a simple invention. This disparity between the possible meanings of "myth" is in a sense as ancient as Plato and Aristotle. However, it is not by chance that its modern usage in this phrase that underlies our knowledge of myth—that myth is a myth—produces, in a play on words, the structure of the abyss. For this sentence contains, as well as two heterogeneous meanings for a single vocable, one mythic reality, one single idea of myth whose two meanings and whose infinitely ironic relation are engendered by a kind of internal disunion. This is the same myth that the tradition of myth conceived as foundation and as fiction. The phrase that plays on the disunion puts to work the resources of a former union, a secret and profound union at the heart of myth itself.

Mythic thought—operating in a certain way through the dialectical sublation of the two meanings of myth²³—is in effect nothing other than *the thought of a founding fiction, or a foundation by fiction*. Far from being in opposition to one another, the two concepts are conjoined in the mythic thought of myth. When Schlegel calls for a “new mythology,” he appeals expressly to art, to poetry, and to the creative imagination. It is the imagination, in fact, that holds the secret of an original force of nature, alone capable of genuine inauguration. Poetic fiction is the true—if not truthful—origin of a world. And when Schelling takes objection, in a sense, to Schlegel and everyone he reproaches for considering mythology as a fiction, when he declares that the forces at work in myth “were not simply imaginary forces, but were the true theogonic powers themselves,”²⁴ his critique nonetheless tends to privilege what one would have to call an autoimagining or an autofictioning of nature.

Schelling’s analysis of mythology is undoubtedly the most powerful to be produced before structural analysis. One might even think that these constitute two versions—the “idealist” and the “positivist”—of the same myth of mythology, and of the same mythology of myth.²⁵

According to this myth, or according to this logic, mythology cannot be denounced as a fiction, for *the fiction that it is is an operation*: an operation of engenderment for Schelling, of distribution and exchange for the structuralists. Myth is not “a myth” if it has, qua myth, this operative power and if this operative power is fundamentally not heterogeneous but homogeneous with the different but similar operations realized, for Schelling by consciousness, for the structuralists by science. In this sense, myth is not susceptible to analysis on the basis of a truth other than its own, and consequently above all not in terms of “fiction.” Rather, it must be analyzed according to the truth that its fiction confers upon it, or more precisely according to the truth that *mything* fictioning confers upon *mythic* tales and narratives. This is what Schelling demands with his “tautegory.” Myth signifies itself, and thereby converts its own fiction into foundation or into the inauguration of *meaning* itself.

Myth is therefore not only made up of a proper truth, *sui generis*, but it perhaps tends to become truth itself, that truth that for Spinoza, as well as for essential philosophical thought in general, *se ipsam patefacit*. But again it is this “patefaction” of myth, and precisely this, that confers upon myth its fictive character—in an auto-fictioning. As Schelling admits, “It is true in a certain way” that “the expressions of mythology are figurative”: but “for the mythological consciousness” this is the same thing as the impropriety of the majority of our “figurative expressions.” Which is to say that, just as this figuration is appropriate in language, so within mythology impropriety is quite proper, appropriate to the truth and the fiction of

myth. *Mythology is therefore figuration proper*. Such is its secret, and the secret of its myth—of its truth—for the whole of Western consciousness.²⁶

To be figuration proper, to be the proper figuration of the proper, is to realize properly—improperly-properly, as a supplement of propriety²⁷—the proper itself. Nature with all its “powers” would never attain to its truth without the *double* process of natural *and* figurative “theogony,” effective *and* represented in consciousness, presenting itself, uttering itself in its *mythos*.

For Schelling this is not a matter of a secondary representation, of an interpretation of nature by a primitive consciousness. It concerns rather much more the fact that nature, in its origin, engenders the gods by affecting immediate consciousness (which becomes thereby, and only thereby, true consciousness). It affects it from the outside, it strikes it with *stupor*, as Schelling says (*stupefacta quasi et attonita*).²⁸ It is in this stupor, which is anterior to all representation, that *representation* itself is born. It marks the representative rupture itself, the “initial break effected by mythic thought” of which Lévi-Strauss speaks, and more exactly the rupture brought about by “the primary schematism of mythic thought.”²⁹

Here, as in Kant, “schematism” designates the essential operation of transcendental imagination, which in Kant produces the “non-sensible images” that furnish a “rule for the production of empirical images,” whereas for Lévi-Strauss, in an inverse but symmetrical movement, myth “subsumes individualities under the paradigm, enlarging and at the same time impoverishing the concrete givens by forcing them one after the other to cross over the discontinuous thresholds that separate the empirical order from the symbolic order, from the imaginary order, and finally from schematism.” Myth, in short, is the transcendental autofiguration of nature and of humanity, or more exactly the autofiguration—or the autoimagination—of nature as humanity and of humanity as nature. Mythic speech thus performs the humanization of nature (and/or its divinization) and the naturalization of man (and/or his divinization). Fundamentally, *mythos* is the *act of language* par excellence, the performing of the paradigm, as the *logos* fictions this paradigm to itself in order to project upon it the essence and the power it believes to be its own.

In this respect, the romantic goal of a new mythology, one that would be fictioning, imaginary, playful, poetic, and performative, merely brings to light the thinking from which the myth of myth arises: it consists in the thought of a poetico-fictioning ontology, an ontology presented in the figure of an ontogony where being engenders itself *by figuring itself*, by giving itself the proper image of its own essence and the self-representation of its presence and its present. *Die sich selbst erklärende Mythologie* is the correlative of an essentially *mything* being or of a *mything* essence of being.

And the myth of myth, its truth, is that fiction is in effect, in this ontology, inaugural. In sum, fictioning is the subject of being. *Mimesis* is the *poesis* of the world as true world of gods, of men, and of nature. The myth of myth is in no way an ontological fiction; it is nothing other than an ontology of fiction or representation: it is therefore a particularly fulfilled and fulfilling form of the ontology of subjectivity in general.

But this is also what provokes the interruption. From Schelling to Lévi-Strauss, from the first to the last version of mythic thought, we pass from one interruption to another. In the beginning, the power of myth strikes consciousness with stupor and puts it "outside of itself" (that is, it makes it conscious). In the end, this consciousness become consciousness of self and of the totality qua myth suspends itself on (or as) the consciousness of the mythic (or subjective) essence of the "self" of all things. Lévi-Strauss in fact writes:

My analysis . . . has brought out the mythic character of objects: the universe, nature and man which, over thousands, millions or billions of years, will, when all is said and done, have simply demonstrated the resources of their combinatory systems, in the manner of some great mythology, before collapsing in on themselves and vanishing, through the self-evidence of their own decay.³⁰

Or again:

Wisdom consists for man in seeing himself live his provisional historical internality, while at the same time knowing (but on a different register) that what he lives so completely and intensely is a myth—and which will appear as such to men of a future century.³¹

The disunion of the meanings of "myth" is therefore once again at work at the heart of the very thinking meant to dismiss any denunciation of myth on the basis of its being fiction, at the heart of a thinking of the communion of foundation and fiction (of foundation by fiction). In fact, the same Lévi-Strauss, in a tone all in all very close to Schelling's, contended that myths, "far from being the works of man's 'myth-making faculty' turning its back on reality," preserve "modes of observation and reflection" whose results "were secured ten thousand years" before those of the modern sciences, and which "still remain at the basis of our civilization."³²

The phrase "myth is a myth" harbors *simultaneously* and *in the same thought* a disabused irony ("foundation is a fiction") and an onto-poeticological affirmation ("fiction is a foundation").

This is why myth is interrupted. It is interrupted by its myth.

This is why the idea of a “new mythology” is not only dangerous, it is futile, for a new mythology would presuppose, as its condition of possibility, a myth of myth that would not be subject to the rigorous logic whose course extends from Schelling to Lévi-Strauss³³—or else, from Plato to us—and that is composed essentially of this nihilist or annihilating logic (or this *mythics*): the being that myth engenders implodes in its own fiction.

* * *

The power of myth has spanned two interruptions: the interruption of pure nature and the interruption of myth itself. The appeal to the power of myth (whether this appeal be poetical or political, and it can only be, necessarily, both at the same time: this is what myth is, it is the poeticity of the political and the politicality of the poetic—foundation and fiction—inasmuch as the poetical and the political are included in the space of myth’s thinking), this appeal, then, or this desire for the power of myth, has sustained itself through these two interruptions—between the nature opened up by an autofiguration of its natural power and the culture closed by an auto-resolution of its illusory figures.

Essentially, myth’s will to power was totalitarian. It may perhaps even define totalitarianism (or what I have called immanentism), which is therefore strictly speaking also interrupted.

Using a rather poor distinction for the sake of clarity, one might say that myth’s will (to power) is doubly totalitarian or immanentist: in its form and in its content.

In its form, because myth’s will, which is manifest more exactly as the will to mythation, is perhaps nothing other than the will to will.³⁴ We must turn to Kant for the definition of will: will, which is nothing but the faculty of desiring determined according to reason, is the faculty enabling the cause of representations to coincide with the reality of these same representations. Schelling’s *mything* nature is a will: it is even, anticipating Schopenhauer, the will of the world and the world as will. Myth is not simple representation, it is representation at work, producing itself—in an autopoetic mimesis—as effect: it is fiction that founds. And what it founds is not a fictive world (which is what Schelling and Lévi-Strauss challenged), but fictioning as the fashioning of a world, or the becoming-world of fictioning. In other words, the fashioning of a world for the subject, the becoming-world of subjectivity.

As theogony, cosmogony, mythogony, and mythology, myth’s will is myth’s will to will. As I have already said, essentially, myth communicates itself, and not something else. Communicating itself, it brings into being what it says, it founds its fiction. This efficacious self-communication is

will—and will is subjectivity presented (representing itself) as a remainderless totality.

Mythic will is totalitarian in its content, for its content is always a communion, or rather all communions: of man with nature, of man with God, of man with himself, of men among themselves. Myth communicates itself necessarily as a myth belonging to the community, and it communicates a myth of community: communion, communism, communitarianism, communication, community itself taken simply and absolutely, absolute community. For Pierre Clastres, the community of the Guarani Indians provides an exemplary figure (or myth) of this:

Their great god Namandu emerged from the darkness and invented the world. He first of all made Speech come, the substance common to divinities and humans. . . . Society is the enjoyment of the common good that is Speech. Instituted as *equal* by divine decision—by nature!—society gathered itself together into a single, that is, undivided whole. . . . The men of this society are *all one*.³⁵

Absolute community—myth—is not so much the total fusion of individuals, but the *will* of community: the desire to operate, through the power of myth, the communion that myth represents and that it represents as a communion or communication of wills. Fusion ensues: myth represents multiple existences as immanent to its own unique fiction, which gathers them together and gives them their common figure in its speech and as this speech.

This does not mean only that community is a myth, that communitarian communion is a myth. It means that myth and myth's force and foundation are essential to community and that there can be, therefore, no community outside of myth. Wherever there has been myth, assuming there has been something of the sort and that we can know what this means, there has been, necessarily, community, and vice versa. The interruption of myth is therefore also, necessarily, the interruption of community.

* * *

Just as there is no new mythology, so there is no new community either, nor will there be. If myth is a myth, community is reabsorbed into this abyss along with it or is dissolved in this irony. This is why lamenting the "loss of community" is usually accompanied by lamenting the "loss" of the power of myths.

And yet the pure and simple effacement of community, without remainder, is a misfortune. Not a sentimental misfortune, not even an ethical one, but an ontological misfortune—or disaster. For beings who are essentially, and more than essentially, beings *in* common, it is a privation of being.

Being *in common* means that singular beings are, present themselves, and appear only to the extent that they compear (*comparaissent*), to the extent that they are exposed, presented, or offered to one another. This compearance (*comparution*) is not something added on to their being; rather, their being comes into being in it.

Hence community does not disappear. It never disappears. The community resists: in a sense, as I have said, it is resistance itself. Without the compearance of being—or of singular beings—there would be nothing, or rather nothing but being appearing to itself, not even *in common* with itself, just immanent Being immersed in a dense pearance (*parence*). The community resists this infinite immanence. The compearance of singular beings—or of the singularity of being—keeps open a space, a spacing within immanence.

Is there a myth for this community of compearance? If myth is always a myth of the reunion and the communion of community, there is not. On the contrary, it is the interruption of myth that reveals the disjunctive or hidden nature of community. In myth, community was proclaimed: in the interrupted myth, community turns out to be what Blanchot has named "*the unavowable community*."

Does the unavowable have a myth? By definition, it does not. The absence of avowal produces neither speech nor narrative. But if community is inseparable from myth, must there not be, according to a paradoxical law, a myth of the unavowable community? But this is impossible. Let me repeat: the unavowable community, the withdrawal of communion or communitarian ecstasy, are revealed in the interruption of myth. And the interruption is not a myth: "It is impossible to contest the absence of myth," wrote Bataille.

We are thus abandoned to this "absence of myth." Bataille defined it thus:

If we say quite simply and in all lucidity that present day man is defined by his avidity for myth, and if we add that he is also defined by the awareness of not being able to accede to the possibility of creating a veritable myth, we have defined a kind of myth that is the *absence of myth*.¹⁶

Bataille arrived at this definition after having considered the proposal, which came from surrealism (that is, from an avatar of romanticism), to create new myths. He goes on to say that "neither these myths nor these rituals will be true myths or rituals since they will not receive the endorsement of the community." This endorsement cannot be obtained if the myth does not already exist in the community—be it in the mouth of a sole being who lends it his singular voice. The very idea of inventing a myth, in this

sense, is a contradiction in terms. Neither the community nor, consequently, the individual (the poet, the priest, or one of their listeners) invents the myth: to the contrary, it is they who are invented or who invent themselves in the myth. And it is to the extent that he defines himself through the loss of community that modern man defines himself through the absence of myth.

At the same time, Bataille defines the absence of myth as “a kind of myth” in itself. He explains this as follows:

If we define ourselves as incapable of arriving at myth and as though awaiting its delivery, we define the ground of present-day humanity as an absence of myth. And he finds himself before this absence of myth as one who lives it, and lives it, let us understand, with the passion that in former times animated those who wanted to live not in tern reality but in mythic reality [Bataille therefore also defines myth as a *myth*]; this absence of myth before him can be infinitely more exalting than had been, in former times, those myths linked to everyday life.

What makes the absence of myth a myth is no longer, or not directly, in any case, its communitarian character. On the contrary, the mythic relation to the “absence of myth” is here presented, in appearance, as an individual relation. If the absence of myth marks the common condition of present-day man, this condition, rather than constituting the community, undoes it. What assures the functioning of a life led according to myth, here, is the passion and the exaltation with which the content of myth—here the “absence of myth”—can be shared. What Bataille understands by “passion” is nothing other than a movement that carries to the limit—to the limit of being. If being is defined in the singularity of beings (this is at bottom the way Bataille, consciously or not, transcribes the Heideggerian thought of the finitude of being), that is to say if being is not Being communing in itself with itself, if it is not its own immanence, but if it *is* the singular aspect of beings (this is how I would transcribe Heidegger and Bataille, one by the other), if it shares the singularities and is itself shared out by them, then passion carries to the limit of singularity: logically, this limit is the place of community.

This place, or point, might be one of fusion, of consumption and communion in an immanence regained, willed anew, staged once more: it might be a new myth, that is to say the renewal of the old myth, still identical to itself. But at this point—at the point of community—there is, precisely, no community: nor, therefore, is there any myth. The absence of myth is accompanied, as Bataille says a moment later, by the absence of community. The passion for the absence of myth touches upon the absence of com-

munity. And it is in this respect that it can be a passion (something other than a will to power).

This point is not the inverse or negative image of a community gathered together in and by its myth, for what Bataille calls the absence of community is not the pure and simple dissolution of community. The absence of community appears with the recognition of the fact that no community, in the fusion that it is essentially seeking, for example in "the ancient festival," can fail "to create a new individual, that one might call the collective individual." The fusion of community, instead of propagating its movement, reconstitutes its separation: community against community. Thus the fulfillment of community is its suppression. To attain to immanence is to be cut off from another immanence: to attain immanence is to cut off immanence itself.

Absence of community represents that which does not fulfill community, or community itself inasmuch as it cannot be fulfilled or engendered as a new individual. In this sense, "the appurtenance of every possible community to what I call . . . absence of community must be the ground of any possible community." In the absence of community neither the work of community, nor the community as work, nor communism can fulfill itself; rather, the passion of and for community propagates itself, unworked, appealing, demanding to pass beyond every limit and every fulfillment enclosed in the form of an individual. It is thus not an absence, but a movement, it is unworking in its singular "activity," it is the propagation, even the contagion, or again the communication of community itself that propagates itself or communicates its contagion *by its very interruption*.

This contagion interrupts fusion and suspends communion, and this arrest or rupture once again leads back to the communication of community. Instead of closing it in, this interruption once again exposes singularity to its limit, which is to say, to other singularities. Instead of fulfilling itself in a work of death and in the immanence of a subject, community communicates itself through the repetition and the contagion of births: each birth exposes another singularity, a supplementary limit, and therefore another communication. This is not the opposite of death, for the death of this singular being who has just been born is also inscribed and communicated by its limit. It is already exposed to its death, and it exposes us to it as well. Which means, essentially, that this death as well as this birth are removed from us, are neither our work nor the work of the collectivity.

On all sides the interruption turns community toward the outside instead of gathering it in toward a center—or its center is the geographical locus of an indefinitely multiple exposition. Singular beings compear: their compearance constitutes their being, puts them in communication with one

another. But the interruption of community, the interruption of the totality that would fulfill it, is the very law of compearance. The singular being appears to other singular beings; it is communicated to them in the singular. It is a contact, it is a contagion: a touching, the transmission of a trembling at the edge of being, the communication of a passion that makes us fellows, or the communication of the passion to be fellows, to be *in* common.

The interrupted community does not flee from itself: but it does not belong to itself, it does not congregate, it communicates itself from one singular place to another. "The basis of communication," writes Blanchot, "is not necessarily speech, nor even the silence that is its foundation and punctuation, but exposure to death, and no longer my death, but someone else's, whose living and closest presence is already an eternal and unbearable absence."¹⁷

Thus "the myth of the absence of myth"—which corresponds to the interrupted community—is itself neither another myth, nor a negative myth (nor the negative of a myth), but is a myth only inasmuch as it consists in the interruption of myth. It is not a myth: there is no myth of the interruption of myth. But the interruption of myth defines the possibility of a "passion" equal to mythic passion—and yet unleashed by the suspension of mythic passion: a "conscious," "lucid" passion, as Bataille calls it, a passion opened up by compearance and for it. It is not the passion for dissolution, but the passion to be exposed, and to know that *community itself does not limit community*, that community is always beyond, that is, on the outside, offered outside of each singularity, and on this account always interrupted on the edge of the least one of these singularities.

Interruption occurs at the edge, or rather it constitutes the edge where beings touch each other, expose themselves to each other and separate from one another, thus communicating and propagating their community. On this edge, destined to this edge and called forth by it, born of interruption, there is a passion. This is, if you will, what remains of myth, or rather, it is *itself the interruption of myth*.

* * *

The interruption of myth—and the interruption of myth as the passion of and for community—disjoins myth from itself, or withdraws it from itself. It is not enough to say, "Myth is a myth," since the formula for irony, as I have already said, is fundamentally the same as the formula for the identity of myth (and for its mythic identity).

In the interruption there is no longer anything to be done with myth, inasmuch as myth is always a completion, a fulfillment. But the interruption is not a silence—which itself can have a myth, or can be myth itself in one of its fulfillments. In the interruption of myth something makes itself

heard, namely, what remains of myth when it is interrupted—and which is nothing if not the very voice of interruption, if we can say this.

This voice is the voice of community, or of the community's passion. If it must be affirmed that myth is essential to community—but only in the sense that it completes it and gives it the closure and the destiny of an individual, of a completed totality—it is equally necessary to affirm that in the interruption of myth is heard the voice of the interrupted community, the voice of the incomplete, exposed community speaking as myth without being in any respect mythic speech.

This voice seems to play back the declarations of myth, for in the interruption there is nothing new to be heard, there is no new myth breaking through; it is the old story one seems to hear. When a voice, or music, is suddenly interrupted, one hears just at that instant something else, a mixture of various silences and noises that had been covered over by the sound, but in this something else one hears again the voice or the music that has become in a way the voice or the music of its own interruption: a kind of echo, but one that does not repeat that of which it is the reverberation.

In itself, in its presence and in its fulfillment, the voice or the music is played out, it has dissolved. The mythological prestation is ended, it no longer holds good and no longer works (if it ever worked in the way we thought it was supposed to work, in our functional, structural and communal mythology). But in some way the interrupted voice or music imprints the schema of its retreat in the murmur or the rustling to which the interruption gives rise. It is no longer the sermon—or the performance, as the linguists or artists say—though it is neither without voice nor without music. The interruption has a voice, and its schema imprints itself in the rustling of the community exposed to its own dispersion. When myth stops playing, the community that resists completion and fusion, the community that propagates and exposes itself, makes itself heard in a certain way. It does not speak, of course, nor does it make music. As I have said, it is itself the interruption, for it is upon this exposure of singular beings that myth is interrupted. But the interruption itself has a singular voice, a voice or a retiring music that is taken up, held, and at the same time exposed in an echo that is not a repetition—it is the voice of community, which in its way perhaps avows, without saying it, the unavowable, or states without declaring it the secret of community, or more precisely presents, without enunciating it, the mythless truth of endless being-in-common, of this being *in* common that is not a “common being” and that the community itself therefore does not limit and that myth is incapable of founding or containing. There is a voice of community articulated in the interruption, and even out of the interruption itself.

A name has been given to this voice of interruption: literature (or writing, if we adopt the acceptance of this word that coincides with literature). This name is no doubt unsuitable. But no name is suitable here. The place or the moment of interruption is without suitability. As Blanchot puts it, "The only communication that henceforth suits it [the community] . . . passes through literary unsuitability."³⁸ What is unsuitable about literature is that it is not suited to the myth of community, nor to the community of myth. It is suited neither to communion nor to communication.

And yet, if the name "literature" is always in a state of not being suited to "literary unsuitability" itself, is this not because literature is so closely related to myth? Is not myth the origin of literature, the origin of all literature and perhaps in a sense its sole content, its sole narrative, or else its sole posture (that of the recitalist, who is his own hero)? Is there any literary scene not taken from the mythological scene? (And is not this true also, in this respect, of the philosophic scene or scenes, which, in one way or another, belong to the "genre" of literature?)

Not only is literature the beneficiary (or the echo) of myth, literature has itself in a sense been thought and no doubt should be thought as myth—as the myth of the myth of mythless society.³⁹ In an early text by Blanchot, one even reads that in literature "everything should end in a mythic invention: only where the source of revealing images opens up is there a work."⁴⁰ It is not certain that Blanchot would settle for such a sentence today. Certainly, there is a work only if there is "revelation" (you might interrupt me here: What are we to make of this word "revelation"? Does it not go along with "myth," as it does moreover with "image"? But this is the space of absolute unsuitability: each one of these words also bespeaks its own interruption). But literature's revelation, unlike myth's, does not reveal a completed reality, nor the reality of a completion. It does not reveal, in a general way, *some thing*—it reveals rather the unrevealable: namely, that it is itself, as a work that reveals and gives access to a vision and to the communion of a vision, essentially interrupted.

In the work, there is a share of myth and a share of literature or writing. The latter interrupts the former, it "reveals" precisely through its interruption of the myth (through the incompleteness of the story or the narrative)—and what literature or writing reveals is above all else its interruption, and it is in this respect that it can be called, if it still can be—and it no longer can be—a "mythic invention."

But the share of myth and the share of literature are not two separable and opposable parts at the heart of the work. Rather, they are shares in the sense that community divides up or shares out works in different ways: now by way of myth, now by way of literature. The second is the interruption of the first. "Literature" (or "writing") is what, in literature—in

the sharing or the communication of works—interrupts myth by giving voice to being-in-common, which has no myth and cannot have one. Or, since being-in-common *is* nowhere, and does not subsist in a mythic space that could be revealed to us, literature does not give it a voice: rather, it is being *in* common that *is* literary (or scriptuary).

* * *

What does this mean? Does it mean anything? I have said that the sole question is the question of “literary communism,” or of a “literary experience of community.” Blanchot has insisted that “community, in its very failure, remains linked in some way to writing,” and has referred to the “ideal community of literary communication.”⁴¹ This can always make for one more myth, a new myth, and one not even as new as some would believe: the myth of the literary community was outlined for the first time (although in reality it was perhaps not the first time) by the Jena romantics, and it has filtered down to us in various different ways through everything resembling the idea of a “republic of artists” or, again, the idea of communism (of a certain kind of Maoism, for example) and revolution inherent, *tels quels*, in writing itself.

But because the interruption of myth does not make up a myth, the being-in-common of which I am speaking—and that many of us are trying to speak about, that is to say, to write—has nothing to do with the myth of communion through literature, nor with the myth of literary creation by the community. But if we can say, or if we can at least try to say, while remaining fully conscious of its unsuitability, that being-in-common *is* literary, that is, if we can attempt to say that it has its very being in “literature” (in writing, in a certain voice, in a singular music, but also in a painting, in a dance, and in the exercise of thought), then what “literature” will have to designate is this being itself . . . in itself. In other words, it would designate that singular ontological quality that *gives* being *in* common, that does not hold it in reserve, before or after community, as an essence of man, of God, or of the State achieving its fulfillment in communion, but that rather makes for a being that *is* only when shared *in common*, or rather whose quality of being, whose nature and structure are shared (or exposed).

It is as difficult to describe the structure of sharing as it is to assign an essence to it. Sharing divides and shares itself: this is what it is to be in common. One cannot tell its story, nor determine its essence: there is no myth of it, nor is there a philosophy of it. But it is “literature” that does the sharing. It does it, or is it, precisely to the extent that it interrupts myth. Myth is interrupted by literature precisely to the extent that literature does not come to an end.

If literature does not come to an end, this is not in the mythic sense of an "infinite poetry," such as the romantics desired. Nor is it in the sense in which, for Blanchot, "unworking" would be attained and presented by works,⁴² nor in the sense that this "unworking" would be purely exterior to the work. Literature does not come to an end at the very place where it comes to an end: on its border, right on the dividing line—a line sometimes straight (the edge, the border of the book), sometimes incredibly twisted and broken (the writing, reading). It does not come to an end at the place where the work passes from an author to a reader, and from this reader to another reader or to another author. It does not come to an end at the place where the work passes on to another work by the same author or at the place where it passes into other works of other authors. It does not come to an end where its narrative passes into other narratives, its poem into other poems, its thought into other thoughts, or into the inevitable suspension of the thought or the poem. It is unended and unending—in the active sense—in that it is literature. And it is literature if it is speech (a language, an idiom, a writing)—whatever kind of speech it may be, written or not, fictive or discursive, literature or not—that puts into play nothing other than being *in* common.

"Literature," thought as the interruption of myth, merely communicates—in the sense that what it puts into play, sets to work, and destines to unworking, is nothing but communication itself, the passage from one to another, the sharing of one by the other. What is at stake in literature is not just literature: in this, it is unlike myth, which communicates only itself, communicating its communion. It is true that the profound texture of the literary work seems at times similar in its intention: it is indeed true that the text represents nothing other than itself and that its story is always its own story, its discourse the discourse of itself. And it is precisely to this extent that there can be a myth of the text.⁴³

But the text that recounts its own story recounts an unfinished story; it recounts it interrupted and it essentially interrupts its own recitation. The text interrupts itself at the point where it shares itself out—at every moment, to you, from him or her to you, to me, to them. In a sense, it is the sharing of myth. It is community exchanging and distributing its myth. Nothing could resemble more closely our myth of the foundation and communion of a tribe, or a people, indeed of humanity. And yet, this is not what it is. It is not the original scene of our communion. This does not mean that there is no theater—as though there could be literature without theater. But theater, here, no longer means the scene of representation: it means the extreme edge of this scene, the dividing line where singular beings are exposed to one another.

What is shared on this extreme and difficult limit is not communion, not the completed identity of all in one, nor any kind of completed identity. What is shared therefore is not the annulment of sharing, but sharing itself, and consequently everyone's nonidentity, each one's nonidentity to himself and to others, and the nonidentity of the work to itself, and finally the nonidentity of literature to literature itself.

Thus, when the text recounts its own story, when it recounts it unfinished, and when it interrupts itself—and when it goes on to recount this interruption, but in the end interrupts itself again—it is because it has a stake, an end, and a principle beyond itself. In one sense, literature only ever comes from literature, and returns to it. But in another sense—which continually interferes with the first in such a way that, with each interference, it is myth that is interrupted—the text, or the writing, stems only from the singular relationship between singular beings (they are called, or we have called them up to this point, men, gods, and also animals; but once again these are mythological names). The text stems from, or *is this relationship*; it renders its ontological vein: being as being *in* common is (the) being (of) literature. This does not imply a being of literature: it is neither a narrative nor a theoretical fiction. On the contrary, what this means is that literature, at least from the moment we understand this word as the interruption of myth, has as being (as essence, if you will, or again, as transcendental constitution) the common exposure of singular beings, their compearance. The most solitary of writers writes only for the other. (Anyone who writes for the same, for himself, or for the anonymity of the crowd is not a writer.)

It is not because there is literature that there is community. One could even say, no doubt, that it is because there is literature that there is the myth of communion and by extension the myth of literary communion. In this respect, the literature corresponding to the great modern interruption of myth immediately engendered its own myth. But now this myth in turn is interrupting itself. And the interruption reveals that it is because there is community that there is literature: literature inscribes being-in-common, being for others and through others.⁴⁴ It inscribes us as exposed to one another and to our respective deaths in which we reach one another—in passing to the limit—mutually. To reach one another—in passing to the limit—is not to commune, which is to accede to another total body where everyone melts together. But to reach one another, to touch one another, is to touch the limit where being itself, where being-in-common conceals us one from the other, and, in concealing us, in withdrawing us from the other before the other, exposes us to him or her.

It is a birth: we never stop being born into community. It is death—but if one is permitted to say so, it is not a tragic death, or else, if it is more accurate to say it this way, it is not mythic death, or death followed

by a resurrection, or the death that plunges into a pure abyss: it is death as sharing and as exposure. It is not murder—it is not death as extermination—and it is not death as work, no more than it is the nay-saying embellishment of death; rather, it is death as the unworking that unites us because it interrupts our communication and our communion.

* * *

It is because there is this, this unworking that shares out our being-in-common, that there is “literature.” That is to say, the indefinitely repeated and indefinitely suspended gesture of touching the limit, of indicating it and inscribing it, but without crossing it, without abolishing it in the fiction of a common body. To write for others means in reality to write because of others. The writer neither gives nor addresses anything to the others; he does not envisage his project as one that involves communicating something to them, be it a message or himself. Of course, there are always messages, and there are always persons, and it is important that both of these—if I may for a moment treat them as identical—be communicated. But writing is the act that obeys the sole necessity of exposing the limit: not the limit of communication, *but the limit upon which communication takes place.*

Communication, in truth, is without limits, and the being that is in common communicates itself to the infinity of singularities. Instead of getting upset over the gigantic (or so they say) growth in our means of communication, and fearing through this the weakening of the message, we should rather rejoice over it, serenely: communication “itself” is infinite between finite beings. Provided these beings do not try to communicate to one another myths about their own infinity, for in such a case they instantly disconnect the communication. But communication takes place on the limit, or on the common limits where we are exposed and where it exposes us.

What takes place on this limit requires the interruption of myth. It requires that it no longer be said that a word, a discourse, or a fable gathers us together beyond (or on the near side) of the limit. But it requires equally that the interruption itself make itself heard, with its singular voice. This voice is like the cut or the imprint, left by the interruption, of the voice of myth.

It is each time the voice of one alone, and to the side, who speaks, who recites, who sometimes sings. He speaks of an origin and an end—the end of the origin, in truth—he stages them and puts himself on stage along with them. But he comes to the edge of the stage, to its outer edge, and he speaks at the softest limit of his voice. Or rather, it is we who stand at the furthest extreme and who barely hear him from this limit. Everything is a matter of one’s practical, ethical, political—and why not add

spiritual?—positioning around this singular eruption of a voice. You can always make a myth out of it again. But this voice, or another, will always begin interrupting the myth again—sending us back to the limit.

On this limit, the one who exposes himself and to whom—if we listen, if we read, if our ethical and political condition is one of listening or reading—we expose ourselves, does not deliver a founding speech. On the contrary, he suspends this speech, he interrupts it and he says that he is interrupting it.

And yet even this, his speech, has something inaugural about it. Each writer, each work inaugurates a community. There is therefore an unimpeachable and irrepressible literary communism, to which belongs anyone who writes (or reads), or tries to write (or read) by exposing himself—not by imposing himself (and anyone who imposes himself without in any way exposing himself is no longer writing, no longer reading, no longer thinking, no longer communicating). But the communism here is inaugural, not final. It is not finished; on the contrary, it is made up of the interruption of mythic communion and communal myth. This does not mean that it would be, attenuating a little the strong meaning of myth, simply “an idea.” The communism of being-in-common and of writing (of the writing of being-in-common) is neither an idea nor an image, neither a message nor a fable, neither a foundation nor a fiction. It consists, in its entirety—it is total in this respect, not totalitarian—in the inaugural act that each work takes up and that each text retraces: in coming to the limit, in letting the limit appear as such, in interrupting the myth.

What is inaugural is this forward movement, moving forward here along the dividing line—from you to me, from silence to speech, from the many to the singular, from myth to writing. And there is no sequel to it: this inaugural act founds nothing, entails no establishing, governs no exchange; no history of community is engendered by it. In a sense, the interruption of myth, just like its birth, according to Schelling, takes place in *stupor*, for it represents also the interruption of a certain discourse of the communitarian project, history, and destiny. But at the same time, the interruption does entail something: it entails not annulling its gesture—in fact it entails recommencing it. In this sense there is once again a history; there is another story, another history going on, one that has been going on since the interruption of myth.

From here on, it will no longer be a question of a literature that espouses or discloses the form of History, nor will it be a question of communism bringing this History to a close. It will be a question, and in truth it already is a question, of a history that comes about within a literary communism. It is almost nothing, this communism—it is not even “a communism,” in whatever sense one takes this word. (It must be said, however, that if this

word had not had a meaning in other connections, if it had not had so many mythic and practical meanings, the history of which I am speaking would not be happening to us.) For the moment, it offers us only this rather poor truth: we would not write if our being were not shared. And consequently this truth also: if we write (which might also be a way of speaking), we share being-in-common, or else we are shared, and exposed, by it.

Thus, once myth is interrupted, writing recounts our history to us again. But it is no longer a narrative—neither grand nor small—but rather an offering: a history is offered to us. Which is to say that an event—and an advent—is proposed to us, without its unfolding being imposed upon us. What is offered to us is that community is coming about,⁴⁵ or rather, that something is happening to us in common. Neither an origin nor an end: something *in* common. Only speech, a writing—shared, sharing us.

In a sense, we understand ourselves and the world by sharing this writing, just as the group understood itself by listening to the myth. Nonetheless, we understand only that there is no common understanding of community, that sharing does not constitute an understanding (or a concept, or an intuition, or a schema), that it does not constitute a knowledge, and that it gives no one, including community itself, mastery over being-in-common.

* * *

Of course, the writer is always in some way the teller of the myth, its narrator or fabulator, and he is also always the hero of his own myth. Or rather, writing itself, or literature, is its own recital; it stages itself in such a way that once again the mythic scene is reconstituted. In spite of this, at the heart of this inevitable repetition, something has happened to the writer since the interruption of myth. For also interrupted is the myth of the writer—a myth perhaps as old as myths in general, and yet as recent as the modern notion of the writer, but above all a myth through whose mediation (among others) the modern myth of myth has been elaborated: the primitive teller is imagined from out of the writer, and referred back to him as his originary model. (In a word, this represents the *subject* of literature, of speech or of writing, a subject that can take all forms, from the pure recitalist-announcer to the self-engendering of the text, passing through the inspired genius.)

The myth of the writer is interrupted: a certain scene, an attitude, and a creativity pertaining to the writer are no longer possible. The task of what has been designated as *écriture* (writing) and the thinking of *écriture* has been, precisely, to render them impossible—and consequently to render impossible a certain type of foundation, utterance, and literary and communitarian fulfillment: in short, a politics.

The gift or the right to speak (and to speak of gifts or rights) is no longer the same gift or the same right, and it is perhaps no longer either a gift or a right. No more is there the mythic legitimacy that myth conferred upon its own narrator. Writing is seen rather as illegitimate, never authorized, risked, exposed to the limit. But this is not a complacent anarchy. For it is in this way that writing obeys the law—the law of community.

The interruption of the myth of the writer is not the disappearance of the writer. It is certainly not “the death of the last writer,” as Blanchot has represented it to be. On the contrary, the writer is once again there, he is if you will more properly (and therefore in a more unsuitable way) there whenever his myth is interrupted. He is what the withdrawal of his myth imprints through the interruption: he is not the author, nor is he the hero, and perhaps he is no longer what has been called the poet or what has been called the thinker; rather, he is a singular voice (a writing: which might also be a way of speaking). He is this singular voice, this resolutely and irreducibly singular (mortal) voice, *in common*: just as one can never be “a voice” (“a writing”) but *in common*. In singularity takes place the literary experience of community—that is to say, the “communist” experience of writing, of the voice, of a speech given, played, sworn, offered, shared, abandoned. Speech is communitarian in proportion to its singularity, and singular in proportion to its communitarian truth. This property, in the form of a chiasmus, belongs only to what I have called here speech, voice, writing, or literature—and literature in this sense has no other final essence than this property.

Translated by Peter Connor

Chapter 3

"Literary Communism"

*Literature cannot assume the task of
directing collective necessity.*

—Georges Bataille

The community of interrupted myth, which is community that in a sense is without community, or communism without community, is our destination. In other words community (or communism) is what we are being called toward, or sent to, as to our ownmost future. But it is not a "to come," it is not a future or final reality on the verge of fulfillment, pending only the delay imposed by an approach, a maturation, or a conquest. For if this were the case, its reality would be mythic—as would be the feasibility of its idea.

Community without community is *to come*, in the sense that it is always *coming*, endlessly, at the heart of every collectivity (because it never stops coming, it ceaselessly resists collectivity itself as much as it resists the individual). It is no more than this: to come to the limit of compearance, to that limit to which we are in effect convoked, called, and sent—and whence we are convoked, called, and sent. The call that convokes us, as well as the one we address to one another at this limit (this call from one to the other is no doubt the same call, and yet not the same) can be named, for want of a better term, writing, or literature. But above all, its essence is not to be "*la chose littéraire*" however one might understand this (as art or style, as the production of texts, as commerce or communication between thought and the imaginary, etc.), nor does it consist in what the vocabulary of the "call" understands in terms of *invocation*, *proclamation*, or *declaration*, nor in the effusion of a solemn subjectivity. Its essence is

composed only in the act that interrupts, with a single stroke—by an incision and/or an inscription—the shaping of the scene of myth.¹

The interruption of myth is no doubt as ancient as its emergence or its designation as “myth.” This means that “literature” begins . . . with literature (epic, tragic, lyrical, philosophical: these distinctions are of little importance here). If the fulfilled scene of myth—the scene of lived experience and of the performance of myth—is in a sense such a belated montage in our history, it is because this scene is in fact the scene of the myth of literature, a scene that literature has (re)constituted as if to erase the trait of writing by means of which it had cut into myth.

But all things considered, this perhaps means nothing more than the following: myth is simply the invention of literature. Literature, which interrupts myth, will not cease until it has reestablished a continuity beyond this interruption.

Literature does not know what it has interrupted: it only knows that it inaugurates itself with one stroke, one incision, and it names “myth” that which it represents to itself as having been present before this stroke. Its own myth, consequently, is to link up again with “myth,” to reground itself in “myth” (in its poietic and performative power), which is to say, *in itself*. But forasmuch as it is haunted by this myth, the stroke of writing, bravely confronting this haunting memory, must never stop interrupting it again.

Literature interrupts itself: this is, essentially, what makes it literature (writing) and not myth. Or, better, what interrupts itself—discourse or song, gesture or voice, narrative or proof—*that* is literature (or writing). Precisely what interrupts or suspends its own *mythos* (that is to say, its *logos*).

* * *

It is here, in this suspension, that the communionless communism of singular beings takes place. Here takes place the *taking place* (which is itself without a place, without a space reserved for or devoted to its presence) of community: not in a work that would bring it to completion, even less in itself as work (family, people, church, nation, party, literature, philosophy), but in the unworking and as the unworking of all its works.

There is the unworking of the works of individuals in the community (“writers,” whatever their mode of writing might be), and there is the unworking of works that the community as such produces: its peoples, its towns, its treasures, its patrimonies, its traditions, its capital, and its collective property of knowledge and production. These are the same unworking: the work in the community and work of the community (each, moreover, belongs to the other, since either one can be reappropriated or unworked in the other) do not have their truth in the completion of their

operation, nor in the substance and unity of their *opus*. What is exposed in the work, or through the works, begins and ends infinitely within and beyond the work—within and beyond the operative concentration of the work: there where what we have called up to now men, gods, and animals are *themselves exposed* to one another through an exposition that lies at the heart of the work and that gives us the work at the same time as it dissolves its concentration, and through which the work is offered up to the infinite communication of community.

The work—be it what we designate as “a work” or be it the community presenting itself as work (and the one is always in the other, and can be made into capital, made profitable by the other, or else exposed again)—must be offered up for communication.

This does not mean that the work must be “communicable”: no form of intelligibility or transmissibility is required of it. It is not a matter of a message: neither a book nor a piece of music nor a people is, as such, the vehicle or the mediator of a message. The function of the message concerns society; it does not take place in community. (This is why the vast majority of critiques addressing the “elitist” character of certain works have no pertinence: the communication taking place between a writer and someone who, for lack of information or instruction, cannot even be his reader, is not the communication of a message—but communication does take place.)²

That the work must be offered up for communication means that it must in effect be *offered*, that is to say, presented, proposed, and abandoned on the common limit where singular beings share one another. The work, as soon as it becomes a work, at the moment of its completion—which also means as soon as it becomes a project, and in its very texture—must be abandoned at this limit. And this can only happen if, by itself and for itself, the work does nothing other than trace and retrace this limit: in other words, only if it does nothing other than inscribe singularity/community, or inscribe itself as singular/common, as infinitely singular/common.

(I say “must . . .,” but this cannot be dictated by any will, to any will. It cannot be the object either of a morality or of a politics of community. And yet, it is prescribed. And a politics, in any case, can adopt the objective that this prescription should always be able to open a free way of access.)

When the work is thus offered up to communication, it does not pass into a common space. Let me repeat: only the limit is common, and the limit is not a place, but the sharing of places, their spacing. There is no common place. The work as work might well be a communal work (and in some respect it always is: one never works alone, one never writes alone, and the “singular being” cannot be represented, quite to the contrary, by

the isolated individual): offered, in its unworking, the work does not go back to being a common substance, it does not circulate in a common exchange. It does not melt into the community itself as work, and it does not begin to function commercially in society. The specific character of *communication* that the work takes on only on condition of being abandoned as work consists neither in a unitary interiority nor in a general circulation. This character functions as does, for Marx, the "social" character of labors in primitive "communes":

Under the rural patriarchal system of production, when spinner and weaver lived under the same roof—the women of the family spinning and the men weaving, say for the requirements of the family—yarn and linen were *social* products, and spinning and weaving *social* labour within the framework of the family. But their social character did not appear in the form of yarn becoming a universal equivalent exchanged for linen as a universal equivalent, *i.e.*, of the two products exchanging for each other as equal and equally valid expressions of the same universal labour-time. On the contrary, the product of labour bore the specific social imprint of the family relationship with its naturally evolved division of labour. . . . It was the distinct labour of the individual in its original form, the particular features of his labour and not its universal aspect that formed the social ties. . . . In this case the social character of labour is evidently not effected by the labour of the individual assuming the abstract form of universal labour or his product assuming the form of a universal equivalent. [It is clearly community,] on which this mode of production is based, [that] prevents the labour of an individual from becoming private labour and his product the private product of a separate individual; it [is community that] causes individual labour to appear . . . as the direct function of a member of the social organisation.¹

For the moment, we need not stop to evaluate the element of retrospective illusion in this interpretation, which represents for Marx the truth of "communal labor in its spontaneously evolved form as we find it among all civilized peoples at the dawn of their history."⁴ What is important, beyond the nostalgic ideology that is common to Marx and to many others, is the thinking of community that in spite of everything still comes through here—for it is a thinking, not merely an idyllic narrative ready to be transformed into a future utopia. Community means here the socially exposed particularity, in opposition to the socially imploded generality characteristic of capitalist community. If there has been an event in Marxist thought, one that is not yet over for us, it takes place in what is opened up by this thought.⁵

Capital negates community because it places above it the identity and the generality of production and products: the operative communion and general communication of works. (And when it plays the game of multiplying differences, no one is fooled: difference belongs neither to the work nor to the product as such). As I have already said, it is a work of death. It is the work of death of both capitalist communism (including when it goes under the name of "advanced liberal society") and of communist capitalism (called "real communism"). Standing opposite and to the side of both of these—and resisting them both, in every society—there is what Marx designates as community: a division of tasks that does not divide up a preexisting generality (as though society, or humanity, could have a general task that could be given, and known, in advance—only capitalist accumulation has ever tried to represent such a general task), but rather articulates singularities among themselves. This is "sociality" as a sharing, and not as a fusion, as an exposure, or as an immanence.⁶

What Marx designates here, or at least raises as a thought—and in such a way that "we can only go farther"—is the same thing he points to each time he proposes, as though at the limit of his thinking, the idea of "individual property" beyond private property and its socialist abolition (for example: "Truly common property is that of the individual owners and not of the union of those owners having an existence in the city distinct from particular individuals")⁷—namely, community: but community formed by an articulation of "particularities," and not founded in any autonomous essence that would subsist by itself and that would reabsorb or assume singular beings into itself. If community is "posited before production," it is not in the form of a common being that would preexist works and would still have to be set to work in them, but as a being *in* common of the singular being.

This means that the articulation from which community is formed and in which it is shared is not an organic articulation (although Marx can find no other way to describe it). This articulation is doubtless essential to singular beings: these latter are what they are to the extent that they are articulated upon one another, to the extent that they are spread out and shared along lines of force, of cleavage, of twisting, of chance, whose network makes up their being-in-common. This condition means, moreover, that these singular beings are ends for one another. It even goes so far—this is necessarily implied—as to mean that together they relate, in some respect or in some way, from the very heart of their singularities and in the play of their articulation, to a *totality* that marks their common end—or the common end (community) of all the finalities that they represent for one another, and against one another. This would therefore resemble

an organism. However, the totality or the whole of community is not an organic whole.

Organic totality is a totality in which the reciprocal articulation of the parts is thought under the general law of an instrumentation which cooperates to produce and maintain the whole as form and final reason of the ensemble (at least this is the way the "organism" has been conceived since Kant: it is not obvious that a living body is to be thought only according to this model). Organic totality means the totality of the operation as means and of the work as end. But the totality of community—by which I understand the totality of community resisting its own setting to work—is a whole of articulated singularities. Articulation does not mean organization. It refers neither to the notion of instrument nor to that of operation or work. Articulation has nothing to do, as such, with an operative system of finalities—although it can no doubt always be related to such a system or be integrated into it. By itself, articulation is only a juncture, or more exactly the play of the juncture: what takes place where different pieces touch each other without fusing together, where they slide, pivot, or tumble over one another, one at the limit of the other—exactly at its limit—where these singular and distinct pieces fold or stiffen, flex or tense themselves together and through one another, unto one another, without this mutual play—which always remains, at the same time, a play *between* them—ever forming into the substance or the higher power of a Whole. Here, *the totality is itself the play* of the articulations. This is why a whole of singularities, which is indeed a whole, does not close in around the singularities to elevate them to its power: this whole is essentially the opening of singularities in their articulations, the tracing and the pulse of their limits.

This totality is the totality of a dialogue. There is a myth of the dialogue: it is the myth of the "intersubjective" and intrapolitical foundation of *logos* and its unitary truth. And there is also the interruption of this myth: the dialogue is no longer to be heard except as the communication of the incommunicable singularity/community. I no longer (no longer essentially) hear in it what the other *wants to say* (to me), but I hear in it that the other, or some other (*de l'autre*) speaks and that there is an essential archi-articulation of the voice and of voices, which constitutes the being *in* common itself: *the voice is* always in itself articulated (different from itself, differing itself), and this is why there is not a voice, but the plural voices of singular beings. Dialogue, in a sense, is no longer "the animation of the Idea in subjects" (Hegel); it is made up only of the articulation of mouths: each one articulated upon itself or in itself, facing the other, at the limit of itself and of the other, in this place that is a place only in order to be the spacing of a singular being—spacing it from the self and from others—and constituting it from the very outset as a community being.

Dialogue, this articulation of speech, or rather this sharing of voices—which is also the articulated being (being articulated) of speech itself (or its written being/being written)—is, in the sense I am trying to communicate, “literature” (after all, *art* itself owes its name to the same *etymon* of juncture and the dis-position of the juncture).

It is not an exaggeration to say that Marx’s community is, in this sense, a community of literature—or at least it opens onto such a community. It is a community of articulation, and not of organization, and precisely because of this it is a community situated “beyond the sphere of material production properly speaking,” where “begins the flowering of that human power that is its own end, the true reign of liberty.”*

The only exaggeration, all things considered, in reference to such a formation, would be the confidence apparently placed in the epithet “human,” for the unworked community, the community of articulation cannot be simply *human*. This is so for an extremely simple but decisive reason: in the true movement of community, in the inflection (in the conjugation, in the diction) that articulates it, what is at stake is never humanity, but always *the end of humanity*. The end of humanity does not mean its goal or its culmination. It means something quite different, namely, the limit that man alone can reach, and in reaching it, where he can stop being simply human, all too human.

He is not transfigured into a god, nor into an animal. He is not transfigured at all. He remains man, stripped of nature, stripped of immanence as well as of transcendence. But in remaining man—at his limit (is man anything but a limit?)—he does not bring forth a human essence. On the contrary, he lets appear an extremity upon which no human essence can take place. This is the limit that man is: his exposure—to his death, to others, to his being-in-common. Which is to say, always, in the end, to his singularity: his singular exposure to his singularity.

The singular being is neither the common being nor the individual. There is a concept of the common being and of the individual; there is a generality of what is common and of the individual. There is neither of these for the singular being. There is no singular *being*: there is, and this is different, an essential singularity *of being* itself (its finitude, in Heidegger’s language). That is to say, the “singular being” is not a kind of being among beings. In a sense, every being is absolutely singular: a stone never occupies the space of another stone. But the singularity of being (that is, beings are given one by one—which has nothing to do with the idea of indivisibility that makes up the concept of the individual; on the contrary, the singularity of the singular being endlessly divides Being and beings, or rather divides the Being of beings, which is only through and as its division into singular/common), the singularity of being, then, is singular on the basis of the

limit that exposes it: man, animal, or god have been up to now the diverse names for this limit, which is itself diverse. By definition, the fact of being exposed at this limit leads to the risk—or the chance—of changing identity in it. Neither gods nor human beings nor animals are assured of their identity. It is in this respect that they share a common limit upon which they are always exposed to their end, as is witnessed, for example, in the end of the gods.

The sharing of this limit resembles, to the point of confusion, the interweaving through which myth holds together and structures men, gods, animals, and the totality of the world. But myth relentlessly announces the passing of the limit, the communion, the immanence or the confusion. Writing, on the other hand, or “literature,” inscribes the sharing: the limit marks the advent of singularity, and its withdrawal (that is, it never advenes as indivisible: it does not make a work). The singular being advenes at the limit: this means that it advenes only inasmuch as it is shared. A singular being (“you” or “me”) has the precise structure and nature of a being of writing, of a “literary” being: it resides only in the communication—which does not commune—of its advance and its retreat. It offers itself, it holds itself in suspense.

* * *

In writing’s communication, what does the singular being become? It becomes nothing that it is not already: it becomes its own truth, it becomes simply *the truth*.

This is what is inaccessible to mythic thought, for which “the problem of truth is no longer asked,” as Benjamin wrote.⁹ In myth, or in mythic literature, existences are not offered in their singularity: but the characteristics of particularity contribute to the system of the “exemplary life” in which nothing holds back, where nothing remains within a singular limit, where, on the contrary, everything is communicated and set up for identification. (This can take place, I would repeat, as much in reading as in writing: it is a matter of the mode of the inscription, the operation or the unworking of the work in community.)

This is not to say that mythic literature is simply the literature of the hero, while the literature of truth would be that of some kind of antihero. It is more than just a matter of models, or literary genres. Everything can play a role in every genre. It is, rather, a question of a communitarian existence of the work such that, whatever its genre or its hero—Ajax, Socrates, Bloom, theogony, discourse on method, confessions, divine or human comedy, madness of the day, recollections of a working girl, correspondence, hatred of poetry—the communication of this work incom-

pletes it instead of completing it, and suspends the completion of the heroic-mythic figure it cannot fail to propose (the figure of a hero in the strict sense, figure of the author, figure of literature itself, or of thinking, or of communication, figure of fiction or figure of truth). For the unworking is offered wherever writing *does not complete a figure*, or a figuration, and consequently does not propose one, or does not impose the content or the exemplary (which means also legendary, hence, mythic) message of the figure.

This does not mean that the work renounces presenting any figure: for in such a case, it would never become a work, it would come to a halt before existing.¹⁰ If it is a work, or if it makes a work, it proposes at least itself (if not at the same time its hero, its author, etc.) as a tracing that indeed must be exemplary, in some respect, however slight this may be. But in the end, what corresponds in the work to writing as well as to community is that by means of which such a tracing exemplifies (if it is still an example) the limit, the suspense, and the interruption of its own exemplarity. What the work gives us to understand (to read) is the withdrawal of its singularity, and what it communicates is the following: that singular beings are never founding, originary figures for one another, never places or powers of remainderless identification. Unworking takes place in the communication of this withdrawal of singularity on the very limit where singularity communicates itself as exemplary, on the limit where it makes *and unmakes* its own figure and its own example. This does not take place, of course, in any work: *it never takes place in an exemplary way*, neither through an effacement nor through an exhibition, but it can be shared by all works: it is something offered to the community, because it is through this that community has already been exposed in the work as its unworking.

Here the mythic hero—and the heroic myth—interrupts his pose and his epic. He tells the truth: that he is not a hero, not even, or especially not, the hero of writing or literature, and that there is no hero, there is no figure who alone assumes and presents the heroism of the life and death of commonly singular beings. He tells the truth of the interruption of his myth, the truth of the interruption of all founding speeches, of all creative and poetic speech, of speech that schematizes a world and that fictions an origin and an end. He says, therefore, that foundation, poesis, and scheme are always offered, endlessly, to each and all, to the community, to the absence of communion through which we communicate and through which we communicate to each other not *the meaning of community*, but *an infinite reserve of common and singular meanings*.

If, in the writing of community, the hero traces the interruption of the heroic myth, this does not mean that his acts are deprived of something that we can perhaps no longer correctly call heroism, but that is no doubt

at least courage. The singular voice of interruption is not a voice without courage. This courage, however, is not—as one might at first think—the courage to say something that it would be dangerous to dare to proclaim. Of course, such courage exists—but the courage of interruption consists rather in daring to be silent, or rather, to put it less summarily, it consists in *allowing to be said* something that no one—no individual, no representative—could ever say: a voice that could never be the voice of any subject, a speech that could never be the conviction of any understanding and that is merely the voice and the thought of community in the interruption of myth. At once *an* interrupted voice, and the voiceless interruption of every general or particular voice.

* * *

In this consists what I have called, provisionally, “literary communism.” What must be understood by this can hardly be aligned with the idea of “communism” or with the idea of “literature” as we habitually use either of them. “Literary communism” is named thus only as a provocative gesture—although at the same time the name cannot fail to be a necessary homage to what communism and the communists, on the one hand, and literature and writers on the other, have meant for an epoch of our history.

What is at stake is the articulation of community. “Articulation” means, in some way, “writing,” which is to say, the inscription of a meaning whose transcendence or presence is indefinitely and constitutively deferred. “Community” means, in some way, the presence of a being-together whose immanence is impossible except as its death-work. This presupposes that neither literary art nor communication can answer to the double exigency proposed in “literary communism”: to defy at the same time the speechless immanence and the transcendence of a Word.

It is because there is community—unworked always, and resisting at the heart of every collectivity and in the heart of every individual—and because myth is interrupted—suspended always, and divided by its own enunciation—that there exists the exigency of “literary communism.” And this means: thinking, the practice of a sharing of voices and of an articulation according to which there is no singularity but that exposed in common, and no community but that offered to the limit of singularities.

This does not determine any particular mode of sociality, and it does not found a politics—if a politics can ever be “founded.” But it defines at least a limit, at which all politics stop and begin. The communication that takes place on this limit, and that, in truth, constitutes it, demands that way of destining ourselves in common that we call a politics, that way of opening community to itself, rather than to a destiny or to a future. “Literary communism” indicates at least the following: that community, in its

infinite resistance to everything that would bring it to completion (in every sense of the word "*achever*"—which can also mean "finish off"), signifies an irrepressible political exigency, and that this exigency in its turn demands something of "literature," the inscription of our infinite resistance.

It defines neither *a* politics, nor *a* writing, for it refers, on the contrary, to that which resists any definition or program, be these political, aesthetic, or philosophical. But it cannot be accommodated within every "politics" or within every "writing." It signals a bias in favor of the "literary communist" resistance that precedes us rather than our inventing it—that precedes us from the depths of community. A politics that does not want to know anything about this is a mythology, or an economy. A literature that does not want to say anything about it is a mere diversion, or a lie.

Here, I must interrupt myself: it is up to you to allow to be said what no one, no subject, can say, and what exposes us in common.

Translated by Peter Connor

Chapter 4

Shattered Love

Thinking: of Love

"I love you more than all that has been thought and can be thought. I give my soul to you."

—Henriette Vogel to Heinrich von Kleist

I

The thinking of love, so ancient, so abundant and diverse in its forms and in its modulations, asks for an extreme reticence as soon as it is solicited. It is a question of modesty, perhaps, but it is also a question of exhaustion: has not everything been said on the subject of love? Every excess and every exactitude? Has not the impossibility of speaking about love been as violently recognized as has been the experience of love itself as the true source of the possibility of speaking in general? We know the words of love to be inexhaustible, but as to speaking *about* love, could we perhaps be exhausted?

It might well be appropriate that a discourse on love—supposing that it still has something to say—be at the same time a communication of love, a letter, a missive, since love sends itself as much as it enunciates itself. But the words of love, as is well known, sparsely, miserably repeat their one declaration, which is always the same, always already suspected of lacking love because it declares it. Or else this declaration always carries

the promise of revealing itself as the unique incarnation, the unique and certain, if derisory manifestation of the love that it declares. The discourse might well have nothing more to say or to describe than this communal indigence, these dispersed and tarnished flashes of an all-too-familiar love.

This is why, at our slightest attempt to solicit the thinking of love, we are invited to an extreme reticence. (Should this thinking be solicited? I will not discuss this. As it happens, it is. As it happens, indeed, this solicitation regularly returns, throughout our history, to formulate its demands. One asks what has become of love, but one does not forget to return to it after a certain period. When, for example, as is the case today, love is no longer the dominant theme of poetry, when it seems to be essentially relegated to dime-store novels instead, it is then that we inquire and question ourselves about love, about the possibility of thinking love. As though this possibility were always, recurringly indispensable to the possibility of thinking in general—that is to say, to the possibility of the life of a community, of a time and a space of humanity—something that would not be the case for other objects, such as God, for example, or history, or literature, or even philosophy.)

This reticence of thinking that beckons to us does not imply that it would be indiscreet to deflower love. Love deflowers and is itself deflowered by its very essence, and its unrestrained and brazen exploitation in all the genres of speech or of art is perhaps an integral part of this essence—a part at once secret and boisterous, miserable and sumptuous. But this reticence might signify that all, of love, is possible and necessary, that all the loves possible are in fact the possibilities of love, its voices or its characteristics, which are impossible to confuse and yet ineluctably entangled: charity and pleasure, emotion and pornography, the neighbor and the infant, the love of lovers and the love of God, fraternal love and the love of art, the kiss, passion, friendship. . . . To think love would thus demand a boundless generosity toward all these possibilities, and it is this generosity that would command reticence: the generosity not to choose between loves, not to privilege, not to hierarchize, not to exclude. Because love is not their substance or their common concept, is not something one can extricate and contemplate at a distance. Love in its singularity, when it is grasped absolutely, is itself perhaps nothing but the indefinite abundance of all possible loves, and an abandonment to their dissemination, indeed to the disorder of these explosions. The thinking of love should learn to yield to this abandon: to receive the prodigality, the collisions, and the contradictions of love, without submitting them to an order that they essentially defy.

But this generous reticence would be no different from the exercise of thought itself. Thinking rejects abstraction and conceptualization as these are recognized by understanding. Thinking does not produce the operators

of a knowledge; it undergoes an experience, and lets the experience inscribe itself. Thought therefore essentially takes place in the reticence that lets the singular moments of this experience offer and arrange themselves. The thinking of love—if it is necessary to solicit it, or if it is necessary that it be proposed anew, as a theme to be discussed or as a question to be posed—does not therefore lay claim to a particular register of thinking: it invites us to thinking as such. Love does not call for a certain kind of thinking, or for a thinking of love, but for thinking in essence and in its totality. And this is because thinking, most properly speaking, is love. It is the love for that which reaches experience; that is to say, for that aspect of being that gives itself to be welcomed. In the movement across discourse, proof, and concept, nothing but this love is at stake for thought. Without this love, the exercise of the intellect or of reason would be utterly worthless.

This intimate connivance between love and thinking is present in our origins: the word “philosophy” betrays it. Whatever its legendary inventor might have meant by it, “philosophy,” in spite of everything—and perhaps in spite of all philosophies—means this: love of thinking, since thinking is love. (Love of love, love of the self, in consequence? Perhaps, but we will have to return to this.)

We cannot, however, dispense with asking what we must understand by this. To say that “thinking is love” does not mean that love can be understood as a response to the question of thinking—and certainly not in the manner of a sentimental response, in the direction of a unifying, effusive, or orgiastic doctrine of thinking. Even though the paradox might appear simple, it is necessary to say that “thinking is love” is a difficult, severe thought that promises rigor rather than effusion. Faced with this thought about thinking, we can do nothing but begin the quest for an ignored essence of thinking for which we lack any evident access. It might well be that nothing that has been designated, celebrated, or meditated under the name of “love” is appropriate for this determination: “thinking is love.” It might also be that everything is appropriate, that all loves are at stake in thinking and as thinking.

In fact, to say “thinking is love” (*la pensée est amour*) is different from saying “thinking is Love,” (*la pensée est l'amour*) or “Thinking is a certain species of love.” Neither genre nor species, perhaps not any genre or perhaps all species. However this may be, “love” thus employed would be, so to speak, existential rather than categorial, or again it would name the act of thinking as much as or more than it would its nature. (The model for this phrase is obviously the ancient “God is love,” which entailed the same formal implications.) We know nothing more about what this means. We only know, by a sort of obscure certainty or premonition, that it is necessary

or that it will one day be necessary to attest this phrase: *Thinking is love*. But philosophy has never explicitly attested this.

One single time, however, the first philosopher expressly authenticated an identity of love and of philosophy. Plato's *Symposium* does not represent a particular treatise that this author set aside for love at the heart of his work, as others would do later (and often by relating to this same Plato: Ficino, among others, or Leon the Hebrew, as though Plato were the unique or at least necessary philosophical reference, *de amore*, always present, beyond the epoch of treatises, in Hegel or in Nietzsche—"philosophy in the manner of Plato is an erotic duel"—in Freud or in Lacan). But the *Symposium* signifies first that for Plato the exposition of philosophy, as such, is not possible without the presentation of philosophic love. The commentary on the text gives innumerable confirmations of this, from the portrait of Eros to the role of Socrates and to the figure—who appeared here once and for all on the philosophical scene—of Diotima.

Although the *Symposium* speaks of love, it also does more than that; it opens thought to love as to its own essence. This is why this dialogue is more than any other the dialogue of Plato's generosity: here he invites orators or thinkers and offers them a speech tempered altogether differently from the speech of the interlocutors of Socrates. The scene itself, the gaiety or the joy that traverses it, attests to a consideration that is unique in Plato (to such a degree, at least)—consideration for others, as well as for the object of discourse. All the different kinds of loves are welcomed in the *Symposium*; there is discussion, but there is no exclusion. And the love that is finally exhibited as true love, philosophical Eros, does not only present itself with the mastery of a triumphant doctrine; it also appears in a state of deprivation and weakness, which allows the experience of the limit, where thought takes place, to be recognized. In the *Symposium*, Plato broaches the limits, and all his thinking displays a reticence or reserve not always present elsewhere: it broaches its own limit, that is to say, its source; it effaces itself before the love (or in the love?) that it recognizes as its truth. Thus it thinks its own birth and its own effacement, but it thinks in such a way that it restores to love, to the limit, its very task and destination. Philosophy is not occupied with gathering and interpreting the experiences of love here. Instead, in the final analysis, it is love that receives and deploys the experience of thinking.

But this has only taken place once, at the inauguration of philosophy, and even that time it did not really take place, since it did not reach its ends. For all its generosity, the *Symposium* also exercises a mastery over love. At any rate, we cannot fail to read or to deduce here, in the order and the choices of philosophical knowledge, a truth regarding love, one that assigns its experience and hierarchizes its moments by substituting the

impatience and *conatus* of desire for its joyous abandon. Thus in Plato, thinking will have said and will have failed to say that it is love—or to explain what this means.

There is not one philosophy that has escaped this double constraint. In each, love occupies a place that is at once evident and dissimulated (as, in Descartes, between the theory of union and that of admiration), or embarrassed and decisive (as, in Kant, in the theory of sublime reason), or essential and subordinate (as, in Hegel, in the theory of the State). At the cost of these contradictions and evasions, love consistently finds the place that it cannot not have, but it only finds it at this cost. What we would have to understand is why this place is essential for it, and why it is essential to pay this price.

II

Philosophy never arrives at this thinking—that “thinking is love,” even though it is inscribed at the head of its program, or as the general epigraph to all its treatises. One might say: it reaches toward it, it does not reach it. But this does not mean that it does not have any thinking of love. Quite the contrary. Since the *Symposium*—or, if you prefer, since before Plato, in Heraclitus or Empedocles, in Pythagoras or Parmenides—the general schema of a philosophy of love is at work, and it has not ceased to operate even now, determining philosophy as it understands and construes itself, as well as love as we understand it and as we make it.

If it were necessary to take the risk of grasping this schema in a formula, one might try this: love is the extreme movement, beyond the self, of a being reaching completion. The first meaning of this formula (and it deliberately has several meanings) would be that philosophy always thinks love as an accomplishment, arriving at a final and definitive completion. The second meaning would be that philosophy thinks love as an access rather than an end: the end is the completion of being (even though this might also be conceived as “love,” which would thus designate its own result). The third meaning would be that philosophy thinks the being in love² as incomplete and led by love toward a completion. The fourth meaning, that this completion surpasses what it completes, and consequently fulfills it only by depriving it of itself—which comes down to suppressing its tension: thus, love suppresses itself (inasmuch as it reaches its end). The fifth meaning would be that philosophy thinks the suppression of self in love, and the correlative suppression of the self of love, as its ultimate truth and as its ultimate effectivity: thus, love infinitely restitutes itself beyond itself (in the final analysis, death and transfiguration—and this is not by chance the title of a musical work, since music accomplishes the philosophical erotic).

The sixth meaning would be that this "beyond the self" in which, in a very general manner, love has taken place is necessarily the place of the other, or of an alterity without which neither love nor completion would be possible. But the seventh meaning would nevertheless be that this "beyond" is the place of the same, where love fulfills itself, the place of the same in the other, if love consists, in Hegel's terms, of "having in an other the moment of one's subsistence."

According to this schema, the nature of love is shown to be double and contradictory, even though it also contains the infinite resolution of its own contradiction. This nature is thus neither simple nor contradictory: it is the contradiction of contradiction and of noncontradiction. It operates in an identical manner between all the terms in play: the access and the end, the incomplete being and the completed being, the self and the beyond of the self, the one and the other, the identical and the different. The contradiction of the contradiction and of the noncontradiction organizes love infinitely and in each of its meanings. It is this that definitively confers on love the universality and the totality to which, according to philosophy, it is destined by right—and that have crystallized in the figure of Christian love, where the love of God and the love of men form the poles of a new contradiction and of its resolution, since each of them is carried out by the other and in the other.

Of course, this kind of philosophical thinking is not confined only to philosophical discourse or to its theological avatar. It is easy to see that it structures all occidental experience and expression of love (it is not certain that the "Occident," here, might not include both Islam and Buddhism): its poetics, its drama, its pathos, its mystique, from the Grand Rhetoricians to Baudelaire, from the troubadours to Wagner or Strauss, from Saint John of the Cross to Strindberg, and moving through Racine or Kleist, Marivaux or Maturin, Monteverdi or Freud. For all of them, love is double, conflictual, or ambivalent: necessary and impossible, sweet and bitter, free and chained, spiritual and sensual, enlivening and mortal, lucid and blind, altruistic and egoistic. For all, these oppositional couples constitute the very structure and life of love, while at the same time, love carries out the resolution of these very oppositions, or surpasses them. Or more often, it simultaneously surpasses them and maintains them: in the realization of love, the subject of love is dead and alive, free and imprisoned, restored to the self and outside of the self. One sentence by René Char best epitomizes this thinking and its entire tradition: "The poem is the fulfilled love of desire remaining desire." This sentence, in effect, does not only speak the truth of the poem, according to Char; it speaks the truth of love. More precisely, it intends to speak the truth of the poem by grace of the truth of love, thus confirming, moreover, that love holds the highest truth for

us: the contradiction (desire) opposed to the noncontradiction (love) and reconciled with it ("remaining desire").

But this thinking that so profoundly and so continually innervates so much of our thought received its name and its concept in philosophy: it is the thinking of the dialectic. One might say that love is the living hypothesis of a dialectic, which formulates the law of its process by way of a return. This law is not only the formal rule of the resolution of a contradiction that remains a contradiction: it gives, under this rule, the law and the logic of being in general. By being thought according to the dialectic and as the essence of the dialectic, love is assigned to the heart of the very movement of being. And it is not surprising that these two ideas have coexisted or have even intermixed: that "God is love" and that God is the Supreme Being. Love is not only subject to the ontological dialectic, it does not only form one case of its ontic application. If one may say so—and one may, rightly, in the most accurate or proper manner—love is the heart of this dialectic. The idea of love is in the dialectic, and the idea of the dialectic is in love. Hegel transcribing Christian theology into the ontology of the statement "The Absolute wishes to be close to us," says nothing other: The Absolute loves us—and the Absolute dialecticizes itself. Love is at the heart of being.

Again it is necessary that being have a heart, or still more rigorously, that being *be* a heart. "The heart of being" means nothing but the being of being, that by virtue of which it is being. To suppose that "the being of being," or "the essence of being," is an expression endowed with meaning, it would be necessary to suppose that the essence of being is something like a heart—that is to say: that which alone is capable of love. Now this is precisely what has never been attested by philosophy.

Perhaps being, in its essence, is affected by the dialectic that annihilates its simple position in order to reveal this contradiction in the becoming of reality (or of reason, of the Idea, of history)—and in this sense one might say that being *beats*, that it essentially is in the beating, indeed, in the e-motion of its own heart: being-nothingness-becoming, as an infinite pulsation. And yet, this heart of being is not a heart, and it does not beat from the throbbing of love. Philosophy never says this, and above all, never explains its implications, as close as it might come to thinking it. It is not that love is excluded from fundamental ontology; on the contrary, everything summons it thither, as we have just shown. Thus, one must rather say that love is missing from the very place where it is prescribed. Or better still, love is missing from the very place where this dialectical law operates—the law that we have had to recognize as the law of love. And there is nothing dialectical about this loss or this "lack": it is not a contradiction, it is not

made to be sublated or resorbed. Love remains absent from the heart of being.

That love is missing from philosophical ontology does not mean that the dialectical law of being is inappropriate for love. In one sense, nothing is false in what we have just demonstrated regarding this law and the nature of love. Nothing is false, but love is missing, because the heart of being, which has shown itself to be commanded by the dialectic, is not a heart. That which has the power of the dialectic is not a heart, but a subject. Perhaps one could find a heart in the subject. But this heart (if there is one) designates the place where the dialectical power is suspended (or perhaps shattered). The heart does not sublata contradictions, since in a general sense, it does not live under the regime of contradiction—contrary to what poetry (or perhaps only its philosophical reading?) might allow us to believe. The heart lives—that is to say, it beats—under the regime of exposition.

If the dialectic is the process of that which must appropriate its own becoming in order to be, exposition, on the other hand, is the condition of that whose essence or destination consists in being presented: given over, offered to the outside, to others, and even to the self. The two regimes do not exclude one another (they do not form a contradiction), but they are not of the same order. The being that has *become* through a dialectical process is perhaps destined to be exposed (one could show that this is what happens, despite everything, at the end of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*)—but the dialectic knows nothing of this, it believes it has absorbed the entire destination in the becoming-proper. The *exposed* being is perhaps also the subject of a dialectical process, but what is exposed, what makes it exposed, is that it is not completed by this process, and it “incompletes itself” to the outside; it is presented, offered to something that is not it nor its proper becoming.

The heart exposes, and it is exposed. It loves, it is loved, it does not love, it is not loved. Affirmation and negation are present here as in the dialectic. But in its modes of affirmation and negation, the heart does not operate by reporting its own judgment to itself (if it is a judgment). It does not say “*I love*,” which is the reflection or the speculation of an *ego* (and which engages love neither more nor less than the *cogito*), but it says “*I love you*,” a declaration where “*I*” is posed only by being exposed to “*you*.” That is to say that the heart is not a subject, even if it is the heart of a subject. The subject is one who reports to himself, as his own, his judgments and their contradiction, in order to constitute therefrom his proper being: for example, that he is (Descartes), that he is not his immediate being (Spinoza), that he becomes what he is by traversing the other (Hegel). This resembles love; in any case it calls to and even demands love—and yet this is not love. The subject poses its own contradiction in order to

report it to itself and to "maintain it in itself," as Hegel says. Thus it surmounts it or infinitely sublates it. By principle, the moment of exposition is evaded, even though it dimly emerges. This is the moment when it is not a matter of posing or of opposing and then of resorbing the same and the other. It is when the affirmation "I love you" is given over to that which is neither contradictory nor noncontradictory with it: the risk that the other does not love me, or the risk that I do not keep the promise of my love.

The being of philosophy is the subject. The heart of the subject is again a subject: it is the infinite rapport to the self. That this rapport demands, in turn, an infinite migration through the other, even the gift of the self, does not in any way hinder the structure of the subject from thence deriving all its consistency. Philosophy will not fail to retort: what is at stake is nothing but a dialectic of the heart and the subject, of love and the conscience or the reason. From Pascal to Hegel and beyond, this dialectic is well attested. But the response of philosophy is not admissible. There is no dialectic of the heart and the reason, not because they would be irreconcilable (the question of their rapport, if it be a question, cannot be posed in these terms; the perhaps pseudo-Pascal of the *Discourse on the Passions of Love* writes, "They have inappropriately removed the name of reason from love, and they have opposed them without a sound foundation, since love and reason is but the same thing"), but because the heart is not able to enter into a dialectic: it cannot be posed, disposed, and sublated in a superior moment. The heart does not return to itself beyond itself, and this is not, as Hegel would have wished, "the spirit which is attendant to the power of the heart." Or again, there is no sublimation of the heart, nor of love. Love is what it is, identical and plural, in all its registers or in all its explosions, and it does not sublimate itself, even when it is "sublime." It is always the beating of an exposed heart.

This argument carries a corollary: because it is a stranger to the dialectic, the heart does not maintain itself in opposition to the subject, any more than love does to reason. But they are one in the other, and one to the other, in a manner that is neither a mode of contradiction nor of identity nor of propriety. This mode might declare itself thus: The heart exposes the subject. It does not deny it, it does not surpass it, it is not sublated or sublimated in it; the heart exposes the subject to everything that is not its dialectic and its mastery as a subject. Thus, the heart can beat at the heart of the subject, it can even beat in a movement similar to that of the dialectic, but it does not confuse itself with that.

This is why love is always missed by philosophy, which nevertheless does not cease to designate and assign it. Perhaps it cannot help but be missed: one would not know how to seize or catch up with that which exposes. If

thinking is love, that would mean (insofar as thinking is confused with philosophy) that thinking misses its own essence—that it misses by essence its own essence. In philosophy (and in mysticism, in poetics, etc.) thinking would thus have said all that it could and all that it should have said about love—by missing it and by missing itself. Loving, and loving love, it will have lost love. It is thence that Saint Augustine's *amare amabam* draws its exemplary force of confession.

This does not at all mean that in all this tradition thinking has never occurred, or that love has never occurred, or that thinking about love has never occurred. On the contrary. But this does mean that love itself, in that it is missed by thinking, and by the love of thinking, gives itself again to thinking. This is to say that in thinking, it calls forth once again this love that it is. Something revealed and re-veiled with the *Symposium*, like a missed rendezvous, calls again for its repetition.

The Heart: Broken

Love is a series of scars. "No heart is as whole as a broken heart," said the celebrated Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav.

—Elie Wiesel, *The Fifth Son*

I

One would want to be able to engage this repetition, at least in part, outside of the Occident, that is to say, apart from love as we have come to know it from our history and from our thinking. That which is not the Occident is, in fact, no stranger to any of the figures or forms we know as love (sexuality, erotism, tenderness, passion, friendship, fraternity, or even fidelity, abandon, union, desire, jealousy, or what we represent as the emotion of love, as the adoration or supplication of love, or the gift of the self, or deliverance by love, etc.). But in all these figures (which their occidental denominations here risk falsifying, and which, moreover, are perhaps not figures, but rather so many distinct essences—or so many flashes) what is at issue, outside of the Occident, is not *love* absolutely. Only the Occident designates within love—absolutely and in every sense, or in the absolute of all its conjoined meanings, which obstinately make up one sole meaning, one sole essence—an ordering (or disordering) principle of the totality of being and of beings, of nature, of the city, of knowledge, and of God. Only the Occident raises with this one name, "love," such a claim to universality. That this claim is continually disappointed or ridiculed, that it is continually found guilty of delirium, of

contradiction or of bad faith, only confirms its imperious, demanding, insistent, or insidious character. When we name love, we name something—and without a doubt, the only thing of this kind—that diffuses itself through all things, that comes closer and closer to totality, because this thing is the principle or the movement of proximity and of the neighbor, because it is the evidence and the certainty of recognition, and at the same time the power of fulfillment. Diverse as the realities are that are designated by *amor fati*, by the love of God, by the love of Tristan, by love in the afternoon, love on the ground, love in flight, or by the sacred love of the fatherland, the meaning remains the same, unchangeable and infinite: it is always the furthest movement of a completion.

If we take love within the Occident, and the Occident in turn within love, how then can we hope to repeat the rendezvous that seems to have been missed once and for all, since it is the very nature of this love—unique and universal, plenary, fulfilling—that caused the rendezvous to be missed?

If such an undertaking will always be in vain, it is nonetheless certain that love is not to be found elsewhere. Elsewhere (if such an “elsewhere” exists, but this is not the question here), one will find, by definition, only pleasure or desire, vows, sacrifice, or ecstasy, but “love” will not be found. We will not be able to redirect love to the edges of the Occident, if such edges exist, in order to abandon it to voluptuous rituals, innocent games, or heroic communions, as certain ethnological or archaeological fictions would like to do. For there we would instantly lose what makes “love,” its unique nomination, and the intimate communication it establishes between caress and devotion, between charity and nuptials (we would, in fact, lose the very meaning of these words, of all love’s words). Nothing leads us more surely back to ourselves (to the Occident, to philosophy, to the dialectic, to literature) than love.

That is why one would want to separate oneself from love, free oneself from it. Instead of this law of the completion of being, one would want to deal only with a moment of contact between beings, a light, cutting, and delicious moment of contact, at once eternal and fleeting. In its philosophical assignation, love seems to skirt this touch of the heart that would not complete anything, that would go nowhere, graceful and casual, the joy of the soul and the pleasure of the skin, simple luminous flashes of love freed from itself. That is Don Juan’s wish, it is his fervor, it is even his success: but we can think Don Juan only condemned, unless we represent his impunity as a diabolical or perverse challenge to the very law of love. Thus there is no innocent or joyous Don Juan. Mozart’s, it is true, continues up until the end merrily thwarting the condemnation. And, yet, perhaps in spite of himself, Mozart let him be condemned. But even in hell, the figure of Don Juan testifies with remarkable force and insistence that this

style of love as heart's touch obstinately haunts the thinking of love as law of fulfillment.

(Actually, when we represent modes of existence and thinking foreign to the law of love, we supplement this law, in our representations, by something else: it is a sacred order, a social tie, or a natural attraction that plays, in the final analysis, the role of love and that gives tenderness, eroticism, and fraternity their independence. This means that we think love in the guise of a substitute or a transfiguration of these things that our imaginary figures as realities that we would have possessed, then lost: religion, community, the immediate emotion of the other and of the divine. But this substitute is not satisfied with coming to the place of what would have been lost—or in the most Christian version, it is not satisfied with transfiguring it. Love conceals a fundamental ambivalence in which it at the same time challenges that which it must replace: we represent love as hostile or as foreign to the city and to religion—so that while affirming that they are founded within love or virtually fulfilled in it, they multiply with respect to love the procedures of control or of conciliation. But for itself, in its living essence, love is reputed to be rebellious, fugitive, errant, unassignable, and inassimilable. Thus love is at once the promise of completion—but a promise always disappearing—and the threat of decomposition, always imminent. An entire modern eroticism and an entire modern spirituality, those of romantic love, of savage love, of transgressive love, are determined according to this dialectic.)

Love is thus not here, and it is not elsewhere. One can neither attain it nor free oneself from it, and this is at bottom exactly what it is: the excess or the lack of this completion, which is represented as the truth of love. In other words, and as it has been extensively said, extensively represented, and extensively theorized for some two centuries: the impossible.

II

We will thus have to engage the repetition differently. We will have to stop thinking in terms of possibility and impossibility. We will have to maintain that love is always present and never recognized in anything that we name "love." We will have to admit that the rendezvous, our rendezvous with love, takes place not once, but an indefinite number of times and that it is never "love" that is at the rendezvous, or unique and universal love (*Catholic* love), or nomadic and multiple loves, but another presence or another movement of love. Or rather, another love presence or another love movement that we in fact touch or that touches us, but that is not the "love" we were expecting. (Classical figure of romantic comedy or drama: it is another who is at the rendezvous, but it is love itself that is revealed

thereby—and betrayed. *Così fan tutte*.) Another love presence or another love movement: that is what the repetition should let emerge. This would not at all imply the invention of another “love” or of a beyond love. It would imply letting love once again open up its paths within thought, letting it once again call thought toward it, thought exposed to missing love as well as to being touched by it, exposed to being betrayed, as well as to taking account of its miserable means of loving.

We will set out again from the given that is perhaps the simplest and that is offered right in the middle of the tradition. In this tradition, love is defined above all as *that which is not self-love*. Any other determination—ontological, erotic, political—is excluded from the start and could only be recaptured, if that is necessary, starting from there.

(It was within the spirituality of the mystic tradition that this formulation of love came to be privileged. As an example, some lines from Fénelon:

The ownership condemned with such rigor by the mystics, and often called impurity, is only the search for one's own solace and one's own interest in the *jouissance* of the gifts of God, at the expense of the jealousy of the pure love that wants everything for God and nothing for the creature. The angel's sin was a sin of ownership; *stetit in se*, as Saint Augustine says. Ownership, of course, is nothing but self-love or pride, which is the love of one's own excellence insofar as it is one's own, and which, instead of coming back completely and uniquely to God, still to a small extent brings the gifts of God back to the self so that it can take pleasure in them.

What is expressed in these terms and under the rubric of a relation to “God” belongs in one way or another to all modes and all forms of the thinking of love that we have been able to know. In one sense, this does not say anything other than what the philosophical schema of love already contains, and, nonetheless, it displaces its entire economy of a fulfillment *proper*. It is simply a matter of letting oneself be carried by a tiny movement, barely perceptible, which would not reconstitute the dialectical logic, but which would touch the heart of the schema, the heart of love itself.)

Love defines itself as the absolute opposite and as the destruction of self-love. Self-love is not simply the love of the self; it is, as we have just read, “the love of one's own excellence *insofar as it is one's own*.” One can love oneself with a real love, and it might even be that one must do so (however, it is not certain that these words, “the self,” “oneself,” can let us discover, without being themselves put into play, precisely *who* is at issue in this love of “self”: that is a question that we will have to take up again later). But self-love, understood according to the signification the

spiritual authors gave to it, and not as a term in psychology almost synonymous with sensitivity, is the love (which, from this moment on, is no longer one) of possession. It is the love of the self as property.

Property is an ontological determination. It does not designate the object possessed, but the subject in the object. "Matter, for itself, is not proper to itself" (Hegel), it can therefore become my possession. But in this possession, it is I myself, as subject, that finds myself realized, it is my subjectivity (*me* as will, need, desire, consciousness—of *me*), and in this respect possession properly becomes property. Which is to say that property is the objectivized presence of subjectivity, its realization in the outside world, and thus "the first existence of freedom" (Hegel). Property is the attestation and the assurance of the self in the actuality of the world. The self presents itself there outside itself, but in this presentation it is itself that it posits. Self-love is the desire and the affirmation of this autoposition: outside itself, in objectivity and in exteriority, the subject has the moment of its authenticity and the truth of its fulfillment.

Thus self-love indeed has the structure of love: here also, it is a matter of "having in another the moment of one's subsistence." In one sense, the formulas of love and of property respond to each other infinitely in the philosophical economy, each one giving to the other its stability or its movement.

If love is the gift of the self, it would thus also be, dialectically, the appropriation of the self. Self-love would therefore be at the heart of love, it would be its heart, the heart of love, and this implacably reconstituted economy—the dialectical economy of fulfillment, the capitalist economy of an absolute surplus value of the self—would proscribe love from the heart of love itself. The tradition knows well this absence of love from love itself. La Rochefoucauld, in this respect, sums it all up, or there is Nietzsche's formula: "a refined parasitism," and so on until Lévinas, for example, who writes, "To love is also to love oneself within love and thus to return to the self." Actually, the problem had been posed since the Aristotelian discussion of *philautia*, of the love of oneself, and it has traversed and troubled all Christian thought since Saint Augustine. (The question that dominated all the debates of the Middle Ages about love was the question of knowing "if man, by nature, is capable of loving God more than himself.") One could even explain by way of this absence the missed rendezvous between philosophy and love: if the latter always frustrates love or diverts it to self-love, if love finally lies to itself and lacks itself, how could one fail to forever lack it? And how could one not substitute for it sometimes its dismembered parts (the sexual organ, sentiment . . .), sometimes its sublimations (friendship, charity . . .)?

III

But this knowledge is too slight. Love frustrates the simple opposition between economy and noneconomy. Love is precisely—when it is, when it is the act of a singular being, of a body, of a heart, of a thinking—that which brings an end to the dichotomy between the love in which I lose myself without reserve and the love in which I recuperate myself, to the opposition between gift and property.

Of course, philosophy and theology have always surmounted and dialecticized this opposition: God's love for himself in his son brings itself about as a love for man on the part of this same Son, given, abandoned, and retaken in glory, with all of creation redeemed and brought into relation, through the love thus received, with its creator. But the separation is thus surmounted only because it is annulled in its principle: God gives only what he possesses infinitely (in a sense, he thus gives nothing), and reciprocally, he possesses only what he gives. (He is the proprietor par excellence; he appears to himself in the totality of objectivity—and that is what the idea of the "creation," in this respect, signifies. And if our time still had to be one of such a research, it is in an entirely different direction that we would have to look for the mystery of the "god of love.")

Love brings an end to the opposition between gift and property without surmounting and without sublating it: if I return to myself within love, I do not return to myself *from* love (the dialectic, on the contrary, feeds on the equivocation). *I* do not return from it, and consequently, something of *I* is definitively lost or dissociated in its act of loving. That is undoubtedly why *I* return (if at least it is the image of a return that is appropriate here), but *I* return broken: I come back to myself, or I come out of it, broken. The "return" does not annul the break; it neither repairs it nor sublates it, for the return in fact takes place only across the break itself, keeping it open. Love re-presents *I* to itself broken (and this is not a representation). It presents this to it: he, this subject, was touched, broken into, in his subjectivity, and he *is* from then on, for the time of love, opened by this slice, broken or fractured, even if only slightly. He *is*, which is to say that the break or the wound is not an accident, and neither is it a property that the subject could relate to himself. For the break is a break in his self-possession as subject; it is, essentially, an interruption of the process of relating oneself to oneself outside of oneself. From then on, *I* is *constituted broken*. As soon as there is love, the slightest act of love, the slightest spark, there is this ontological fissure that cuts across and that disconnects the elements of the subject-proper—the fibers of its heart. One hour of love is enough, one kiss alone, provided that it is out of love—and can there, in truth, be any other kind? Can one do it without love, without being broken into, even if only slightly?

The love break simply means this: that I can no longer, whatever presence to myself I may maintain or that sustains me, propose myself to myself (nor impose myself on another) without remains, without something of me *remaining*, outside of me. This signifies that the immanence of the subject (to which the dialectic always returns to fulfill itself, including in what we call "intersubjectivity" or even "communication" or "communion") is opened up, broken into—and this is what is called, in all rigor, a transcendence. Love is the act of a transcendence (of a transport, of a transgression, of a transparency, also: immanence is no longer opaque). But this transcendence is not the one that passes into—and through—an exteriority or an alterity in order to reflect itself in it and to reconstitute in it the interior and the identical (God, the certainty of the *cogito*, the evidence of a property). It does not pass through the outside, because it comes from it. (Transcendence is always thought as a self-surpassing: but here it is not at all a "surpassing," and even less "self-"; transcendence is the disimplication of the immanence that can come to it only from the outside.) Love does not stop, as long as love lasts, coming from the outside. It does not remain outside; it *is* this outside itself, the other, each time singular, a blade thrust in me, and that I do not rejoin, because it disjoins me (it does not wound, properly speaking: it is something else, foreign to a certain dramatics of love).

The movement of the transcendence of love does not go from the singular being toward the other, toward the outside. It is not the singular being that puts itself outside itself: it is the other, and in the other it is not the subject's identity that operates this movement or this touch. But in the other it is this movement that makes it other and which is always other than "itself" in its identity; that is what transcends "in me." This transcendence thus fulfills nothing: it cuts, it breaks, and it exposes so that there is no domain or instance of being where love would fulfill itself.

This does not mean that this transcendence accomplishes only what we would call—for example, in the theory of the sublime—a "negative presentation." (Love, certainly, has the most intimate relations with the sublime and with this extreme mode of presentation that I have attempted to designate elsewhere as the "sublime offering" (see chap. 2, n. 45); but with the offering, it is already a question of what, in fact, exceeds the sublime itself, and within love it is perhaps a question, in the final analysis, of that which exceeds love.) When the transcendence that touches me presents the unfulfillment of love (which becomes neither substance nor subject), it at the same time offers its actual advent: love takes place, it happens, and it happens endlessly in the withdrawal of its own presentation. It is an offering, which is to say that love is always proposed, addressed, suspended in its arrival, and not presented, imposed, already having reached its end.

Love arrives, it comes, or else it is not love. But it is thus that it endlessly goes elsewhere than to "me" who would receive it: its coming is only a departure for the other, its departure only the coming of the other.

What is offered by transcendence, or as transcendence, is this arrival and this departure, this incessant coming-and-going. What is offered is the offered being itself: exposed to arrival and to departure, the singular being is traversed by the alterity of the other, which does not stop or fix itself anywhere, neither in "him," nor in "me," because it is nothing other than the coming-and-going. The other comes and cuts across me, because it immediately leaves for the other: it does not return to itself, because it leaves only in order to come again. This crossing breaks the heart: this is not necessarily bloody or tragic, it is beyond an opposition between the tragic and serenity or gaiety. The break is nothing more than a touch, but the touch is not less deep than a wound.

Transcendence will thus be better named the crossing of love. What love cuts across, and what it reveals by its crossing, is what is exposed to the crossing, to its coming-and-going—and this is nothing other than finitude. Because the singular being is finite, the other cuts across it (and never does the other "penetrate" the singular being or "unite itself" with it or "commune"). Love unveils finitude. Finitude is the being of that which is infinitely inappropriable, not having the consistency of its essence either in itself or in a dialectical sublation of the self. Neither the other nor love nor I can appropriate itself nor be appropriated ("Infinity of one and of the other, in the other and in the one"—Valéry).

This is why desire is not love. Desire lacks its object—which is the subject—and lacks it while appropriating it to itself (or rather, it appropriates it to itself while lacking it). Desire—I mean that which philosophy has thought as desire: will, appetite, conatus, libido—is foreign to love because it sublates, be it negatively, the logic of fulfillment. Desire is self extending toward its end—but love does not extend, nor does it extend itself toward an end. If it is extended, it is by an upheaval of the other in me. (Along with desire, all the terms of this contemporary lexicon are foreign to love: demand, seduction, dependence, and so on, and more generally, an entire analytics—that is not only of the "psych" variety—of the amorous operation as calculation, investment, completion, retribution, and the like.)

Desire is unhappiness without end: it is the subjectivist reverse of the infinite exposition of finitude. Desire is the negative appropriation that the dialectic tries indefinitely to convert into positivity. It is infelicitous love and the exasperation of the desired happiness. But in the broken heart, desire itself is broken. This heart is no more unhappy than it is happy. It is offered, at the limit between one and the other "sentiment," or one and

the other “state.” And this limit corresponds to that of its finitude: the heart does not belong to itself, not even in the mode of a desire, and even less in the mode of happiness or unhappiness. To love “with all my heart” puts a totality into play—that of the crossing—to which I cannot accede. *Cor tuum nondum est totum tuum* (Baudoin du Devon). The heart of the singular being is that which is not totally his, but it is thus that it is *his heart*.

(Actually, the heart is not broken, in the sense that it does not exist before the break. But it is the break itself that makes the heart. The heart is not an organ, and neither is it a faculty. It is: that *I* is broken and traversed by the other where its presence is most intimate and its life most open. The beating of the heart—rhythm of the partition of being, syncope of the sharing of singularity—cuts across presence, life, consciousness. That is why thinking—which is nothing other than the *weighing* or testing of the limits, the ends, of presence, of life, of consciousness—thinking itself is love.)

Love does not transfigure finitude, and it does not carry out its transubstantiation in infinity. (The transubstantiation is infinite, without being the infinite.) Love cuts across finitude, always from the other to the other, which never returns to the same—and all loves, so humbly alike, are superbly singular. Love offers finitude in its truth; it is finitude’s dazzling presentation. (This could be said in English: *glamour*, this fascination, this seducing splendor reserved today for the language of makeup and of the staging of faces. *Glamour*: love’s preparations and promises.)

Or perhaps love itself is eclipsed in this outburst, at once because it does not stop coming and going, never being simply present, and because it is always put into play farther off than everything that would have to qualify it (sublime love, tender love, foolish love, implacable love, pure love, abandoned love). Nietzsche’s Zarathustra says: “Great loves do not *want* love—they want more.”

To Joy and Concern

So I say it again and again, pleasure is shared.

—Lucretius

I

In one sense—and in a sense that will perhaps always conceal the totality of *sense*, assignable as such—love is the impossible, and it does not arrive, or it arrives only at the limit, while crossing. It is also for this reason that it is missed by philosophy and no less by poetry. They do not miss love

simply because they say it and because they say that it is fulfilled, whether by a divine force or in the splendor of words. It is true that in saying "I love you," I suspend all recourse to gods as much as I put myself back in their power, and that I unseat the power of words as much as I affirm that power at its peak. But philosophy and poetry still feed themselves on these contradictions. But there is more, for in one sense, nothing happens with "I love you," neither power nor effacement. "I love you" is not a performative (neither is it a descriptive nor a prescriptive statement). This sentence names nothing and does nothing. ("Though spoken billions of times, *I-love-you* is extralexical; it is a figure whose definition cannot transcend the heading.")⁴ It is the very sentence of indigence, immediately destined to its own lie, or to its own ignorance, and immediately abandoned to the harassment of a reality that will never authenticate it without reserve. In one sense, love does not arrive, and, on the contrary, it always arrives, so that in one way or another "the love boat has crashed against the everyday" (Mayakovsky).

But "I love you" (which is the unique utterance of love and which is, at bottom, its name: love's name is not "love," which would be a substance or a faculty, but it is this sentence, the "I love you," just as one says "the cogito")—the "I love you" is something else. It is a promise. The promise, by constitution, is an utterance that draws itself back before the law that it lets appear. The promise neither describes nor prescribes nor performs. It does nothing and thus is always vain. But it lets a law appear, the law of the given word: that this must be. "I love you" says nothing (except a limit of speech), but it allows to emerge the fact that love must arrive and that nothing, absolutely nothing, can relax, divert, or suspend the rigor of this law. The promise does not anticipate or assure the future: it is possible that one day I will no longer love you, and this possibility cannot be taken away from love—it belongs to it. It is against this possibility, but also *with* it, that the promise is made, the word given. Love is its own promised eternity, its own eternity unveiled as law.

Of course, the promise must be kept. But if it is not, that does not mean that there was no love, nor even that there was not love. Love is faithful only to itself. The promise must be kept, and nonetheless love is not the promise *plus* the keeping of the promise. It cannot be subjected in this way to verification, to justification, and to accumulation (even if there are, indisputably, illusory or deceitful loves, loves without faith and law, that are no longer of love—but these are counterfeits, and even Don Juan is not one of them). Love is the promise and its keeping, the one independent of the other. How could it be otherwise, since one never knows what must be kept? Perhaps unlike all other promises, one must keep only the promise itself: not its "contents" ("love"), but its utterance ("I love you"). That

is why love's ultimate paradox, untenable and nonetheless inevitable, is that its law lets itself be represented simultaneously by figures like Tristan and Isolde, Don Juan, or Baucis and Philemon—and that these figures are neither the types of a genre nor the metaphors of a unique reality, but rather so many bursts of love, which reflect love in its entirety each time without ever imprisoning it or holding it back.

When the promise is kept, it is not the keeping, but it is still the promise that makes love. Love does not fulfill itself, it always arrives in the promise and as the promise. It is thus that it touches and that it traverses. For one does not know what one says when one says "I love you," and one does not say anything, but one knows that one says it and that it is law, absolutely: instantly, one is shared and traversed by that which does not fix itself in any subject or in any signification. (If one more proof or account were necessary: the same holds true when one hears "I love you" said by an other whom one does not love and whose expectations will not be met. Despite everything, it cannot be that one is not traversed by something that, while not love itself, is nonetheless the way in which its promise touches us.)

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Love arrives then in the promise. In one sense (in another sense, always other, always at the limit of sense), it always arrives, as soon as it is promised, in words or in gestures. That is why, if we are exhausted or exasperated by the proliferating and contradictory multiplicity of representations and thoughts of love—which compose in effect the enclosure and the extenuation of a history of love—this same multiplicity still offers, however, another thought: love arrives in all the forms and in all the figures of love; it is projected in all its shatters.

There are no parts, moments, types, or stages of love. There is only an infinity of shatters: love is wholly complete in one sole embrace or in the history of a life, in jealous passion or in tireless devotion. It consists as much in taking as in giving, as much in requiring as in renouncing, as much in protecting as in exposing. It is in the jolt and in appeasement, in the fever and in serenity, in the exception and in the rule. It is sexual, and it is not: it cuts across the sexes with another difference (Derrida, in *Geschlecht*, initiated the analysis of this) that does not abolish them, but displaces their identities. Whatever my love is, it cuts across my identity, my sexual property, that objectification by which I am a masculine or feminine subject. It is Uranian Aphrodite and Pandemian Aphrodite; it is Eros, Cupid, Isis and Osiris, Diane and Acteon, Ariadne and Dionysus; it

is the *princesse de Clèves* or the *enfant de Bohême*; it is Death enlaced around a naked woman; it is the letters of Hyperion, of Kierkegaard, or of Kafka.

(It is perhaps that—a hypothesis that I leave open here—in love and in hate, but according to a regime other than that of Freudian ambivalence, there would not be a reversal from hate to love, but in hate I would be traversed by the love of another whom I deny in his alterity. Ultimately, I would be traversed by this negation. This would be the limit of love, but still its black glimmer. Perverse acts of violence, or the cold rage to annihilate, are not hate.)

From one burst to another, never does love resemble itself. It always makes itself recognized, but it is always unrecognizable, and moreover it is not in any one of its shatters, or it is always on the way to not being there. Its unity, or its truth as love, consists only in this proliferation, in this indefinite luxuriance of its essence—and this essence itself at once gives itself and flees itself in the crossing of this profusion. Pure love refuses orgasm, the seducer laughs at adoration—blind to the fact that they each pass through the other, even though neither stops in the other. Plato had encountered the nature of Eros; son of Poros and of Penia, of resources and indigence, love multiplies itself to infinity, offering nothing other than its poverty of substance and of property.

But love is not “polymorphous,” and it does not take on a series of disguises. It does not withhold its identity behind its shatters: it *is* itself the eruption of their multiplicity, it *is* itself their multiplication in one single act of love, it is the trembling of emotion in a brothel, and the distress of a desire within fraternity. Love does not simply cut across, it cuts itself across itself, it arrives and arrives at itself as that by which nothing arrives, except that there is “arriving,” arrival and departure: of the other, always of the other, so much *other* that it is never *made*, or *done* (one makes love, because it is never *made*) and so much *other* that it is never *my* love (if I say to the other “my love,” it is of the other, precisely, that I speak, and nothing is “mine”).

There is no master figure, there is no major representation of love, nor is there any common assumption of its scattered and inextricable shatters. That is why “love” is saturated, exhausted with philosophy and poetry (and threatened with falling into sexology, marriage counseling, newsstand novels, and moral edification all at once, as soon as it no longer supports its major figures, sealed in the destiny of occidental love), if we miss what love itself misses: that it comes *across* and never simply *comes* to its place or to term, that it comes across itself and overtakes itself, being the finite touch of the infinite crossing of the other.

III

What thus arrives in the crossing, crosswise, is not an accident of being, nor an episode of existence. It is an ontological determination of that existent that Heidegger names the *Dasein*—which is to say, the being in which Being is put into play. The putting into play of Being in the *Dasein* and as the *Dasein* is indissociable from the following: that the world of the *Dasein* is right away a world “that I share with others,” or a “world-with.” Because Heidegger, at the final frontier of philosophy, is the first to have assigned the being-with in Being itself, we must consider him for a moment.

The “world” that is here in question is not an exteriority of objects, nor an environment or neighborhood. It designates the mode of the putting into play of Being: through the *Dasein*, Being is being-in-the-world (thrown, abandoned, offered, and set free: that is what “in the world” means). If the world is *Mitwelt*, shared world, Being insofar as it is “in the world” is constitutively being-with, and being-according-to-the-sharing. The ordinary sharing of the world is the sharing of Being, and the Being of the *Dasein* is nothing other than the Being of this sharing. (One could transpose this approximately into a more classical language as follows: that which confers Being, on whatever it may be, is that which puts in the world; but the world is a “with”; Being consists thus in being delivered to the “with.”) The *Dasein* is what it is in being originally *with* others. And if concern most properly creates the Being of the *Dasein* (“concern,” that is to say the structure and the thrust of the existent that is offered-to, ahead of itself), concern for the other is its constitutive determination. Heidegger names it *Fürsorge*, “concern for” the other, whose analysis shows that it is, in its “advancing” (as opposed to its domineering) form, the movement of touching the other in his own concern, of restoring him to this concern or of liberating him for it, instead of exempting him from it. The concern for the other sends the other—in sending me to him—ahead of him, outside of him, once more into the world. The shared world as the world of concern-for-the-other is a world of the crossing of singular beings by this sharing itself that constitutes them, that makes them be, by addressing them one to the other, which is to say one by the other beyond the one and the other.

I am certainly betraying in part the Heideggerian description. Concern or preoccupation for things—and not for others—that are in the world (*Besorgen*) plays a role in Heidegger parallel to the *Fürsorge*, and although the latter is in effect a fundamental ontological determination, it does not exactly accede to the privileged position I have just given it. The analytic of the being-with remains a moment, which is not returned to thematically,

in a general analytic where the *Dasein* appears first of all and most frequently as in some way isolated, even though Heidegger himself emphasizes that there is solitude “only *in* and *for* a being-with.” Moreover, love is never named and consequently never furnishes, as such, an ontologico-existential character (although the description of *Fürsorge* greatly resembles a certain classical description of the most demanding, most noble, and most spiritual love).

I will not undertake here the dense and meticulous explication that Heidegger’s text would demand. I will be content to propose dryly this double hypothesis: in approaching more closely than we ever have the *altered* (crossed by the other) constitution of Being in its singularity, Heidegger (1) determined the essence of the *Dasein* outside of subjectivity (and a fortiori outside of inter-subjectivity) in a being-exposed or in a being-offered to others, of which philosophy (since Plato? despite Plato?) has always been, despite everything, the denial, and (2) kept (despite himself?) the assignation of this *Dasein* in the apparent form of a distinct individuality, as much opposed as exposed to other individualities and thus irremediably kept in a sphere of autonomic, if not subjective, allure. In accordance with these two gestures, Heidegger was prevented from summoning love to the ontological register. On the one hand, he could, in effect, only collide with the metaphysical-dialectical thinking of love, which had redirected the *Mitsein* into the space of subjectivity. On the other hand, love insofar as it is traversed by Being exceeds the very movement of *Fürsorge*, which “surpasses and liberates the other”: this movement is still thought *starting* from an “I” or from an “identity” that goes toward the other, and it is not thought as what cuts across and alters *I* going to the other while the other comes to it.

It is not at all by chance that Heidegger is silent about love (at least his references to Scheler, his critique of the theory of empathy, and at least one allusion made to love demonstrate that this silence was deliberate—if it were not already obvious that it is deliberate with respect to the entire philosophical tradition). Love forms the limit of a thinking that carries itself to the limit of philosophy. Until thinking extricates itself, it will not be able to reach love. But what this thinking, at its limit, lets emerge could be this: that one never *reaches* love, even though love is always happening to us. Or rather, love is always offered to us. Or yet again, we are always, in our Being—and in us Being is—exposed to love.

(*Note:* I will be even less explicit with Lévinas than with Heidegger. Every philosophical inquiry on love today carries an obvious debt toward Lévinas, as well as points of proximity, such as are easily detected here. For Lévinas cleared the path toward what one can call, in the language of

Totality and Infinity, a metaphysics of love, to the point that this metaphysics commands, at bottom, his entire oeuvre. For this very reason, a discussion of Lévinas would have to be an enterprise distinct from this essay. I should, however, indicate what its principle would be. As a citation above recalled, love remains *equivocal* for Lévinas, reducing itself to egotism. Its transcendence lifts the equivocation only by transcending itself into fecundity, filiation, and fraternity. If I, for my part, do not thematize such notions here, it is because another work would be necessary to attempt to extract them from the oriented sequence that, in Lévinas, in a rather classical manner, hierarchizes them and prescribes them to a teleology. This teleology proceeds from the first given of his thought, “the epiphany of the face”: love is the movement stressed by this epiphany, a movement that transcends it in order to reach, beyond the face, beyond vision and the “you,” the “hidden—never hidden enough—absolutely ungraspable.” From this “vertigo that no signification any longer clarifies” (that of the Eros), the fraternity of children, lifting its equivocation, can emerge, the fraternity of children in which, again, the epiphany of the face is produced. Love thus retains at least certain traits of a dialectical moment. It retains them, it seems to me, due to the motif of the face. The latter signifies the primordial relation as the expression of another and as signification. Because this signification is given at the beginning, it must disappear within love and be recaptured in its surpassing. I can, on the contrary, grasp the relation with the face only as second and as constituted. Lévinas opposes it, and pre-poses it, “to the unveiling of Being in general,” a Heideggerian theme in which he sees “the absolute indetermination of the *there is*—of an existing without existents—incessant negation, infinite limitation,” “anarchic.” I can be in solidarity with Lévinas’s distaste for certain accents, shall we say, of dereliction in Heidegger’s discourse. But in the *es gibt* (“it gives [itself]”) of Being, one can see everything except “generality.” *There is* the “each time,” an-archic in fact (or even archi-archic, as Derrida might say?), of an existing, singular occurrence. *There is no* existing without existents, and *there is no* “existing” by itself, no concept—it does not *give itself*—but there is always being, precise and hard, the theft of the generality. Being is at stake there, it is in shatters, offered dazzling, multiplied, shrill and singular, hard and cut across: its being is there. Being-with is constitutive of this stake—and that is what Lévinas, before anyone, understood. But being-with takes place only according to the occurrence of being, or its posing into shatters. And the crossing—the coming-and-going, the comings-and-goings of love—is constitutive of the occurrence. This takes place before the face and signification. Or rather, this takes place on another level: *at the heart of being.*)

IV

We are exposed by concern—not that which “we” “hold” for the other, but by this concern, this solicitude, this consideration, and this renunciation for the other that cuts across us and does not come back to us, that comes and goes incessantly, as the being-other of the other inscribed in being itself: at the *heart* of being, or as the *promise* of being.

This concern exposes us to joying.⁶ To joy is no more impossible, as Lacan wanted it, than possible, as the sexologist would want it. To joy is not an eventuality that one might expect, that one might exclude, or that one might provoke. To joy is not a fulfillment, and it is not even an event. Nonetheless, it happens, it arrives—and it arrives as it departs, it arrives in departing and it departs in the arrival, in the same beat of the heart. To joy is the crossing of the other. The other cuts across me, I cut across it. Each one is the other for the other—but also for the self. In this sense, one joys in the other for the self: to be passed to the other. This is the syncope of identity in singularity. A syncope: the step marked, in a suspense, from the other to me, neither confusion nor fading, clarity itself, the beating of the heart, the cadence and the cut of another heart within it.

Everything has been said of joying, as of love, but this word resists. It is the verb of love, and this verb speaks the act of joy (the *joy* of courtly love). Something resists, through these two words (that are only one), the overwhelming exhaustiveness of discourses on love. It is not so much a result, or “discharge,” as Freud says and as it is said vulgarly, as an acute insistence, the very formation of a shatter (one might say, like Deleuze, “a hardening that is one with love”). It is not something unspeakable, because it is spoken, the joy is named, but it is something with which discourses (narratives and poems) can never be even. They have never said it enough, having always discoursed it too much, declared it too much.

Joy is the trembling of a deliverance beyond all freedom: it is to be cut across, undone, it is to be joyed as much as to joy: “Love is joy accompanied by the idea of an exterior cause,” writes Spinoza, and he specifies that with this joy it is not a matter of desire, for “this definition explains with enough clarity the essence of love. Regarding that of the authors who define love as *the will of he who loves to join himself to the loved object*, it does not express the essence of love, but its property.” But we have to push “the idea of an exterior cause” to this: to be joyed—to face the extremity of being, which is to say at once its completion and its limit, beyond desire or short of it. This is joy, and this also reflects on the essence of chagrin and of pain. For joy is not appeasement, but a serenity without rest. To joy is not to be satisfied—it is to be filled, overflowed. It is to be cut across without even being able to hold onto what “to joy” makes happen.

To joy cannot contain *itself*. Joy is not even to contain joy itself, nor the pain that consequently accompanies it. The joy of joying does not come back to anyone, neither to me nor to you, for in each it opens the other. In the one and the other, and in the one by the other, joy offers being itself, it makes being felt, shared. Joy knows concern, and is known by it. Joy makes felt, *and* it lets go the very essence of the sharing that is being. (Although it means diverting the sentence from its proper context, I will cite Michel Henry: "Far from coming after the arrival of being and marveling before it, joy is consubstantial with it, founds it and constitutes it.")

This puts one beside oneself, this irritates and exasperates, and the language for saying it is exasperated. (It would be better to let another speak, and in a language that would remain, somewhat, on the side:')

Laura the basilisk made entirely of asbestos, walking to the fiery stake with a mouth full of gum. Hunkydory is the word on her lips. The heavy fluted lips on the sea shell, Laura's lips, the lips of lost Uranian love. All floating shadowward through the slanting fog. Last murmuring dregs of shell-like lips slipping off the Labrador coast, oozing eastward with the mud tides, easing starward in the iodine drift. . . . I kept it up like a Juggernaut. Moloch fucking a piece of bombazine. Organza Friganza. The bolero in straight jabs. . . . We embraced one another silently and then we slid into a long fuck. [Henry Miller]

But this is shared too much within the other. It is not that identity, in joying, simply loses itself. It is there at its peak. There is in fact too much identity—and joying opens the enigma of that which, in the syncope of the subject, in the crossing of the other, affirms an absolute *self*. To joy poses without reserve the question of the singular being, which we are no doubt barely on the way to broaching. It is the question of *that which remains "self" when nothing returns to the self*: the very question of love, if love is always proffered ("I love you") and if joy, coming from the other, coming and going, is however always mine.

It is the question of a presence: to joy is an extremity of presence, *self* exposed, presence of *self* joying outside itself, in a presence that no present absorbs and that does not (re)present, but that offers itself endlessly.

To try to enter into the question, one could say at least this: *self* that joys joys of its presence *in the presence of the other*. He, she, is only the presence of the reception of the other presence—and the latter cuts across. The presence that cuts across is a burst. To joy, joy itself, is to receive the burst of a singular being: its more than manifest presence, its seeming beyond all appearance—*ekphanestaton*, Plato said. But it is *by oneself* also that he, she who joys is bedazzled. It is in himself thus that he is delighted.

But he does not belong to himself, and he does not come back to himself; he is shared, like the joy he shares.

What appears in this light, at once excessive and impeccable, what is offered like a belly, like a kissed mouth, is the singular being insofar as it is this "self" that is neither a subject nor an individual nor a communal being, but *that*—she or he—which cuts across, that which arrives and departs. The singular being affirms even better its absolute singularity, which it offers only in passing, which it brings about immediately in the crossing. What is offered through the singular being—through you or me, across this relation that is only cut across—is the singularity of being, which is to say this: that being itself, "being" taken absolutely, is absolutely singular (thus it would be that which remains "self" when nothing comes back to the self).

This constitution is buried at the heart of being, but it emerges in outbursts of joy. One could say: being joys. One would thus define an ontological necessity of love. But love is neither unique nor necessary. It comes, it is offered; it is not established as a structure of being or as its principle, and even less as its subjectivity. One would thus define a necessity without a law, or a law without necessity, thus: the heart of being within love, and love in surplus of being. One could say, at the limit, the fundamental ontology *and* the caprices of love. The correlation would neither be causal nor expressive nor essential nor existential nor of any other known genre. Perhaps it would no longer be necessary to speak of correlation. But there is this brilliant, shattering constitution of being. "Love" does not define it, but it names it, and obliges us to think it.

Postscriptum

—You wrote: "It might well be appropriate that a discourse on love be at the same time a communication of love, a letter, a missive, since love sends itself as much as it enunciates itself." But you didn't send this text to anyone. And you know very well that that doesn't mean that you sent it to everyone. One can't love everyone.

—But a letter, a missive, once published, is no longer a missive. It is a citation or a mimicking of one. About how many poets do the biographers or the critics tell us that their poems are far from the reality of their loves?

—And don't you think that "I love you," by itself, is already a citation? Listen to Valéry: "To say to anyone *I love you* is to recite a lesson. It was never invented!" Recitation for citation, you might have risked that. You might have risked playing at losing the distance of discourse.

—I didn't want to. I was afraid, if I played that game, that it would be even more discourse, and not necessarily more love.

—And nonetheless, aren't you ever touched by a poem, by a letter, by a dialogue of love? And do you really believe that your love—if you have one, how could one know?—owes nothing to these public dispatches?

—I know. I know my debt, and I know that I don't pay returns. But you also read that I would want to be exempt from love, to be even with it. The splinters that cut across me, coming from another, from you perhaps, or coming from me, that is still something other than "love," other than this burden of the word and its declaration. It is lighter, more relaxed; it is not subject to the grandiloquence of love.

—There is then no excess, no infinite transport in this raving: it must be only *this other*? Only him, her, *to whom* you send your love, and if not there is no love? But each time, and even if you switched every day, and even if you love several at a time, love is addressed to one alone, singularly and infinitely: does not your lightness forget that?

—No, I haven't forgotten that. But this infinity is minute, and the words of love are too big for it. Or rather, they are really too small. . . . I don't know anymore. I should perhaps give them all to you, send them all to you, all imprinted, as one touches everywhere the minute infinity of skin, with impatience, with this boundless disorder that never finds an order or a measure, except by being always shaken, always broken, rushed to multiply itself, a nervousness of fingers on masses, on flanks, and in secret folds—with nothing more that is secret, in the end. . . . I should have sent everything, a thousand pages of love and not one word on it, to you alone. All the words of love from everyone. . . . It would have flown into pieces, barely thrown toward you, as it always flies into pieces as soon as it is sent.

—Yes, it's made for that.

Translated by Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney

Chapter 5

Of Divine Places

What is God? Why this question? Can God be said to be a thing? Since he is dead, do we not at least owe him respect for the person he was?

“What is God?” is nonetheless a classic question, admissible and admitted in the strictest theologies. *Quid sit Deus?*: neither the Fathers nor the Councils reject the question. On the contrary, it is *the* theological question, for it presupposes *quod Deus est*—that God is. If it is established for the theologian *that* he is, it may then be asked *what* he is, what sort of thing or being—even if the question cannot be answered, for this too is in keeping with the strictest traditions, not solely of Christianity but probably of all monotheism: we must say that God is, or we must say of God that he is, but it is possible that we will be unable to say of what being his unique and eminent being is made.

“What is God?” will perhaps turn out to have been the necessary but unanswerable question in which the god set about withdrawing.

“I say: God is an essence; but immediately and with greater force I deny it, saying: God is not an essence, since he is not of those things which are definable for us in terms of type, difference and number. And after that I infer from this contradiction that God is an essence above all essence, and, proceeding thus, my understanding establishes itself in infinity and is engulfed by it” (St. Albert the Great).

I can therefore answer, since I can set aside the wrong answers—which is to say ultimately all answers—God is not predicable. (This places us instantaneously at a peak of philosophical saturation, in a Hegelian reab-

sorption of predication: subject and predicate have here, in God, merged with one another.) In raising the question of the theology of the sole and eminent God, we already have the answer: *Deus est quod est*, God is the very fact of his being, the *quod* of which is inaccessible to the question *quid*? It defies the question, it submerges it, and in that way it satisfies it.

The god of the Jews said "I am who I am"; he did not say, as the Greeks understood it, "I am that I am." The gods of other nations said they were gods, or said nothing. One way or the other the god offered himself in his concealed presence. If the god no longer offers himself, if he no longer even conceals his presence in his divine being, he leaves only bare places, where no presence withdraws or comes (*advient*).

1. The question "*what is God?*" is an essentially monotheistic one. Not because it names God in the singular: that naming itself is after all merely a consequence of monotheism, and monotheism consists first of all in the pre-valence of the being of the divine, or of the divine considered as being, over the qualities, functions, or actions of the divine. Contrary to a vague and widespread belief, monotheism definitely does not arise out of a reduction in the number of the gods, nor does it result from a condensation or an Assumption of the Pantheon: in short, monotheism does not consist in the positing of *one* single god as against several gods. It signifies another position of the divine altogether, or an altogether different way of looking at it: here the divine is equivalent to being, and its qualities and actions depend upon the fact of its being.

(Certainly, this presupposes that being is one by definition, that we are talking about being in itself, or of the particular being of such and such a being [*étant*]). The question whether being could be said to be several, that is to say *more than one*—or *less than one*—lies quite a way ahead of us.)

Quid sit Deus? presupposes *quod Deus est*, whereupon we ask ourselves: *what* is the being peculiar to this god who is—*Deus est, ergo unus est*. His quality may remain unknowable, but his quantity at least is certain, and forms as it were the primary quality of all divine quality: God will be good, vengeful, powerful, merciful, insofar as he is one, and not the reverse. Hence God is god insofar as he is, or exists, preeminently, being one. The idea of the preeminence of existence in being-as-one (*l'être-un*) provides the essence of monotheism—which is not to say that monotheism always simply confuses God with Being: but in it God is at least the preeminence of being. (Hence non-Greek Judaism is not monotheistic: faith in the god of one people is not faith in one god. It is rather the opposite.)

Polytheism—which takes its name from monotheism—also posits gods who *are*, but this being, as such, they have in common with all things that

are, and it does not constitute the preeminence of being. What does distinguish the god, on the other hand, is first and foremost a quality common to the race of the gods (immortality), then one or several qualities peculiar to each one of them. In spite of this they do not make up a group of figures of the one divine. They do all partake together of divine immortality, but this divine quality does not exist by itself, no more than for its part does the human quality of being mortal. Immortality and mortality do not exist: on the contrary, *existing* takes place either in a mortal or in an immortal fashion. The divine only exists in the gods, in each god insofar as he is *this* or *that* distinct god, the *that one* who exists immortally: Apollo, Indra, or Anubis. In that case the question must be expressed as: *who is that god?* It is a question concerning the distinctness of an existent, and not the preeminence of existence. That is why the question may on occasion concern new gods: gods can turn up.

2. "As Aristotle so rightly said, we should never show more restraint than when speaking of the gods," wrote Seneca. The passage by Aristotle is lost, like the gods of whom he spoke. We who come after must show all the more restraint. For we cannot escape a feeling of futility: there is no more to be said about God.

"God," the motif or theme of God, the question of God, no longer means anything to us. Or else—as is all too obvious to an unbiased eye—what the theme of God might mean to us has already moved or been carried entirely outside of him. Is there any statement about the divine that can henceforth be distinguished, strictly speaking, from another about "the subject" (or its "absence"), "desire," "history," "others" (*autrui*), "the Other," "being," "speech" (*la parole*), "the sublime," "community," and so on and so forth? It is as if "God" were in fragments, an Osiris dismembered throughout all of our discourse (indeed there are those who will now continue to speak of the divine in terms of explosion, dispersal, suspension, etc.). As if the divine, God, or the gods formed the common name or place—common and as such erasable, insignificant—of every question, every exigency of thought: wherever thought comes up against the furthest extreme, the limit, against truth, or ordeal (*l'épreuve*),¹ in short wherever it thinks, it encounters something that once bore, or seems to have borne, at one time or another, a divine name.

In a pithy formula that was not in itself without force, Jean-Luc Marion² once defined what he saw as the necessary encounter between the modern age and theology in terms of "the principle of insufficient reason": modernity recognizing insufficiency everywhere (in consciousness, discourse, etc.) and theology proposing, along with God and the gift of Charity, the notion of "insufficient reason," or of what Marion calls "the gap," "the distinc-

tion," or "the difference" between beings, as opposed to the fullness of metaphysical being. In fact this was tantamount to proving the opposite: far from being rediscovered, God disappears even more surely and definitively through bearing all the names of a generalized and multiplied difference. Monotheism dissolves into polyatheism, and it is no good asserting that this polyatheism is the true word and the true presence of God in his distance from the supreme Being of metaphysics. For the infinitely absent god, or the god infinitely distended by the infinite distance of god, should no longer be termed "God," nor be presented in any way as "God" or as divine. Try as it may, there is no theology that does not turn out here to be either ontological or anthropological—saying *nothing about the god* that cannot immediately be said about "event," about "love," about "poetry," and so on and so forth. Why not recognize, on the contrary, that thought in this age of ours is in the process of wresting from so-called theology the prerogative of talking about the Other, the Infinitely-other, the Other-Infinite. It is taking away from theology the privilege of expressing the *absconditum* of experience and discourse. In so doing, perhaps the modern age secretly corresponds to the true destination of a *theology*: for it indicates to theology that, in order to speak of God, we have to speak of something other than the Other, the Abstruse, and their infinite remoteness (if indeed it is still a matter of "speaking of something"). So long as we have not understood what is here made clear to us, we will never move beyond an interminable post-theology in which transcendence endlessly converts to immanence (the "metareligion" of Ernst Bloch, in all of its metaphysical candor, is an excellent example of this). In baptizing our abysses with the name of God, we are guilty of at least two errors or two incoherencies: we fill in the abysses by attributing a bottom to them, and we blaspheme (in the true sense of the word) the name of God by making it the name of *something*. On the other hand, the most subtle—and most theological—error would doubtless consist in *believing* that the infinite cannot provide a bottom and that naming a person is not naming a sort of "thing."

Lévinas may well say, in many an admirable text, that God is "Infinite," in the sense of "unthematizable": the very term "Infinite" thematizes him, and meanwhile that "revision of Hegel's bad infinite," which Lévinas proposes, begins to suggest itself, a revision that he claims will give the unaccomplishable the dignity of the divine. One thus finds oneself wondering whether any discourse on God can deviate, however slightly, from that of Hegel (even were he *revised*), that is to say from the discourse of philosophy *itself*, or of ontotheology (which culminates in the dialectical ontotheology of the death of God). One finds oneself suspecting that everything could be no more than a question of baptism: from one moment to the next, what has been debaptized could just as easily be rebaptized with the name

of God. And this “baptism” itself would scarcely be a metaphor: from there on there would be ample scope, yet again, for thematizing the “mystery” of the “sacrament” in various discourses on the name, the proper name, the property of names, on election, the symbolic, and so on.

It is thus not enough to ask oneself what God is. That can even turn out to be the surest means of falling short of the question (if indeed it is a question, if it still hides or still reveals a true question), for God has perhaps become everything (or nothing); perhaps he has become, potentially at least, every true question, exigency, or furthest extreme of thought. We would need to be capable of asking, by a very different turn of question or inquiry, *if there is a place* for god, if there is still room (*place*) for him; that is, a place where he does not become indistinguishable from something else, and where it is consequently still worth calling him by the name of *God* (is this the only possible name? I shall come back to that.) A place that allows us to prescribe, with Bias of Priene: “*When speaking of the gods, say they are the gods.*”

Could we then in fact be dealing with a question of place, of distinct location (*lieu*) and not with a question of being? But access to such a question (or such an “inquiry” or “quest”), whose turn quite honestly escapes me, is not offered me by a discourse *de Deo*, of whatever sort. I can distinguish neither the “question” itself nor any access to it. But I suspect that one would need to move away, to find a place at some remove in order to say of the gods that they are the gods. That is why, by way of a method, I find myself obliged here to fragment my argument.

3. (*Of divine places: of the gods and their places; of the places they have abandoned and of those where they hide; of gods without hearth or home, of nomadic gods; of the here where the gods are also; of the common places of God; of the gods common to all places, to some places, to no place; of God: in what way he is a topos; topics and atopics of the divine; of gods and places: treatise on divine paronomasia; where is God to be found? in what place?*)

“For yourself, O God of glory and majesty, you have need of no place; you live entirely within yourself” [Bossuet]. But then what are these places “within yourself”?)

4. Jean-Marie Pontevia once wrote: “The cult of the Virgin is one of the major events in Western history. It is certainly an event, whose principal phases are datable, and it is a major event, because it may well perhaps be the last example in the West of the birth of a divinity.” I propose to add that this “last” example perhaps signifies, and must perhaps have signified for Pontevia, that a divine birth is always possible, and that it is

therefore still possible. But at the same time it means that such a birth bears no relation to a "return," a restoration, or a reinvention of the divine—quite the opposite. Pontevia was well aware of this: "the sacred cannot be reinvented." The divinity born in the figure of the Virgin was in no way the return or the reincarnation of a former divinity. It was the divinity of a new age: of a new age of painting and of woman, as well as of the age in which God himself would vanish into the Concept. It was a divine sign opposed to God.

The "last god" of which Heidegger speaks ought to be understandable in this sense: not the god who comes after all the others, concluding their series, and perhaps not "a god" at all, but rather the fact that there is always another last god to be born, a last god to come, or to disappear. Whether he comes or goes—and perhaps his *coming* is made up of his *departure*—his passing makes a sign. He is "*im Vorbeigang*": he is just passing, or he is in passing. It is in passing that he is, which is why he has his essential mode of being in the *Wink*,⁴ that is to say in the gesture we make in order to give a sign, call, invite, lead on, seduce: a wink of the eye, a motion of the hand. The god, the last god: he who, in passing, invites, calls, leads on, or seduces—while "signifying" nothing.

This could therefore be entitled: *a wink from the Holy Virgin*. It would be the movement of profanation, the Virgin becoming Venus (Pontevia studied this). That is to say it would raise the question: what sort of advances does the profane make to us? Not that, like a good dialectician, the profane makes a sign in the direction of the sacred. But to "give a sign" is perhaps always—divine. And the Virgin could be said to have given a sign for the first time—or else for the last—in the very profanation of the god, beyond the "sacred."

5. It would appear that the two questions "what is God?" and "who is this god?" are implied by each other. For we cannot ask "who is this god?" if we do not already know we are dealing with a god and if, consequently, we do not know what a god, or the divine, is in general. Conversely, we can only ask "what is God?" when an existing being has been presented or indicated to us as "God." However, this is only apparently the case. To ask "who is this god?" does suppose that we recognize him as being a god, but this is not the effect of a knowledge of the divine previously acquired through examining the question "what is God?" We recognize a god as god, or as divine, without having the least idea of what that is, or even that it can be, but because it manifests itself as such. (This constitutes what we call conversion.) The divine is precisely what manifests itself and is recognizable outside of all knowledge about its "being." God does not

propose himself as a new type of being—or of absence of being—for us to know. He proposes himself, that is all.

Conversely, the question “what is God?” is not posed, despite appearances, once a god has in fact proposed himself: for by so proposing himself (or imposing his presence), he has eliminated the very possibility of the question. The question “what is God?” can only be put when nothing remains of God or the gods that is divine, that is to say nothing that makes itself known through its manifestation alone, through its passing or its *Wink* alone. The question arises when all that remains of the gods or of God is the name, “God,” a sort of strange half-proper, half-common name or noun. And only then is it appropriate to ask what thing or type of being it signifies.

6. Is “God” a proper name or a common noun?⁵

St. Thomas denies it is a proper name. For the proper name does not refer to the nature of a being but to that precise being—*hoc aliquid*—considered as a singular subject. Now God is not a singular subject, says St. Thomas, although he is not a universal nature either. The common noun, for its part, refers to the nature of a being: but that of God is for ever unknown to us. What remains is that the name *God* refers to God by its operation, and through that at least he is known to us. It will be a name borrowed metaphorically from one of the divine operations, as St. John Damascene indicates: “God comes from *thein*, which means provide for all things, take care of all things; or from *aithein*, meaning burn (for our God is a fire consuming all wickedness); or else from *theasthai*, that is to say to see all things.” There is a more appropriate name for God, if we are considering the origin of the name, and that is “*He who is.*” But the name *God*, despite its metaphorical origin, remains the superior name when we consider what it has the task of signifying, that is, the nature of the divine. (*He who is* does not qualify his nature; it signifies that he is, but not what he is, nor even that he is being.) However, for St. Thomas there is an even more appropriate name, and that is the Hebrews’ Tetragram “which signifies the very substance of God, which is incommunicable and, so to speak, singular.”

Hence the God who is considered as the preeminence of being, and not at all as a singular subject, is nevertheless acknowledged, in the end, to be *in some way* singular, and as answering to an unpronounceable proper name. The Tetragram is in no way a metaphor, either for care, or for fire, or for vision, but is the proper noun for him whose proper name cannot be pronounced. The Tetragram is *magis proprium* than any other name, but because it is unpronounceable (*Tetragrammaton* is the name of this Name, but is not the Name) it is therefore also improper. Consequently

“*God*”—what we call “God,” and not the name *Deus/Theos* and all its metaphors—is the very name for the impropriety of the name. *Tetragrammaton* is the common noun for this Name, or for this name considered as the lack of a name. “God” calls the god where his name is lacking: but the divine is a name that is lacking.

That is why, above and beyond the metaphysics of the Treatise on Divine Names that, from Pseudo-Dionysius to Thomas and down to the present, repeats that God is unnameable (the absolute excess of being over the word or of the thing over the sign is merely a law of metaphysics, which is eminently applicable in the case of the preeminence of being), “God” is that common noun (that metaphor, proper/improper by definition) that *becomes* a proper name only when it is *addressed* to that singular existent who lacks a name. It is thus prayer, invocation, supplication, or whatever—addressed to the lack of a name:

My God, my God, life is there
Simple and peaceful . . .⁶

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

7. What does “my God” mean?

It is in no way an appropriation, a privatization, even less a subjectivization of God. “My God” says that it is I alone, each time, who can call on God or the god. It is the voice of someone who is himself singular that can call upon and name that other singular being. Speaking of “God,” discourse speaks of the god, the gods, or the divine. But when someone speaks they are addressing *God*. We say “my God” as we say “my friend” or as we used to say “my Lord,” (*mon Seigneur*) which became “mon sieur.” In each case, behind the apparent possessive there in fact lies what we ought to call an interpellative: you, here, now, are entering into a singular relationship with me. This does not ensure the relationship, nor in any way provide the measure of it. But it proclaims it, and gives it its chance.

“My God” signifies: here, now, I am entering into a singular relationship with the lack of a singular name. Hence our justification in asking: who then has the right or the ability to say “my God?”

8. Today what is no doubt most crucial concerning God is this: he is not unnameable in the metaphysical sense of that being that is inaccessible to all names, of that being that transcends all names, including the name of being itself, according to an unbroken tradition that is the very tradition of onto-theo-logy.⁷ (St. John Damascene once again: “He is above all that is, and above being itself.” This brings to mind the divine “superessence,”⁸ of Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart, or Ruysbroek, and even certain of Lévinas’s

injunctions, such as: "Understand a God uncontaminated by being").⁹ God is not unnameable in that sense, because in that sense unnameability is the result of an overflowing of names and language, whereas the unnameability of the god to whom I address myself (if I can) results from the lack of a name. God is unnameable today in that his name, or his names, are lacking. There is no impotence on the part of names in general to express or refer to God (just as, conversely, the unnameable is neither necessarily nor exclusively divine: after all, the name "being" is not appropriate to being either, if as Heidegger says being "*is not*"). In fact it could well be that the "unnameable" is never divine, and that the divine is always named—even if it is for want of a name. But it is the proper name of God that is wanting.

Such for us is the fate of all divine names—or of the divine in all names: they no longer refer to gods, that is to say we can no longer call upon the gods with these names (Indra, Zeus, Wotan, Yahweh, Jesus). They are, as *divine* names (and not as the nomenclature of worship), strictly unpronounceable: they no longer call upon "my God." So it turns out that all divine names refer, as to a common destiny written down in the distant past of the Western world, to the unpronounceable Name, the unutterable Tetragram. As if in Judaism it were written that the divine is destined to withdraw its own name, and in so doing to abscond from call and from prayer. And that we would then be left with only this withdrawal of the name of God, in place of all gods, and also in place of the god of Israel.

When Hölderlin writes: "sacred names are lacking" or "there is a lack of sacred names" (*es fehlen heilige Namen*),¹⁰ he is not implementing the problematic of the Treatise on Divine Names (and in contrast, this latter appears much more as constituting a problematic of the *concepts* of God). No doubts are cast, in Hölderlin, on the possibility of divine names. On the contrary, the assertion of a lack of sacred names implies that we know what such names are—names, as Heidegger's commentary puts it, "which are commensurate with the sacred (or the holy) and which themselves cast light upon it."¹¹ These names are thus not only peculiar (*propre*) to the divine, they bring it to light, they make it known as the divine that it is. These names are the manifestation of the divine, they are thus perhaps not far from being the divine itself. It is simply (if one may say so) that these names, here and now, are lacking.

(Thus we are familiar with the name God, and it is undeniable, when all is said and done, that it does bring to light something of the divine, however little—at least when we still say "my God," in a sort of mild relaxation of thought and speech. However, even this name is seriously lacking: "God," "god," the God, the god, the gods, gods . . . which way are we to take it? When Hölderlin writes "*der Gott*," because in German all nouns take a capital letter, we do not know if it should be translated

by "the God" or "the god"; but Hölderlin himself does not know what he is naming. *Der Gott* names something divine that no longer has any identity, or else it names the very unidentification of the divine and of all the gods. The Tetragram itself is drawn into this unidentification: it can no longer be the common noun for the proper Name of the god, but is in turn subsumed under this even more common noun, "the god," which is the name of no presence of a god.)

And so a history ends as it began: "In former times, so I have heard it said in Dodona, the Pelasgians offered up all their sacrifices while invoking 'the gods,' without referring to any one of them by a qualifier or a personal name; for they had as yet heard of no such thing" (Herodotus).

9. What is a proper name? Is it part of language? This is not certain, or at least it is not certain that it is a part in the way a common noun is. It does not behave like a sign. Perhaps its nature is that of a *Wink*, of a gesture that invites or calls. On that score, the lack of proper names has nothing whatever to do with the metaphysical surfeit of the thing over the sign, of the real over language. The lack of a proper name is a lack of *Wink*, and not of signifying capacity. It cannot be judged in relation to sense but in relation to gesture. For the same reasons it could be that there is something of the divine—rather than any meaning—in all proper names. Thus all names could be given to the gods, so that if there is a lack of sacred names, it is not because certain names are lacking. There is a lack of naming, of appellatives, of address.

I am she, says Apuleius's Isis, "cuius numen unicum multiformi specie, ritu vario, nomine multiugo totus veneratur orbis. Inde primigenii Phryges Pessinuntiam deum matrem, hinc autochtones Attici Cecropeiam Minervam, illinc fluctuantes Cyprii Paphiam Venerem, Cretes sagittiferi Dictynnam Dianam, Siculi trilingues Stygiam Proserpinam, Eleusini vetustam deam Cerreram, et Iunonem alii, Bellonam alii, Hecatam isti, Rhamnusiam illi, sed qui nascentis dei Solis inchoantibus inlustrantur radiis Aethiopes Arique priscaque doctrina pollentes Aegyptii caeremonis me propriis percolentes appellant vero nomine reginam Isidem" (whose single godhead is adored by the whole world in various forms, in differing rites and with many diverse names. Thus the Phrygians, earliest of races, call me Pessinuntia, Mother of the Gods; thus the Athenians, sprung from their own soil, call me Cecropeian Minerva; and the sea-tossed Cyprians call me Paphian Venus, the archer Cretans Diana Dictynna, and the trilingual Sicilians Ortygian Proserpine; to the Eleusians I am Ceres, the ancient goddess, to others Juno, to others Bellona and Hecate and Rhamnusia. But the Ethiopians, who are illumined by the first rays of the sun-god as he is born every day, together with the Africans and the Egyptians who

excel through having the original doctrine, honour me with my distinctive rites and give me my true name of Queen Isis).¹²

10. That God has a name, that the gods have names, which are theirs and which are, consequently, holy or sacred names, of that there is no doubt. One thing only remains undetermined: whether “the lack of sacred names” amounts to a pure and simple absence—be it definitive or provisional—of the sacred, or whether this lack still belongs to the sacred itself. Heidegger writes that “the source of this lack is probably concealed in a reserve (*Vorenhalt*) of the sacred.” The lack of divine names—the suspension of prayer, of worship—would thus be a way for the sacred to keep itself in reserve, to withhold itself, and as a consequence, thereby to offer itself, to offer itself in reserve, both as its own reserve and as its own withdrawal.

The suspension of worship: no longer to be able to sing, as in the Catholic hymn to the Holy Sacrament, “*Adoro te devote, laetens deitas.*” For there is no longer a *latent* divinity, that is to say a divinity hidden by appearances and revealed as present in its latency. There is nothing latent, there is only the manifest, and what is manifest is nothing other than the lack of sacred names, visible and legible everywhere. There is no longer a single divine name that cannot be pronounced in the most profane and ordinary way. Moreover—proof *a contrario*—we no longer blaspheme the name of God. The divinity is not concealed by this lack, it does not pass from one form of latency into another. This lack reveals the divinity itself as suspended. We should beware of the dialectical reserve, the *Aufhebung* to which Heidegger’s words could give rise: I would argue that we should understand those words as meaning that it is the sacred itself that is lacking, wanting, failing, or withdrawn. The lack of sacred names is not a surface lack concealing *and* manifesting the depths of a sacred held in reserve. It bars the way to the sacred, the sacred as such no longer comes (*advient*), and the divine is withdrawn from itself.

11. I should like here, without violence and without confusing them, to force together Lévinas and Heidegger momentarily and say: the lack of sacred names is the *à-Dieu* of the sacred. An *à-Dieu* from the depths of its *withdrawal*: a thought that is for the moment quite simply impossible—and impossible in any case as a *unified* thought.

Each of them knows that a *waiting* concerning the divine is inscribed at the heart of our experience, at the heart of our slow-footed Western necessity. For Lévinas, this waiting, the *vigil* traverses, perishes (*transit*), and pushes to the breaking point consciousness, man, the self, being, and philosophy. In this “breach of immanence” a presence comes (*advient*)—God, the in-finite, “the beyond of being,” transcendence as an “ethical

each-for-the-other." The breach delivers us up to an "à-Dieu."¹³ For Heidegger, the breach of immanence is constitutive of ex-istence (of being-*there*), and the god is not a presence that could come there: in this sense *Dasein* is being-unto-death and not unto-a-god. But this act of ontological constitution opens precisely onto the possibility of waiting for the strangeness of the divine, which would then in short be a strangeness strange to the in-finite breaching of existence and of the existent. *Dasein* could be exposed to the divine, not in death, nor in its place, but as it were at the same time as to death. "Man dies continually, under heaven, before the divine." Thus the possibility of a "being-unto-God" (*ein mögliches Sein zu Gott*) is opened up, but not established.¹⁴ I could say: the *à-Dieu* of Lévinas is constitutive of the "passivity more passive than passivity" in which immanence is breached; Heidegger's *being-unto-God* (or unto-the-god) is merely a possible: opened up, offered (but equally withheld, withdrawn), in the finite transcendence of being-unto-death. Thought relates to the beyond of being and to the finiteness of being; to the for-the-other and to the for-death: in each case thought has so to speak its *à-dieu*. It is doubtless too soon to be able to say what clashes or encounters, what evasions or confrontations, mark its passage from one relation to the other: I simply wished to recall, here, the sign (*Wink*) that is addressed thus to the thinking of our times.

12. The singular address to a singular god—my god!—is prayer in general. The lack of names suspends prayer. To celebrate transcendence beyond being, or the immanence of the divine, or else, like the German mystics whose heirs we all are, the "sublimeness" of God (nowadays "the sublime" has at times begun to take on the role of a new negative theology), is not to pray, is no longer to pray. To pray is first and foremost to name the singular god, *my* god. Prayer is suspended. All that remains is a distant quotation (*citation*) in the memory: *schema Israel . . . Pater noster . . . lâ ilâh illâ 'llâh. . .* This recitation, like our cultural or cult memory of divine names, merely sustains the reality of a lack of prayer. This recitation prays for want of praying. It does not implore so as to be able once again to pray: it addresses a lack of prayer to a lack of sacred name, it is a litany laid bare.

13. (A polemical note that it is unfortunately difficult to dispense with when one ventures to speak of "god" today: in the last few years a sickening traffic has grown up around a so-called return of the spiritual and of the religious.¹⁵ Simultaneously, the religious aspect of recent Polish history, the avowed end of Marxism, the renewed assertiveness of Islam, the rediscovery and return to circulation of several currents of Jewish thought, have all

been exploited, then indiscriminately and uncritically enlisted in the promotion of a new cultural value, a spirituality deemed necessary for a jaded Western world, which has lost faith in all its “ideologies.” This is to forget, out of stupidity or cunning, the philosophical work that has been unremittably carried out from a starting point in the death of God [thinking today entails among other things recognizing and meditating ceaselessly upon this irrefutable and unshiftable event that has rendered derisory in advance any “return of the religious”]. The death of God called for and brought forth a mode of thought that ventures out where God no longer guarantees either being or the subject or the world. At these extremes, over these abysses or amid this drifting no god could possibly return. First, because there is no reason why the divine should lend its name to baptizing what thought explores or confronts in its withdrawal. Second, because gods are always coming—or at least can always come—but doubtless never come again. Forgetting the death of God, when not politically or commercially motivated, is tantamount to forgetting thought. It is moreover ironic, though not really surprising, to note that this “return of the religious” proposes itself at the same time and often under the same colors as the return of an empirico-liberal pragmatism [roughly speaking of the Popperian variety] that accurately reflects, in an identical forgetting of thought, the actual “spiritual” content or conduct of these movements of opinion.)

14. “What is God?” is the question of a man wanting for prayer, wanting for divine names. It is the question of a man wanting for God (which is not necessarily to say *lacking* God), or else it is the question put by a man to the want of God.

It is Hölderlin’s question, which Heidegger chooses to take up, because the question “who is the god?” is “perhaps too difficult for man and asked too soon.”

What is God? The sky’s aspect,
 Though so rich in qualities,
 Is unknown to him. Lightning indeed
 Is the anger of a god. All the more invisible
 Is that which has its envoy in something foreign to it.¹⁶

The world is unknown to God. The visible and its brilliance, appearing (*l’apparaître*) is unknown to him. But he, the invisible, delegates himself, or rather sends himself—or destines himself (*sich schicket*)—in the visible, something foreign in which, having sent himself there, he is all the more invisible. Heidegger writes: “The Invisible sends itself there so as to remain what it is: invisible.” So what is God? He who wishes to remain unknown,

he who wishes, sending himself in the visible, there to remain invisible. God is not the Hegelian Absolute who "wishes to be close to us." God does not wish to be close to us when he sends himself to us, in the visible we know: he wishes to make himself invisible therein.

(But what if the fact that he wishes to remain himself, *absolutum*, separate in his invisibility at the heart of the visible in which we dwell, were another form of the same Absolute will? And if that is indeed the case, can we still be content to go on conceiving of God, with or against Hegel, with or against St. Augustine, as a form of extreme intimacy? Will a day not come when we shall have to confront a god outside, exposed in the open sky, nowhere hidden and internal to nothing? We must leave these questions to find their own way.

God is that which knows not the world and which does not manifest itself there, does not present itself there, although it penetrates it, sends itself, and dispatches itself therein. The beginning of *Patmos* is well known:

He is near
And difficult to grasp, the God.

The nearness of the god is inscribed in these other lines out of which Heidegger develops his commentary:

Is God unknown?
Is he manifest like the heavens? It is rather that
Which I believe.

Heidegger writes: "This God who remains unknown must, at the same time as he shows himself for who He is, appear as he who remains unknown." The god is therefore as manifest as the heavens, he is as *revealed* (*offenbar*) as the open sky and offered to view, selfsame with its aspect.¹⁷ The face of God is as manifest as the *Angesicht* of the heavens. Heidegger writes that "the God who remains unknown is, as such, made manifest by the heavens."

But the poem does not say that God is made manifest by means of the heavens. What it says is quite different: the god is as manifest as the heavens. That God is manifest like the heavens, that is to say that he is as visible, as offered to the view of men as the radiance open and offered over the entire horizon, indicates that the radiance of the divine is equal to that of the heavens, but not that it is mediated by it. The god may very well be made manifest selfsame with the heavens, or with the sea, or with the skin of man or the animal's gaze; it may be that he is manifest selfsame with everything that is open and offered and in which he has dispatched himself. But none of that serves as a (re)presentative of the god—contrary to what

Heidegger's text may at least lead us to believe. If the heavens, or if aspect in general, *Angesicht*, countenance, is also the place of divine revelation, it is not as a visible image of the invisible. The invisible divine lets itself be seen resting, itself, upon the face, or woven into it, sent or destined therein, but as another face that lets itself be seen *here*, without "here" serving as mediation for it.

(This im-mediacy of the god, who is nevertheless not something immediate, this immediacy withdrawn from proximity and immanence in its most manifest presence, is no doubt so unamenable to our modes of discourse that Heidegger, like Hegel perhaps before him, seems to lose sight of it almost as soon as he has glimpsed it.)

Here—on a face, but equally, perhaps, in a name—the divinity lets itself be seen, manifestly invisible and invisibly manifest. God reveals himself—and God is always a stranger in all manifestation and all revelation. Revelation—if such a thing must be conceived of—is not a presentation, or a representation: it must be the evidence of the possibility (never the necessity) of a *being-unto-god*. What there is revelation of is not "God," as if he were something that can be exhibited (that is why to the question "what is God?" there is and there is not an answer), it is rather the unto-God (*I' à-Dieu*) or being-unto-god. Or more exactly, it becomes manifest that such a being-unto-god is possible, that man is invited and permitted to be—that is, to die—before the face of the god.

Pascal: "Instead of complaining because God has hidden himself, you will give thanks to him for having revealed himself so much."

15. Moreover this is what grounds such a revelation: the essence of the god is recognizable simultaneously by two features, the first being that man *is not* the god, the second that man and the god are *together* in an identical region of being (neither of them is being; in Lévinas's language they are together "beyond being"—but *there is* no such "beyond").

Heidegger says: "The gods and men are not only illumined by a light. . . . They are illumined in their being. They are conquered by light (*erlichtet*) . . . , never hidden, but dis-lodged (*ent-borgen*)."¹⁸

Man and the god, in their radical difference, which is none other than the opening out of the "sacred"—but which is equally well an im-mediacy outside of the profane and the sacred—disclose themselves to each other, and perhaps by means of each other. They disclose themselves, they are, each for his part and each for the other, those who come disclosed.

But what is disclosed here is their strangeness. Where man and the god cease to disclose one another, and to be disclosed to each other, as strangers, in strangeness itself, there the god disappears. (For Hegel, on the contrary,

“man can know he has a refuge in God, since God is not a being strange to him.”)

Perhaps, at the extreme—but everything is always decided at the extreme—we will one day have to face the fact (*découvrir*) that the god is essentially distinguishable by nothing save the extreme strangeness of his coming. Euripides:

Numerous are the forms of the divine,
and numerous, the unexpected decision of the gods.
What was expected does not come about,
but for the unexpected, the god has found the means.

16. If God is God, his death is also his supreme strangeness. Although Hegel himself cannot ultimately think this death except as “the death of death,” he nevertheless cannot avoid remaining suspended, seemingly dumbfounded (so that we remark that he too did after all experience the divine) in the face of the event: “The supreme alienation of the divine Idea: ‘God is dead, God himself is dead,’ is a prodigious and dreadful thing to represent to oneself, something which presents to representation the deepest abyss of schism. . . . God is no longer alive, God is dead; a most dreadful thought: so everything which is eternal, true, is not, there is negation even in God; supreme suffering, a feeling of out-and-out perdition.”

In the death of God—inasmuch as “*we have killed him*”—something of the divine is announced, or rather called upon, as Nietzsche knew. It is not “the death of death,” it is not the dialectic of the God of triumphant subjectivity. Of course the gods are immortal, they all rise again: Osiris, Dionysus, Christ. But resurrection is not what Hegel would like it to be. It is not the end of the process, nor is it the final appropriation of the Living Concept. Resurrection is the manifestation of the god inasmuch as he comes in his own withdrawal, leaves his mark in his own obliteration, is revealed in his own invisibility (it is not a “resurrection,” it is not a return). The god is invisibly manifest and manifestly invisible: this is like a dialectic, but it is not one. However, the fact that it is not one *can only be revealed by the god* (here perhaps lies the difference in knowledge, or in experience, that distinguishes Hegel from Hölderlin).

What “resurrection” refers to—inadequately—is the radiance of manifestation. Osiris, Dionysus, Christ are never as radiant as when they have risen again. They are then what they are: gods of radiance itself, divine glory open, offered, dazzling as the heavens and effaced like them. But this glory, this splendor, like that of the heavens, emerges from shadow and in shadow, in the darkness of the absence of the heavens, of the absence

of the world and of god. Divine radiance is just as much the manifestation of this darkness, which is itself divine.

This is not a dialectic: the gods are immortal. "Death" and "resurrection" do not apply to them. What does apply to them is what they have in common with the heavens, without the heavens being their mediation: the sovereign interplay of darkness and radiance, of radiance withdrawn into darkness and of darkness as manifest as radiance.

For if mortals have the possibility or the freedom to be-unto-god, unto what or unto whom can the god be? Unto nothing, unless it be unto divine manifestation itself: radiance, effulgence, and darkness. The god is not the freedom to *be-unto* in general. He is not projected-toward or destined-to. He simply comes, in radiance and in the withdrawal of radiance. Or rather: his pure radiance withdraws him.

17. Gilles Aillaud: "The invisible does not conceal itself like an essential secret, like the stone in fruit, at the heart of what we see. Freely displayed for all to see, the hidden always protects the un-hidden."¹⁹

I should like to write: always, whatever happens, a god protects mortals, that is to say exposes them to what they are; and in so doing, he exposes himself for all to see, withdrawn like the heavens. But that is to write more than I can.

Yet Seneca in his time wrote: "Many beings akin to the supreme divinity both fill our eyes and escape them" (*Oculos nostros et implent et effugiunt*). Eyes filled and deserted by divinity, that is our condition.

18. Origen: "If there is an image of the invisible God, it is an invisible image."

19. One might say: there is nothing more divine than a new god shining in all his young splendor. But this new god never comes in any temple; it is the emptiness of the temple and its darkness that make it the sacred place.

Art is sacred, not because it is in the service of worship, but because it makes manifest the withdrawal of divine splendor, the invisibility of its manifestation, the inconspicuousness of its exposure. No passage in Hegel better salutes the gods than the one in which fate is shown offering their absence to us: "Statues are now corpses whose animating soul has fled, hymns are words which faith has abandoned. The tables of the gods are without food and spiritual beverage, and games and festivities no longer restore to consciousness the blessed unity between itself and essence. Lacking in the works of the Muses is that strength of spirit which saw certainty itself spring forth from the crushing of both gods and men. Henceforth

they are what they are for us: beautiful fruits plucked from the tree; friendly fate has offered them to us, as a young girl presents this fruit."²⁰

Who is this young girl? She is herself a work of art, she is painted on a fresco, she is deprived of divine life—she is thus a goddess herself, exposed to her own withdrawal. The girl, in the flush of her youth in the midst of the world of “that pain expressed in the harsh words *God is dead*,” is the divine truth of the presentation (Hegel writes *präsentiert*) or the offering of this fruit in its beauty. *It is a god—or a goddess—who offers us art*: that is something we have still to think about.

20. The sacred in art, thus defined, means that all art is sacred, and that there is nothing sacred save in art or through it. That is what Christianity in the grip of the Reformation ceased to understand. (For its part, the Catholic church forgot God. Thus it too ended up losing art, and so becoming indistinguishable today from the Reformation.)

There is no profane art, and there is nothing sacred outside of art. However, that is only intelligible if we have done with “aesthetics.” And also perhaps with “art.” The divine manifests itself at the limits of art, but without art, nothing would reach those limits. And to understand this, ought we not also to have done with the divine?

21. In his study, *Divine Names*, Usener saw a primary species of gods in those he called “the gods of the instant,” divinities attached to nothing other than a momentary state, a sensation, or an isolated feeling. “The singular phenomenon is divinized without mediation, without the intervention of any generic concept, however narrow its limits; the bare thing, which you see before you, that and nothing else is the god.”²¹ Usener is certainly wrong to be content with what we might call the positivist and anthropocentric notion of “divinization,” precisely when describing this encounter and this nonconceptual designation of the god. (Not to be able to place, face to face with religious faith, anything other than this paltry, artless reversal, the “divinization” by man of a natural thing, is not to be in the death of God, it is to have forgotten the death of God itself: God would not be dead if he had simply been a projection. As Nietzsche well knew, the death of God requires of us something very different from anthropological idolatry!) But Usener does unwittingly furnish the essence of all divine manifestation: the bare thing, which you see before you, that and nothing else is the god. (The “thing” can be an animal, a person, a stone, a word, a thought.) God is never anything other than a singular, bare presence.

“God is not present to things by situation, but by essence; his presence manifests itself by its immediate operation” (Leibniz).

All gods are “gods of the instant,” for as long as they can or wish to endure.

22. There is the god who ceaselessly plays with the world, and the god who fashions it in a perpetual labor. There is the god who comes and offers himself selfsame with the grass, or with suffering, and the god who conceals himself in the furthest depths of the temples. There is the god who annihilates man, and the god who dwells in his gaze.

There is the god who approaches man to the extent of touching him, and the god who retreats from man to the extent of abandoning him infinitely. The two are the same: the god who touches man touches him so as to leave him to himself, not so as to take hold of him and detain him. Hence: “The first desertion consists in the fact that God does not detain, as a result of which man leaves him, bringing about the second desertion, by which God leaves him. In one of these desertions God follows and there is no mystery about it; for there is nothing strange in the fact that God leaves the men who leave him. But the first desertion is quite mysterious and incomprehensible” (Pascal).

23. Judaism is an atheism with God. Protestantism, on the other hand, is a theism without God. Catholicism is the worship of all gods in God, or the loss of God in all gods. Islam is the pure proclamation of God to the point where it becomes an empty clamor. Buddhism is the worship of God in all gods or the loss of all gods in God. Philosophy, for its part, thinks the communication beyond its confines and the absolute alienation of the infinite substance of God.

So an entire universe, for which God will prove to have been the pain and the fervor of infinite separation, comes to a close: division becoming immanent in the divine, the death of God inscribed as his life.

In a sense, all our great religions are inseparable from philosophy: that is to say from the onto-theo-logical *end*—the aim and the cessation—of religion.

And as for paganism, where do we grasp it if not at that extremity where it already offers, in the god, the death of the god: Tammouz, Attis, Osiris, Adonis, Dionysus.

The death of God is the *final* thought of philosophy, which thus proposes it as an *end* to religion: it is toward this thought that the West (which in this case excludes neither Islam nor Buddhism) will have ceaselessly tended. It signifies: the death of death, the negation of negation, the end of the separateness of God, the divinization of man, the making absolute of his knowledge and his history (or the affirmation of their total insignificance),

and the infinite suffering that his labor, his discourse, and his death become when they have as their goal and their meaning an infinite reconciliation.

The god is abandoned in thought of absolute separation and reconciliation, which is thought of the "death of God." The god does not die in that thought, since he rises again there endlessly, like the very being of nothingness that has passed through the nothingness of being. But things are worse: he is abandoned there—or else, he abandons us. He abandons us to our philosophy and our religion of the death of God.

24. But we must not jump to the conclusion that the "god of the philosophers" is a vanity pure and simple. Every philosopher in his way, according to the order and the ordeal of thought, also experiences the approach or the flight of the divine.

There is at the heart of every great philosophy (and this could be the measure of its greatness), a mystery concerning God or the gods. This is in no way to say that the mystery is the heart of the philosophy that bears it. It certainly is not; but it is placed in that heart, even though it has no place there.

An example—which is also of necessity to say, an approximation: "In divine understanding there is a system, but God himself is not a system, he is a life." You will always quite justifiably be able to demonstrate the deep-rooted equivalence, in speculative idealism, of "system" and "life," and in so doing make that statement of Schelling's contradict itself. Yet you will not be able entirely to deny that the same statement tends or pretends to something that is not exhausted by that equivalence and that testifies here to the ordeal of thought. All would seem to hang, were one inclined to attempt a commentary, upon an exegesis of the words "God *himself*." Schelling is suggesting that *the god himself* is something other again than "God." From Kant to Hölderlin, by way of Schelling, Novalis, and Hegel, this exigency of thought was put to the test (*l'épreuve*) and transmitted to Nietzsche, Rilke, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Lévinas, and us: the God of the philosophers has himself made god or the gods his concern.

25. Though all art is sacred, and though there is doubtless nothing sacred except where there is art, art and the divine are nevertheless two totally distinct things. Which is to say that when the divine manifests itself, art itself is reduced to nothing.

Selfsame with whatever thing the divine is made manifest (for example, a thing of nature, an animal, a stone, or else man himself), this manifestation places the thing within the sphere of art. But at the same time it reduces art as such to nothing.

Conversely, art transports what it sets to work upon into the sphere of the divine, because it is always a god—or a goddess—who offers us art. But of itself, insofar as it is art or for as long as it is art, it keeps the divine at a distance. In this sense art is always profane, no less than thought, discourse, or science.

Perhaps we are dealing here with two forms of the sublime, different to the extent of being opposites:

There is the sublime in art, going from Kant to Benjamin and from there on down to us. It signifies: to feel the fainting away of the sensible, to border on the furthest extreme of presentation, on the limit where the outside of presentation offers itself, and to be offered up to this offering.

And there is divine sublimity, that in terms of which Hegel seeks to characterize the Jewish moment in religion. In this case it is the presence of God insofar as it overwhelms the sensible. The coming of God reduces the phenomenon to nothing. Here the sublime is no longer to be found at that furthest extreme of presentation where presentation is transformed into offering. It is in a presence that ruins all presentation and all representation. It is no longer the gesture of offering, it is the imposition of glory. It is no longer the limit of forms and figures, it is the light that disperses the visible. God imposes his presence outside of all presentation. He comes in the ruin of all appearing (*le paraître*). Art, on the contrary, infinitely incises the edges of appearance (*l'apparaître*), but keeps it intact.

Between the “thing” of sublime art and the sublime “thing” of the divine, there can be said to be that infinitesimal (and in its turn sublime?) difference that lies between presentation at the limit and naked presence: it follows that each can offer the other, but also that it is impossible to confuse one with the other.

26. Whoever speaks of god risks the detestable effects of the sacralization of discourse. The language that names God is always well on the way to taking on some semblance of his glory. “God,” “the divine,” “the sacred,” “the holy” are insuperably sacred words: how could they avoid being a prey to sacerdotal arrogance, ecclesiastical love of power, not to mention clerical cupidity? Alternatively, it is prophetic bombast that threatens them, not to mention a mystic intensity—whatever their reserve and their sobriety. In each case, discourse appropriates to its own advantage the hierophany behind which it ought to disappear.

We must not be blind to the danger today of a certain spiritual posturing, of a particular bland or sublime tone with which a “sacred dimension” is “rediscovered”: it is one of the best signs of the absence of the gods. When the god is there, in fact, his presence is close, familiar, simple, and unobtrusive, even though it be strange, disconcerting, and inaccessible.

(In Africa, for example, whether conspicuous or concealed from view, the sacred appears familiar. Not that it tips over into profane or profanatory familiarity: but it offers itself—or withholds itself—with simplicity, and even in laughter and disrespect, because it has no need of a certain solemn seriousness, affected and inspired, which belongs only to Churches, States and Speeches. Need I add, the Africa of which I speak is at least in part a symbolic place.)

27. The essence of art is to be offered, and it is a god—or goddess—who offers us art. However, art does not lead to god. Indeed nothing leads to god, neither art, nor nature, nor thought, nor love. The gods come or do not come. They impose their presence or they withdraw.

28. “The god is almost always the imminence of a god, or even the mere possibility of a god” (Alain).

To keep open, available, undecided, the possibility for man of a “being-unto-god” is in itself a most resolute gesture of welcome to the divine. As if this undecidedness alone—our own—were already unto-the-god. However, it is not, by definition (and that is where Alain is wrong in the end).

29. To have done once and for all with a constantly recurring error: *being is not God, in any way*. Being is the being of beings, what is. Or rather—for it is not part of a being—what it is about a being is the fact that that being *is*. Consequently, being itself, in return, *is* not. The god, on the contrary, *is*. If he is not, then there is no god: whereas if being is not, then there is being (or more accurately, there is = being).²² The god therefore is a being, and in that respect he is one being among all other beings. Being is the being of the god, as it is the being of every other being, but the god is not the god of being (that expression would have strictly no meaning; the god is always, whatever and wherever he may be, the god of man).

Of what sort is this being, god? That is the elusive question: what is god? However, it is at least possible to say this: God is not the supreme being (*étant*) (assuming that there is any sense in talking about a supreme being). God is the being we are not, but which is not a being at our disposal in the world around us, either. God is the being we are not, which is not at our disposal, either, but which appears or disappears before the face of the existing, mortal beings we are.

For example, it is only from this angle that we may understand the idea of god as *creator*, if we wish to avoid lapsing into error. God the creator is not he who makes being be. Nothing and no one “makes” beings “*be*”: they are not produced and production exists only within the world of beings.

On the other hand, being *makes the being* (*fait l'être*) of beings, and this is not a "making," it is a being.

God the creator does not make be, nor does he make the being of beings. God the "creator" (if we can keep this word) means: beings appear before him, emerging from the nothingness of their being. They are summoned and appear (*ils apparaissent et comparaissent*) before him—who manifests himself or conceals himself before their face, in the visible. "*Fiat lux!*" does not mean: "I invent something like light and I make it come into existence by the sole power of my word," as a metaphysical catechism repeatedly asserted. "*Fiat lux!*" means "the light appears before my face and I send myself in it." Hegel: "This figure is the pure *luminous essence* of the dawn, which contains and fills everything, and which is preserved in its formless substantiality."

Nothing can be summoned to appear before being, for being has no face and utters nothing. Being, by not being, delivers beings up to what they are. It "is" the fact that a being detaches itself from the nothingness it is. Hence being does not make beings, but it *finishes them off*: their finite detachment takes place, infinitely, in it and from it. That is the finitude of being, in all beings. It detaches the gods as well as men. The immortality of the gods does not exclude their finitude: they appear or they disappear (whereas being neither appears nor disappears: it is).

Between beings there can be all sorts of relations. There can be, among others, that of the god to man, or that of the man to the god. Beings, on the other hand, have no relation to being, since it is nothing other than the fact that beings are. From this point of view the god is (or is not) in the same way as man—or a star—is. The divine is not the fact that man—or the star—is. The divine is that, or he, with which or with whom man finds himself involved in a certain relation, be it one of presence or of absence, one of appearance (*parution*) or of disappearance. He involves the star in it with him.

That is why the gods necessarily have places, just like a person, a star, or a bird. Being has no place: it is (it "makes") the dis-position, the spacing out of beings according to their places (that is to say also according to their times), but it has itself neither place nor time. It *is* not, and this not-being "consists" in the fact that beings are dis-posed throughout their places and their times. The gods have their places and their times. They are immortal and they have a history. The gods have a history and a geography: they can move off, withdraw, spring up, or decline; they can come, here or there, now or later, and show themselves, and not show themselves.

30. "God exists," "God does not exist," "the proposition 'God exists' (and therefore the opposing proposition, too) has no meaning": these propo-

sitions have not merely been argued back and forth to excess; they have all—and a few more besides—been rigorously proved true. All of these proofs and counterproofs put together have perhaps never demonstrated anything other than the fact that being is *and* is not. For this whole array of proofs was based on a confusion, in its discourse, between being and God. It was demonstrated that there is necessarily being and God. It was demonstrated that there is necessarily being, or some being, as soon as we admit that *there is* something. Then it was demonstrated that this “there is” of being is in itself nothing that is.

On the other hand, if in the advancing or the thinking of these proofs there was anything that was at the same time preserved from this confusion and that truly had to do with the divine as such, it must have been a totally different sort of concern (*souci*). Not the concern to show that God (= necessary being) is, but the concern to intimate that God *exists*. (One can conceive of the conjunction, one might say the interweaving, of these two concerns in the writings of Descartes, and also in those of Hegel and Nietzsche.) To intimate that God exists: that is to say that he cannot, precisely, be according to the mode of what we know and grasp as positions of being, and that his is a quite different existence, a quite different ordeal of existing.

On this subject, proofs and counterproofs have doubtless always concurred: the proof of the existence of God corresponds to the ordeal of his im-mediacy (hence the idea of the infinite in me: an idea already present—and yet by which I am myself overwhelmed), and the critique of this proof again corresponds in its turn to this experience of being overwhelmed (it says, for example: God is not an object of possible experience; so leaving impossible experience open).

We thus need to ask some quite different questions. Not whether God exists, but how (or else: where and when) he exists—which is equally to say: how he withdraws from existence, how he is not where we expect him to be, how he does not duplicate in another world the mode of existence of our own, but is in ours the existence of that other world, or else how his existence is strictly inseparable from that of the world, an animal or a star, a person or a poem, and how it unceasingly remains beyond the reach of all these existences, and so forth.

31. Deus, in ajutorium nostrum intende . . .
 Domine, ad adjuvandum me fastina . . .
 Introibo ad altare Dei,
 ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam . . .

What is there to say about vanished rites, lost sacred languages, about the necessary incomprehensibility of those languages, which brought with

them at the same time a familiar truth; what is there to say about the solemn rhythms of Latin, about genuflexions, incense, versicles, and responses, about the church, that remote place full of darkness and splendor; what is there to say about signs of the cross, clasped hands, open palms, outstretched arms, chasubles on shoulders, stoles, shoes left at entrances, ablutions, prayer mats, prostration, or intoning; what is there to say about divine service?

Nothing, nothing must be said about them. It is too late or too soon. Wherever divine service takes place, we cannot be sure that it is not merely the pious and ridiculous repetition of what it once was, or else that it is not confined to being the exercising of a social convention, not to say a social obligation. Yet after all has it ever been any different? Where and when can we say that true worship takes place? We can say it when the god is present at the ceremony.

But in that case we are not far from saying that the presence of the god—in the heart, for example—replaces to advantage the mimicry of worship. And this is not what is called for by our requirement of the divine, our thought of it, our feeling for it: we feel that there must be worship, divine service; we feel that there must be celebration of the glory of the god. And yet we can say nothing about worship. We can say: there are men and women who observe rituals; there are millions of them every day, in every place. But nowadays we have also to take account of the possibility of gods wandering from place to place, without allotted temples or established rituals. *Einaï gar kai entautha theous*: “Here too are the gods to be found”; these words of Heraclitus can today be given one further meaning at least (it could also be that they now only have this meaning), according to which “here” can be without place (*lieu*), nowhere, or from place (*place*) to place, a “here” wandering in and out of places.

It could well be—this is all that can be said—that it is henceforth to a wandering of the gods that divine worship and its permanent locations must be adapted: not so as to disqualify these, but so as to assert that in temples or outside of them, in rituals or with no ritual, what henceforth is divine, or that part of the divine that withdraws and confides itself, is a wandering, not to say a straying (*égarement*) of the gods. There is no ritual of wandering, nor should the significance of divine service be overstretched so as to make it, with Hegel, the equivalent of reading one’s daily paper. But in divine wandering a ritual remains to be invented, or forgotten.

32. Just as former materialists or former freethinkers began intoning the mumbo jumbo (*patenôtres*) of a return of the spiritual, theologians were getting down to reading the Scriptures and understanding the message of faith in terms of all the codes of the sciences of this world: semiology,

psychoanalysis, linguistics, sociology, and so on. General anthropology was called upon with the sole end of converting the word of God into human speech, so that men might better grasp its divine import. Over and above the manifest contradictoriness of this strange logic, there is something curiously aberrant here: as if God let himself be understood, as if he made himself understood. In the time of the Scriptures, God did not make himself understood: he showed himself, his word obliged, there was no question—even when the Doctors were interpreting—of knowledge or of understanding.

It is high time we learned that no Scripture can be of any help to us, be it through a decoded message or a mystery held in reserve. The Book is no longer. (I am not saying “there is no longer a Book,” for there is undeniably, to the same extent that there is divine service, in every temple, church, synagogue, or mosque; but I am saying that *the Book is no longer*, as we ought to know since Mallarmé and Joyce, Blanchot and Derrida.) It is not in vain that the text has proliferated, has become scattered and fragmented in all our writings. The writing we practice, which obligates us and is infinite to us, is in no way the *Aufhebung* of Scripture. Scripture, on the contrary, is undone and swept away in it, without end, without god, definitively without God or his Word, toward nowhere except this carrying away, and this disaster, and this fervor bereft of faith and piety.

Writing and its trace lie outside of Holy Scripture, along its outer edge, which they contribute endlessly to fraying and breaking down. The age when the Book was placed on the altar and read is past and gone. Writing will no longer speak of the divine: it no longer speaks of anything but its own insistence, which is neither human nor divine; it inscribes the undone edges of Books, altars, and readings, it inscribes the disjoining (*déliation*) of their religions, it traces a divesting of the divine, the denuding of the gods that no word announces.

Face to face, but without seeing each other from now on, the gods and men are abandoned to writing. This abandonment is the sign given to us for our history yet to come. It has only just begun. My god! We are only just beginning to write.

33. But after all, all gods are odious (*tous les dieux sont odieux*). All sacrality is oppressive, either through terror or through guilt. (As for separating the divine from the sacred altogether, is it possible without yet again nullifying the divine?) All sacrifice is a traffic in victims and indulgences. Christ's sacrifice sums it all up: mankind redeemed as if it were a band of slaves, at the cost of the most precious blood. (How can anyone have sought to argue that Christianity was a nonsacrificial religion? Because it is a

religion, it is sacrificial. And because it represents faith in a god, it is a religion.)

The gods are odious to the extent that they saturate the universe and exhaust mankind: that extent is no doubt always measured by religion as such, and religion, whatever we try to make words mean, religion and the sacred remain the measure of the divine: the god who deserted religion would no longer be a god (Lévinas, among others, knows this; he even speaks of atheism, but it is an atheism of God, there is no getting around the fact).²³ The god keeps an eye, an ear, a hand on everything, he holds or pronounces “the alpha and the omega,” he accounts for everything and in the end we must give account of everything to him. The gods prevent the supreme undecidedness of man; they close off his humanity, and prevent him from becoming unhinged, from measuring up to the incommensurable: in the end God sets the measure. The gods forbid that man should be risked further than man. And most serious of all, they take away his death.

That is to say they take away his sacrifice—this time in the sense of his abandonment. For there is an abandonment that is not a traffic, but that is an offering, an oblation, a libation. There is that: a generosity and a freedom outside of religion—however, I am not sure whether this abandonment is still to gods, to another god said to be coming, or to “no god.” But it has death as its generic name, and an infinite number of forms and occasions throughout our lives.

No doubt this abandonment has always forged a path for itself through the religions. In the end, though, these religions have failed to allow it to be accomplished. They have irresistibly diverted it and misappropriated it—not modern religions only, but all religions, all forms of worship, all rites.

What there is to say here can be said very simply: religious experience is exhausted. It is an immense exhaustion. This fact is in no way altered by the upsurge in the political, sociological, or cultural success of religions (Islam in Africa; the Catholic church in Poland or, from another angle, in South America; Protestantism in the United States; Jewish, Islamic, or Christian fundamentalism; sects; theosophies; gnosés). There is no return of the religious: there are the contortions and the turgescence of its exhaustion. Whether that exhaustion is making way for another concern for the gods, for their wandering or their infinite disappearance, or else for no god, that is another matter: it is another question altogether, and it is not something that can be grasped between the pincers of the religious, nor indeed between those of atheism.

No god: this would be, or will be, unrelated to atheism—at least to that metaphysical atheism that is the counterpart of theism, and that wants to put something in the place of the god that has been denied or refuted. No

god: that would mean God's place really wide open, and vacant, and abandoned, the divine infinitely undone and scattered. It could equally well be the god so close that we can no longer see him. Not because he has disappeared inside us, but, on the contrary, because in coming closer, and disappearing the closer he comes, he has made all our inside, all subjectivity, disappear with him. He would be so close that he would not be, either before us or in us. He would be the absolute closeness to ourselves—at once tormenting and glorious—of a naked presence, stripped of all subjectivity. A presence that is no longer in any way a *self-presence*, neither the self-presence of a consciousness nor the presence to that consciousness and its science of its representations (of Self, World, God). But a naked presence: less the presence of *something* or of *someone*, than presence "itself" as such. But presence "itself" as such does not constitute a subject; it does not constitute a substance—and that is why "no god." The accomplishment of the divine would be no god's presence.

To return to the problem: this would not be a dialectic of death and resurrection. It does not lie by way of a death of subjectivity (which for Hegel is precisely the definition of death, and more particularly of the death of Christ), in which death is defined as the very moment at which the subject is constituted, discovering itself and accomplishing itself in the suppression of its particularity. God, in this sense, has always signified the very idea of the Subject, the death of death, truth and life in the suppression of existence and of singular exposure in the world, in the suppression of place and instant.

The presence of no god would be what thinking on the Subject has never been able to approach—even though it was only ever separated therefrom by an infinitesimal distance, indeed an intimate distance. It would be death that is not the *Aufhebung* of life but its suspension: life suspended at each instant, *hic et nunc*, suspended in its exposure to things, to others, to itself; existence as the presence of no subject, but the presence to an entire world. An invisible presence everywhere offered selfsame with being-there, selfsame with the *there* of being, irrefutable and naked like the brilliance of the sun on the sea: millions of scattered places.

This presence of no god could however carry with it the enticement, the call, the *Wink* of an à-dieu: a going to god, or an adieu to all gods—together, inextricably, divine presence and the absence of all gods. The place—*hic et nunc*—in place of the god. Perhaps that was written between the lines of the very principle of onto-theo-logy: *Deus interior intimo meo*; there is a place more remote than the place of any subject, a place without substance consisting entirely of exposed presence, sheer invisible brilliance (*éclat*) where the subject—God—flies into pieces (*éclats*).

34. Why Christianity?

That is to say: why did Hellenistic Judaism, given Roman form, have to engender that new era by which we once lived?

In a sense, nothing new came of it, apart from a new configuration for a Western world already at least ten centuries or so old. St. Paul drains from the language of Hellenistic mystery religions (a language impregnated at the same time with philosophy, and dating back to Egypt) the thin trickle of water from one or two marginal Jewish baptisms, and offers it in the imperious style of Roman activism to a world given over totally to morals.

(I mean morals here in Hegel's sense: the reign of *Verstellung*, of a ceaseless shifting between the pragmatic density of the here below and the transparency of values and wills in the beyond. I also therefore mean it in Nietzsche's sense: *ressentiment* against this world, servility, the organization of weakness—and in addition, work, technology,²⁴ subjectivity, the modern State, which will all nevertheless still have been, to use Heidegger's terms, missives from being.)

Morals did not come from Christianity: Christianity, on the contrary, originated in them. They are neither religious nor philosophical. In philosophy they are a forgetting of thought, and in religion a forgetting of the divine. Morals are Socratic thought without Plato, and Socratic thought is the impiety of Greece without art.

What was new was merely the *ordo romanus* (which tended both to be a religion on its own, not to say an absolute religion, and to dissolve in itself all religion), which provided morals with a frame. In that sense, Christianity was the Empire depoliticized and rendered moral, which is also to say unburdened of strictly Roman sacrality—and it was morals rendered imperial, that is, preserved from the adventures that they had after all been through from the Cynics to the Epicurians (and perhaps down to the Essenes).

But what then was radically new was the twilight of the gods in morals, the opening out of humanism and atheism—and the simultaneous invention of theodicy considered as the general matrix of modern historical thinking, of technology, or of politics. Theodicy can only emerge when the god is in decline and finds himself tangled up, as he declines, in the affairs of the world: it is then that he must be justified, shown to be provident and considerate, because the ways of the world and its affairs must be justified. Theodicy is thinking about *meaning* and the *guarantee* of meaning: in this thinking it engulfs the gods.

Theodicy—that is to say anthropodicy, and logodicy—is the truth of Christianity, of that religion that abolishes all religions and itself—having completed the task of making the gods odious. It consists in providing the meaning of morals by means of a morals of meaning: God is resolved into

a justified history (the history of a subject, history itself as Subject), and the ultimate justification of this history lies with man coming everywhere onto the scene in place of the gods.

He is the last species of odious god: the man-God, himself abandoned by God, the totally secular divinity of humanity, in its arrogant forcefulness (*in hoc signo vinces*) and in its complacent effusions (the Sacred Heart of Jesus).

Something else was offered simultaneously, however. It was a prayer: "Let us pray to God to release us and free us from God" (Meister Eckhart). This marked the return, in the modern guise of dialectical thinking, of the old ordeal of the religion of the God who abandons, the religion that the Western world looks upon as that of the Jewish people, the people whom "God had kept aside to be the age-old anguish of the world," and that was "destined to witness the agony" of the end of the world of the gods (Hegel). With the Judeo-Christian religion, moral assurance and anguish at the passing of the gods progressed side by side. Our atheism will turn out to have been inextricably woven from these two strands: morals that dissolve the gods, and prayer to God to be abandoned by him.

If we are to pass beyond our atheism one day, it will be because we no longer even pray to God to deliver us from God.

35. However, Christian faith—not to say Christianity (but it is advisable not to have too much faith in that sort of distinction)—exposed something else again, a thing apart: Christ. That is to say something to be confused neither with the personage whose moral preaching is told of in the Gospels, nor with the sublime or bland figure exploited by centuries of piety. Set apart from the doctrine of the Gospels and from the exploits (*la geste*) of Jesus, Christic theology propounds the mystery of the man-god. This *mystery* corresponds to the fact that the essence or the instance or the presence of the man-god is neither the fruit nor the product of any process, of any operation. It is not a union, and strictly speaking the term "incarnation" is not appropriate to it. The strict canon of Catholic faith lays down that in Christ "the two natures are not united solely by homonymy, nor by grace, nor by relation, nor by interpenetration, nor by naming alone nor by worship, nor by the conversion of one nature into the other, but through subsistence (*hypostasis*)." There is only one hypostasis for the two natures of man and the god. There is neither fusion nor differentiation, but a single place of subsistence or presence, a place where the god appears entirely in man, and man appears entirely in god. This is neither a divinization of man nor a humanization of God. What there is is this: how man appears to the god, in the god, how the god appears to man, in man, and how that itself is totally unapparent.

In this unapparent appearing (*parution*), faith and theology (and in theology, thought) somewhere link up, while religion and philosophy (and in philosophy, theology) turn obstinately away from this point. At least, that is what one might be tempted to say, but this opposition is too simple, and vain. What the mystery of Christ borders on, that is to say what all divine mystery has eventually bordered on—from whatever religion we extract it henceforth—this point of the naked appearing (*parution*) or the dis-lodging of man before god and of the god before man, this point of their im-mediacy can no longer be preserved as if it belonged to an order of faith distinct from an order of reason and of institution. On the contrary, this is what we must affirm: *with the gods, faith too has disappeared*. That is our truth, and against it the evidence of the heart and inward conviction are powerless: for faith, as long as it is faith, belongs neither to the inwardness nor to the feelings of the faithful. Faith is entirely an outward act of presence (*une comparution à l'extérieur*), of the order of presence and of manifestation: because it is (or was) faith in god, it is (or was) like clearly turning one's face toward the manifest heavens.

There is no faith in a vanished god: as he withdrew he took faith with him, for faith had never addressed itself to darkness, but solely to the radiance of the divine. What henceforth puts us face to face with the no-return (*sans-retour*) of the gods cannot be a faith, nor even—nor especially—a faith in the mystery of this no-return, or this “no god.” Faith is faith in mystery, which is god made evident. Along with the god and with faith, mystery has withdrawn. There is no more mysterious revelation, no more mystical revelation—not even the soberest, most reserved sort, the sort most given up to its own darkness or its own unapparentness.

There is in a way a *zero mystery* (*mystère nul*), inscribed in the margins of holy books, on temple courts, at the close of the prayers of those who still meditate before the mystery, inscribed also on our artificial suns and moons, in our calculations, and always selfsame with the heavens. This is much more and much less than a death of the gods, or their absence, or their withdrawal. It is something else again, something totally different. *Zero mystery* means no mystery, and the mystery of there being none. And always it is a matter of the appearing (*paraître*) of the god to man and of man before the god. This dual appearing is without mystery: everything has been explained. One has only to read *The Essence of Christianity* or *The Future of an Illusion*²⁵ (and it is not worthy of thought to look down, as is very near to happening, upon such arguments: for the gods that these arguments laid to rest or denounced had themselves long since become unworthy of thought and of faith). One has only to read *De Rerum Natura*: it is the poem of clarity wrested from mystery—which promptly plunges into insignificant obscurity. But there is a mystery—a zero mystery—about

this very clarity, about this peak of clarity regarding the nature of the things among which and to which our existences appear. It is a zero mystery: there is nothing to seek, nor to believe—no god; but it is a mystery: this closeness of things, this manifest world is precisely what conceals itself.

36. (In the end, something resists. To all of the harshest and most justified criticism of Christianity—of its political and moral despotism, its hatred of reason as much as of the body, its institutional frenzy or its pietistic subjectivism, its traffic in good works and intentions, and ultimately its monopolization and its privatization of the divine—to all of that something puts up a resistance, beneath the horizon of everything: something that, it is not impossible to claim, has [in spite of all the mumbo jumbo] left upon the form of the *Pater noster*—that prayer which Valéry in his unbelief judged to be perfect—a mark that is difficult totally to erase: a generous abandonment to divine generosity, a supplication out of that distress to which the divine alone can abandon us—the divine or its withdrawal.

No doubt something in us resists that resistance: the title “Father” appears suspect to us; we see only too well what this god is modeled on. But perhaps we see very badly. Perhaps the “Father,” for those who made up this prayer, and for those who prayed it, was not something paternal on the lines of our petty family affairs; perhaps paternity was nothing more, but also nothing less, than the obscure evidence of a naming.

However, in the end, beyond the end if necessary, we can yet but say: the *Pater noster* is finished, in Latin as well as in all languages. For we speak another language than its language of prayer. We speak another language, one whose *names*, proper and common, profane and sacred, have yet—in a still unheard of sense—to be *sanctified*.)

37. To strive against idolatry presupposes that one has the highest and most demanding idea of God, or of the absence of all gods. That is precisely what shows up the limits of criticism of idols. For in opposition to the idol there is no *idea* we can form of God, nor of his absence (apart from a moral or metaphysical idea, which in essence has nothing to do either with the gods or their absence).

I am not proposing a return to idols (in any case there is nothing to be *proposed*). I would merely posit that idols are only idols with regard to the Idea. But above and beyond idol and Idea, in the effacement of every God, be he old or new, it could be that we see emerge, like an Idea imprinted upon an idol, serene and secret, the unmoving smile of the gods.

Their smile would be there, on their clearly delineated lips. They would not be idols. They would not be representations. But the outline of divine place would be in the smile of their face, a face effaced but exposed, here

or there present, offered, open—and barred across, withdrawn by that same smile.

This place of the gods has no place—though there are archaic statues that suggest that it does. But it is not just anywhere. It is delimited by the smile of the gods: that thinnest tightening of their lips, which do not even part. In that singular feature, the smile of the gods—a feature (*trait*) as singular as a stroke (*trait*) of the pen—there is this: where the god presents himself, he withholds his divine name and his divine knowledge; but this withholding appears in his smile as an Idea imprinted on an idol. (Idea and idol undo each other infinitely. All that remains is their speechless, smiling, ideal, and divine exchange.)

38. “The gods, whose life is nought but joy” (Homer).

(We too once had a word or a shout for that: Alleluia! Henceforth our joy and the thought of our joy will keep themselves more secret. But when what concerns us is the gods, or no gods, then we are concerned with nothing else but joy.)

39. A dual temptation is constantly recurring: either to baptize with the name of “god” all the obscure confines of our experience (or our thought), or on the contrary to denounce such baptism as superstitious metaphor. For as long as the Western world has existed, perhaps not a single argument concerning God has avoided yielding to one or other of these temptations, or even to both at once. But god is not a manner of speaking—and of protecting ourselves—nor is he the ultimate truth of humankind. Men and women are men and women and the gods are the gods. They are distinct and can never mix. Living in the same world, they are always face to face with each other, on either side of a dividing—and a retreating—line. They are, together, the vis-à-vis itself, the face-to-face encounter in which the unreserved appearing (*paraître*) of one to the other engages them in an irredeemable strangeness. The gesture of the gods is to conceal themselves, on this very line, from the face of men. The gesture of men is to stand back from this line where it encounters the face of the god.

They thus have no names for each other. For the gods, man is unnameable, for there are no names in the language of the gods (it knows only the summons, the order, the expression of joy). And the name of God, among men, names only the lack of sacred names. But men and the gods find themselves brought together face to face in this way; unnameable, and perhaps absolutely intolerable to each other.

40. God is for the community, the gods are always the gods of the community—and a community, in return, is what it is only before the face of the gods.

“Finite consciousness only knows God to the extent that God knows himself in it; hence, God is spirit, and more precisely he is the spirit of his community, that is to say of those who honour him” (Hegel).

If there are no more gods, there is no more community. That is why community has been capable of becoming horrifying, massive, destructive of its members and itself, a society burned at the stake by its Church, its Myth, or its Spirit. Such is the fate of community without god: it thinks it is God, thinks it is the devastating presence of God, because it is no longer placed *facing* him and his absolute remoteness. But it cannot be brought back face to face with its vanished gods—the less so in that it is with the withdrawal of the gods that community came into being: a group of men facing its gods does not conceive of itself as a community, that is to say it does not seek within itself the presence of what binds it together, but experiences itself as this particular group (family, people, tribe) before the face of the god who holds and preserves in his innermost self the truth and the power of its bond.

(That is why we should not say that God is for the community. Community as such indicates that the gods have taken their leave. We should say rather that the god is always for several people together, including when he is *my* god: as soon as I name my god, or as soon as I am summoned and appear before him, I find myself precisely thereby placed alongside other mortals like me—which is not to say that they are always those of my tribe or my people.)

We should therefore rather lead community toward this disappearance of the gods, which founds it and divides it from itself. Over divided community, selfsame with its expanse, like a sort of ground plan, the traces of the paths along which the gods withdrew mark out the partition of community.²⁶ With these traces community inscribes the absence of its communion, which is the absence of the representation of a divine presence at the heart of community and as community itself. Communion is thus the representation of what the gods have never been, when they were or when they are present, but what we imagine to ourselves, when we know they are no longer present. In place of communion, in fact, there is the absence of the gods, and the exposure of each of us to the other: we are exposed to each other in the same way as we could, together, be exposed to the gods. It is the same mode of presence, without the presence of the gods.

In place of communion there is no *place*, no site, no temple or altar for community. Exposure takes place everywhere, in all places, for it is the exposure of all and of each, in his solitude, to not being alone. (This does not only or necessarily take place at the level of families, tribes, or peoples: on the contrary, these, as we know, can all circumscribe solitude. But on

the contrary, because in our great metropolises, where more and more different "communities" exist side by side, intersect, pass each other by and intermingle, the exposure to not being alone, the risk of face-to-face encounter, is constantly becoming more diverse and more unpredictable—before whom, at this precise moment, am I writing? Before what Arabs, what Blacks, what Vietnamese, and in the presence or the absence of which of their gods?)

Not to be alone, that is divine (but I shall not say: that is the divine; that would be another baptism). For the god is never alone: he is always presenting himself, to the other gods or to mortals. Solitude only has meaning and existence for mankind, not for the god. He is always addressing himself, assigning himself, sending himself, or else—and it is the same thing—he is being invoked, or encountered, or worshipped. How are we not alone when we are neither before the gods nor within the bosom of the community? That is what we have to learn, through a community without communion, and a face-to-face encounter with no divine countenance.

41. What if we were to shift the question very slightly, and instead of asking "what is God?"—a question of essence that it is impossible for us to answer, since God has already provided an answer to the question of essence itself, and even to the question of "superessence"—we were to ask "what is a god?" We would not have gained very much, no doubt, but at least we would have gained this: "God" is indistinguishable from his own essence; "a god" would be a presence, a some "one" present—or absent—that is not simply indistinguishable from divine essence, that does not represent it either, or individualize it, but that rather puts it as it were outside of itself, revealing that "a god" does not have "God" or "the divine" as its essence. Essence here comes to be indistinguishable from the mode of presence—or absence—from that singular mode of manifesting, *hic et nunc*, a god, never God, the god of one instant, in one place—and so always another god, or always another place, and no god.

"Come . . . I cannot see you, and yet my heart strains toward you and my eyes desire you. . . . The gods and mankind have turned their face toward you and weep together." This is the lament of Isis to Osiris—the god whom the gods themselves cannot perceive.

"This God who quickens us beneath his clouds is mad. I know, I am he," wrote Bataille. These words count less for their meaning, which is clear, evident, dazzling, and mortal, than for the impetuousness that bears them along and in which in their turn they carry me away: in the infinite anguish or infinite joy at the fact that God is always outside of God, that he is never what God himself would wish him to be (if in general God

wished anything at all). It is this impetuosity itself—which is not mad, which is something other than madness—of which we should say that it is no longer atheist, but indefinitely loosed from God in God, and divine beyond the divine.

42. *"I am God"*: it is perhaps impossible to avoid this answer, if the question "what is God?" presupposes that God is a Subject. And either it does presuppose that—or else it must take the extreme risk (as Hölderlin perhaps wished) of giving no meaning to the word "God" and taking it as the pure proper name of an unknown.

If this answer is mad, its madness is no different from that of thought that seeks to identify itself, it and its "thing," as subject, as its own substance and its own operation: something that happens continually in ontotheology.

But I cannot answer the question "what is a god?" by saying I am he. "A god" signifies: something other than a subject. It is another sort of thought, which can no longer think itself identical or consubstantial with the divine that it questions, or that questions it.

43. "The gods went away long ago," said Cercidas of Megalopolis, in the third century B.C.

Our history thus began with their departure, and perhaps even after their departure—or else, when we stopped knowing they were present.

They cannot return in that history—and "to return" has no sense outside of that history.

But where the gods are—and according as they are, whatever the present or absent mode of their existence—our history is suspended. And where our history is suspended, where it is no longer history, that is to say where it is no longer the time of an operation but the space of an opening, there something may come to pass.

44. "God is something extended" (Spinoza).

Alone among painters of our time, Cy Twombly ceaselessly paints the Gods: Apollo, Pan, Venus, Bacchus, others besides. There is never a face, there is often—not always—the name of the god, written in broad, unsteady letters. There is no really identifiable outline, though forms do from time to time fleetingly appear: a breast, a sexual organ, a palm, a wave. But also a lot of patches, of lines leading nowhere. And always a lot of light.

Selfsame with every canvas, without there being a face, there is a divine smile, secret and serene.

Nothing is dumb
More than the mouth of a god. (Rilke)

45. The face of the divine is not a countenance (it is not the other [*autrui*]). But it is the material, local presence—*here* or *there*, selfsame with somewhere—of the coming, or the noncoming of the god. All presence is that of a body, but the body of the god is a body *that comes* (or that goes). Its presence is a face; it is that before whose face we are offered, and this is inscribed in space, as so many divine places. (“My principle . . . : in the notion of ‘God as spirit’, God considered as perfection is *denied*.” [Nietzsche])

46. Naming or calling the gods perhaps always necessarily resides not in a name, even one equipped with sublime epithets, but in whole phrases, with their rhythms and their tones.

The gods will go away one day, as mysteriously as they came, leaving behind them a shell in human form, enough to fool the believers. (Henry Miller)

This is the true history of the gods: this fading. The gods: what I call thus so as to help you. A name. But I do not call the gods. They are. (Jean-Christophe Bailly)

Gathering together the fragments of the divine, even piecing together what will be lacking. (Jean-Claude Lescout)

God keep us! And ho! Eh? Amen on earth to all phenomena. What? (James Joyce)

No image is permitted. The background on either side might be accessible to the living. . . . But it has been clouded over, out of respect, with a dark glaze. He alone—god wishes to be apparent. (Victor Segalen)

Every gesture you make repeats a divine pattern. (Cesare Pavese)

The divine name, like an immense bird,
Has escaped from my breast
Before me the wreaths of a dense fog
And behind me an empty cage. (Osip Mandelstam)

God
(when a complete phosphorescence warns)
is linear by nature. (Jean Daive)

God shines, man hisses, echoing the snake. (Victor Hugo)

I sat astride God in the distant-the close by, he was singing,
 it was
 our last ride above
 the hedgerows of men. (Paul Celan)

Hybris is the belief that happiness could be anything other than a present from the gods. (Walter Benjamin)

And our dead hearts live with the lightning in the wounds of the Gods. (Norman Mailer)

We all pray to some god, but what comes of it has no names. (Cesare Pavese)

Then the Gods are seized by dizziness. They stagger, go into convulsions, and vomit forth their existences. (Gustave Flaubert)

47. The god expels man outside of himself.

For Lucan, when the god penetrated the Pythia, “mentemque priorem expulit atque hominem toto sibi cedere iussit pectore” (he expelled all prior thought and ordered that she should yield herself up wholeheartedly to him).

However, outside or inside of himself, man, insofar as he is the place of the god (on that account, perhaps, another name than man would suit him better, since we are no longer accustomed to hearing that name as the name that stands face to face [*vis-à-vis*] with the name of the god), finds himself first and foremost in a state of destitution.

It is always in extreme destitution, in abandonment without shelter or protection, that man appears, waxes, or wanes before the face of the god. Wherever he presents himself, God brings about destitution and denuding. Whether he presents himself or absents himself—and that is the secret of God—he denudes man and leaves him destitute.

Destitution should not be contrasted with the magnificence of worship or with the splendor of hymns. All of these, on the contrary, are apt to reveal the infinite abandonment and fragility of the one who performs the rites. One might even say: destitution before the face of the god is the experience of the temple.

48. In the temple, worship, prostration, celebration take place. Hieratic postures, sacred recitations, consecrated actions bring us into contact with divine mystery, with the nakedness of god himself. The altars where according to ritual sacred substances are touched are always basically theatres of obscenity—and places of obscenity in turn are altars: the eye of Horus between the thighs of Pharaoh's wife.

Henceforth all experience of temple and altar has passed into experience of the obscene. To name God as Bataille did in the heat of love and in a brothel²⁷ is still to yield to a modern temptation. Altars and temples—does it need repeating?—are deserted. Obscenity, love, their agony and their ecstasy, have devolved to us alone, as have the dereliction of *Dasein* or the disquieting essence of power. There is positively no use wishing to find or name the divine in all that: for the gods have left it all behind for us.

If I say the divine has deserted the temples, that does not mean, as a ruse of dialectic is always ready to suggest, that the emptiness of the temples now offers us the divine. No: it means precisely and literally that the temples are deserted and that our experience of the divine is our experience of its desertion. It is no longer a question of meeting God in the desert: but of this—and *this* is the desert: we do not encounter God; God has deserted all encounter. Let us not precipitately see this as the very sign of the divine.

From all the rites and all the liturgies, not the least canticle is left over: even the *believer* who prays can only *quote* his prayer. Not the least genuflection remains. Music, theater, or the dance have taken it all over. That is our portion: the fact that the divine can no longer find refuge anywhere. There is no more meditation.

All that remains of the experience of the temple or the desert is destitution before the empty temples. These are not merely the temples of the West. God died in the West, and because of it, he died of the reason and the poetry of the West, of its cupidity and its generosity, of its coldness and its ardor, of its hate and its love. More perhaps than of anything else, God died of the love of God, of that intimacy with man—and to this extent, the dead God was still only the God of the West. But everywhere else, wherever there can be said to be somewhere other than the West, the gods have long since—perhaps since the beginning—exhausted themselves in a surfeit of signs and powers, in clergies, clans and castes, in the scrupulous observance and the firm ties that form the two possible meanings of the word *religio*.

If a god can still come, he can come neither from the East nor from the West, nor through a birth, nor through a decline. (If he comes, he comes just as much in the rites and the prayers of those who honor gods as in the indifference and the blasphemy of others. If he withdraws, it is just as much from the former as from the latter.) But the mere formulation of this possibility—"that a god might come"—is devoid of sense. Space is everywhere open, there is no place wherein to receive either the mystery or the splendor of a god. It is granted us to see the limitless openness of that space, it falls to our age to know—with a knowledge more acute than even the most penetrating science, more luminous than any consciousness—

how we are delivered up to that gaping naked face. It reveals to us nothing but us—*neither gods nor men*—and that too is a joy.

49. What presents itself is destitution. The only thing we can still receive into ourselves, aside from all the rest (the erotic, the political, the poetic, the philosophical, the religious) is such a destitution.

We must no longer seek either temples or deserts; we must abandon meditation. We must let ourselves be delivered up to dispersal and destitution. Yet we must not even do this: neither the god nor the destitution of the god can impose any obligations. God has no part in law. He simply indicates this: there is no longer any divine meditation. There are the heavens, more manifest than ever, and there is our destitution, set apart from the heavens and the earth.

Where does this take place? Nowhere, if there is no longer any place for the gods. And yet it does take place: we happen to find ourselves destitute. That opens something up, outside of all places, it makes a spacing out. If we are in it, we do not stand in it: there is no place there—but we ourselves are opened up there, parted from ourselves, from all our places and all our gods. We are in this place, denuded, before the destitute (*dénué*) face of the god.

50. Does there not remain, in spite of everything, a possibility that God may rise again, once more, and perhaps again and again?

No doubt this possibility exists, in defiance of everything. It is written into the most stringent logic of our philosophy, that is to say into the power of the negative: that God is not "God," that is divine. That is ontotheological ecstasy, from St. Paul to St. Thomas and from St. Thomas to Eckhart, Luther, and Hegel. Divine is the *kenosis* whereby God empties himself of himself, of his separation from man, of his abstract absoluteness. God is precisely that: the negation of his own particularity, his becoming man and corpse, and the negation of that negation—his resurrection, and his transfiguration into the universally radiant countenance of his own mystical body.

But the final resurrection of God left upon this countenance some strange features. God is resurrected a final time with Nietzsche, with the parodic and dizzying uttering of the inevitable "I am God" of self-consciousness. I am Dionysus, the Crucified, and all gods. A sort of monstrous spasm brings to completion, in *Ecce Homo*, both Hölderlin's fraternity of gods strange to the world and the "simple most intimate knowledge of self" where in Hegel there resounds "the harsh word that God himself is dead." God rises again, God gambles his own resurrection in the madness of Nietzsche, which combines the madness of Hölderlin with that of Hegel:

the madness of derangement in an exhausted calling to the gods, and the madness of the night of consciousness that knows the Self as negated (“that harsh expression is the expression of the most intimate self-knowledge, the return by consciousness into the depths of the night of Me = Me, which no longer perceives or knows anything outside of that night”).

The last God to rise again went mad. His madness is both what arises at the furthest extreme of the *cogito*: the “*ego sum*” uttered in the negation of its own substance—and what is set off, mechanically, in the infinite reciting of the extreme edge of language, that is to say in the impossible naming of all divine Names, which are lacking. God has become the twofold madness of the absolute subject of utterance (*l'énonciation*) and of the infinite number of subjects of the uttered (*l'énoncé*) in our *logos*.

His mouth can no longer smile, his hands can no longer bless. He has lost charity as well as serenity. Those who can still pray, those who still understand mercy no longer recognize him.

The madness of God is not a new death. The mad god can no longer either die or rise again. He no longer has any freedom. He is fixed, frozen in his madness, in the absolute *logic* of a being identical to its own utterance, in the implacable automatism of the subject who is himself his own *acting out*.

The im-mediate and incommensurable presence, everywhere manifest and everywhere concealed, before the face of which we are bereft (*dénués*) of discourse and of *cogito*, is not in turn the negation of the mad God. It does not have that power, and even if it had, it could not use it, for it does not take place within the logic of the mad God.

That is why we shall not call this presence “god,” we shall not even say it is divine: we shall not say it—we shall leave it to set out the places of its reserve and its generosity.

51. Divine places, without gods, with no god, are spread out everywhere around us, open and offered to our coming, to our going or to our presence, given up or promised to our visitation, to frequentation by those who are not men either, but who are there, in these places: ourselves, alone, out to meet that which we are not, and which the gods for their part have never been. These places, spread out everywhere, yield up and orient new spaces: they are no longer temples, but rather the opening up and the spacing out of the temples themselves, a dis-location with no reserve henceforth, with no more sacred enclosures—other tracks, other ways, other places for all who are there.

Translated by Michael Holland

Foreword

1. Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 79–153.

2. "La juridiction du monarque hégélien," in *Rejoue le politique* (Paris: Galilée, 1981), pp. 51–90.

3. Nancy's publications in English include, "Larvatus Pro Deo," trans. Daniel A. Brewer, in *Glyph 2* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 14–36; "Dei paralysis progressiva," *Stanford Italian Review* 6, nos. 1–2, *Nietzsche in Italy*, ed. Thomas Harrison, pp. 199–208; "Vox Clamans in Deserto," *Notebooks in Cultural Analysis* vol. 3, ed. Norman F. Cantor and Nathalia King (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1986), pp. 13–14; "Elliptical Sense," forthcoming in *Research in Phenomenology*; "Finite History," in *The States of "Theory"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); "Wild Laughter in the Throat of Death," *MLN* 102, no. 4, 1988, pp. 719–36; "Introduction," in *Who Comes after the Subject?*, ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1990). "Sharing Voices," in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). See also the book written with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barrard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), and the forthcoming translation (State University of New York Press) of their book on Lacan, *Le titre de la lettre*. The Stanford University Press is also preparing a collection of essays in translation under the title *The Birth to Presence*.

4. We see a particularly vivid example of the gap to which I am referring in Nancy's recent essay on freedom, *L'expérience de la liberté* (Paris: Galilée, 1988). On page 107, he writes, "A politics—if this were still a politics—of initial freedom would be a politics allowing freedom to begin." On page 109, while pointing to the signs of such a notion of freedom in Hegel's thought, he writes: "There is nothing upon which freedom depends, that conditions it or that renders it possible—or necessary." The gap begins to appear already in the first

phrase, between "politics" and "politics"; it then widens as Nancy argues that the politics in question can have no causal relation to its ostensible object. Freedom (an event that Nancy has defined as "coming into the presence of existence" ["Introduction," *Who Comes after the Subject?*]), like community, is not something that can be produced or that can be guaranteed with any pragmatic politics. It is what would be called in traditional philosophical terminology a "transcendental": the condition of any free political act or any free choice of pragmatic objectives. The term "transcendental," however, is misleading because this transcendental condition is radically historical and cannot be thought apart from its inscription in the finite acts it makes possible (just as "community" cannot be thought as subsisting somewhere beyond the singular acts by which it is drawn out and communicated). It is thus what Derrida has called a "quasi transcendental": something that comes about and is marked in a practice of writing (in a large sense of this term that embraces acts of all kinds), but that resists any representation or objectification.

5. Indissociable *in principle*, I would say, with all due caution. We touch here upon a necessity to which Heidegger pointed throughout his work before the Second World War (one of the key points of what I would call his political thought, and indeed one of the key points of a thought of finitude): namely that a fundamental questioning, as Heidegger defines it in the first chapter of his essay, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (trans. Ralph Manheim [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959]), is inseparable from a sociohistorical and sociopolitical stance: a decision about one's history (Heidegger defined this "one" as a *people*) that must be understood as political, even if political phenomena are in turn read in relation to the history of Being. The relation asserted here between the "ontic" and the "ontological" is what I referred to above as a "gap and a bridge"; it remains in large measure to be thought in political terms, but it demands our attention today, as we see from the reemergence of the question of Heidegger's politics in the context of a larger concern (emerging, we might say, *nachträglich*) with the questions of nationalism and fascism.

6. Let me anticipate this discussion by saying that in focusing on the problematic of language, I will be touching upon what I take to be one of the crucial implications of Nancy's thinking (and deconstruction in general) for any philosophical or literary practice—any domain where activity bears upon the order of the symbolic. A meditation on language in the context of a thought of difference and its bearing on politics will suggest that a politically effective language in these domains is a language that *intervenes in language* (language understood here as the site of articulation of our being-in-common, and thus the site of its historicity). This view of philosophical or literary praxis implies that the effort to politicize critical discourse must involve more than an increasing thematization of political issues. This thematization is essential for political purposes, and in this respect the current shift of attention to history and to political themes is an extremely important and valuable development. But I would argue that this turn in critical thought must be accompanied (and this may be one of the conditions of escaping the neutralizing forces of the academy) by a meditation on the conditions under which a discourse can engage with what is *at stake* in politics *along with* practical political concerns and issues such as social justice: namely, existence in its historicity and materiality, or the *meaning* of social existence.

7. It is worth noting that a large portion of the work I am commenting upon here was intended for a broad public. The difficulty of the thought in question (which derives primarily from the weight of tradition) and the economy of Nancy's style of exposition have tended to frustrate his aim of writing for a community beyond the university. But it remains true that essays like "Théorie et pratique" (initially prepared for *Le Monde*, but not published) and works like *L'oubli de la philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1986) and *La communauté désœuvrée* were addressed to the general public. In fact, it might be observed that Nancy consistently takes his inspiration from political or social concerns that are in the air (this was very much

the case with the works contained in this volume: love, religion, and myth have been "current" topics over the past decade). Nancy does not take up current themes in order to keep up with intellectual fashion, however; he is addressing the *concern* with these topics—attempting to think through the reasons (philosophical, but also sociohistorical) for their currency.

8. This theme is already present in "The Origin of the Work of Art" in Heidegger's description of the way truth is "drawn to the work." See pp. 60-66 of Albert Hofstadter's translation of this essay in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

9. I might note that the concept of experience also plays an important role in Heidegger's later thought. See, for example, the opening paragraphs of Heidegger's essay, "The Essence of Language," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 57-59. (Hertz translates the title of this essay as "The Nature of Language.")

10. Nancy's emphasis on the facticity of experience warrants some emphasis here, since it is widely thought that a deconstructive discourse (or a thought of difference) dissolves the identity of the subject and suspends its relation to the world. Nancy makes it evident, however, that deconstruction is concerned with precisely the subject's relation to itself and to what is (its relation to itself as a relation to what is: not in the mode of a founding, but rather in that of an opening)—it represents an effort to overcome an abstract concept of identity and to think the subject's exposure to what is other than it. Deconstruction attempts to think the *opening* of the subject onto the world, and the opening of the world (a spatiotemporal disposition) that both determines and is determined by the subject's intervention ("writing," *écriture*, designates nothing else). In a Heideggerian terminology, this means that deconstruction is concerned with the subject's ecstasis, or "finite transcendence," and with truth, understood as the opening of a time and a space wherein beings have a meaning and are available to representation.

11. See Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," trans. David Farrell Krell, in *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

12. See, on this point, Nancy's discussion of evil in the concluding pages of *L'expérience de la liberté*.

13. Since Nancy ventures to define thought as love in "Shattered Love" ("the love of what comes to experience"), we might be prompted to ask whether freedom should not be defined as being in part the capacity for love (though a capacity not in our power). But love might also be thought as something that delivers us to our freedom in the sense that love is a passion that seizes Dasein and *calls it out*. I could not define the relation between love and freedom more precisely than by saying that love is a *singular experience of freedom*. This is what Nancy means, I believe, when he speaks of "the freedom of love."

14. Cited on p. 15.

15. Georges Bataille, "Nietzschean Chronicle," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 208.

16. The question of community represents something like a limit in Nietzsche's thought. But I would argue that what Nietzsche is thinking with the term "solitude" (which he uses to describe his own experience first of all) is nothing other than an experience of the grounds of community as Nancy is trying to define them. It is on this basis that Bataille claimed him as a companion.

17. See paragraph 47 of Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

18. *Ibid.*, p. 294.

19. Unless Heidegger means by "undone" the dissolution of defined social or political ties and the opening of what Blanchot might call a "relation without relation" and what Nancy calls "community."

20. Christopher Fynsk, *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), chapter 1.
21. Maurice Blanchot, "Two Versions of the Imaginary," trans. Lydia Davis, in *The Gaze of Orpheus* (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1981), pp. 82–85.
22. Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1988), p. 25.
23. In this respect, I cannot help but remain slightly puzzled by Nancy's use of a term like "*désœuvré*" or "*désœuvrement*," terms with a distinctly Blanchotian cast. One can see how Blanchot would develop the term in relation to his meditation on death and the neutral, and in stressing the community's *undoing*, one can see how he might call upon his notion of the quotidian. But to my knowledge, Nancy never explores these senses of *désœuvrement* in any of his writings. I would have to say that whether we understand the term in a Blanchotian sense or even in a more everyday sense, "idleness" is not part of Nancy's understanding of community (and if I may say so, the term is profoundly foreign to his way of being in the world). Nancy is driven to write because the community (or its concept) has grown idle, and if he tries to turn *désœuvrement* into an active trait of the community he is trying to think, we must surely understand this "activity" more as an *unworking* (a praxis that is not a production: the key term is "work") than an undoing. Let me insist that I am not making a critique here. I am trying to get at the "pitch" or tonality of Nancy's work: the distinctive traits of his gesture of thought as it proceeds from and articulates a singular *experience* of freedom and community.
24. Nancy, *L'oubli de la philosophie*, p. 81.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
26. "*Meaning . . . is the element in which there can be significations, interpretations, representation . . . The element of meaning is given to us, we are set, placed, or thrown in it as into our most proper possibility, that possibility that distinguishes from any other the idea of a significant world and the fact of this world (since the idea and the fact are strictly contemporaneous in this case). A significant world is a world offered to comprehension, explication, or interpretation before having any signification. Our world is a world presented as a world of meaning before and beyond any constituted meaning . . . The presentation of its meaning, or its presentation in meaning, this elementarity of meaning occupies, in a way, the place of schematism*" (*ibid.*, p. 91).
27. *Ibid.*
28. "Freedom as the *force of the thing* as such, or as the force of the act of existing, does not designate a force opposed to or combined with the other forces of nature. It designates rather that on the basis of which there can exist relations of force as such, between humankind and nature and between human beings. It is the force of force in general, or the very resistance of the existence of the thing—its resistance to absorption in immanent Being or in the succession of changes. A transcendental force, consequently, but as a material effectivity. Because *existence* as such has its being (or its thing) in the act, or, if you will, in the *praxis* of existing, it is not possible not to recognize in it the effective character of a force, which implies for thought something like a transcendental materiality of force, or, if you prefer, an ontological materiality" (Nancy, *L'expérience de la liberté*, pp. 132–33).
29. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
32. Heidegger attempts to think this movement with the phrase "*Es gibt*"—"Es, das Wort, gibt"; what the word gives, with itself, is the "is." See "The Essence of Language," p. 88.
33. For the theme of the *Geflecht*, see the essay, "The Way to Language," in *On the Way to Language*.

34. The concept appears prominently in Heidegger's definition of what he means by phenomenology: "Our investigation itself will show that the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation [*Auslegung*; Nancy adopts the French translation, "explicitation"]. The *logos* of the phenomenology of Dasein has the character of a *hermeneuein*, through which the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being that Dasein itself possesses, are *made known* [*kundgegeben*] to Dasein's understanding of Being. The phenomenology of Dasein is a *hermeneutic* in the primordial sense of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting" (*Being and Time*, pp. 61–62).

35. Martin Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language," in *On the Way to Language*, pp. 1–54.

36. See Nancy, "Of Being-in-Common," in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. Miami Theory Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).

37. Here, authors such as Habermas and Rorty meet as allies. The intolerance shown by these authors *vis-à-vis* much modern French work (particularly when it takes on a political cast) has to do in part with the fact that what is at stake in this work is a thought of the social or political bond and a thought of language (with implications for the practice of philosophy) that radically challenges the notions of communication and consensus pursued by them.

38. Heidegger points to the paradox in which we are turning here when he describes the way in which the work of art "demands its setting up" ("The Origin of the Work of Art," p. 44). Heidegger's argument implies that the artist (like the "preserver") answers to a law that initially opens in the work.

39. Let me specify that I am using the term "writing" here to designate the practice that traces out the "writing" that is the voice of community (described here as a "prescription"). "Writing" carries a double sense because the practice and the prescription are indissociable from one another: the latter *happens* in the former, and the structure of this relation is one of repetition (one will find a similar double usage of the term in Derrida's texts). In my discussion of "Of Divine Places," I will be focusing primarily on the more originary sense of the term (in which "writing" names the original tracing out of a differential articulation). But it should be recalled that this originary tracing must be *drawn out* (in a gesture, or in a text: it can be in any form of signifying act) *in order to occur*.

40. See the essays on Blanchot collected in *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), as well as "D'un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie," in *Les fins de l'homme: À partir du travail de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Galilée, 1981), pp. 446–79, and "En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici," in *Textes pour Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1980), pp. 21–60.

41. See Heidegger's essay "Language" (the first essay in the German edition of *On the Way to Language*) in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 189–210.

42. A translation of the "Remarks" is available in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters on Theory*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 101–16.

43. In discussions with various readers, Nancy has come to recognize that he actually went a bit too far in this experiment—for the text inevitably gives the impression of a greater religiosity than is appropriate. Thus I would underscore a point that is already clear in this essay, but that may require greater emphasis: Nancy's essay is an "experiment" without faith—*une expérience sans foi*.

44. In interpreting this smile, and in seeking to preserve it from any sentimental association, I cannot but recall Celan's lines: "Entmündigte Lippe melde/das etwas noch geschieht, noch

immer,/unweit von dir." In Pierre Joris's translation: "Unmouthered lip, announce,/that something's happening, still,/not far from you."

Preface

1. As every translator of Blanchot knows, the French *désœuvrement* does not have any adequate translation in English. The use of the word in this book is explained on page 31. There—and throughout the whole chapter—the word is translated by "unworking," as in Pierre Joris's translation of Blanchot's *La communauté inavouable* (*The Unavowable Community*, Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1988). Pierre Joris thanks Christopher Fynsk for suggesting "unworking," and we too would like to express our gratitude to him for his helpful and amicable guidance in the present translation.

Another possible translation, by Ann Smock in *The Writing of the Disaster* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) and *The Space of Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), is "uneventfulness," which emphasizes the fact that the work doesn't happen as such without its own withdrawal, a notion also helpful for the understanding of the thinking of "community" here. However, neither one of these "translations" or substitutes was deemed suitable for the title of the book, since a title ought not to inflict upon the reader an unrecognizable word. Therefore we decided for the title to shift the emphasis of the meaning a little by choosing *The Inoperative Community*.

2. As well as other texts, written after these. See especially *L'expérience de la liberté* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), forthcoming in English from Harvard University Press; "Finite History," in *The States of Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); and "Abrégé philosophique de la révolution française," in *Poésie*, no. 48 (1989).

1. The Inoperative Community

1. Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 332. Subsequent references to this work are indicated in the text as *O.C.*, volume and page number.

2. Considered in detail, taking into account the precise historical conjuncture of each instance, this is not rigorously exact as regards, for example, the Hungarian Council of '56, and even more so the left of Solidarity in Poland. Nor is it absolutely exact as regards all of the discourses held today: one might, in this respect alone, juxtapose the situationists of not so long ago with certain aspects of Hannah Arendt's thought and also, as strange or provocative as the mixture might appear, certain propositions advanced by Lyotard, Badiou, Ellul, Deleuze, Pasolini, and Rancière. These thoughts occur, although each one engages it in its own particular way (and sometimes whether they know it or not), in the wake of a Marxist event that I will try to characterize below and that signifies for us the bringing into question of communist or communitarian humanism (quite different from the questioning once undertaken by Althusser in the name of a Marxist science). This is also why such propositions communicate with what I shall name, tentatively and in spite of everything, "literary communism."

3. Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 108–9.

4. Michel Henry's reading of Marx, which is oriented around the conceptual reciprocity of the "individual" and "immanent life," bears witness to this. In this regard, "by principle the individual escapes the power of the dialectic" (Michel Henry, *Marx* [Paris: Gallimard, 1976], vol. 2, p. 46). This might permit me to preface everything I have to say with the following general remark: there are two ways of escaping the dialectic (that is to say mediation in a totality)—either by slipping away from it into immanence or by opening up its negativity to the point of rendering it "unworked" (*désœuvré*), as Bataille puts it. In this latter case,

there is no immanence of negativity: "there is" *ecstasy*, ecstasy of knowledge as well as of history and community.

5. "Le communisme sans héritage," revue *Comité*, 1968, in *Gramma* no. 3/4 (1976), p. 32.

6. For the moment, let us retain simply that "literature," here, must above all not be taken in the sense Bataille gave to the word when he wrote, for example (in his critique of *Inner Experience* and *Guilty*): "I have come to realize through experience that these books lead those who read them into complacency. They please most often those vague and impotent minds who want to flee and sleep and *satisfy* themselves with the escape provided by literature" (*O.C.* 8:583). He also spoke of the "sliding into impotence of thought that turns to literature" (*ibid.*).

7. See chapter 5, "Of Divine Places."

8. See J.-L. Nancy, "La juridiction du monarque hégélien," in *Rejouer le politique* (Paris: Galilée, 1981). Translation forthcoming in *The Birth to Presence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

9. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Transcendence Ends in Politics," trans. P. Caws, in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. C. Fynsk, Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 267-300, and G. Granel, "Pourquoi avoir publié cela?" in *De l'université* (Toulouse: T.E.R., 1982).

10. Except for Denis Hollier, already in *La prise de la Concorde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) and in particular with the publication of *Collège de sociologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), English translation by Betsy Wing, *The College of Sociology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). More recently, Francis Marmande has published a systematic examination of Bataille's political preoccupations. See *Georges Bataille politique* (Paris: Parenthèses, 1985).

11. But it is unfortunately in the name of the most conventional political or moral attitudes that the most haughty—and the most vain—critiques of fascism itself and of those who had to confront its fascination are undertaken.

12. See, for example, *O.C.* 7:257.

13. See, for example, *O.C.* 7:312.

14. I employ the term "communication" in the manner of Bataille, that is to say, following the pattern of a permanent violence done to the word's meaning, both because it implies subjectivity or intersubjectivity and because it denotes the transmission of a message and a meaning. Rigorously, this word is untenable. I retain it because it resonates with "community," but I would superimpose upon it (which sometimes means substitute for it) the word "sharing." Bataille was aware that the violence he had inflicted upon the concept of "communication" was insufficient: "*To be isolated, communication, have only one reality. Nowhere do there exist 'isolated beings' who do not communicate, nor is there a 'communication' independent of points of isolation. Let us be careful to set aside two poorly made concepts, the residue of puerile beliefs; by this means we will cut through the most poorly constructed problem*" (*O.C.* 7:553). What this calls for, in short, is the deconstruction of the concept, such as Jacques Derrida has undertaken in "Signature, Event, Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), and such as it has been pursued, in another manner, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ("Postulates of Linguistics," in *A Thousand Plateaux*, trans. B. Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987]). These operations necessarily entail a general reevaluation of communication in and of the community (of speech, of literature, of exchange, of the image, etc.), in respect to which the current use of the term "communication" can only be provisional and preliminary.

15. Although all the questions concerning territory, frontiers, local divisions of all kinds—urban distribution for example—would have to be rethought in accordance with this.

16. This is not unrelated to the opposition drawn by Hannah Arendt between revolutions of freedom and revolutions of equality. And in Arendt, also, the fruitfulness of the opposition remains limited after a certain point and not entirely congruent with other elements in her thinking.

17. On the other hand, in the bourgeois world, whose "confusion" and "helplessness" Bataille recognized perfectly well, the uneasiness over community has made itself felt in many ways since 1968, but most often in a naive, indeed puerile way, caught up in the same "confusion" that reigns over ideologies of communion or conviviality.

18. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

19. Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 251-77.

20. Cf. Bernard Sichère's remarks in "L'Érotisme souverain de Georges Bataille," *Tel Quel*, no. 93.

21. Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986).

22. Concerning more specifically the exhaustion of religion, see Marcel Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

23. And as it lives on, in one sense, in the Deleuzian theme of *haecity*, which, however, in another sense, turns upon the theme of "singularity."

24. In this sense, the compearance of singular beings is anterior even to the preliminary condition of language that Heidegger understands as prelinguistic "interpretation" (*Auslegung*), to which I referred the singularity of voices in "Sharing Voices," in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989). Contrary to what this essay might lead one to think, the sharing of voices does not lead to community; on the contrary, it depends on this originary sharing that community "is." Or rather, this "originary" sharing itself is nothing other than a "sharing of voices," but the "voice" should be understood not as linguistic or even prelinguistic, but as communitarian.

25. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Ego sum* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979).

26. I do not include the political here. In the form of the State, or the Party (if not the State-Party), it indeed seems to be of the order of a work. But it is perhaps at the heart of the political that communitarian unworking resists. I will come back to this.

27. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), paragraph 47.

28. *Ibid.*, paragraphs 47 and 48.

29. It is no doubt also anterior to Girard's "mimetic desire." Both Hegel and Girard presuppose at bottom a subject who knows all about recognition or *jouissance*. Such a "knowledge" presupposes in turn the passionate communication of singularities, the experience of the "fellow creature."

30. *O.C.* 1:486, 489; and Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl, trans. Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 208, 210. (Translation modified.)

31. There is perhaps no better testimony to this essential, archi-essential resistance of the community—whose affirmation does not stem from any "optimism," but from truth, and whose truth stems from the experience of limits—than Robert Antelme's account of his captivity in a Nazi concentration camp. Let me recall these lines, among others: "The more the SS believes us to be reduced to indistinction and irresponsibility, an appearance we undoubtedly give, the more our community in fact contains distinctions, and the more strict these distinctions are. The man of the camps is not the abolition of his differences. On the

contrary, he is their effective realization." And the resistance of community has to do with the fact that singular death imposes its limit. It is death that makes the unworking: "The dead man is stronger than the SS. The SS cannot pursue one's friend into death. . . . He touches a limit. There are moments when one could kill oneself, if only to force the SS to run up against the limit of the dead object one will have become, the dead body that turns its back, that has no regard for the law." See *L'espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

32. On the notion of *task*, see Jean-Luc Nancy, "Dies irae" in *La faculté de juger* (Paris: Minuit, 1985).

33. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

34. I am leaving aside here community according to the artist, or rather according to "the sovereign man of art." Bataille's affront to society and the State comes most expressly and continuously from the community of lovers. But the communication or the contagion it represents are at bottom those of the community in the "sovereign abandon of art"—removed from any aestheticism and even from any aesthetic "abandon." This will be taken up later in a discussion of "literature."

35. Faced with the impossibility of referring sociality solely to the erotic or libidinal relation, even in a sublimated form, Freud introduced that other "affective" relation, which he named "identification." The question of community involves all the problems of identification. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "La panique politique" in *Cahiers confrontations*, no. 2 (1979), and "The Jewish People Do Not Dream," trans. B. Holmes, Part I of "The Unconscious Is Destructured like an Affect," in *Stanford Literature Review*, Fall 1989, pp. 191-209.

36. But Hegel knew this: This unity [the child], however, is only a point, a seed; the lovers cannot contribute anything to it. . . . Everything which gives the newly begotten child a manifold life and a specific existence, it must draw from itself." In a similar vein, he writes: "Since love is a sensing of something living, lovers can be distinct from one another only insofar as they are mortal" ("The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," in *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948], pp. 307, 305).

2. Myth Interrupted

1. One would have to name far too many of them, if one wanted to be complete. Let us say that the complete version of this scene has been elaborated from Herder to Otto, passing through Schlegel, Schelling, Görres, Bachofen, Wagner, ethnology, Freud, Kerényi, Jolles, Cassirer. . . . Nor should we forget, in the beginning, Goethe, whose mytho-logico-symbolic narrative *The Tale* is in sum the archetype of the modern myth of myth. Recently, a German theoretician has gathered and reactivated all the grand traits of this scene, picking up again the romantic appeal to a "new mythology" (and he, too, mixes into it, as one might expect, the motif of an end of mythology or, more exactly, its self-surpassing): Manfred Frank, *Der kommende Gott* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982). But the strains of the mythological motif are to be heard pretty much everywhere these last years.

2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The View from Afar*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 219.

3. See Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, app. B, in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 18.

4. Marcel Détienné, *L'invention de la mythologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981). In another, more recent article ("Le mythe, en plus ou en moins," in *L'infini*, no. 6, Spring 1984), Détienné, speaking of "the fleeting, ungraspable essence of myth," seems to me to contribute

even more factual and theoretical elements to the reflection I am proposing here. As to the invention, the avatars, and the aporia of the discourse on myth, see several of the contributions and the discussions in *Terror und Spiel: Probleme der Mythenrezeption* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1971).

5. Fragment from 1872, quoted in *Terror und Spiel*, p. 25.

6. See Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, trans. E. Howard (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Robert Cecil, *The Myth and the Master Race: A. Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (New York: Dodd, 1972); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Nazi Myth," trans. B. Holmes, in *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1990), pp. 291-312. But it would be necessary to study more extensively myth's entry into modern political thinking, for example in Sorel, and before him in Wagner—and also more generally the relationship between myth and ideology as Hannah Arendt understands it, as well as the ideology of myth. I will limit myself here to a marginal and elliptical reference: Thomas Mann wrote to Kerényi in 1941, "Myth must be taken away from intellectual fascism, and its function diverted in a human direction." This, it seems to me, is exactly what must not be done: the function of myth, as such, cannot be inverted. It must be interrupted. (This does not mean that Mann, the author moreover of the famous phrase "life in myth," did not think or sense something other than what these words say explicitly.)

7. It remains nonetheless eloquent, and memorable, that one of the most acute thinkers of "demythologization," Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was killed by the Nazis. Furthermore, what remains intact of myth even within the thinking of demythologization is brought to light perfectly in the opposition drawn by Paul Ricoeur between "demythologization" and "demythification." On these problems in general, see the analyses and references in Pierre Barthel, *Interprétation du langage mythique et théologie biblique* (Leiden: Brill, 1963).

8. In addition to the works already cited, see the acts of the Colloque de Chantilly, *Problèmes du mythe et de son interprétation* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1978). In a highly significant way, Jean-Pierre Vernant ends his *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne* (Paris: Maspero, 1982) by calling for "a logic other than that of the *logos*" in order to arrive at an understanding of the specific functioning of myths.

9. As Lévi-Strauss says. And if we must see, in Lévi-Strauss, "the myth of man without myth," to borrow a phrase from Blanchot's *L'amitié*, this myth is then made up of the totality of the myths of humanity.

10. Lévi-Strauss again: "That great anonymous voice uttering a discourse from the depths of the ages, issuing from the extreme depths of the mind" (*The Naked Man*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman [New York: Harper and Row, 1981]).

11. The traits of this characterization are borrowed from several of the writers quoted at the beginning of this essay. I would add here a trait from Heidegger. In what he says about myth, Heidegger is in many respects heir to the Romantic tradition and "scene" of myth. Yet his discretion, indeed his reserve, in regard to the theme of myth is quite remarkable in itself. He wrote, "Myth is what most merits being thought," but also, "Philosophy did not develop out of myth. It is born only of thinking, and in thinking. But thinking is the thinking of Being. Thinking is not born." Rather than a thinking of myth, it is a question here of a thinking *at the extremity* of myth, which in this respect is, moreover, indebted to Holderlin.

12. See Pierre Clastres, *Le Grand Parler* (Paris: Seuil, 1974).

13. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. R. C. McCleary (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1984), p. 124.

14. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1857), Seventh Lecture.

15. See Maurice Leenhardt, *Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World*, trans. B. M. Gulati (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

16. Marcel D tienne, *L'invention de la mythologie*, p. 230.
17. W. F. Otto, "Die Sprache als Mythos," in *Mythos und Welt* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1962), p. 285. With the invented word *Spruchgesang* (similar to Sch nberg's *Sprechgesang*), Otto is trying to designate both the rhythm and the melody present together in language, which according to him make up "the supreme, close to divine being of things themselves."
18. As the Wagnerian definition puts it, "Myth unleashes the common poetic force of a people" (in Manfred Frank, *Der Kommende Gott*, p. 229). And L vi-Strauss: "All individual works are potential myths, but only if they are adopted by the collectivity as a whole do they achieve mythic status" (*The Naked Man*, p. 627).
19. See Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), esp. pp. 120ff.
20. Walter Benjamin, "Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972-80), vol. 1.
21. This was the myth of an ephemeral community where Schelling, H lderlin, Hegel, and the Schlegels crossed paths. Among other texts, see *Le plus ancien programme de l'id alisme allemand* and the *Discours sur la mythologie* by Friedrich Schlegel. (Cf. P. Lacoue-Labarthe and J.-L. Nancy, *L'absolu litt raire*, Paris: Seuil, 1980.)
22. But this tradition is as old as the concept or as the myth of myth: Plato is the first to have evoked a new mythology, which would be the mythology of the City, and which was to assure its well-being by protecting it against the seductiveness of the ancient myths. Cf. M. D tienne, *L'invention de la mythologie*, chap. 5.
23. This is a simplification, of course. What distinguished and constituted these two meanings was *already* the operation of mythic thinking, that is to say, of philosophical thinking, which could alone determine the two concepts of "foundation" and "fiction." (On the Platonic elaboration of the meaning of *mythos*, see Luc Brisson, *Platon, les mots et les mythes* (Paris: Maspero, 1982). The true thinking of myth is philosophy, which has always—in its very foundation—wanted to tell the truth (1) of myth and (2) in relation to (as opposed to) myth. The two truths together constitute the philosophical myth of the logical/dialectical sublation of myth. In this sublation, the "fiction" is converted integrally into "foundation." Thus Fran ois F dier, for example, can write that for H lderlin myth does not have "today's current meaning, roughly that of fiction." It is on the contrary "pure speech, averring speech" (in *Qu'est-ce que Dieu? Philosophie/Th ologie. Hommage   l'abb  Daniel Coppieters de Ghison [1929-1983]*, [Brussels: Publications des Facult s Universitaires Saint-Louis, 1985] p. 133). The sublation—profoundly tributary of a metaphysics of the speaking subject, or of speech as subject—consists therefore in founding truth in a truthfulness, in the "averment" of a speaking, that is, in the finest of determinations, the one most unlinked to a fiction—that of diction. The whole philosophical problem of *Dichtung* hangs on this.
24. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1858), p. 379.
25. Cf., limiting ourselves to a striking similarity, this sentence from L vi-Strauss at the end of *The Naked Man*: "Myths . . . were simply making a general application of the processes according to which thought finds itself to be operating, these processes being the same in both areas, since thought, and the world which encompasses it, are two correlative manifestations of the same reality" (p. 678).
26. Schelling, *Philosophie der Mythologie*, p. 139. For an analysis of the poetico-mythological configuration of philosophy—in which philosophy sublates—see P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Le sujet de la philosophie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), especially the chapter entitled "Nietzsche apocryphe."
27. According to the logic of the "proper," whose metaphysical constraints Jacques Derrida has analyzed in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns

Hopkins University Press, 1974), and in "White Mythology," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 207-71.

28. *Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856), p. 193.

29. Lévi Strauss, *The Naked Man*, pp. 679 and 675.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 694.

31. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 225.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

33. Moreover, it is not only the idea of a "new mythology" that is at stake here, but the whole idea of a directive or regulative fiction. In this respect, the Kantian model of a "regulative Idea" is up to a point only a modern variation on the function of myth: it knows itself to be the fiction of a myth that will not come about but that gives a rule for thinking and acting. Hence there is an entire philosophy of the "as if"—which does not belong solely to Hans Vaihinger, whose *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (*The Philosophy of "As If,"* trans. C. K. Ogden [New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968]) is well known, but also to Nietzsche, to Freud, and to a whole modern style of thinking—which is not to be confused with a mythology but which nonetheless bears comparable markings. It is still a question of the foundation of fiction. Even Lyotard's recent use of the regulative Idea (in *The Differend*), where it is explicitly distinguished from myth and set in opposition to it, does not seem to me to be determined precisely enough to escape this function completely. It is necessary to go so far as to think an interruption or a suspension of the Idea as such: what its fiction reveals has to be suspended, its figure incompleting.

34. In which Heidegger resolves Nietzsche's will to power, and circumscribes the ultimate essence of subjectivity.

35. Pierre Clastres, *Recherches d'anthropologie politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 125.

36. Georges Bataille, "L'absence du mythe" in *Le surréalisme en 1947* (Paris: Maeght, 1947), and his lecture "La religion surréaliste" in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 7 (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p.381ff.

37. Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (New York: Station Hill Press, 1988), p. 25.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

39. From Romanticism to our times, even outside the Schlegelian context of the "new mythology," one can trace an uninterrupted sequence of instances of this mythological, or rather mythopoietic, vision of literature. A recent example would be Marc Eigeldinger's *Lumières du mythe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983).

40. Maurice Blanchot, *Faux pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 222. Shortly before this passage, Blanchot had defined the mythic dimension, opposed to psychology, as "the sign of great realities that one attains by means of a tragic effort against oneself." Only after the composition of my own text did I become aware of Blanchot's article "Les intellectuels en question" in the May 1984 issue of *Le débat*, where he writes: "The Jews incarnate . . . the refusal of myths, the abandonment of idols, the recognition of an ethical order that manifests itself in respect for the law. What Hitler wants to annihilate in the Jew, in the 'myth of the Jew,' is precisely man freed from myth." This is another way of showing where and when myth was definitively interrupted. I would add this: "man freed from myth" belongs henceforth to a community that it is incumbent upon us to let come, to let write itself.

41. Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, p. 21.

42. "The unworking that haunts [works], even if they cannot reach it" (*ibid.*).

43. Just as there is, moreover, a text of myth that interrupts it at the same time as it shares it and reinscribes it in "literature": literature is perhaps only ever nourished on myths, but is only ever written from their interruption.

44. In this respect, it is not love, indeed it even excludes it. In a sense, the community of lovers exceeds the sharing and will not let itself be written. But love as the assumption of community is precisely a myth, even myth itself. Literature inscribes its interruption. In this interruption a voice that is no longer the derisory voice of the lovers, but a voice that comes from their love, makes itself heard to the community.

45. The theme of the offering is set out fully in "L'offrande sublime," *Poésie*, no. 30 (1984).

3. Literary Communism

1. In a general sense, the interruption, the suspension, and the "difference" of meaning at the very origin of meaning, or even the being-trace (always already traced) of the "living present" in its most proper structure (which is never a structure of propriety) constitute the fundamental traits of what Jacques Derrida has thought through under the names of "writing" and "archi-writing."

2. Only when we manage to comprehend this will we be liberated from the sociological concept of "culture."

3. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ryazanskaya, ed. Maurice Dobb (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), pp. 33-34.

4. *Ibid.*

5. The questioning of communism mentioned above depends upon this (cf. chap. 1, n. 1).

6. But we should not forget to recall that the universality and generality that govern capitalism have as their corollary the atomization of tasks in the industrial division of labor—as distinct from its social division—and the solitary dispersion of individuals that results from this and that continues to result from it. And from this stems a possible confusion of singularity and the individual, of differential articulation and "private" partitioning, a confusion leading to the collapse of the dreams, the ideals, or the myths of communitarian, communist, or communal society—including, of course, the ones that Marx shared or brought to life. To get beyond this confusion, to interrupt the myth, is to make oneself available for a relation to one's fellows.

7. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (New York: Vintage, 1973), "Pre-Capitalist Property and Production."

8. Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: Vintage, 1977), "Conclusion."

9. Walter Benjamin, "Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972-80), vol. 1.

10. The constitutive function of exemplarity in literature is analyzed and deconstructed—in the strict sense of the word—by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, in particular in "Typography," trans. E. Cadava in *Typography*, pp. 43-138.

4. Shattered Love

Note: The title of the French text is "*L'amour en éclats*." The word *éclat* should be read in all its outbursts. The word can mean, and appears here as, shatter, piece, splinter, glimmer, flash, spark, burst, outburst, explosion, brilliance, dazzle, and splendor.—Trans.

1. The distinction that Nancy makes here is very easy to render in French, where abstract nouns may or may not be preceded by the definite article, depending upon the context. Hence, Nancy is able to distinguish between "la pensée est amour" and "la pensée est l'amour." In the first instance, love qualifies or describes thinking; in the second, it is offered more as a definition of thinking: thinking is love; it is identical with love.—Trans.

2. The French text reads, "l'être dans l'amour," but it is important to remember that the English expression "being in love" does not translate literally into idiomatic French. That might, then, be one of the meanings invoked here, but it is not necessarily the sole or dominant one.—Trans.

3. René Char, *Hypnos Waking*, trans. Jackson Mathews (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 59.

4. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1978), p. 148.

5. See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 50ff.

6. There is no adequate translation for the French verb "jouir." Translated as "to enjoy," "jouir" loses its sexual connotation; translated as "to come," it loses its relation to "joy." Following a suggestion by Nancy, I have created a new verb to translate "jouir": "to joy."—Trans.

7. The citation is in English in the original.—Trans.

5. Of Divine Places

All notes to Chapter 5 are provided by the translator.—Ed.

1. The use of the term *épreuve* in relation to thought is a reference to a work by Heidegger entitled *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954). (Thanks to Marian Jeannert for this lead.) This work has been translated into French under the title *L'expérience de la pensée* (in *Questions III* [Paris: Gallimard, 1966]). Nancy's use of *épreuve* would seem to be an attempt to refine upon the much-used term *expérience*, and carry over in translation some of the significance of the verb *erfahren*, which is defined as *fahrend erkunden*: to find out while or through traveling. My choice of *ordeal* does not achieve an analogous effect. The word is close to the German *Urteil* (judgment), rather than to *Kund* (knowledge) or *erkunden*. Nevertheless, I hope that *ordeal* will serve to specify the particular process to which Heidegger and Nancy refer. It is also possible to point to a posthumous work of Edmund Husserl's in justification of the choice of word: *Erfahrung und Urteil* (Hamburg: Claasen and Goverts, 1948), trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks as *Experience and Judgement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

2. Works by Jean-Luc Marion include *L'idole et la distance* (Paris: Grasset, 1977); *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes* (Paris: P.U.F., 1981); *Dieu sans l'être* (Paris: Fayard, 1982).

3. Jean-Marie Pontevia, *La peinture, masque et miroir* (Bordeaux: William Blake, 1984), p. 69.

4. In "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung" (Hölderlin and the essence of poetry), Heidegger writes:

Dichten ist das ursprüngliche Nennen der Götter. Aber dem dichterischen Wort wird erst dann seine Nennkraft zuteil, wenn die Götter selbst uns zur Sprache bringen.

Wie sprechen die Götter?

"... und Winke sind

Von Alters her die Sprache der Götter."

Das Sagen des Dichters ist das Auffangen dieser Winke, um sie weiter zu winken in sein Volk.

[Poetry is the original naming of the gods. But the poetic word only receives its power to name when the Gods themselves bring us to speech. How do the Gods speak?

"... and nods have been
 Since time immemorial the language of the Gods."

The poet's utterance is the act of being receptive to these nods so as to pass them on to his people.]

(In *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* [Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1951], pp. 42-43. An English version of this particular study can be found in *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock [Chicago: Regnery, 1968], pp. 270-91.)

5. The French *nom* means both "noun" and "name," and the text plays on this constantly. English is slightly handicapped in having two words. What is more, although there are proper nouns, common nouns, and proper names, "common names" is not a relevant term here. It was thus rather difficult sometimes to decide which of the words "noun" or "name" to choose. In each case, the reader should always be aware of the pressure constantly exerted in the original by the play of meaning that the word *nom* sets up.

6. Paul Verlaine, "Le ciel est par-dessus le toit" (*Sagesse* 3, p. 6).

7. The term onto-theo-logical—its sense and its form—belongs to a particular stage in Heidegger's thinking as it relates to the divine. At first he simply bracketed the question of God, so as to devote himself to laying the foundation of metaphysics. This done, he believed, the question of God could then properly be addressed. A coherent ontology would provide the basis for a coherent theology. Subsequently, however, he came to consider metaphysics and ontology as an obstacle to thinking about being, and he included theology in this condemnation. His articulation of the term onto-theo-logical is intended to bring out the separate components of this obstacle. For a full discussion of what is usually called this *Kehre* or turn in Heidegger's thinking, see James L. Perotti, *Heidegger on the Divine* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974). See also John D. Caputo, "Heidegger's God and the Lord of History," *New Scholasticism* 57 (1983), 439-64.

8. In the *Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite distinguishes between differentiated and undifferentiated names for the Godhead. One of the undifferentiated names is *hyperousion*. Nancy translates this as *superessence*, and I follow suit. William J. Carroll, however, prefers the translation *suprabeing*. Carroll distinguishes between the prefixes supra- and super- as follows: the latter "indicates an exceptional or outstanding member of a group," while the former "indicates that which transcends or is beyond a particular category" ("Unity, Participation and Wholes in a Key Text of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *Divine Names*," *New Scholasticism* 57 (1983), 253-62 (p. 254, note). See also *Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, translated with an introduction by C. E. Rolt (New York and London: Macmillan, 1920).

9. See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Autrement qu'être, ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p. x: "Mais entendre un Dieu non contaminé par l'être est une possibilité humaine non moins importante et non moins précaire que de tirer l'être de l'oubli où il serait tombé dans la méta-physique et dans l'onto-théologie" (But to comprehend a God uncontaminated by being is a human possibility that is no less important and no less precarious than to rescue being from the oblivion into which it is said to have fallen in meta-physics and onto-theology). This is a clear statement of Lévinas's position as it relates to Heidegger's. (The work appears in English as *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis [Hingham: Kluwer Academic, 1981].)

10. These words are from verse VI of the Elegy *Heimkunft*, where Hölderlin says of the god:

Ihn zu fassen, ist fast unsere Freude zu klein.
 Schweigen müssen wir oft; es fehlen heilige Namen,
 Herzen schlagen, und doch bleibt die Rede zurück?

(Our joy is almost too small for us to grasp him.
We must often be silent; sacred names are lacking,
Hearts beat, and yet speech hangs back?)

11. Heidegger's *Erläuterungen* also contains the study entitled "Heimkunft/An die Verwandten," pp. 9-30 (translated as "Remembrance of the Poet" by Douglas Scott, in *Existence and Being*, ed. Brock).

12. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, Book XI, 5. Translation taken from *The Isis-Book: Metamorphoses, Book XI*, edited, with an introduction, translation, and commentary by J. Gwyn Griffiths (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975).

13. For an English introduction to Lévinas see "Ethics of the Infinite," in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 47-70. Of man's relation to God Lévinas says:

Time is the most profound relationship man can have with God precisely as a going towards God. There is an excellence in time which would be lost in eternity. . . . To accept time is to accept death as the impossibility of presence. To be in eternity is to be *one*, to be *oneself* eternally. To be in time is to be for God [*être à Dieu*], a perpetual leavetaking [*adieu*]. (p. 59)

See also *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* (Paris: Vrin, 1982), especially p. 250:

Dieu . . . n'est pas terme, mais Infini. Infini auquel je suis voué par une pensée non-intentionnelle dont aucune préposition de notre langue—pas même le *à* auquel nous recourons—ne saurait traduire la dévotion. *A-Dieu* dont le temps diachronique est le chiffre unique, à la fois dévotion et transcendance. Il n'est pas certain que la notion du "mauvais infini" de Hegel n'admette aucune révision.

(God . . . is not a term, but an Infinite. An Infinite to which I am destined by a non-intentional thinking whose devotion can be translated by no preposition in our language—not even the *to* which we have recourse to. An *à-Dieu* for which diachronic time is the sole index and which is simultaneously devotion and transcendence. It is by no means certain that Hegel's notion of "bad infinity" allows of no revision.)

Nancy alludes to this last reference in section 2.

For another dialogue with Lévinas in English see *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard Cohen (Atlantic Highlands: Duquesne, 1985).

14. See Martin Heidegger "Vom Wesen des Grundes" (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1949).

Durch die ontologische Interpretation des Daseins als In-der-Welt-sein ist weder positiv noch negativ über ein mögliches Sein zu Gott entschieden. Wohl aber wird durch die Erhellung der Transzendenz allererst ein zureichender Begriff des Daseins gewonnen, mit Rücksicht auf welches Seiende nunmehr gefragt werden kann, wie es mit dem Gottesverhältnis des Daseins ontologisch bestellt ist.

(The ontological interpretation of *Dasein* as Being-in-the-World tells neither for nor against the possible existence of God. One must first gain an adequate concept of *Dasein* by illuminating transcendence. Then, by considering *Dasein*, one can ask how the relationship of *Dasein* to God is ontologically constituted.) (*The Essence of Reasons*, trans. Terence Malich [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969].)

This early text expresses an attitude to God and the divine that Heidegger will subsequently reject. See note 18.

15. See, for example, Guy Lardreau and Christian Jambet, *L'Ange* (Paris: Grasset, 1976); Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Le Testament de Dieu* (Paris: Grasset, 1979); Maurice C'level, *Dieu est*

Dieu, nom de Dieu! (Paris: Grasset, 1976); Philippe Nèmo, *Job et l'excès du mal* (Paris: Grasset, 1978). Mention should also be made of two works by René Girard: *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972), trans. Patrick Gregory as *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1978). See also Philippe Sollers, "La lettre volée de l'Évangile," in "Dieu est-il mort?" *Art Press* 19 (1978), pp. 6-8. Referring to Girard, Sollers writes: "L'idée que la Bible et les Évangiles sont ce qu'on ne voit pas parce qu'on l'a trop sous les yeux m'est venue en poursuivant mon expérience d'écriture. . . . Il ne s'agit pas de retour du refoulé. C'est le fait que quelque chose s'éclaire qui était là depuis toujours. C'est le retour de vous-même comme refoulé. C'est le retour d'un sujet qui n'est pas 'vous,' le retour du nom, du sujet dans le nom." (The idea that the Bible and the Gospels are what we do not see because we see it too much came to me during the course of my experiences (and experiments) with writing. . . . This is no return of the repressed. It is the fact that something is brought to light that has always been there. It is the return of yourself as repressed. It is the return of a subject that is not "you," the return of the *name*, of the subject in the name.)

16. These lines come from Hölderlin's poem "Was ist Gott? . . .," whose opening words are echoed by Nancy at the beginning of this text. The original reads:

Was ist Gott? unbekannt, dennoch
 Voll Eigenschaften ist das Angesicht
 Des Himmels von ihm. Die Blitze nähnlich
 Der Zorn sind eines Gottes. Je mehr ist eins
 Unsichtbar, schicket es sich in Fremdes.

17. "Selfsame with" is used to translate the preposition *à même* throughout. In justification of my use of such a neologism I would quote Philip E. Lewis who, in a recent study of translation effects, posits an "abuse principle" whose application he describes as follows: "The abusive move in the translation . . . will bear upon a key operator or a decisive textual knot that will be recognized by dint of its own abusive features, by its resistance to the preponderant values of the 'usual' and the 'useful'" ("The Measure of Translation Effects," in *Difference in Translation*, edited with an introduction by Joseph F. Graham [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985], pp. 31-62 [pp. 42-3]). *A même* is used by Nancy in just such an abusive fashion, I would claim. And though its usual translation, "on the surface of," would have linked it to the topic of *face*, it would have eliminated all reference to the question of identity and sameness that is found in the word *même*, and that is crucial to the problematic of Nancy's text. In justification of my choice of term, I would refer to the entry for *selfsame* in the OED, which quotes two instances of its use, each of which seemed to fit it for my purpose: "That we should believe in Him as He who is, the self-existing, the self-same" (Thomas Pusey, 1860); "Always selfsame, like the sky" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1870).

18. Each of these German terms is a neologism coined from a term that is basic to Heidegger's thinking: *er-lichten* comes from *Lichtung* (clearing), which he uses to describe the opening up and the illumination that constitute the event (*Ereignis*) of being; *ent-borgen* is the past participle of the neologism *ent-bergen*, by means of which he reinterprets the Greek term for truth, *aletheia*, as an un-concealing. Nancy translates *ent-bergen* as *dés-abriter*, which is also a neologism. Consequently, the English translation should perhaps have been something like *un-shelter*. The term *dis-lodge* seemed, however, despite its lexical orthodoxy, to translate *ent-bergen* so well that I decided to use it in preference to *un-shelter*, and to try to reproduce some of the effect of the neologism by means of the hyphen.

19. See Gilles Aillaud, John Berger, and Catherine Tieck, *Le proche et le lointain* (Paris: Regard, 1980); Gilles Aillaud, *Peintures et préambules* (Paris: Galerie Karl Flinker, 1982).

20. This passage occurs in Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, section VII, C, "Revealed Religion."

21. Hermann Usener, *Götternamen: Versuch einer Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung* (Bonn, 1896).

22. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger writes, "Sein liegt im Dass- und Sosein, in Realität, Vorhandenheit, Bestand, Geltung, Dasein, im 'es gibt'" (Being lies in the fact that something is, in its Being as it is, in Reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the "there is") (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973], p. 26).

Lévinas translates *es gibt* as *il y a*, and makes this specific mode of being his main preoccupation. See *De L'existence à l'existant* (Paris: Vrin, 1947). Relevant to the present discussion is his declaration in that work that "plutôt qu'à Dieu, la notion de l'il y a nous ramène à l'absence de Dieu" (rather than to God, the notion of there is leads to the absence of God) (p. 99).

23. See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et infini* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), pp. 29-30:

On peut appeler athéisme cette séparation si complète que l'être séparé se maintient tout seul dans l'existence sans participer à l'Être dont il est séparé—capable éventuellement d'y adhérer par la croyance. La rupture avec la participation est impliquée dans cette capacité. On vit en dehors de Dieu, chez soi, on est moi, égoïsme. L'âme—la dimension du psychique—accomplissement de la séparation, est naturellement athée. Par athéisme, nous comprenons ainsi une position antérieure à la négation comme à l'affirmation du divin, la rupture de la participation à partir de laquelle le moi se pose comme le même et comme moi.

(We can term atheism this separation that is so complete that the separate being subsists all alone in existence, and does not participate in the Being from which it is separated—while remaining capable on occasions of adhering to it through faith. The break with participation is implied by this capacity. You live outside of God, within yourself, you are an 'I', an egoism. The soul—the dimension of the psychic—which is consummate separation, is naturally atheist. By atheism I thus mean a position prior to both the negation and affirmation of the divine, the breach of participation from which the 'I' goes on to posit itself as self and as I.)

For an English version of this work see *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Henry J. Koren (Atlantic City: Duquesne, 1969).

24. Technology (*die Technik*) is the term by which Heidegger characterizes the modern relationship to being. It is the technological or calculative relationship to the world that, he claims, is responsible for our forgetfulness of being. For a discussion of this crucial notion, see *The Piety of Thinking: Essays by Martin Heidegger*, translations, notes, and commentary by James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 152-67, "Some Heideggerian Pathways to Technology and the Divine."—Trans.

25. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841); Sigmund Freud, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (1927).

26. The question of partition (*le partage*) is examined by Nancy in *Le partage des voix* (Paris: Galilée, 1982), and again in "La communauté désœuvrée," where the author revises his position somewhat. It is a difficult term to translate. The expression *un partage des voix* means the casting of votes equally on both sides. This sense is present in Nancy's use of the term. However, the two main senses of the verb *partager*, to divide or share, and to be torn (*être partagé*) are also brought into play by Nancy, and they in turn have a considerable

amount of play in them. There is no equivalent English verb. My choice of partition, which is not totally satisfactory, seemed justified by the semantic richness of the term as it appears in the OED.

27. Georges Bataille, *Madame Edwarda* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963). Also in Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 9-31.

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